

## **Duty and Dedication**

It is a bright and sunny day today in Champaign, Illinois. The yellow rays of the sun beam down coloring this red brick-built college landscape of The University Of Illinois with a gleaming shade of gold. Students, professors, and workers all are hustling to make looming due dates, prepare lectures, and earn a living. Adam Yau is one of these workers for the University, but there are some differences between him and his peers. Entering his office makes this all the more obvious. As the sun gleams into his working space, military awards and mementos are brightened with this golden sheen showcasing Adam's military past. A past that molded him into the man he is today, and allowed him to work in the position he currently has today. A path of life that certainly did come with its ups and downs, but to Adam, would overall provide lifetime motivation and a sense of purpose. Utilizing both discipline and hard work throughout his life he was able to build himself up to where he is today. As with any person's story, it is best to start at the beginning, to see the rise of Adam Yau from a civilian just like anyone else, to a U.S. Army Infantry soldier, to the returning Afghanistan Veteran who stands today.

Adam Yau was born on August 23rd, 1971 as the youngest child of three, his brothers being Anderson and Albert Yau. Born to Chinese immigrants, Mee-Quen and Shu-Woon Yau who both left China from Hong Kong years before he was born. Although Adam and his brother Albert are both identical twins, Albert was born just a few minutes before him and as such earned the title of being the "older" brother. Adam's other brother, Albert, on the other hand, was born only a few years before the duo having been born in 1969. Being relatively close to each other in age allowed the brothers to, in turn, become quite close with one another personally. It was normal for Adam and his brothers to play games like tag, hide and seek, and the like throughout their childhoods. The connection between the twins was naturally particularly strong,

he usually hung out with Albert more often than Anderson but still, they were as close as any other brothers.

Adam has many fond memories of his early life, times of playing games with his brothers while his parents worked at the restaurant owned by one of his Uncles called Mois Tea Garden Restaurant in Champaign Illinois. If he wasn't playing and having fun, then he was watching superheroes like *Batman* on the TV. Eventually, Adam's parents would own a Chinese restaurant of their own and he would learn to help out around the place. Even during the earliest years of his life, he remembers having to help out around a kitchen. If he wasn't helping his parents prepare and actually cook the food, then he was taking someone's order at the front of the restaurant. It seemed that it would be expected for all of the Yau children to help out with the restaurant when they were able, it being the primary source of income for the family. Although his mother occasionally worked in other ventures, like sewing, the family's primary and often sole source of income was from the restaurant. Adam does not remember his parents as being the most strict disciplinarians in the world, and according to him they rarely had to be, as he only ever remembers being hit once by his father. A simple literal slap on the wrist punishment for knocking over a large container of soy sauce after messing around with his brother.

Once it came time for school Adam would still work at the family restaurant while also going to class, even at an early age this was something that he had little difficulty maintaining. Cary Busey Elementary would be the first school that he would attend, thinking back to his time at the school he struggled to remember much of the place, only really remembering that his parents walked him to class. However, he could just vaguely remember his 1st-grade teacher Mrs. Barker a teacher that he describes as being a "clear veteran teacher" a title he gives to many of his elementary school teachers who he described as mostly being older women who appeared

to have been there a while. Cary Busey as it turns out would not be the only elementary school that he would attend, change would be coming quite quickly for him in this regard.

Upon entering the third grade, Adam would go from the familiar grounds of Cary Busey to the new school of Westview Elementary in Champaign. A change that brought little stress and was of little issue to him, for it was closer to his home. Considering he also mostly played with his brothers anyway, it also seemed that the complete social reset that came with changing schools was of minimal concern. As a matter of fact, he would meet some of his most memorable friends during his time in Westview, one of which being another student named Jim Sails. Both of the young boys shared some similarities beyond just going to the same school, both of their parents were immigrants. Adam the son of two Chinese immigrants, and Jim the son of two German immigrants. On occasion, both boys would also race each other and play outside riding bikes, and all the like. Jim would become a longtime friend who although ended up moving away from Champaign to North Carolina while both were still in middle school, still maintain contact with each other even today decades later.

When it came to classes Adam was no different to most young boys, he loved physical education as well as mathematics, two subjects he felt he was quite good at. Even when moving up from elementary school to middle school these two particular subjects remained to be a personal favorite. The actual transfer from elementary to middle school was of equal concern to him, this concern being none. Upon entering Jefferson Middle School in the Fall of 1981, he noted little change in how he viewed things. It would mostly seem that school as an entity while important, was a more secondary aspect to his life, a trend that would carry on throughout his life. Rather than being in extracurricular activities like baseball, band, or football, he worked at the family business instead. Adam's family and working life, while also having fun outside

appeared to be the main focus of his attention early on, and his home life was something that appeared to be completely separate from his school life.

