

VFW Life Member Earns Ph.D. While on Active Duty

From a young age, the importance of education was instilled in Marine Sgt. Maj. Collin Barry and he has now earned three degrees during his 23 years in the Corps.

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In the days leading up to the 1st Marine Division's Iraq invasion in March 2003, seven Marines with the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company were inserted into Iraq by helicopter.

Carrying 145-pound packs apiece, those Marines served as the eyes and ears for the commanding generals preparing to enter the country. Among those recon Marines was Sgt. Collin Barry, now a VFW Life member of VFW Post 2357 in Bouse, Arizona.

"We were there to confirm or deny enemy movement," said Barry, who earned his VFW eligibility in Iraq. "It was an 11-day long-range reconnaissance patrol, which was one of the longest Marine recon combat patrols at the time since the Vietnam War. It was awesome operating with such an exceptional team of professionals."

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTILLED

When Barry was young, his father was a college president and his mother a teacher, so the family moved a few times before Barry reached high school.

They lived in Kansas, New Jersey and Iowa before landing in New Mexico, where his dad finished out his career.

"Higher education was instilled in my brother and me at a very early age," Barry said.

Barry, who says he "idolized Rambo," hunted and enjoyed outdoors while he was growing up. He joined the Marine Corps in 1999 after being enticed by a Marine Corps recruiter who visited his small high school in Tucumcari, New Mexico.

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The importance of higher education was not lost on Barry. He earned a Ph.D. in Global Leadership and Organizational Management from the Indiana Institute of Technology in 2020 while serving on active duty. He graduated from Texas A&M in 2011 with his Masters of Business Administration.

For Barry, who is now in his 23rd year with the Marine Corps, the decision to make a career out of his service was an easy one.

“I kept re-enlisting because of my fellow Marines and the mission,” said Barry, whose son followed in his footsteps and is now a reconnaissance Marine. “I was doing everything I daydreamed about as a kid, and now I was making a living doing it.”

Barry, now a sergeant major based at Yuma, Arizona, with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 225 (VMFA-225), joined the VFW in 2020 after Post 2357 adopted his previous unit.

While the Post is located about 2½ hours from Yuma, Barry said members there have hosted welcome home events and holiday parties for the Marines.

“I established a relationship with Gunny Doyle Robertson, who is the Post commander,” Barry said. “Post 2357 has been amazing for our active duty Marines and sailors.”

Barry said that earning his Ph.D. took five-and-a-half years to achieve. During that period, he deployed twice (Okinawa and Bahrain) and executed two permanent change of station orders. He added there were a lot of late nights and long weekends of reading, researching and writing.

Incidentally, Barry only took one semester off during his Ph.D. pursuit.

“Senior military officers now desire educated minds among enlisted members because our capacity to contribute to the mission is significantly enhanced,” Barry said.

His dad, who earned a Ph.D. from Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, offered Barry a bit of advice when Barry told him of his own doctoral interest.

Barry’s father told him that people pursue a Ph.D. for two reasons: to be an educator at a college or a practitioner within one’s industry. Barry has experienced a tremendous amount of fulfillment applying the knowledge learned throughout the pursuit.

“It was such a challenging, yet inspiring journey,” Barry said of the Indiana Institute of Technology program. His degree is already paying off. He will be relocating to Quantico, Virginia, in May as the sergeant major for the College of Enlisted Military Education at Marine Corps University.

This article is featured in the February 2022 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.