

Training veterinarians to care for US military animals that serve a nation

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Dr. Jeff Ullmer, a new CSU veterinary graduate, is part of the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps.

He felt called to serve, but it wasn't until his tour with Colorado's Fort

Carson Mounted Color Guard that Army 2nd Lt. Jeff Ullmer found a second calling: veterinary medicine.

His experience with Army horses provided Ullmer with new insights into the long tradition and vital importance of supporting the health of U.S. [military service](#) animals – animals that often exhibit unique skills, courage and loyalty while working alongside handlers and troops in the field.

This spring, Ullmer was one of four new [veterinarians](#) to graduate from Colorado State University's Doctor of Veterinary Medicine Program and be commissioned as officers in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps during commencement.

CSU and Kansas State University each graduated four new military veterinarians in May; that's the highest number to enter the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps from any university in the country this spring. CSU has six more students now in vet school bound for the corps.

"People's lives depend on the health and well-being of military service dogs," Ullmer said, as he anticipated the work ahead. "It's our jobs as veterinarians to ensure that they are in proper health to perform their duties."

Service dogs have gained increased visibility since working alongside emergency responders during the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks of 2001. In recent years, during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, highly trained combat canines have been deployed alongside U.S. troops to find improvised explosive devices before they blow.

Army veterinarians care for military working dogs on and off the field. This includes training handlers to respond to medical emergencies and supporting Human-Animal Bond Programs at military hospitals.

Joining Ullmer from CSU's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences are Hailey Harraun, Kelly Horgan and Joshua Powell. They now serve among more than 700 veterinarians in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps, a network of medical experts posted in dozens of countries and in all branches of the U.S. military.

Congress established the corps nearly a century ago, in 1916, to maintain the health of military service animals – chiefly horses in the early years – and to ensure troop vitality by managing the health of food animals destined for mess tents. Today, aspiring veterinarians may take advantage of the U.S. Army's Health Professionals Scholarship Program, which pays full tuition and fees for graduate-level health degrees; enrolled students are commissioned as officers upon graduation, and new veterinarians are obligated to serve for at least three years.

It seemed the ideal route to [veterinary medicine](#) for Horgan, an animal lover raised in a military family.

"Growing up in an Air Force family, it seemed fitting for me to follow that same track. But I've wanted to be a vet ever since I could answer the question, 'What do you want to be?'" she said. "I heard about the corps through a veterinarian I worked with, and I saw it as a perfect fit."

She and others will gain experience in many aspects of veterinary medicine, including surgery, food safety and biomedical research. Corps veterinarians also provide expertise during natural disasters and other emergencies.

"It is a bit nerve-racking because it's a whole new layer of responsibility that I have never had before," Horgan said. "As an officer, I am responsible for other soldiers, so I'm looking forward to developing my leadership skills."

After commencement, the new veterinarians from CSU traveled to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio for training and will be deployed to new posts from there.

"I hope I don't forget everything I've learned," Harraun said with a laugh. "It's a lot to take in, and it's a lot of adjustment. I know I'm going to learn a lot."

Provided by Colorado State University

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