Adam's life at home was one that allowed him to get that early work experience from helping with the family business. When he wasn't in class or playing with friends then he was helping his family directly in the restaurant. He would not only just work the register at the front of the restaurant or take the orders of customers, but would also assist in cooking. The small hot kitchen and the smell of chop suey are two things that to this day he still remembers vividly, a smile describing the work with family, a wince describing the at times greasy smells of a kitchen. Even still, being able to get this early work experience and working with his hands were two things that would greatly benefit him later on in his life. The actual house that he and his family lived in was in Champaign on Greendale Dr. A ranch house where he shared a room with his twin brother Albert while the oldest, Anderson had his room. It was quite normal for the father of the family to work six days a week for almost the entirety of the day, so this idea or concept of hard, consistent work was something that Adam personally witnessed before entering the hard and routine profession of the military that would later define his life. Every now and then his parents would use leftover food from the restaurant as their family dinner, at times a necessity for the restaurant was the family's primary and key source of income. He remembers his mother telling him and his brothers how thankful they should be that their father works and owns a restaurant, without it, they likely wouldn't be eating that night. Beyond this, his home and life at home were not different at all from the typical Illinois household.

Whenever he was not helping the family or doing schoolwork then he was indulging in his earliest hobbies, reading comic books and playing at the arcade. If there was one thing that he consistently enjoyed reading about in his youth it was that of comic book heroes like Plastic

Man, Batman, and all the like. A hobby introduced to him by his Uncle Sander who he would occasionally see whenever he would travel up to Chicago, either to visit extended family or sometimes visit Chinatown. The trips up North to Chicago were particularly memorable to him, being able to see the giant buildings and the bustle of the city certainly was a different tone to that of life in Champaign. Sometimes during these trips to the city, he would see his Uncle Martin Moore who had served in the Army from 1968-1972 working as a Military Police Officer at the time. During his youth, Adam wanted to be a cop like the people who helped out the superheroes in the comic books, and Uncle Martin was just like that. Although he never saw combat in Vietnam during the time, the military was still quite an integral part of his life and was something he was not at all at issue with talking about. Sharing with a young Adam some of his stories about working in the service, would be the earliest taste of what would eventually become a massive part of his own life.

Eventually, as quickly as it began, middle school would end. Once again this transition from the middle school to the high school landscape was not a very stressful one. Another school change had arrived, bringing about yet another massive change of scenery and really nothing more in the eyes of Adam. Centennial High School in Champaign would be his new school and once again it was something he would really seem to just go through to just get it done. Even throughout high school, he was not involved in any extracurricular activities or sports but still, he did help out at the restaurant. Every now and then his parents would give him and his brothers a little bit of money as a paycheck for their help at the restaurant. If he wasn't watching TV or reading comics then he was going down to the arcades around Champaign and playing games there as well. As he got older, he would travel around the town and campus seeing the numerous places around Champaign and getting even more acquainted with the area. Something he would

be able to do even more once he received his car upon earning his license at 16, a 1976 Chevrolet Impala, handed down to him from his parents. Although he didn't go on any country-wide road trips or anything during this time, he did enjoy cruising around the town and just lived life.

Doing school work when he needed to, working with the family, and going to the arcade were staples of the adolescent years of Adam Yau. However, yet again as quickly as school starts for many it quickly ends and high school was another instance of this.

Graduation day had finally arrived in May of 1989, and things were starting to come together, at least for now. Adam decided to pursue an associate's degree in business at Parkland College in Champaign. A decision that was welcomed by his parents as it allowed him to stay in town and continue to help the family business while at the same time allowing him to continue his education. It was something at this point that seemed like an easy follow-up to high school, finishing that wasn't too difficult a challenge so how bad could college be?

Well unfortunately for Adam, a lack of motivation mixed with not having a ton of passion for the material made things rather difficult for him. While he was still getting most of what he needed to done and still was helping out with the business, he did start to struggle in school. During this time, he remembered seeing posters and other things for the National Guard, benefits like tuition assistance and the like intrigued him heavily. Thinking back to his days hearing stories of the Army from his Uncle Martin made the prospect all the more enticing. Finally, one particular incident in particular convinced him to finally take the plunge into the military, a chance meeting that would play such a large role in his life. One day while getting on the bus back home he saw a man wearing the military army green button-up uniform of the time. Jeff Buxton a friend from high school just so happened to be in the right place at the right time. Upon seeing each other the two would begin to talk about things, how their lives were going, and

other topics. After having a small discussion about the military, the topic being quite unavoidable considering Buxton's uniform, Adam decided to go through with it and try the military for himself. No longer would he hear of stories of soldiers on TV and from word of mouth, he too would eventually become one.

