

CPT Jen Wilson

Please tell us a little about yourself

I am from San Diego, California. I received a commission into the Medical Service Corps in 2007 from the University of California at Davis with a Major in Modern US History. I was a division 1 lacrosse player for 4 years and played in a garage band in my off time.

I've been married to the wonderful CPT Ryan Wilson for over nine years. Together we have one 5 year old dog, Zeva.

I was a company commander in 2BCT, 82nd ABN and love jumping out of airplanes. Before that I was stationed at FT Carson, CO, and deployed with 3BCT, 4ID to Iraq. Before that I was stationed at Camp Casey, Korea, where I started my career.

Can you please describe your duties as a Tactical Officer (TAC)?

A TAC is an integrator of all of the programs at West Point: Physical, Military, Academic and Character.

I am a career counselor, resident advisor, cadet chain of command mentor, formal and informal mentor (in and outside of the chain of command), disciplinarian and standards bearer.

Like command I've found I spend 90% of my time on 10% of my company.

What made you decide to serve as a TAC?

Since I commissioned, I've always had a desire to serve as a TAC. I had a great experience in my ROTC program at Davis. I was always surrounded by great cadre that really cared.

I think there is a great opportunity to make an impact on young people before they go out and serve in the operational Army.

What has been the most rewarding part of serving as a TAC?

Cadets are thirsty for knowledge, which I think can be easily forgotten about in the day to day. Here is a great opportunity to affect future officers from graduating classes 2016 – 2021 (by the time I leave). I don't think I'd have this opportunity anywhere else in the Army. Most days it's fairly rewarding.

For me it's definitely the mentoring opportunities. I formally mentor 4 cadets either in SLDP, SLDP – H or for PL300. I have great conversations with these cadets and really get to experience their growth. It's fun to push them to think hard about who they are and about leadership.

How has serving as a TAC prepared you for future assignments back in the operational Army?

This job certainly has prepared me to be the “unemotional” field grade. The cadets and Academy have really forced me to separate myself from the emotional attachment I have felt in the past as a company commander.

Additionally the current BTO has really taken a vested interest in the TACs and leading through us. He talks to us a lot about serving as field grades and does his best to keep us abreast of what is going on out in the operational Army.

What was your graduate school experience like at Teachers College – Columbia University?

TC was great. All of the faculty are wonderful and fully vested in our success.

The first summer may have been the most “rough.” That is, it was a transition back to being a student, re-learning how to learn and how to study was difficult. It was also the most condensed course load and work load of the year. But the material always felt very accessible and relatable to our future jobs.

I had a lot of fun and met a lot of new friends outside of ELDP. I really loved being able to take an elective without the rest of the cohort. It made me feel a bit like a regular college student.

The commute wasn't bad either. I lived at West Point and either carpooled or road the train. It was a great opportunity to get some reading in or just chat with friends on the way down. City food is great too. Definitely ate well while in school.

A bunch of us started to use the Columbia gym as well, which is a perk of being a student as well.

How has this assignment been in terms of family time and work-life balance?

It puts the onus on the TAC for sure to strike the balance. As a TAC you can spend as much or as little time with the cadets as you want. There isn't anyone keeping you here, but there are more than enough activities to be present at and go to in support of the company cadets. They all either participate in a competitive club, division 1 sport or company athletics, which is a great opportunity to go out and see your cadets at work. In the same breath, if I need to go home in the middle of the day to take care of something, I just have to make sure my cadets know how to get a hold of me. We are encouraged to take leave and just make sure the cadets have someone to contact in they need something. In an average week, I do PT with the company 1 day in the morning (0530), have 2-3 things before they have breakfast formation at 0700, then will have various counselings/mentor meetings through the day, do administrative work, go to

the gym, then be ready to go home around 1730 (sometimes drill goes to 1820). Like any job, there are late days (summers), but for the most part it's all up to you.

What advice would you give to officers who are considering applying to become a TAC?

The opportunity to get a master's degree from Columbia in one year in itself is amazing. While every day is not amazing and there are a lot of regulations specific to West Point, the overall experience as a TAC is fairly rewarding. You can be involved in as much or little as you want. I work with the women's lacrosse team as an officer rep, some TACs teach MS/MX courses and others participate in club activities as OICs/other things. Or you can stick to TAC life (which can fill you day as well). At the end of it all, like I mentioned before, there isn't anywhere else in the Army where you can affect some many future officers. And you get to see what your future subordinates go through in their leader development – you get to have a stake in how your future subordinates turn out by being a TAC.

Anything else you'd like to share?

It's not your typical "take a knee assignment," but it is definitely a great opportunity to surround yourself with great officers and NCOs and work together to continue shaping our Army's future.