

# THE BEAR BATTALION

By Dr. Greg Brandao '73

They have provided servant leadership throughout the country, from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii to The Pentagon in Washington, D.C., from Miami, Florida to Topeka, Washington, and many places in between.

They have provided servant leadership throughout the world, including, but not limited to, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Germany, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kosovo, Kuwait, Oman, and South Korea.

They share at least two common bonds: These men have all attended United States service academies, and they are all graduates of Catholic High School in Baton Rouge.

They are 56 men whose names are listed in the online chart and who are now joined by seven CHS grads who headed to service academies in the fall of 2022 and another three in fall of 2023.

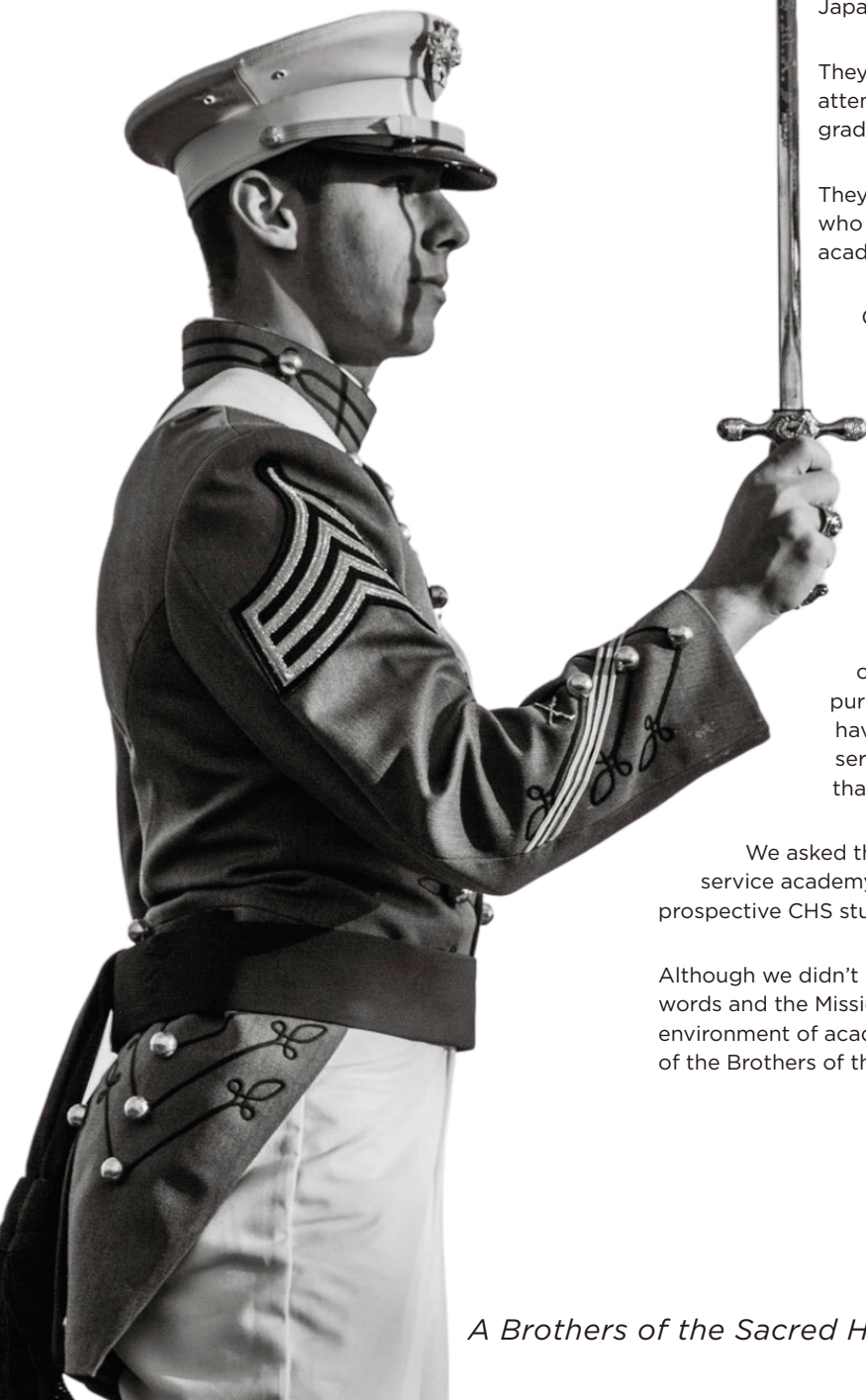
Catholic High School is certainly one of, if not THE top feeder schools to the United States service academies. This tradition of distinguished education and service to our country is a source of great pride for our alumni. Blue Ribbons, superior ratings, championships, National Merit scholars...all of these accolades and countless others distinguish us from peer schools in the state. But the "Long Orange Line" clearly separates CHS from all other schools in the country.