Thoughts of the fun and adventurous side of the military were prominent in his mind when going to the National Guard at this time. "I'd be able to drive trucks, see more things, and blow stuff up," he would say during an interview, describing the fun he was expecting to experience when signing up. It seemed that the military for him was not only an avenue to experience new things but an escape from the mundane and boring parts of college. Not too long after having his catch-up conversation with Jeff Buxton, he was well on his way to the National Guard Armory in Urbana. Once he arrived, he was informed of the unfortunate news that the normal recruiter at the time was on vacation. Undeterred by this he still decided to talk with Sergeant First Class Robert Leonard who was taking over the position of recruiter for the area at that point. Ultimately he would sign up to be a part of the Danville National Guard, a decision that he would come to regret, not because of anything negative but because he hated having to drive to Danville for drill. "I was definitely an easy enlistment" Adam would say thinking back, nothing would hold him back from trying this military option in life. Informing both of his parents of his intent to join the National Guard was not a difficult conversation, both of his parents were proud, and he would continue his education at Parkland once he returned from military basic training. August 17th, 1990 was the day that he would sign his paperwork and begin one of the largest and most influential periods of his life, his military career. Adam was certainly excited about it, doing push-ups and pull-ups whenever he could and drinking more

water in preparation. From this point on, things were about to change if only a little bit at this point.

If there is one particular period of time that every single former military servicemember remembers, it is their time in boot camp. Regardless of branch, period of service, or length of service, the memories of basic training tend to be some of the longest-lasting in most people's minds. For Adam this also does reign true, he remembered his first night arriving at Fort Benning Georgia, the bumpy hilly South a whole different world and environment to the flat plains of Illinois. The night was particularly dark and cold, and as he and the other recruits arrived at training the realization that things were going to be difficult really began to set in. Once at the base, drill sergeants were quickly on every recruit yelling for them to move and gather all of their items. The screaming and counting down of numbers stood out strongly in his mind, "TEN", "NINE", "EIGHT", the drill instructors would shriek counting down the time needed for the recruits to finish a task. Failure would result in more push-ups, or getting chewed out, among various other punishments, so if a drill instructor wanted things to happen a certain way it would happen. In order to keep calm and keep his mind off of the stressful and quick-paced environment of basic training the same thought would keep him motivated, "Millions of others did it before me, I could too."

Once he began to get settled into his area and the new environment he found himself in, he would grind through the tasks and challenges of basic training. Things such as marksmanship, military expectations, foot marching, and a multitude of other topics were extensively practiced and covered routinely to craft the civilians that entered into soldiers. If there ever was one particular thing that he absolutely despised it was foot marching, the black combat boots were especially uncomfortable and sometimes blistered the feet of many soldiers. As with many other

recruits Adam earned a nickname from his Drill Sergeant Timothy Rewer, “Tweety”. Timothy Rewer was a shorter man with a neatly trimmed mustache who gave Adam this name for his apparent squeaking while yelling out during drills. Other soldiers earned various nicknames as well, “chicken wing” was another for the group, mockery and punishment were both utilized at times to enforce discipline a normal aspect of the military. The only area that Adam was particularly concerned with passing was the firing course test with the M16 rifle. Having little to practically no proper experience with weapons prior to basic training, he was a little worried about passing this particular course, however, his worries ended up unfounded as he was able to make it through without any holdups.

In April of 1991, he would finally earn the title that he sought and looked up to many years before, soldier. The stories told by Uncle Martin, the value of hard work he learned from all of those years working in the kitchen, and the chance meeting he had with Jeff Buxton all led up to this moment in his life. Through self-discipline and personal willpower, he was able to take control and bring about great change to what became the typical routine of his life prior. Things were not entirely finished, however. Although he did complete his basic military training, he still had to finish his military occupational training for the infantry. The training for Infantry was not too much different from that of what he did in basic training. There was more foot marching, more fire range practice, and a few other different types of training left but these would quickly come to pass. Only a few months later he would be completely done with his training and return home, back to Champaign Illinois.

