USMA Featured Tactical Officer – CPT Alissa Morrison

1. Please tell us a little about yourself. I am married to CPT Doug Morrison and we are both from Massachusetts. Our children are our two English Bulldogs named Daisy and Dozer, who love coming to work and playing with the cadets. The cadets love Daisy and Dozer so much that they painted a mural of the two in my company. I studied Architecture at Roger Williams University and received my commission through ROTC. I also hold a Master of Science in Geological Engineering from Missouri University of Science and Technology and a Master of Arts in Social Organizational Psychology from Columbia University. I have served in the Corps of Engineers for more than nine years, including service in Afghanistan, Jordan, and Qatar, with concentrations in force protection, vulnerability assessment, non-lethal targeting, and construction operations. My interests include four-wheeling, traveling, and cooking.

2. Can you please describe your duties as a Tactical Officer (TAC)? A TAC is the integrator of a cadet’s 47 month experience at West Point. As a TAC you will coach, mentor, counsel and teach cadets to increase their competencies as they develop into United States Army leaders. The great aspect about West Point is the vast amount of opportunities available to TACs. In addition to being a TAC, I am an Officer Representative (OR) for the Women’s Soccer Team and the Rabble Rousers. Being an Officer Representative provides you with the opportunity to mentor cadets outside of your company, attend their practice sessions, and travel to their competitions. I also lead a Lean In Circle at West Point that provides a group of fifteen female cadets and faculty with support and encouragement to achieve their goals.

3. What made you decide to come to USMA as a TAC? I was in Afghanistan serving with 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, when I learned of the opportunity. Several officers on brigade staff, who had been instructors at West Point, recommended I apply. They all shared amazing stories regarding their time at West Point and the enduring relationships the developed. In addition, having the opportunity to attend Columbia University and learn about leadership, coaching, and team building is a gold in terms of professional development. I wish I had received my degree in Social-Organizational Psychology when I was a brand new officer. The information taught in this program is directly applicable to the responsibilities of officers in the Army.

4. What has been the most rewarding part of serving as a TAC? The most rewarding part of being a TAC is when a cadet overcomes an obstacle as a result of the support you have provided him or her. It is humbling the appreciation cadets have for you when counseling them through a difficult time, or simply doing PT with them in the morning to help them improve their run time.

5. How has serving as a TAC prepared you for future assignments back in the operational Army? Being a TAC assists your transition from being a company grade to a field grade officer. As a company grade officer your primary focus is on tactical leadership. As a TAC your level of influence begins to shift to organizational leadership and systematic problem solving, which will set you up for success in future field grade key development positions.
6. What was your graduate school experience like at Teachers College – Columbia University? I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Columbia University. The campus is quintessential Ivy League, the population of students is diverse and engaging, and the professors are truly amazing and pivotal in the field of social-organizational psychology. Although information throughput was fast and furious, and classes involved a hefty amount of reading and writing, the experience and knowledge I have gained as a result had a lasting impact on me in my personal and professional life.

7. How has this assignment been in terms of family time and work-life balance? My husband and I are both TACs so life is pretty busy. However, this position is not as time consuming as being a company commander. The responsibilities of being a TAC are similar to that of a company commander without the responsibility of planning training events or property accountability. For TACs with children, the Brigade Tactical Department (BTD) is extremely family friendly and it is common to see children at parades and company events. My dogs are always excited to go to work and be part of formations with the cadets!

8. What advice would you give to officers who are considering applying to become a TAC? I recommend you attend a class with the ELDP students at Columbia University to understand the work required of you in graduate school and shadow a TAC for a day in order to better visualize the day in the life of an officer at West Point.

9. Anything else you’d like to share? Being a TAC Officer provides you with the education and experience to further develop as an officer. It is a challenging position; however it provides officers with breadth and depth in the area of leader development, while further enhancing your competencies and self-awareness.