

### 2020 Scholarship Recipients – answer in their own words

# Question for 173d Airborne Brigade Association Members and Chapters Why should I/we donate to the Sky Soldiers Foundation Scholarship Fund?

The Sky Soldiers Foundation Scholarship Program awards are a living memorial to the Sky Soldiers of the 173d Airborne Brigade who made the supreme sacrifice in serving their country. These awards help Sky Soldiers and their families pursue their dreams.

2020 has been a challenging year in so many ways. Even though the coronavirus disrupted many educational programs during the application timeframe, candidates persevered and are anxious to carry on this academic year.

These scholarship recipients demonstrate why it is important to support the Sky Soldiers Foundation Scholarship Program. They are at different points in their educational endeavors but they all have plans and are the future of our country.

#### 

**Brittani Bushman:** I was pulled out of school during my high school years to take care of my 5 younger siblings. Around the time of what would have been my senior year, I had a falling out with my mother and decided to work for my education and within the next few months I got my GED. I moved to Flagstaff, Az to get away from the family drama and focus on getting myself into a better place. I moved in with my grandparents. My grandma helped motivate me into getting a job and then all the way through me getting my Associates in Psychology at Coconino Community College. Now, I am living in an apartment with two roommates, right off of campus. I'm working on receiving my Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Criminal Justice. I am looking into getting a job at the hospital here in Flagstaff in the Behavioral Unit within the next few months. I greatly appreciate the opportunity of receiving the Sky Soldier scholarship.

James Hentig, Jr.: I served as an Airborne Combat Medic from 2008-2012 before being medically retired. During my time in Afghanistan, I witnessed and treated numerous traumatic brain injuries. I also sustained a brain injury myself. Today, however, I am currently a 5th year PhD Candidate in Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine at the University of Notre Dame under the direction of Dr. David Hyde. My dissertation work, which has been recognized by the National Science Foundation and the Pat Tillman Foundation, is centered around developing a rapid and cost efficient brain injury model that better represents the way that people experience brain injuries. I've applied this damage model to a regenerative animal, the adult zebrafish, with whom we share 80% of the same DNA though they are capable of re-growing their heart, eyes, and brain through their entire life. The aim of my project is two-fold, 1) develop a faster and cheaper way of examining brain injuries, and 2) examine the gene regulation that allows the adult zebrafish to replace damaged brain tissue following a traumatic brain injury. My first aim is complete, where I have characterized the injury model as a mild, moderate, or severe traumatic brain injury where the zebrafish experience similar issues as people; loss of consciousness, brain bleed, seizure, edema, learning and memory issues, neuronal cell death. However, I have also characterized the regenerative response where within 4-7days later the fish has overcome all neurological deficits and regrown lost neurons. I'm currently working on my second aim, identifying the induction genes and proteins that lead this regenerative response. At the moment, I have identified a potential neuroprotective agent that when administered 3 days prior to the injury dramatically decreases injury severity to the organ system and aids in a more rapid and complete recovery in the worst of injuries.



## 2020 Scholarship Recipients - In their own words (continued)

#### James Hentig, Jr.: (continued)

Upon graduating, I would like to complete a post-doctoral fellowship at the center for neuroscience and regenerative medicine/NIH researching therapeutic options explicitly for United States service members who have suffered from traumatic brain injuries as well as developing possible therapeutics that protect or reduce the injury when taken preemptively in future warfighters.

Additionally, here is a short 3minute clip of me explaining my research in laymen's terms. <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrPcVIiMCBQ&feature=youtu.be</u>

**William Holland:** I will be attending Purdue University for Materials Engineering; in fact, I am enrolled in the Early Start summer session. I am a student in the Honors College and will be joining the Engineering Projects in Community Service (EPICS) learning community this fall.

**Kyle R. Hooley:** Kyle recently concluded his service this past June and will enter the Master's of Engineering Management program at Purdue University this fall. Kyle will focus on Industrial and Systems Engineering and is scheduled to graduate in Fall of 2021. While assigned to the 173rd IBCT(A) he served in Able Company and HHC, 2/503rd.