Once he returned back to Champaign, Adam would drive to Danville in order to attend drills while still helping his family with the restaurant every now and then. After switching his major to Criminal Justice and using his military benefits to pay for his education, he was able to

graduate with his Associate's in criminal justice in the Fall of 1993. Although even by his own admission he wasn't the most motivated student, he still decided to transfer to Illinois State University in Bloomington after graduating. After only attending for a few months and still serving in the National Guard at the time, an offer was extended to him that would allow him to travel outside of the country a personal dream of his. Working as an EMT in Egypt, Adam would assist in a simple peacekeeping mission with no combat, and this would likely not last longer than a year. Upon some consideration, he decided to put his ISU education on hold and went to Sharm El-Sheikh Egypt on this mission.

The time spent in Egypt was not extremely eventful, besides one particular incident. During his time there, he remembered the cook of the group, Specialist Noch from New York. Noch was notorious for giving low portions when food was never scarce and only using Adobo seasoning, a seasoning that to this day Adam despises "No Adobo" he says even today. After informing all the soldiers who complained of his cooking that they were "ungrateful" Noch gave up the position, so having this background in cooking decided to take one for the team and took over his spot. Now he did get some stuff out of having two jobs while in Egypt, being a cook and EMT, he wouldn't have to do tower guard duty which was a definite plus to him and he also received an army achievement medal as an E-4 or specialist as a result which is quite the rare accomplishment.

Once he finished up his time in Egypt, Adam returned back to Champaign and continued his education at ISU in the Fall of 1995. Ultimately, however, he would not finish his bachelor's degree in criminal justice, instead, he decided to dedicate himself fully to the army. On January 7th, 1997, he moved from the National Guard and signed to active duty. Now rather than the part-time weekend schedule of the National Guard, the full-time Army schedule would become

the new normal for him. During his signing to active duty, he made it clear that he wanted to see more of the world so he was offered an infantry job at the Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. Unlike some of the previous times informing his parents of his decisions with the military, he remembered his mother crying after telling her about her move to active duty. The thought that her son had fully become a soldier who had grown older than the boy she remembered many years before simply was enough to bring her to tears.

One memory of Hawaii that is still vividly clear is his initial arrival off of the plane. The colorful sky brought about by the sunset gave the silhouetted island an orange and blue hue showcasing the tropical beauty of the land of Hawaii, entirely different from the windy and cold of Illinois. While in Hawaii he would do more dreaded foot marching, weapons training, and sometimes he would go out and have fun with his fellow soldiers around Hawaii. Trips to downtown Honolulu and some of the beaches for frequent areas of fun during this time. Eventually, the contract that he signed for his time in Hawaii would run out and he would return back to Champaign in 2000. The time spent in Hawaii while still being at work, also allowed Adam to have some fun as well and relax, there are likely very few states with weather better than that of Hawaii.

Once he returned from Hawaii he had some personal belongings shipped back to the continental United States, a Honda Civic, as well as some motorcycles. Instead of flying to pick these things up, he drove instead, taking a road trip across the states. During this time he visited some friends that he served with in Texas, saw the Grand Canyon, and picked up all of his stuff in California. One thing he always wanted to do was go and see more of the country and he thought that there would be no better time for him. Eventually, in January 2001 he would sign to work with the Illinois National Guard again, this time with a support battalion. How could he

know that one particularly horrifically tragic event in history was coming that was going to bring great change not to just Adam's life but to millions around the globe?

September 11th, 2001 is one of the few days that every single person can agree will always live in infamy. Many of those alive then remember where they were when they heard the news of the attacks. It is a day that Adam remembers vividly as well, to him it showed that tensions were really about to ramp up all across the world and that they did. When Operation Enduring Freedom and the earliest points of the War in Afghanistan commenced on October 7th, 2001, his National Guard unit and many others were deployed overseas to assist in defending against potential terroristic threats. During this period in time, he would be sent to Wiesbaden Germany near the city of Frankfurt to assist with security and provide aid in the event of a terrorist attack. Anxieties over where and when the next potential target of terror would go beyond just the American mainland. Numerous American bases around the world were viewed as potential targets and the nation was at an all-time point of alarm in the face of potential unknown dangers, attacks similar in scale to those that occurred on 9/11. Luckily for Adam, there would be no combat during his time in Germany. While it was quite a monumental and eventful year in terms of American history, his time in Germany ended up being comparatively not so. He returned back to Illinois in 2002 after staying for only a few months in that area.