According to Lisa Harvey, CHS president, "It is humbling to read the quotes from our alumni and realize how the mission of Catholic High School and their experiences of that mission lived daily as a student prompted them to pursue military academies as a career choice. Over the years I have witnessed the increased number of students who consider serving their country through military academies, and I am proud that this culture exists at CHS."

We asked these men two questions about the impact of CHS on their service academy experiences, and we also asked them their advice for other prospective CHS students who are considering application to a service academy.

Although we didn't prompt them, please note the striking parallels between their words and the Mission of Catholic High School to "teach gospel values in an environment of academic excellence according to Catholic tradition and the spirit of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart."

*Their answers in their words follow.*



# WHAT ROLE DID YOUR EXPERIENCE AT CHS HAVE IN YOUR DECISION TO ATTEND THE SERVICE ACADEMY?

“At CHS, I learned very quickly just how important selfless service is. By taking in the curriculum of the Brothers, I was able to deduce that a life of service is what I want for myself. I had wanted to attend West Point long before my days at CHS, but being a student at CHS cemented my desire of service to this country.”

*William Conger CHS '21, USMA '25*

“The CHS network connected me to CHS grads at the United States Naval Academy. Also, CHS has a code of conduct so students are required to hold themselves to a high standard of honor and discipline. I wanted a college experience that had the same standard.”

*Brian Primeaux CHS '12, USNA '17*

“The values of servant leadership and academic excellence at CHS inspired me to follow a path of service to society, while pursuing a top-tier education.”

*Sean Gahagan CHS '05, USMA '09*

“CHS taught me about service and giving back to institutions and people that helped me. Being in the military allows me to make my career about serving the US and giving back to ensure the advantages of being an American remain secure.”

*Chris Martinez CHS '01, USAFA '05*

“In many ways, CHS opened the door for me to gain exposure on what the service academies were. Prior to attending CHS, I had very little knowledge on what the service academies were, and the many opportunities that they offered.”

*Karsten Brown CHS '19, USAFA '23*

“CHS helped me realize the importance of being a part of something bigger than myself. I found a direct correlation between my passion for my faith and my passion to serve my country.”

*Brian Williams CHS '97, USNA '01*

“The program at CHS showed me that achieving great things was not only possible, but expected. If I had gone to another school where mediocrity was acceptable, I probably would have been mediocre. Succeeding at CHS and having the support of my fellow students, faculty and staff helped build the confidence and sense of self-worth that I needed to tackle bigger and bigger challenges, including applying to a service academy.”

*Bryan Hart CHS '98, USMA '02*

“CHS provided excellent academics and extracurricular opportunities that gave me structure and opportunities to find my calling in life.”

*Spencer Jurkiewicz CHS '07, USNA '11*

“My experience at CHS instilled the drive to live a life of service. When the Naval Academy came knocking at the door for football recruiting I was immediately drawn to that school unlike any other at the time. I knew that going to Navy would give my life a purpose beyond what I thought I deserved, and would allow me to be a servant and a leader for our nation’s finest.”

*Jonathan Alvarado CHS '04, USNA '08*

“Coming from Catholic High, I had a strong background in service to others. Leading Sailors is exactly the same. You place their needs first and do whatever you can to help serve the people that serve the country. For me, the Naval Academy was the best pipeline to have the opportunity to lead Sailors and Marines.”

*Brendan Hardin CHS '16, USNA '20*

“The combined focus on service and striving for excellence in all things that the service academies ask for felt similar to the environment at CHS.”

*Austin Gerald CHS '09, USNA '13*





# HOW DID CHS PREPARE YOU FOR SUCCESS IN THE SERVICE ACADEMY?

“CHS taught me about discipline, integrity, and hard work. All things that are important parts of academy life. They also set a standard of excellence and instilled values that are vital if you want to be a success at the academy and in the Army.”

*Josh Burton CHS '95, USMA '00*

**“The most important thing that CHS prepared me for was instilling a level of self reliance that one must have in order to succeed at a service academy. While the academies have plenty of resources and phenomenal staff, it is ultimately up to you to meet the high standards that are expected. And if you fail to meet the standard then it’s on you and no one else.”**

*Dan Burton CHS '98, USMA '02*

“Character development is a fundamental pillar of the mission of the Brothers and coincidentally is a fundamental pillar of USMA, so it was smooth transition. Honor and service are both shared values at CHS and USMA.”

