

Special Operations Alumnus Starts New Challenge

Interviewed by Jerry Green, USASOC Public Affairs

FORT BRAGG, NC (USASOC News Service, 31 OCT 2013) — When his phone beeped indicating an incoming call, he noticed the number had a Houston, Texas area code. When he answered, the caller told him he had been selected for the position and asked if he would like to join the team down in Texas.



Photo courtesy Matt Pippin, U.S. Army

LTC Andrew R. Morgan

With that call, U.S. Army medical officer, LTC Andrew R. Morgan, 37, a former U.S. Army Special Operations Command Soldier, married, and father of four, was informed he was one of the eight candidates selected to join NASA's 2013 Astronaut Candidate Class.

"It was still a long shot if I would be selected," said Morgan. "After all the interviews and physicals, the final selection process was underway and close to conclusion, and that call was what I hoped for."

Posted in late 2012, a civil service announcement on U.S. Jobs showed that NASA had an opening for an astronaut position. The position listed the work center was based at the Johnson Space Center, Houston. The job description included the standard information—competitive pay, full range of employee benefits, interesting and meaningful work.

It was the challenge of the job that really interested Morgan. His challenge, and those of the other candidates, was being one of the few who may travel to the Moon; possibly Mars; probably the international space station; and maybe to a neighboring asteroid; meanwhile continuing the research and exploration of the vast regions beyond Earth's atmosphere.

In early 2012, the selections began with more than 6000 potential candidates having applied for the coveted position. Once the process started, the numbers reduced to 150. Interviews, medical exams, and question and answer sessions reduced that number to less than 50. Finally, during a NASA news conference on 17 June 2013, the next generation of eight astronauts was announced.

"These new space explorers asked to join NASA because they know we're doing big, bold things here—developing missions to go farther into space than ever before," said NASA Administrator Charles Bolden. "They're excited about the science we're doing on the International Space Station and our plan to launch from U.S. soil to there on spacecraft built by American companies; they're ready to help lead the first human mission to an asteroid and then on to Mars."



Photo courtesy of NASA

8 members of Astronaut Group 21 on a parabolic zero gravity flight

Morgan is a 1998 graduate of The U.S. Military Academy at West Point. After West Point, he earned his doctorate in medicine at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Bethesda, Md., in 2002.

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In 2005, Morgan completed his emergency medicine residency at Fort Lewis, WA, now called Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and then to his next assignment at Fort Bragg, NC. He was a staff emergency physician at the Womak Army Medical Center, and began duties as an emergency physician and flight surgeon for the Army Special Operations community.

Always looking for more opportunities and challenges, Morgan, already jump qualified from his West Point days, Morgan went on to graduate from Ranger school. He completed the combat diver's course and earned his military free fall qualification. Along the way he received flight surgeon accreditation.

In the course of his career he was assigned to the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Bragg. "I believe the most rewarding job of my career was the three years I spent as battalion surgeon in 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group, the Desert Eagles," said Morgan. "It developed my passion for teaching Special Forces medics the skills they would use in the field. I learned as much from them as I hope they learned from me."

Morgan's work in field medicine while deployed, led to another challenge. His battalion medical team believed the use of ultrasound technology in the field was feasible.

"Morgan had the determination and vision to handle the initial resistance to the "good idea" of teaching SF medics how to use ultrasound. He was flexible enough to receive the feedback from the medics and adjust the application from the standard of care in the fixed facility ER to the austere environment of the SF battlefield," said MAJ William N. Vasios III, command and regimental physician assistant, U.S. Army Special Forces Command (Airborne). "He always encouraged the medics to seek higher professional training whether learning to become a physician's assistant or attending medical school."

"Drew is a top performer of unlimited potential and intellect, and although losing his talent in USASOC, it's a gain for America's space program," said COL Peter J. Benson, USASOC surgeon. "He's a top flight emergency medicine physician and has a special expertise at emergency ultrasound applications and one of those who's pioneered the training and fielding of the use of ultrasounds in Special Forces.

"I think our team left a lasting impression with the Army Special Forces community due to our work with

the ultrasound training," said Morgan. "It is now in the curriculum at the school house for all Special Forces medics."

During his seven years in Special Forces, Morgan deployed three times to Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom, developing skills he believed made him stand out among the other candidates during the astronaut selection process.

"The opportunities and training in the Army and working in the Special Operations community made me learn to think outside the box, and become somewhat stress inoculated," said Morgan. "Those skills and my combat experience was something, I think, made a difference in my selection."

Morgan and his family moved to Houston in July, and started the astronaut training program to develop his skills for future space flights.

"I was not hired as a medical doctor for the astronaut mission. Instead, I will be a mission specialist who happens to have medical skills," Morgan said.

Morgan said the next two years will likely include flight training, robotics instruction and Russian-language courses. It will be two years of candidate training before receiving full astronaut status.

"I would have been happy to finish my career in the Army," Morgan said. "But, this is an even greater calling. It's the only thing in the world that I would leave my old career behind for."

Morgan is quick to note in conversation, that he is just a regular guy who is still on and will remain on active duty, adding that he is proud to be representing the Army and the Special Operations community.

His friends agree he is a regular guy, but a regular guy with some very major accomplishments. Maybe so, but this regular guy, a humble guy, an Army Special Operations alumnus, will, in the future, see our world from a different perspective.



Drew in Afghanistan with 3rd SFG(A) in 2009

Photo courtesy of U.S. Army