



## HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

### *Giving Back to Education*

### ***HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!***

*Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,*

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments.

Sincerely,

*Teresa Kroll, Chairman  
HPS Foundation Committee*

### **Stephen Lanham - Class of 2005**

#### **Air Force Career Leads Lanham Back To School**

By Kristine Jacobson

After graduating from Holdrege High School, Stephen Lanham was ready to be finished with school. Instead of college, he set out for the United States Air Force and became a successful aviation mechanic, serving many missions around the world for nearly 10 years.

But, ironically, Air Force leaders decided two years ago to send Stephen back to school. Not only that, they wanted him to be a teacher.

"I thought I would be a terrible instructor," Stephen said. "Standing in front of people. Teaching. Trying to tell them what I do for a living and what they have to do for their job. But, it turns out you don't know what you are good at until you try it."

Lucky for him, he had good teaching role models from back in his days at HHS. He gravitated toward right-brain classes and once considered a

career in graphic design. He enjoyed art teacher Christy Kosmicki, biology teacher Jeff VanEperen, and English teachers like Kris Olson.

"Every single English teacher I had here growing up was excellent," Stephen said. "They really set me up well." His English teachers would enjoy knowing that in addition to now teaching advanced trouble shooting, a flying crew chief class and transition and route classes for the C-17 plane, he also teaches tech writing, grammar and English classes. When, he was chosen for the instructor role, he went back to school at the Community College of the Air Force and earned degrees as an instructor of technology and military science, and aviation maintenance technology.



*Stephen Lanham - Class of 2005*

Not bad for a guy who was hoping to avoid college.

"The Air Force has been really good for personal development," Stephen said. "I never thought I would want to get degrees. But, the Air Force made me. Going back to school made me realize all the things I should have buckled down and done. It took me 10 years to get here, but I got here. I feel like I'm well suited to teach."

Stephen said when he joined the Air Force, he was hoping for an assignment close to home at Offutt Air Force Base after his basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. Stephen enjoyed the closeness of his extended family support system that he grew up with in Holdrege and was hoping to continue to be near them. "I had a really good family system," Stephen said. "My whole family is from here (Holdrege). They were super supportive of every decision I ever made, and that was probably the best foundation anybody could ever ask for."

However, the Air Force had other plans for him. After his aviation mechanic training, he was stationed at McChord Air Force Base in Fort Lewis, Washington. He became a mechanic for the large military transport aircraft, the C-17s.

His first deployment came in 2006, when he was sent to Kyrgyzstan. Then, the boy who never wanted to travel became "addicted" to deployments around the world. "You get to see the mission in real life from fixing the aircraft to medical evacuations," he said. "We would transport all sorts of cargo, anywhere from tanks to toilet paper, to anywhere in the world."

It was a long way from the safety and smallness of his hometown.

"You have those moments when you stop and reflect," Stephen said. "I never thought it would happen. I'm half way around the world in the desert, fixing airplanes to help fight the war and seeing all this crazy stuff going on around me."

He returned to Kyrgyzstan three more times and also served in Qatar twice, Kuwait, Bahrain, Italy, Corsica, Turkey, Germany, Canada, Spain, Sicily, and all over the United States, including Hawaii. He has not yet served in Africa or South America, but he hopes to in the future.

He even served on quick response trips to Antarctica to deliver supplies to the scientists and others working there with the National Science Foundation. "Every time we were down there, we'd save a life," he said of his Antarctica trips. "There was always some scientist that would go down on the ice. It was cool being part of the life-saving missions where we'd bring a scientist back."

During his first 9 and-a-half years with the Air Force, Stephen worked as a flying crew chief, a dedicated crew chief and on the prime nuclear airlift team that transports nuclear missiles.

It was his job to make sure that the C-17s were in working order and repair them if they broke down. He would fly out to repair planes that were stranded in the desert, preventing the Air Force from losing a \$250 million plane. He enjoyed becoming proficient at his job and eventually being that "go-to" mechanic that could problem solve most any problem on the C-17.

He took his role seriously and realized the importance of what he was doing. "Every time you fly the airplane, everyone's life on that plane is your responsibility," he said.

In 2014, he was notified that the Air Force had decided to make him an instructor. He would have to uproot his life in Washington State and move to New Jersey. At first, he was mad about the move and the career change, but he now enjoys his new assignment. In addition to being an instructor, he also serves as the Military Training Leader, the Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Representative, and a Unit Safety Representative. He has earned the rank of staff sergeant and hopes to eventually become a senior staff sergeant.



He has been awarded many ribbons and medals during his years of service so far, including a Commendation Medal, an Achievement Medal, a Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal, and many others.

Stephen said he has nine years to finish out his military career, and then he and his family (wife, Letticia, and children Isabella, 9; Kayla, 6; and Luke, 5) hope to move to Holdrege and be near his family and friends (like his best friend Randy Wells) again.

"I love the Air Force and everything it's done for me," Stephen said. "I love the



people I've met. My mom and dad are still super supportive and my grandparents, too. But, I miss the closeness of being here with them."

## About Us

*The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.*

### **Holdrege Public Schools Foundation**

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