After returning home from Germany, he would move to the town of Brookfield Illinois for a little bit. It was during this period from about 2002 to 2007 that he would work various different jobs for the National Guard and the military. Instead of just doing combat, he decided to try his hand at recruiting. A job that he described as being quite challenging and difficult, the idea and process of convincing someone to join the military as being a hard one. Although he tried to be as honest and direct about the benefits and drawbacks as possible, he still found some

difficulty working recruiting and would move away from this after a while. Beyond this, he also continued to serve his obligations in the National Guard working and doing drills and other duties when required there also. Also during this time he would start a relationship and get married as well. But he was missing something, and that something was not necessarily something he would find by staying in America. He wanted to return to the Infantry which helped make him the man he was at that point. So when the mission alert came through for him to return to the hornet's nest that was Afghanistan at this time, he took the opportunity and ran.

The decision to return to the Army did come with great consequences, Adam's wife was strongly opposed to the decision and did everything she could to convince him not to go. Doing absolutely everything in her power to convince him that doing such was a bad idea day after day. This would in turn lead to his wife giving him his hardest ever dilemma, he would have to choose, his wife, or his Army, in no way could he do both. So he did make his choice, he decided to be a patriot and as such sacrificed greatly for his country as a result without stepping one foot on the battlefield. When he accepted the request to go, he knew it wasn't going to end well for the relationship, but "he loved the uniform." A great sacrifice not all men would willingly do.

September of 2007 was when he was sent to Camp Nathan Smith, located inside Kandahar City Afghanistan. The weather was hot and windy by day, and at night it would cool to a chilly frost. While in this area he and his fellow soldiers were tasked with training and assisting The Afghan National Police (ANP) while also performing mounted and unmounted patrols of the area. Patrols were usually done in the mornings and afternoons but never overnight, at least not any that Adam was a part of. While living within Camp Nathan Smith he could smell the distant burn pits that permeated the area with its stench. A stench that he describes as "burning firewood mixed with feces" and other times he simply refers to as, "a shit smell." Although this was

something he quickly became noise-blind to he still does smell that distinct smell even today. He also remembers the Adhan that would play five times throughout the day calling Muslims to prayer. The chiming noise and horn that would play are two things he still says he can hear perfectly all this time later.

The police force that Adam and his fellow soldiers were sent to train were, in his opinion, not very good at their job and not very good listeners. At this point he was undeniably a true military veteran, he was 36 years old, a staff sergeant, and had been on several active duty contracts. So he did not mind trying to help teach a new generation of people how to handle and protect themselves, he did want to help and show the things he had learned throughout his time in the military. But it seemed that the police with their group were just not getting things or were simply not caring. One incident that sticks out during this time was when two of these police officers were messing with a gun, while toying around with the weapon it accidentally discharged killing one of the men. The man was shot in the chest and died while inside Camp Nathan Smith. Other than the training of these police, he found the routine patrols to not be too bad. Adam never was attacked or saw combat while in Afghanistan personally, but he did see some of the brutality of warfare firsthand, few ever escape war without seeing the visceral brutality that man can cause to man.

One day a few months into his stay in Afghanistan another patrol went out and was attacked with an IED(improvised explosive device) this explosion would everyone in the patrol vehicle. Adam remembers arriving at the scene and keeping it secure, the bodies of those killed had been taken away but the vehicle remained on the road dented, burned, and destroyed. One of the people killed in the explosion was a man named Sergeant Paul Smith from Peoria Illinois. A man that Adam remembered while in Afghanistan and whose name gave him a reflective pause

after saying it. Sergeant Smith left behind a wife and his children. After this Adam still felt he had a mission to do and kept going, but soon his time in Afghanistan would come to an end.

After 8 months it was time for him to go home in 2008, this time for good. He would meet his parents and brother in Pontiac Illinois at the National Guard Armory located there. Although still in the National Guard, he wouldn't deploy again, ending his time in service on September 22nd, 2012. He served twenty years in the Army, granting him full benefits as a result. It would be through a friend at the National Guard that he heard of an opportunity to work at the University of Illinois in 2012 as an inventory specialist. Eventually, he began working at the Siebel Center for Computer Science for a few years until moving positions to the National Center For Supercomputing Applications, where he works today keeping inventory for the department a job that he enjoys and sees himself staying at for some time.

The life of Adam Yau is that of devotion and discipline. Disciplined and attuned to a life of hard work that he witnessed throughout his life from his father which was then strengthened by boot camp, and devoted to the greater cause that is the military as a soldier dedicated to the uniform and willing to sacrifice everything for it. As the world moves on to the next war, and the War in Afghanistan becomes a thing of the past, how will these veterans be remembered? Likely, the answer will only properly lie in retrospect, so only time holds the answer now, and time is rather secretive you never know what it will hold.

