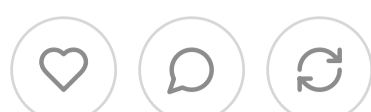


An Opportunity of a Lifetime

The way to selection...

APR 4, 2022



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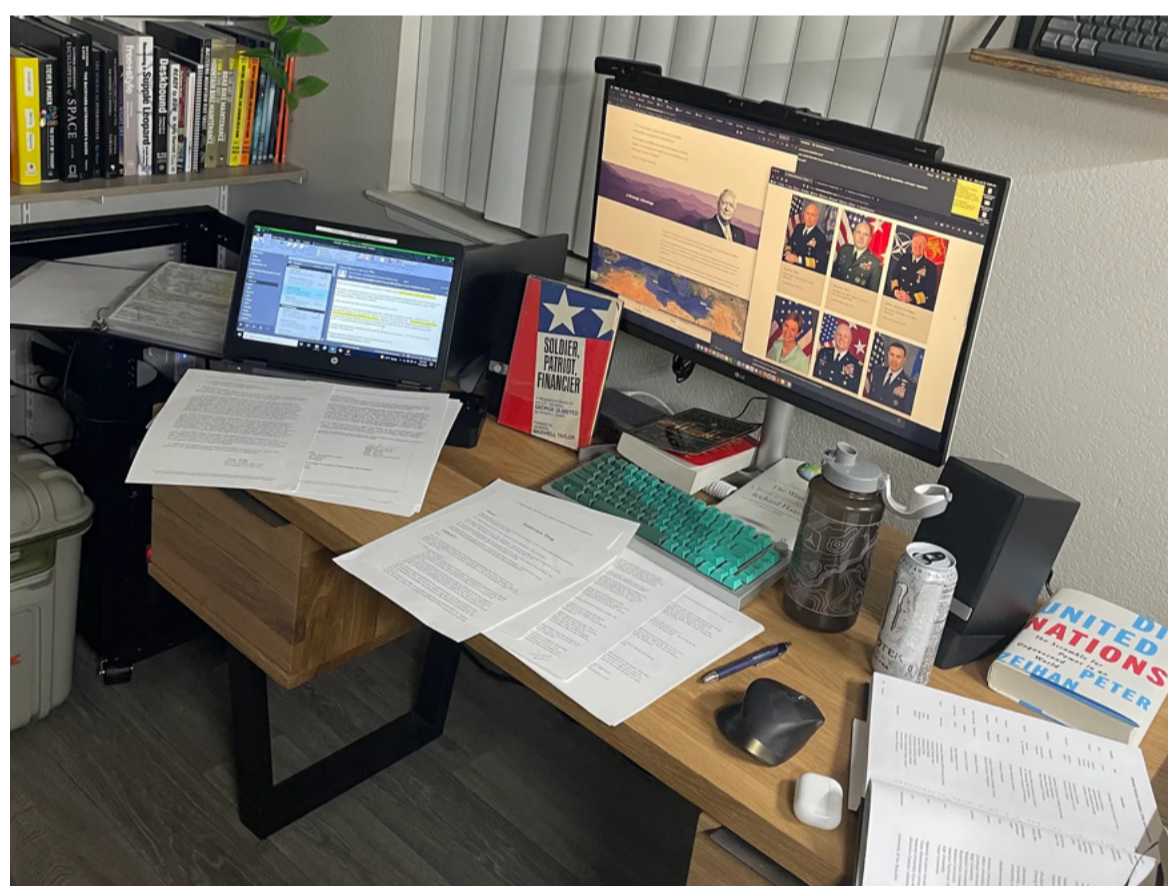


Sometime in 2014 or so, I heard about the "Olmsted Scholar Program" from my triathlon team coach and was immediately intrigued. He'd share stories about his time in China as an Olmsted Scholar and that kind of assignment sounded too good to be true...a three year gap to learn a foreign language and study in that country...while getting paid the normal military salary? Count me in!

He told me that I'd be a good fit for the program and to keep it on my radar for when the time was right. This turned out to be great advice for me at the perfect time. Over the next eight years, the Olmsted Scholar Program was my moonshot goal, keeping me motivated when jobs were hard and reminding me to try to stand out amongst my peers. I told each new commander about my goal when I'd meet them and I took deployments and additional duties that might make me a little more competitive. I never thought I'd actually be "good enough" to be selected for this program, but the dream of participating in this program kept me going.

The first time I applied, I didn't make the first Major Command down-select. Two years later, with a better application and more experience under my belt, I tried again, this time getting to the final Air Force level. Progress! After this second application, the US Space Force (USSF) was created and I elected to transfer over to this new branch which was a gamble. I had no idea if the USSF would get any Olmsted Scholar slots during my eligibility time frame, so I was thrilled when the USSF put out a late notice call for nominations for the Olmsted Class of 2023. Thankfully, the USSF application was exactly like the USAF application and I already had a polished package from the previous years, so I was ready to go. I sent my essays to a few trusted friends and mentors for edits, asked for a new letter of recommendation from a previous commander that I looked up to, and solicited advice from several current Olmsted Scholars, putting in more work this time than ever before. Satisfied with the effort I put in this time, I sent off the long application and started the waiting game.

During the middle of my Test Pilot School space program, I found out that I made the final USSF cut! I had three weeks to prepare for my interview, so I put dozens of hours over the course of my evenings and weekends into interview prep and researching the cities and countries I selected. I wanted to be confident and ready for any question they could ask.



Interview Prep

The interview was pleasant and non-threatening, but the preparation I put in was critical. Without going into the interview questions themselves, I confidently communicated my "why" for this program and expressed a clear vision for my future career goals which surely helped. I was elated after the interview and just had to finish out my Test Pilot School program and wait for the results...

I found out that I was selected right before our final astrodynamics exam. I don't know if that was terrible or excellent timing, because focusing on the math was difficult after hearing this incredible news! The email from the USSF Talent Management Office informed me that I was the first Olmsted Scholar selected from the USSF and that I'd be studying in Seoul, South Korea (my #2 choice).

I've had an incredibly varied and fulfilling career so far, but I feel like it's just the beginning. Years of hard work has paid off, and I was incredibly fortunate with factors outside of my control as well. I owe a debt of gratitude to the George and Carol Olmsted Foundation and my friends and mentors who've helped me over the years with my multiple applications, letters of recommendations, and overall confidence boosting. Furthermore, I owe thanks to over a dozen previous and current Olmsted Scholars who spent hours with me on the phone, on video chats, and over email conversations. I was consistently shocked at the generosity of these scholars with their time to help out a guy like me who they've never met. When you cold email an extremely busy active duty astronaut for advice and they respond with a long phone call and then in-person mentorship, you know how important this program is to them. I hope to return that generosity to the next generation of applicants. I must also thank my current chain of command for allowing me to apply one last time even if the timing wasn't great for my work teams.

This will be a place to post my updates and thoughts over the next several years as I learn a new, challenging language and move to Seoul to fully immerse myself in their culture. I hope you stick along for the ride! 읽어주셔서 감사합니다!

-Sean 드림