*Connor Finucane CHS '20, USMA '24*

**“The challenging academic curriculum at CHS gave me confidence to take on further challenges at the United States Air Force Academy. Although CHS doesn’t teach thermodynamics or Astrophysics, I was confident I could handle the challenge.”**

*Ryan Carville CHS '97, USAFA '01*

**“The CHS course load coupled with sports practices and other extracurricular activities prepared me for the jam-packed schedule of academy life. It was still a significant shock acclimating to West Point’s relentless daily schedule, but I couldn’t imagine how I would have done it without CHS’ preparation.”**

*Reid Finn CHS '98, USMA '02*

“As a young man, the foundation for who you are and who you become begins to form in high school in your daily, weekly, monthly decisions and interactions. Aspects of integrity, courage, and commitment are taught the moment we step foot on the CHS campus, and although not truly appreciated as a young 15 year old, those character attributes can and do provide us the tools to be successful, in whatever you do.”

*Doug Williams CHS '91, USNA '95*

**“I think the biggest thing is the 24/7 rule. Here at USMA, you are a cadet on and off post and that is exactly what CHS taught. It doesn’t matter whether I am on pass out in NYC or home for leave, what I do reflects the Academy’s values. The 24/7 rule at CHS did the same thing and while other high schools couldn’t get students in trouble for things they did off campus, CHS could. This rule made you think twice about decisions and it translates to here at West Point.”**

*Matthew Tilley CHS '21, USMA '25*

“The honesty, integrity, and self-discipline the Brothers, teachers, and coaches instilled in us mesh perfectly with the characteristics our nation needs in our military officers. I certainly would not have made it through the academy without remaining true to those values, much less have had a successful career in the Air Force.”

*Beau Booth CHS '86, USAFA '92*

**“The combined focus on service and striving for excellence in all things that the service academies ask for felt similar to the environment at CHS.”**

*Austin Gerald CHS '09, USNA '13*

“I was organized and efficient, having been familiarized with computer usage at CHS. Not to mention that my study habits and learning techniques, which I had developed at CHS, aided greatly in compensating for such a difficult and rigorous academic setting. One point that is critical to mention though is the CHS Honor Code Policy. The Honor Code Policy my high school had closely mirrored the Honor Code at West Point which states that a cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do. Since I was provided this background in honor, I felt that I was more secure in my character and ability to perform without external and unbalanced aid from disreputable methods.”

*Nicholas DiLeo CHS '18, USMA '22*



# DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS OR COMMENTS OR ADVICE TO CHS STUDENTS CONSIDERING THE SERVICE ACADEMIES?

"It's an incredible experience that will open your eyes to the world, opportunities, and an amazing set of peers and colleagues."

*Chris Hsu CHS '88, USMA '92*

**"When people think about Service Academies like West Point, they often think about the military training, the physical conditioning, and the academic rigor. These are certainly major components of the Academy, but character development often slips everyone's imaginations. It certainly slipped mine. Military skills can be honed, physical ability can be trained, and academics can be studied, but character takes a long time to develop. Catholic High prepared me for all four pillars."**

*Ezra Grant CHS '17, USMA '22*

"I was not accepted to West Point out of CHS and reapplied after a year at LSU. I wouldn't trade that year for anything in the world and, in fact, would do it all over again the same way. If you aren't accepted initially, don't give up on the dream!"

*Steven Alch CHS '88, USMA '93*

**"Your focus should be a holistic view. While academically rigorous, I knew more people that struggled with the physical and military side of life at the academy. Also, be prepared to embrace a military commitment. It will be the best training you receive, regardless of your future career - military or otherwise. I'm an attorney and my army experience serves me well every day in a myriad of ways."**

*Darren Alch CHS '84, USMA '8*

"To any CHS students considering the service academies, I would advise them that the journey is definitely tough and challenging but also extremely rewarding. You will be exposed to people and opportunities that only the service academies can provide."

*Stephen Gaudin CHS '18, USNA '22*

"I am so thankful there is a 'Long Orange Line' of CHS graduates that are choosing Service Academies. For me, it instills hope in the future of our country and community that some of our best graduates volunteer to defend the Constitution and protect our way of life. I also want to encourage CHS students to consider Service Academies as an option. It is truly a one-of-a-kind experience and will teach you more about yourself than you can ever imagine."

*David Beach CHS '96, USMA '00*

**"Challenge yourself as much as you can now, because the stakes are as low as they are ever going to be, and it will be others challenging you in the future."**

*Justin Eagan CHS '02, USAFA '06*

"My advice to CHS students considering the academies is to consider that the service academies exist to develop leaders of character for our nation's military. There are many reasons people might consider the Academy, but the bottom line is that you must be committed to serve something other than yourself. Once you complete this challenging experience, the degree you earn is something that will open doors for you for the rest of your life both in and out of the military. So many of the leaders in our nation's history started at the service academies and the mission remains the same as it was at the beginning. Days might be tough but the reward is worth the challenge."

*Michael Alch CHS '04, USMA '08*

**"Pray and reflect on what you want your college experience to be and decide what you truly want to get out of your time in college. If you can see yourself at an academy, keep researching more and more about what it entails. If the more you research, the more you like it, then I would say it could be the place for you."**

*Ian Cavana CHS '21, USMA '25*

