

STANDING STRONG

IN THEIR FAITH

Not long ago, Samantha Edrington, currently a full-time missionary in the Philippines, was an electrician's mate stationed on a naval vessel. She was introduced to the gospel by a Latter-day Saint shipmate during her first deployment and was soon baptized. She recalls, "Deployments were really hard. I was confined to a small space for nine months at a time and was the only member in my shop. The environment was at odds with what I believed and tried to live. I couldn't change it, but I could keep myself from becoming part of it.

"We were blessed to have a group leader who had the authority to administer the sacrament and hold meetings. He arranged church on Sundays, family home evenings, and institute for us seven to twelve Latter-day Saint sailors. This helped to keep spiritual thought patterns going and made it easier to get through the rest of the week."

Though being in the military was not easy, Samantha is grateful for her experience. "If it wasn't for the military, I wouldn't be a member."

Young adult Church members like Samantha who serve in the military

face daunting challenges, beginning with separation from home and family amid the rigors of intense physical and mental training. These courageous young men and women willingly undergo this training to prepare themselves to serve and sacrifice for their fellowmen. As they continue their military careers, they experience unpredictable and often dangerous work situations, frequent moves, and deployment. Following are more stories about young adults who have stood strong in their faith and reaped

How do young adult Church members in the military stay close to the Lord?

SAMANTHA EDRINGTON





After two years as a West Point cadet, Austin took time out to serve as a missionary for the Church.

the blessings of serving their God as well as their country.

Searching the Scriptures, Letting Others Help

Michael Santana's "battle buddy" introduced him to the Church at army

basic training. Michael embraced the gospel wholeheartedly and was baptized, but he didn't tell his wife, Tori, until the night before his training was over. Tori was surprised because Michael had not been interested in religion, but it was immediately obvious to her that he was happy. In her words, "He fell in love with the Church and everything it stood for." Tori was able to attend Michael's priesthood ordination and was soon baptized by Michael.

Tori credits their nightly hour-long scripture study and gospel discussions, as well as the many friends she and Michael have in the Church, with keeping them growing in their faith. Tori is legally blind, so she cannot drive. Church members and military senior missionaries give her their love and their time, helping her with errands and always being willing to help find answers to gospel questions. The Santanas have two little girls and are excitedly preparing for their temple sealing.

Michael was due to be deployed in the fall of 2015, but after the birth of their second child in July, he decided to leave the army so he could be nearby to help Tori.

Seeking Out Good Examples

Austin Wheeler enlisted in the army at age 17, intending to be an



AUSTIN WHEELER



MICHAEL SANTANA

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT YOUNG ADULT MEMBERS IN THE MILITARY?

- Single members serving in the military are often far from home and can feel lonely and isolated. We can invite them into our homes and to activities, becoming like adopted families for them.
- Writing uplifting letters or communicating through email or social media are wonderful ways to help members in the military feel connected and appreciated. Try this for family home evening or a class activity.
- Families with a deployed parent carry an extra burden and appreciate help. We can help with chores, errands, children's activities, and babysitting and can offer a listening ear.
- Members in the military who are new to the Church need extra fellowshiping. Be aware of who these new members are and extend your love and support.
- Retired military couples can serve missions at military installations (see [lds.org/callings/military-relations](https://www.lds.org/callings/military-relations)).

BRITTNEY CLARK

infantryman. Instead he was offered entrance into the prep school at West Point, New York, that prepares qualified newly enlisted members for the United States Military Academy, also at West Point.

After completing basic training, Austin made the decision to be completely active in the Church. "It was a decision that changed the trajectory of my life," he says. "At my first Church meeting at the West Point Branch, I met cadets who embodied the ideals of selfless service and showed me what it meant to dedicate their lives in the service of God and country. They were all either returned missionaries or planning to serve missions. The strong bonds of friendship we formed, as well as the constant support of the members in the area, gave me a determination to serve not only the nation but to delay my



military career and serve the Lord."

Two years later, Austin and several classmates resigned from the academy to serve missions. They would return to West Point once their missions were completed.¹

Recognizing Blessings

Brittney Clark is training to be an air traffic controller for the United States Air Force. "The training is incredibly hard, and I am struggling through it," she says. "I go to church every week, read my scriptures, pray twice a day, and pay my tithing, but I realize I haven't really thought too much about the blessings I have received. Though I have some dyslexia, I have gotten better at my work, and I know this is a blessing. Some of the trainees have washed out of the program, and I was also on the verge of doing the same. But the trainers are willing to give me extra help—another blessing. I have learned that you can be friends with those who

BRIAN MORRILL





Brittney with her proud father

do not believe nor live as you do and that they will respect your beliefs—yet another blessing. And I do know that by paying my tithing first, I always have money to pay my bills.”

Establishing Priorities, Finding Balance

Brian Morrill served his mission, graduated from college, was accepted into Navy Officer Candidate School, and then began pilot training. “Flight school is a fast-paced, high-pressure, and high-risk environment,” he says. “I have found, through painful experience, that when I forget the spiritual essentials, I can’t perform as I need to. When I do the essential things, prayer and scripture study being most important, I am calm and confident and feel good about my performance. I taught myself to establish these priorities by not leaving my home before morning personal prayer and scripture study. Sometimes this means I have to get up very early. Then, at night, I make sure to have meaningful prayer. The other thing is balance. Whenever possible I take time to go to church, play sports, and hang out with ward and work friends, all of which helps me unwind.”

BRIAN SHIMASAKI



Opening Our Hearts to Heavenly Father

Brian and Nadia Shimasaki rediscovered the Church while stationed in Japan with the United States Navy after years “of not opening up our hearts to let our Heavenly Father in,” says Nadia. “We were brought halfway around the world to be taught how we can come closer to our Heavenly Father, how to bring the gospel back into our lives, and that no matter what, we are never alone.”

Brian and Nadia were surrounded with loving support from the military senior missionaries (whom Nadia calls their “adoptive family”) and their branch. Brian baptized their two daughters, and the family was recently sealed in the temple. Brian received a commission as an officer, and he and Nadia will both be able to complete college in Florida, where they now live. They know the Lord has blessed them with this opportunity.

Nadia testifies, “Our Heavenly Father loves us so much that He gave His Only Begotten Son, who sacrificed His life to give us the opportunity to choose—this was something we had to learn. We love the gospel of Jesus Christ and know that only through Him can we find happiness and eternal life.” ■

NOTE

1. See Kevin Riedler, “Missionary Service a Tradition at West Point Military Academy,” [lds.org/church/news/missionary-service-a-tradition-at-west-point-military-academy](https://www.lds.org/church/news/missionary-service-a-tradition-at-west-point-military-academy).



WE PRAY FOR YOU

“To our brothers and sisters in harm’s way, we say that we pray for you. We pray that the Lord will watch over you. . . .
 “. . . It was [Christ] who said to His beloved disciples: . . .
 “ ‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid’ [John 14:27]. . . .

“Even when the armaments of war ring out in deathly serenade and darkness and hatred reign in the hearts of some, there stands immovable, reassuring, comforting, and with great outreaching love the quiet figure of the Son of God, the Redeemer of the World.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “War and Peace,” *Ensign*, May 2003, 80–81.