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Major Jamahl Evans applies legal skills as a Marine

BY ADAM DURSO
PHOTO KHUE BUI

When major jamahl evans, jd '00, signed on for active duty with the U.S. Marine Corps in 2001, he couldn't have known his law degree would help him procure the best training and equipment in the world for his fellow Marines. Fifteen years later, he is serving his country as a financial management officer at The Pentagon.

Back then, Evans had no idea how crucial the timing of his decision to enlist would be: One month after taking his oath, and as he prepared to enter officer candidate school, the 9/11 terror attacks blindsided the nation. As he watched footage of United Airlines Flight 175 colliding with the south tower of the World Trade Center, his resolve strengthened. “I had not one second thought about becoming a Marine.”

After graduating from Atlanta’s Morehouse College in 1994 with a degree in French, Evans considered a career in education, but decided to pursue a JD instead and moved to New Haven. He graduated law school, married his college friend, Maria, and joined the Marines. The couple now lives in Alexandria with their four children. Following his commissioning in 2002, he was assigned to the position of financial management officer. He recalls a popular recruitment commercial depicting a would-be Marine scaling a fiery mountain and slaying the dragon up top with a sword.

“You never saw anyone reconciling the budget for slaying said dragon,” he jokes.

Evans initially looked upon the financial post as a non-traditional use of his law degree, but he soon realized financial management would be where he could best apply his talents. Chief among these were the legal research, analytic and interpretive skills he gained at Quinnipiac.

“I understood that I could leverage my education here because most aspects of military organization, operations and financial management are bound to laws,” he says.

Evans interprets some of the most significant laws in the nation, including Title 10 of the United States Code—the legal basis for the roles, missions and organization of each of the armed services.

“Any of these documents can come into play at any time,” Evans explains. “They determine what a command can purchase and how federal appropriations can be used.”

As a budget analyst and exercise officer at San Diego County’s Camp Pendleton in 2003, Evans helped manage a $100 million budget for training and operations. In a similar role in Afghanistan in 2009, he coordinated joint and multinational military exercises in the Philippines, South Korea and Australia. During his second deployment to Afghanistan in 2014, he served as a director for the Financial Management Oversight Division.

Evans’ position is intertwined with several defense and federal agencies, Congress and the Office of Management and Budget. He credits his Law of Politics course with giving him an understanding of the political environment and an awareness of how individuals and organizations operate within it.

“Professor John Pavia reinforced his curriculum with in-class interviews of notable figures from the Connecticut political arena. Nowhere in my career has this understanding better served me than while working at the Pentagon,” he says.

He also retains much of what he learned in Martin Margulies’ Criminal Law class. “I try to remain focused on the ball, the crux of a case, to ensure that my argument relates to it, the ball being the legal execution of taxpayer dollars in support of Marine Corps operations.”

Finally, he credits his mother for counseling him to absorb information gleaned from respected professionals and then find ways to shape it into effective action.