

# Serving Those Who Serve

***Zoey Trap takes a personal look into her time in the military and how it has motivated her to honor the men and women that serve in the United States Armed Forces.***

When we play the icebreaker game “two truths and a lie,” one truth about myself that I always use is my service in the Marine Corps. It is usually chosen as the lie, but it’s the truth! When I graduated from high school in 1974 (the year before Title IX was passed), I couldn’t figure out what I wanted to do with my life (other than swim competitively). I didn’t really know how to navigate the financial web of university. A few of my guy friends enlisted in the military to get the GI Bill, and it seemed perfect to me. The Marine Corps had a 2-year enrollment option, so in I went.

Boot Camp on Parris Island, South Carolina was no southern vacation. Our days were organized minute by minute. PT (Physical Training) and Military Drills were my favorite parts of the day. I got a day off and ran around the island, over 10 miles of fun!

When I got to my base in the Mojave Desert, I attracted a lot of attention with my constant running, swimming and diving. They decided to make an ‘experiment’ out of me. I was transferred to Special Services and assigned to the gym, and one of my responsibilities was to train the troops. This meant being the PT leader, a woman training men in PT, which I was told was a first.

When I got out of the Marines, I enrolled in college and

majored in dance. It was then that I was introduced to both Pilates and yoga, which perfectly fit my love of movement. They became my lifelong pursuits, and at grad school, I expanded my knowledge base focusing on alternative therapy and the spine. During those years, I primarily worked with cyclists and learned a lot about the demands and toll of athletic training and competition on the spine.

In life, things tend to come full circle. I now have a lot of friends, colleagues and clients in the military, and I wanted to profile their journeys and honor those who serve so bravely.

## **Steve's Story**

A few years ago, I was asked to work with a Wounded Warrior. Steve was a great guy and a fellow Marine who had a land mine blow up near him. It broke his pelvis, his legs and his spine in multiple places, but it did not break his spirit. When we started, it was clear he was a hard worker. He needed to know the 'whys' of the training. He was clearly motivated and did the homework. These are all essential ingredients in improving quality of life and managing/reducing pain. As a result, he made progress. We lowered his daily pain, taught him strategies for bad pain days, and improved his stability, strength and function. He would often comment that his physical therapists at John Hopkins would tell him the same instructions that I was giving him, but that Pilates instructions made much more sense. Some sessions were taken out on the gym floor incorporating Pilates into his resistance training routine to keep him safe and allow him to do the muscle work he loved.

I learned a lot from Steve; I learned that like any student, he had good and bad days. However, I learned that PTSD often effected his bad days and that the best way to work on those days was to bring a lot of humor and keep his body moving as

much as possible. He taught me not to feel bad for him, that he was not paralyzed, had a great wife and step daughter, was immersed in being a soccer coach and optimistic about continued improvement.

Steve came in one day excited like I had never seen him. He shared with me that he was going to be a father, something they told him would not possible. Sharing in that joy, working with him as a guide in his continued post-rehabilitation work is one of the highlights of my teaching career.

## **Emily's Story**

Emily Owen is a Texan, wife and former Army Sergeant who worked as in the Signal Corps. This is a position that requires a lot of manual labor in the field. Recently, Emily became certified as Peak Pilates® Instructor at the Austin Barn with Nancy Hurd. She now works at Core Pilates and Barre in Marble Falls, Texas.

“No soldier can be pampered with a non-rigorous training program and pristine working conditions at all time,” Emily explains. “However, if soldiers were taught the Critical Connections that keep us stable and flowing during a Pilates session, they would move more efficiently in their duties. I firmly believe that many injuries could be avoided and a lot less pain killers prescribed if Pilates was implemented into the US Army training program.”

Emily believes that – based on how the soldiers sleep, the heavy loads they carry, and the stress they are under – Pilates could go a long way to helping soldiers to stay fit mentally, physically, and emotionally. Hopefully in the near future, those deciding the most current training methods will gain some insight into the power of Pilates!

# Carmen's Story

Major Carmen Elston fell in love with Pilates and became a Peak Pilates Certified Basic Mat instructor while stationed with the Pentagon. When she was transferred to Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, she wished to go deeper into her practice and teaching and received a reformer from her husband as a gift. Inspired, Carmen traveled to Oregon to become comprehensively certified with Peak Pilates MI Jessica Schultz.

"The body is an amazing machine," Carmen says. "And we must do what we can to keep it moving and running properly. Being 'hard core' wears on the body. As I watch those around me age, and even some of my peers, I note the bad knees and backs and see the importance of preserving strength and flexibility. I have also learned that a person who can do 75 sit-ups in a couple of minutes does not necessarily have the core strength to make it through the 'Ab Five.'"

Today, Carmen is committed to her personal practice. She encourages others to take up Pilates because it's gentle on the body but still provides a heck of a workout!

## Your Story

Joseph Pilates created his method to train himself, soldiers and athletes. He refined it while interred on the Isle of Man and helping soldiers serving in World War I. So how are you helping servicemen and women in your community? If you would like to serve those who serve, here are some ideas to get you started:

- Reach out to your local firefighters, police force, army reserve or active military base and offer to train their members and/or families for a big discount...or for free!
- Contact your local Veteran's Hospital if you have skills

that they could use.

- Reach out to your local chapter of the [Wounded Warrior Project](#) to learn more about their program and needs.

Most importantly, work with an open heart to serve the soldiers and their families in your community.

***This article was contributed by Zoey Trap, MS.***