Rebooting to business school

How one veteran is earning his MBA stripes

Gus Giacomin is using his valuable experience as a veteran of Iraq (left) to excel at business consulting.

There's no boot camp comparable to military field training — not even business school.

"There are so many career options. It's a whole new world," says Gus Giacomin, a second-year MBA student at New York University's Stern School of Business.

Growing up in North Carolina, the now 28-year-old military veteran says, "I idolized my dad, who made the army his career. I loved that I could give back to my country."

He was accepted at West Point, and by the time his five-year commitment was up, Giacomin had been commissioned as a second lieutenant of infantry from the US Military Academy. He was deployed in Iraq twice and earned a Combat Infantryman's badge. He's served as a platoon leader, an executive officer and an operations officer in the US army.

"I'd also met my wife, who had an MBA from Cornell University."

"She helped me realize that I can help to protect people and impact their lives through economics. Business is a huge driver for social progress. I wanted to use business to make a positive impact in the world," he says.

His wife told him about the consulting field.

"It seemed rewarding and I'd get a unique perspective interacting with top level executives, affecting social change and improving people's lives," says Gus.

Transitioning from the military to academics is tough, admits Giacomin.

"The army takes care of your housing, what you wear, where you go. It's a big challenge for people to leave that," he says.

Fortunately the Army also offers a wealth of support after discharge at the Manhattan Veterans Center. "You can access their services as a veteran of Iraq or Afghanistan, including medical therapy or psychological counseling, for as long as you need it," says Giacomin.

After working at consulting firm Booz, Allen, Hamilton as an intern this past summer, Giacomin was offered a full-time position once he graduates. "I think I'll bring a level of maturity you don't always find. I know how to sacrifice for the better of a company or for a goal," he says.

For those considering a similar transition, Giacomin says: "Decide what you want to do. Take a path that's interesting and research it. Make a plan. There's nothing but opportunity coming from the military."

— Erika Prafker

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The Post 9/11 GI Bill offers many avenues for education for veterans

The law offers more benefits than ever before, with allowances for housing and books and covering in-state tuition at public institutions. Moreover, private colleges can also opt into the Yellow Ribbon Program, which the federal government will match, dollar for dollar, any additional tuition aid provided by the school.

"We do a lot of specific recruiting to get the brightest and best military candidates," says Isser Gallogly, executive director of MBA admissions at New York University's Stern School of Business. "Many of our applicants have been officers in the military who are faced with life or death decisions, inspiring teams and coordinating significant projects. These invaluable experiences and skills are easily transferable to the corporate world. They're highly sought out by investment banks and consulting companies."

As a GMAA (Graduate Management Admission Council) and military-friendly school, Stern currently has 25 military veterans in its full-time MBA program.

"We have offered a $25,000 military scholarship for each of the past two years to a well-deserving student in our full-time MBA program," says Gallogly.

A strong Military Veterans Club provides networking opportunities and exposes other students to military-style leadership. A section of Stern's admission's web site is also dedicated to military veterans.

"They don't have to pay for their application. We also provide informative videos, podcasts and contact information for many military alumni," adds Gallogly.