Generations of NMSU students have selflessly answered their nation’s call in the form of military service. From the Spanish-American War to current conflicts overseas, NMSU students have made a measurable impact through their commitment to military service. Students from all over the country often enroll at NMSU for the specific purpose of participating in Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps while they pursue their college degree. ROTC is a bit like an extended internship – cadets acquire skills in leadership, management, physical fitness and critical thinking while they balance the demands of their chosen academic curriculum. The return on their investment is made manifest when they complete their four-year degree and take their Military Oath of Office. From there they become active duty second lieutenants in the USAF and attend their chosen career technical training program. For some it is flight training as a pilot or a combat systems operator, for others it is space and missile operations or aircraft maintenance or any of over a hundred other officer career fields. While on campus, these ambitious Aggies have the shared common experience of being students, cadets and community contributors. Once on active duty, their shared common experience will likely include service in a combat zone as was the case for the many NMSU graduates mentioned in this article.

For this particular group of NMSU graduates (from 2007 to 2012), the only military service they have known includes the United States’ involvement in combat operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places throughout the globe. Those who have served in the military often remark “it’s a small Air Force” when they run into a former classmate somewhere in the world. Granted their reunion may not be as pleasant as the friendly confines of the International Mall while changing classes, the comfort of Young Hall while preparing for Leadership Laboratory or the study cubicles of Branson Library but the unexpected joy of running into a friendly face in a combat zone is immeasurable. No matter where in the world these Aggie graduates may be called to serve, NMSU will forever serve as a touchstone – a warm reminder of where they came from and the institution that prepared them for success.
Presently there are ten (and quite possibly more) NMSU/Detachment 505 AFROTC graduates serving overseas in contingency operations. As they run into each other “down-range” they are now linked by a new shared experience – it’s a unique bond forged by the crucible of combat operations. In today’s all-volunteer military force it’s important to remember these amazing Aggies knew their chosen career path would almost certainly take them into harm’s way. And yet they boldly raised their right hand, recited their Military Oath of Office and now proudly serve wherever the mission takes them. Aggie Strong!

Not everyone in the military will experience a combat deployment, and that in no way diminishes their military service, but those that do deploy will forever be linked by the experience. It’s comforting to know they serve their country with such professionalism and represent the best aspects of what New Mexico State University is all about – honor, service, community and commitment.

From campus to combat and whatever military service is required in between, these patriotic young leaders continue to serve as great representatives for the university and proud ambassadors for the United States. “Aggies, oh Aggies, the hills send back the cry!”
Lt William “Fuzz” Thomson, College of Arts and Sciences, Class of 2012 is currently deployed as Special Operations Liaison Intelligence Officer in Afghanistan.

Fuzz was married just weeks before his deployment. His brother, Dave, shown above, toasted him at the wedding this way, “Here’s to my brother in life, my brother in faith and now my brother in arms!”

Jeff “JD” Hutchins, Class of 2011, College of Engineering, deployed as B-1 maintenance officer to Al Udeid, Qatar in support of Operations Inherent Resolve and Freedom Sentinel.

Dave Thomson, shown on right, Class of 2009, College of Business, deployed as HC-130J combat systems operator providing Search and Rescue for Combat Operations.
Capt Seth Vincent, Intelligence Officer, Class of 2008, returns from a deployed location in Afghanistan and celebrates with a “taste of home” on one of the redeployment stopovers. Capt Vincent’s brother, Kyle, Class of 2011, is currently deployed as a U-28 pilot to an undisclosed location in Iraq.

Special Agent Scott White, Class of 2012, serves from an undisclosed location as a member of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Counter-Terrorism Division.
Quaid Watts, Class of 2009, Arts and Sciences College, deploys as a Combat Systems Operator to Italy in support of Combat Search and Rescue operations. Quaid’s wife, Amanda Watts (Reyes), Class of 2011, is currently deployed to Afghanistan (photo not available).

The military’s busy operations tempo will often see members in critical career fields redeploy as quickly as six months after they have rotated back to the United States.

Matt Smith, Class of 2011, Business College, is shown here with his family after returning from overseas combat operations as an AC-130 pilot. His wife, Blanca, Class of 2011, is an engineer in the Air Force assigned to Eglin AFB, FL.
Capt Ashley Bower, Class of 2007, deployed to Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan as an Air Force lawyer overseeing legal operations downrange. She completed the Air Force Marathon in absentia, as the military personnel in Afghanistan mirrored the same marathon run out of Wright-Patterson AFB, OH.

It takes more than being deployed to slow this Aggie down!

A core value for the Air Force is “Service Before Self” – meaning an Airman’s professional duties take precedence over personal desires. Here married NMSU Aggies, Scott White and Jazmine Hood are briefly reunited while deployed. Lt Hood manages the Military Protocol Office in Al Udeid, Qatar. Her husband, Scott, recently processed in through the installation on his way to support operations in Afghanistan.
Paul Ellis, College of Arts and Sciences, Class of 2009, deployed to Kyrgyzstan as a C-130 maintenance officer. He is shown here on the flight line atop one of his squadron’s aircraft.

Lieutenants Courtney Schantz and Jazmine Hood, shown below, are reunited in Qatar during a military deployment. Lt Hood is leading the Military Protocol Office while Lt Schantz is deployed as a weapons systems officer onboard the B-1 bomber. This picture was taken prior to a recent combat sortie.