



Photo by MEL SLATER

Then Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course 21-002 student, Chap. (Capt.) Kelsey Underwood gets ready with fellow students for the Fit to Win Course on Fort Jackson, Jun. 10.

From first female field artillery officer to Army chaplain

By MEL SLATER
Chaplain Center and School

Students in Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course 21-002 graduated at the Fort Jackson Post Theater on Aug. 19. Among them was a Soldier who went from field artillery to being an Army Chaplain.

Graduations are normally held on the Chaplain School campus, but the theater helped to provide better social distancing as an added COVID-19 precaution. More than 80 new members of the Army Chaplain Corps graduated with Family members and friends from across the country in attendance.

“The graduation in the Post Theater was an amazing success. It was especially rewarding to see our new servant leaders graduate in front of Family members and faith group endorsers,” said Chaplain School Commandant, Chap.

(Col.) James Palmer, Jr.

It has taken the CHBOLC students 12-weeks to complete the course and join the ranks to be called Army Chaplains. Each graduate had a unique journey to make to get them to this point.

Chaplain (Capt.) Kelsey Underwood’s journey to the chaplaincy differs a little from her classmates and is also quite unique.

Her military story began at Georgia Southern University where she graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in general studies with concentrations in nursing and nutrition and a minor in military science. Upon graduation, she was commissioned in the Army as a second lieutenant in the Field Artillery Corps.

“Field artillery taught me the importance of cultivating a strong community and support system,” said Underwood. “Field artillerists joke that they ‘put the field’ in field artillery due to the extensive time they spend in the field train-

ing. The job requirements create a need for a strong community in order to stay connected and grounded with others while away from home.”

She held several assignments in field artillery including platoon leader for the 1-38 Field Artillery Battalion, 210th Fires Brigade, at Camp Casey, Korea. She also served as an operations and executive officer for the 5-3 Field Artillery Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Brigade, Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington. She was later selected to serve as the executive officer for Headquarters Support Company, 7th Infantry Division, at JBLM.

Her experience as one of the first female field artillery officers opened her eyes to the need for chaplain care and representation for female Soldiers.

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Chaplain (Capt.)
Kelsey Underwood

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Before coming to CHBOLC, she spent time as a chaplain candidate with HSC, 7th Infantry Division, at JBLM and as a chaplain candidate with The Old Guard, Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia.

Underwood earned a Master of Divinity from Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon in December 2020. She was commissioned to the Army Reserve as a Chaplain in February 2021. She is ordained by Grace Capital City, Washington D.C., and endorsed by The Coalition of Spirit-filled Churches.

“God continues to equip me with the desire and ability to edify others,” Underwood said. “I know the importance of connectedness and how an encouraging word given at the right time empowers Soldiers to grow stronger physically, mentally, and even spiritually. I want to use my gift of serving Soldiers in a way that leads them to discovering their own identity and purpose. I look forward to participating in raising up leaders who act as combat multipliers that improve the Army culture and make our Army Family better.”

Underwood notes there is a difference in being an artillery officer and a chaplain.

“Transitioning from combat arms to the chaplaincy requires a shift in mindset. Due to the nature of the job, field artillery inherently carries an intensity to it due to its focus on lethality. Artillerists measure their effectiveness based on the amount of destruction they achieve,” Underwood said. “As a chaplain, I aim to serve as the calming presence in the chaos that supports the warfighter. Chaplains measure their effectiveness based on providing religious support to Soldiers and advising the commander on the impact of religion within their own ranks and the larger operational environment.”

Underwood will soon put that philosophy to the test. Her next assignment is with the 174th Infantry Brigade, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey to serve as the assistant brigade chaplain.

She said she enjoyed her time in CHBOLC – the personal growth it enabled and the community formed with classmates.

She offers advice to others interested in the Army Chaplaincy.

“The Army needs good chaplains,” Underwood said. “Training as a chaplain candidate serves as a great opportunity to consider your calling as an Army chaplain.”

She added an extra note for interested females.

“Representation matters. We need you. The Soldiers and their Families need you,” Underwood said.

Underwood rejoins her husband and daughter to begin a new journey with a sacred mission to provide religious support services to Soldiers, their Families and Army civilians with the charge to nurture the living, care for the wounded and honor the dead – for God and Country.



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Then Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course 21-002 student, Chap. (Capt.) Kelsey Underwood overcame obstacles and learned to depend on teammates at the Confidence Course on Fort Jackson, Jun. 15.