A Scholarship That Could Change the World

'The VFW scholarship ... lifts a burden off my shoulders and allows me to better provide for my family, while not taking away my focus from school.'

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Eight years in the military prepared 29-year-old Jimmy Salazar to be the best student he could be. Now with the VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship," Salazar, his wife Lauren, and their two children have a busy and happy life while he is enrolled as a full-time student.

Salazar was in middle school when the September 11 attacks took place. He knew at that moment he would pledge his service to defending our country when he was old enough.

He joined the Army in 2008, spending the first half of his time serving as Military Police and the second as a Counterintelligence Special Agent. Salazar deployed to Germany, Afghanistan, South Korea and Virginia.

Salazar saw challenging days during this time. From shivering in five feet of snow in Germany to getting shot at by insurgents in Afghanistan, he was forever changed by his experiences.

Armed with newfound perspective and determination once back home, he started a degree program in Physics, often taking the hardest courses available so he could learn the most. He hopes many of his comrades will take advantage of the opportunities available.

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“You will be able to walk away with a skill set most people may never obtain. Set your goals high and never give up.”

Salazar thanks those who made his scholarship possible from the bottom of his heart.

“The VFW scholarship helps fill the gap where the GI Bill does not. It lifts a burden off my shoulders and allows me to better provide for my family, while not taking away my focus from school. I am confident this scholarship proves just as beneficial to many other veterans across the country. It allowed me to follow my post-military dreams, without the financial burden normally attached to university studies."

For Salazar, his civilian career goals are inspired by his time at war. He replays the day he came across a picture in an Afghanistan home, drawn by a young child. It depicted bombs in the sky and people running frantic. His heart broke to see the fear such a young soul must have felt.

Salazar knows war is a necessity, but he also knows he can make positive changes in cultural relations and politics through advancement in science, technology and education.

Salazar will continue on for a doctorate in physics once his bachelor’s is complete. Because of the generosity of the VFW supporters, Salazar will become the innovator in science able to change the world for the better.

“I truly hope I can bring about the change I hope to one day see.”

Learn more about the VFW's “Sport Clips Help a Hero” scholarship.

Photo courtesy of Jimmy Salazar.