

MERCY KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES



With fond memories of her alma mater, Commander Sarah J. Arnold, MD '91 proudly raised an American flag in Fallujah, Iraq, on Mercy Day (September 24, 2008).

Visiting her family in the Philadelphia area this April, Dr. Arnold, a preventative medicine officer for the United States Navy, stopped by campus to present Dr. Kathleen Owens, president, with the flag and a certificate. She updated us on her journey after GMC to medical school, life in the military and how the fate of Iraq is changing.

As the ninth of 11 siblings, Dr. Arnold was concerned that she'd never afford to go to college. Scholarships and the biology program attracted her to GMC more than 20 years ago as she planned to become a physical therapist. But she wasn't so sure she could handle medical school after graduation.

"I remember when I decided to go to medical school as a student at Gwynedd-Mercy College. I didn't know yet that I would go into the military. I didn't think that I was smart enough for medical school. I really didn't," Dr. Arnold said.

After graduation, an armed forces scholarship helped her to pay for medical school. She studied at Hahnemann



Dr. Arnold and her parents, Jane and John Arnold, at her promotion ceremony, becoming commander.

University Hospital School of Medicine in Philadelphia, then went on to complete an internship at Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia. From there, she reported to active duty for flight surgery training in Pensacola, Florida.

Practicing medicine in the military included a tour of duty in Japan, training in family medicine at her current base at Camp Pendleton, California, and primary care clinics in San Diego, two tours in Iraq and shipboard medicine on four different amphibious ships* and an aircraft carrier. Dr. Arnold needed no practice for life on board ships. Limited privacy, shared bathrooms and bunk beds were all familiar aspects of growing up in a household with so many siblings, she said.

Studying preventative medicine at a base in Bethesda, Maryland, prepared her for her current position in the military and her deployment to Iraq. Dr. Arnold first arrived in Fallujah in 2005 to help with casualties.

"My first deployment to Iraq four years ago was when we were evacuating casualties. I was the officer in charge. We had to land, pick up the casualties and leave. It was worse sending people in harm's way than actually being there myself. I just remember leaving that year thinking, "We [the U.S.] are never going to get out of here." I didn't see things getting better. It's a completely different place now, much more optimistic," she explained.



Her first mission to Iraq, 2004.

She went on to work with Iraqi physicians stationed in Baghdad to provide medical care to civilians.

“The Iraqi people want to trust their own system. The people I’ve encountered are trusting of us and grateful we’re there.”

Dr. Arnold and colleagues of all ranks also performed humanitarian assistance over and above their positions. Efforts to clean up neighborhoods and paint schools are being made every day, she said.

“Americans are not always informed by the news about the efforts being made over there, the good, sustainable efforts happening.”

Her tour of duty ended in February and she has since returned to Camp Pendleton, residing in her home nearby with her dogs, Linus and Lucy. Living a “regular” life, Dr. Arnold provides medical care to active, injured and retired Marines and their families, performing everything from treating wounds to delivering babies.



Dr. Arnold presents President Kathleen Owens, PhD with the flag she raised on Mercy Day and an official military Certificate of Authenticity.



Providing medical assistance in East Timor, Indonesia, 2002.

“When you’re not deployed, your schedule is like everyone else’s,” she said. “You go to work, have a home, see friends and family.”

She knows that there is still work to be done in Iraq and looks forward to the future of the country’s medical care with U.S. assistance.

“I’d like to continue to work with the Iraqis directly so they can have all of the services

they need and update their medical equipment. During the war, Iraqi doctors moved to Canada, Europe and the United States for their own safety. Now many would like to come back, which is certainly a good thing.”

** on call ships that provide assistance in crisis response, power projection, special operations, evacuations, humanitarian operations and disaster relief.*