

# An Education Will Put You a ‘Step Ahead’

## Army National Guardsman Mark Morales cherishes the support he received and hopes others will take advantage of similar opportunities available to them

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Mark Morales, 39, enlisted in the Army National Guard 14 years ago and is still serving. From the start, it felt like a good fit.

“I was in JROTC while I was in high school, and the lifestyle and career path just made sense to me,” he said. “It would allow me to earn a great wage while gaining experience on the job instead of going directly to college. This was perfect, since at the time, I had no idea what I wanted to do or was interested in.”

Today, Morales lives in Ventura, California, with his wife Crista and sons Luke and Levi. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant recently. Throughout his years of service and climbing the ranks, Morales also found time to earn an education with help from the VFW.

After seeing a poster advertising the VFW “Sports Clip Help A Hero Scholarship” while getting a haircut, he decided to apply and is grateful for the assistance.

“It has opened up the door to so many opportunities that would have not been possible prior,” he said.

After earning his degree in Airport Management from the Florida Institute of Technology, Morales returned to school at San Diego Christian College to get a degree in Business Leadership.

Whether other veterans or service members want to build a lifelong military career or take another path, Morales emphasizes the importance of a college education.

“To all my brethren, if you are looking to stay in, a civilian education is one of the greatest

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ways to earn promotion points to make the next grade. Past E6, you need to have a degree to even be considered,” he said.

“If you’re not making a career in the military, use these programs to help you get ahead in the career you want after you leave. You will be a step ahead of all other applicants by having not only a degree, but also years of military experience.”

Morales is proof of what he promises.

“I’m fortunate enough to have a military specialty that I love. I work in Aviation Operations. The skills I learned serving led me to land a job as a Senior Airport Operations Specialist,” he said.

Thanks to his degrees, Morales sees a clear path to progress as his career continues. He cherishes the support he received and hopes others will take advantage of similar opportunities available to them.

“The scholarship prevented me from going into crushing student loan debt,” he said. “There is a plethora of programs available for us to pay for college — there is no need to go into mountains of debt. I can’t even put into words how thankful and appreciative I am.”

Learn more about the VFW's "Sport Clips [Help A Hero Scholarship](#)."