*Personal Essay*

*When 1 first considered joining the military, I reached out to various branches to explore which one might be the best fit. The Marine Corps stood out immediately. Instead of asking if wanted to become a Marine, they challenged me: could I earn the title? That question hooked me. I was drawn to the idea of becoming part of something greater than myself, something no one could take away. The Marine Corps offered me the opportunity to forge a new path in life, and I embraced every chance to expand my abilities and challenge myself.*

*Bootcamp was the first place I learned to balance thinking about others while*

*accomplishing a shared goal. As a squad leader, I carried responsibilities I had never*

*experienced before, learning that leadership required trust, resilience, and empathy. After training, I became an Ammunition Technician, eager to apply my skills. At my first duty station in Camp Pendleton, I quickly adapted to my role, ensuring I was prepared for every task assigned to me.*

*Early in my career, I had the opportunity to attend the Lance Corporals Leadership and Ethics Seminar, where I served as the class First Sergeant. My performance earned a Meritorious Mast, validating my commitment to self-improvement and leadership. These experiences solidified a mindset of constant growth, challenging me to lead by example. After six months at Camp Pendleton, I accepted a transfer to MCAS Miramar to serve as anAmmunition Chief. Although the Master Sergeant warned me about the challenges of joining a*

*deployable unit, I didn't hesitate to say yes.*

*At MCAS Miramar, I worked in S4, serving as the subject matter expert for*

*ammunition and explosives for six companies in the squadron. I embraced my new*

*responsibilities, but managing people proved far more challenging than mastering standard operating procedures. As a newly promoted Corporal, I was tasked with leading six juniorMarines. While I excelled at technical tasks, leaning to motivate and mentor others became my most significant challenge. I made mistakes but grew immensely from those experiences. Leadership, I learned, is not about perfection but about being present, adaptable, and willing to learn alongside those you lead.*

*Deploying to the Middle East was a pivotal moment in my career. There, I*

*optimized accounting procedures for the squadron and established a new ammunition supply point at the armory, earning a Certificate of Commendation for enhancing readiness. These achievements put me on a promising trajectory, but my path changed unexpectedly when I returned home. A motorcycle accident left me unable to reenlist due to my injuries, and I filed for divorce due to infidelity from my partner. This sudden shift forced me to reevaluate my future, but it also reaffirmed the resilience I had cultivated during my service.*

*Determined to move forward, I enrolled in community college using my GI Bill. As I adjusted to civilian life; I found new purpose in building community. Serving as the Veterans Club President gave me a platform to connect with fellow veterans, advocate for their needs and reignite my passion for leadership. This experience inspired me to pursue a degree in Political Science and transfer to California State University, Fullerton, where I became President of the Student Veterans of America Chapter and worked at the Veterans ResourceCenter.*

*My academic journey opened doors I never imagined. I was selected as one of five people nationwide to serve as a Legislative Fellow for the Veterans of Foreign Wars inWashington, D.C. Over six months, I developed and advocated for a policy addressing veteran suicide, combining my military experiences with my passion for public service. It was also important for me to stand up for my veteran friends I was losing to suicide. These accomplishments culminated in graduating with honors in both my associate and bachelor’s-degrees. Now, as I work toward completing my master's degree in public administration, I am driven to continue this trajectory of service and advocacy.*

*As I look to the future, I aim to leverage my education and experiences to influence policy and expand support for veterans. As a current Congressional Aide/Military Affairs Liaison in Congress, I got to help veterans every day. I aspire to have a greater local impact one day, leveraging the connections I am making now to help veterans in Orange County through meaningful policy. This scholarship would enable mc to continue serving my community, ensuring that the lessons I've learned are used to inspire and uplift others.*