

## Semi-automatics to stethoscopes

During service in Iraq, Andy Oh ('03) realizes his life's mission is to be a healer

BY JEFFREY CRETZ ('03)

In the fog of war, one soldier found his calling and his life's mission. During the "routine occurrences" on the battlefield – combat, loss, suffering, brotherhood and courage – **Capt. Andy Oh ('03)** realized he was destined to become a healer.

In the heat of battle in Iraq, Oh recognized that he had many of the traits necessary to make him a good military doctor – a deep appreciation for the American soldier, the ability to process complex situations and to act decisively, and the realization that he was responsible for the lives of the men he led.

Oh decided to make healing his life's work.

Oh is a 2013 graduate of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. He served in Iraq as a rifle platoon leader in an Air Assault infantry regiment during some of the bloodiest months of the nearly nine-year-old war.

While conducting military operations in Ar Ramadi in 2005, Oh was responsible for 35 U.S. Army soldiers and equipment valued at more than \$4 million. One of his most profound memories is a conversation he had with an Iraqi man named Hasan. During a routine reconnaissance mission in and around Hasan's village, Oh talked to the man about his village and the numerous attempts of the insurgents to resist the Americans and other coalition partners who were there to provide a safe and stable environment. Oh and his soldiers were there to help build schools for the children and to stabilize the local economy so adults could earn a living.

Hasan whispered to Oh for him to come closer as if he wanted to share a secret. In broken English, Hasan said, "You be happy tonight." At that moment, Oh understood. "He wanted my men to be safe and to feel like guests in his home. We were now his responsibility, as he was ours."

Oh earned his Bachelor of Business Administration degree from JMU and concentrated in operations management. He also served as a Reserve Officer Training Corps cadet and was active in the Student Government Association. After graduation and being commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, Oh completed Ranger School. The 60-day intense combat leadership course is oriented for small-unit tactics, and training in the three distinct phases occurs in Georgia and Florida.

After Ranger School and service in Iraq, Oh applied for and earned admission to the only federally funded medical school in the

country. The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences is located in Bethesda, Md. Oh began medical school in fall 2009 and says, "The federal government paid for my medical school training. What civilians will have as a financial obligation, I will have as a commitment to the military."

He is currently completing a residency in emergency medicine at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. Upon completion in 2016, Oh plans to serve as a battalion surgeon, preferably in a special operations billet. He hopes to treat and care for special operations soldiers.

After serving as a battalion surgeon for a few years, Oh plans to complete additional medical training or return to teaching. If Oh is destined to teach, he'd like to instruct new military doctors during their emergency medicine residency program. He fondly remembers his time as

an assistant professor of military leadership at the University of Massachusetts. "That was the second-best job I've had in the Army," he says. His favorite job to date was serving as a rifle platoon leader in Iraq.

During his grueling medical school curriculum, Oh found the time to write several studies and case reports. He co-wrote a psychiatry case report about the

profound disinhibition, aggression and paranoia of a previously high-functioning U.S. Navy sailor following synthetic marijuana use. He also co-wrote ongoing research regarding the benefits of creating an injectable powder that could be used during treatment on the battlefield to enhance the healing of compound fractures of extremities.

Oh plans to remain in the Army until he is eligible for retirement, but he says, will retire "once it stops being fun. That was the primary reason why I joined JMU ROTC – because it was fun."

Oh's favorite JMU memories include rappelling off Eagle Hall as an ROTC cadet. "I fit in with ROTC and the Ranger Group," he adds. "I loved the fun and challenging activities, running through obstacle courses in the wooded areas near campus, and eating worms and crickets during a survival class." Oh also met many of his best friends in Ranger Group, and these friends serve alongside Oh in the Army. **11**

**\* Learn more about JMU ROTC at [www.jmu.edu/rotc](http://www.jmu.edu/rotc).**



**Andy Oh ('03) found his calling as a healer while leading an Army unit in Ar Ramadi, Iraq. Oh is a 2013 graduate of the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences and is completing a residency in emergency medicine. He hopes to treat special operations soldiers.**