

My G.I. Bill Story...

Steven J. Errthum



The military and the federal G.I. Bill made me who I am today.

After I graduated from high school, I set a goal to be the first in my family to graduate from college. But, as I started my first year of college, it was clear that my “life savings” were not going to be enough. I had to figure out another way to continue on my journey and meet my end goal.

I was all set with my sophomore year. Well, beside the fact that I was out of money, already in debt, and was no longer eligible for additional loans. My parents were not financially able to help me. Regardless, I wouldn't have been able to ask them knowing that they were unable to help any of my older siblings. There are times that being the youngest in a family of

10 kids really makes you appreciate the small things that your parents are able to provide.

As summer rolled by, I knew I hadn't earned enough to cover the upcoming tuition that was looming. College for me was going to be done if I didn't quickly come up with another plan of action. I had very few options available to meet my goal of graduating college. That's when I turned to the advice of my dad and my older brothers.

My dad had served in the Army during World War II, and my brothers served in the Marine Corps and the Army, too. They gave me some advice that would change my life in telling me about the of the federal G.I. Bill. They each explained what I could expect if I decided to enlist, and they helped me decide which branch would be the best fit.

After much deliberation, I chose to join the United States Air Force. With that, the next stage of my journey was set.

The fall of 1986 took me to basic training, where I had many growing moments that reinforced why I made the right decision in choosing to serve our nation. I was fortunate in the fact that there were no conflicts during my four years of service, which allowed me to take advantage of many opportunities

offered by the Air Force.

I took college courses and received some additional college credit for training that I had completed. In addition, I was given amazing opportunities to serve in various locations. I was stationed in Wiesbaden, Germany for a couple of years and then finished my service in Colorado Springs, Colorado. These experiences along with the military regimen helped mold me into who I am today. They taught me to be strong, work hard and accept change; the opportunity to travel was an extra bonus.

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Once I completed my service, I returned to the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater to finish my college education. I wanted to prove to myself and others that dreams can be accomplished if you put your mind to it and find a way.

I graduated in May 1993 with a bachelor's degree in finance. If I hadn't taken the challenge to join the service and receive the federal G.I. Bill, it's highly unlikely that I would have ever returned to college. Without the benefit, I wouldn't have realized the dream of graduating college. This was the first step to moving forward in many successes.

My career journey has taken me on many different financial paths. I have served for over 22 years within the state of Wisconsin at various financial roles. As with the Air Force, I have served at a variety of different agencies providing me with a large variety of experiences.

The position I currently hold is the one that I am most proud of in my career. I serve as the finance director for the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. It feels good to serve other veterans since the military and federal G.I. Bill gave so much to me. I would encourage everyone to consider military service for all of its opportunities and benefits. No one will ever know their inner strength until pushed into something new and challenging. Finding those strengths will allow them to achieve any dream they desire.

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs congratulates the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on the 75th anniversary of the G.I. Bill, which has been used to help veterans along on their respective career path.