**JoAnna LaFratta**: I am attending the Louisiana State University Master of Social work program. Upon completion of my degree, I would like to work as a school social worker in the military community. It is important for me to work with a community that I know so well and means so much to me.

**Maggie LaFratta**: My educational goal is for me to become a chiropractor for Veterans Affairs by gaining my doctorate of chiropractic. I have spent 5 years immersing myself in the healthcare field to come to this point, because I have always had a passion for science and helping others but never knew where I would fit. During this time, I have shadowed physicians, dentists, physical therapists, optometrists, and even a veterinarian to ensure I wanted to work with humans. After shadowing a chiropractor, I found out that this was the perfect career field for me due to the hands-on and holistic measures taken to treat patients. In 2015, I began my bachelor's degree in Biomedical Sciences, and in 2017 I declared a second degree in Clinical Psychology. Both of these degrees have allowed me to understand how the body and mind work together, and give me full understanding of how to care for people in many aspects. To further my understanding of hard sciences, I began a research position in December 2016 through May 2018 studying the functions of upstream innate immune systems and its impact on asthma. This ensured my desire to attend a chiropractic school that involved large amounts of research and evidence based study. This led me to National University of Health Sciences, which also has an internship with the VA hospital in Pinellas Park, FL, giving me the opportunity to achieve my goal more than any other school. I will be finishing my final semester at the University of Central Florida this fall and in January 2021 I begin my doctorate of chiropractic at National University of Health Sciences.



### 2020 Scholarship Recipients - In their own words (continued)

**Ysaris Urbina Rojas**: I was honored and humbled by the scholarship award from the Sky Soldier Foundation. I am currently in my 3rd year attending Troy University in Dothan, Alabama. I will hopefully complete my Bachelor in Biological Science Fall of 2021. I hope to continue my studies by attending Lecom University located in Brenton, FL. My dream is to complete a doctor's degree in Pharmacology. This scholarship will help me pay for the next semester and more than that it has motivated me to continue because other people believe in me as well. Thank you to all the board members and active members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Association.

**Abigail Whitman:** I am Abigail Whitman, daughter of SGM Robert Whitman. I have lived my whole life while being associated with the army. When my dad joined the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade in 2016 my family moved to Italy. This was my first time ever leaving the United States, and I fell in love with exploring the world. This move gave me so many opportunities to travel and to learn about cultures and history that I would not have experienced if I had never left the United States. More than that, the Army had given me the opportunity to stay in Europe. Thanks to a partial GI Bill, the AER scholarship, other academic scholarships, and now this wonderful scholarship from the Sky Soldiers Foundation I have been able to pursue an undergraduate degree in London. It is such an amazing opportunity. I have had history classes taught at the British Museum and even a British politics course taught by an MP at Westminster Palace. I am currently in my third year studying political science and international relations, and I am on track to enter a master's program. By this time next summer, I will be in an internship position and working on my dissertation. Words cannot adequately express how grateful I am to my father, to the US army, and to the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade for giving me the opportunity to make my educational dreams a reality.

**Ashley Wood:** My educational goal has not wavered since I was a little girl. I have always dreamed of becoming a veterinarian, and hopefully I can turn that dream into reality. I have worked hard throughout my years of school and mastered maintaining excellent grades while being a student athlete. I have the opportunity to play Division 1 softball at Winthrop University while also earning a degree in biology. After I graduate, I plan on attending veterinary school. I am very passionate about my career path.

#### Why should I/we donate to the Sky Soldiers Foundation Scholarship Fund?

These members of the Sky Soldier community and others like them are the reason.

For information on how to donate, how to establish a designated endowment, or how to become more involved in the Scholarship Fund visit: <u>www.skysoldiersfoundation.org/Scholarship-Fund</u> or write via email to <u>scholarship@skysoldiersfoundation.org</u>