

CHRISTOPHER GEORGE '03, AN ADVOCATE FOR THE LIBERAL ARTS

by Michele Tinker, Director of Annual Giving

Sitting in traffic in Norfolk, Virginia, Christopher George '03 had time to chat about Defiance College and life after graduation.

Chris is a U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAG) officer assigned to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Norfolk, where he is part of the Naval Crime Investigative Service (NCIS). He sums his job up as having three bosses: the Navy, NCIS, and the Attorney's Office.

"I don't wear a uniform and I work downtown, not on the base. It's an unusual job for someone on active duty."

Chris was born in Ohio, and even though he grew up in Florida, he knew he wanted to return to Ohio for college. Chris found DC when he was looking for a small college where he could major in criminal justice. "I chose DC because I wanted a place where I would be a student, not a number," he explained. At DC, he was a Presidential Scholar and completed his bachelor's degree in three years. He was also an athlete, playing football. One of his best DC memories was making the play-offs in 2001.

"Defiance gave me the opportunity to have professors and law enforcement officers as mentors. I liked the dedication of the instructors, and their expertise was evident. It seemed like you couldn't go anywhere they didn't know you. Even if you were in a class outside your major, you got as much time with a professor as needed," Chris remembers. He particularly enjoyed the criminal justice trips he participated in, and he still maintains a close relationship with Professors Steve Sondergaard and Don Knueve, coming back for Don's retirement reception at Homecoming.

Chris went on to earn his law degree from Mercer University's Walter F. George School of Law in Macon, Georgia. Criminal justice is a great entry into law, Chris contends, adding that he was surprised there were not more CJ majors in law school. He had started thinking about joining the Navy while he was at DC, and was sworn in as a reserve officer his last year of law school, entering training upon graduation.

In 2009, as a Navy JAG officer, Chris was assigned as Officer in Charge of the Detainee Legal Operations Center in Baghdad, Iraq. He considers this experience to be a career highlight, one that involved him in all manner of legal work concerning detainees – including interaction with the Iraqi legal system. Having this responsibility was a humbling experience as well, but one he places among the top three of his life – along with having a family and representing the United States as a member of the military.



The satisfaction he derives from serving in the military, Chris explains, comes from being around people who are service oriented, from helping sailors and from making the Navy a better place for them. "The dedication and skill of so many of the enlisted ranks blows me away. They give a lot for not much in return. I really like helping them out."

Asked about how his education prepared him overall, he says, "Law school prepared me to be an attorney. My liberal arts education at Defiance College prepared me for life."

Because of his enthusiasm about the importance and impact of a liberal arts education, Chris was selected to provide a testimonial on the power of liberal arts education for the Council of Independent Colleges. The CIC is the major national service organization for small and midsized independent liberal arts colleges and universities in the U.S.

"A legal education does not teach the law. Rather, a complete law student learns to think like a lawyer – to gather the evidence and law to protect the client's interests. A liberal arts education does the same for the undergraduate: it teaches the student how to think, not what to think; how to lead, not just to follow; and how to serve, not just to take. In short, the liberal arts prepares you to take on the world. I majored in criminal justice, but a liberal arts college does not limit your learning. I have used the lessons of my liberal arts education everywhere, from law school, to the courts of Iraq, to the United States District Court," Chris wrote. "The ability to engage in study as a scholar and the opportunity to be so deeply engaged in extracurricular learning are what set Defiance College and liberal arts colleges like it apart."

Chris is married. His wife, Kate, is a music teacher, and they have two sons, John Paul and David, ages 6 and 3. When asked about hobbies, Chris replied, "The outdoors is pretty much my hobby – hiking, camping and Jeeps."