**CMU Exercise Physiology Heather Robak**

CMU alumnus Heather Robak is putting her stamp on the world as an Aerospace Physiologist in the U.S. Navy.

When Robak earned her Masters in Exercise Physiology from CMU in 2017, she had no idea that she would be where she is today. With graduation quickly approaching, she began searching for jobs online. By chance, she stumbled upon the Naval Aerospace and Operational Physiology Program. The military had always sparked her interest, but she never knew where her education would take her. Once she heard that the job involved learning how to fly airplanes and helicopters, water survival, night vision goggles, and encompassed her physiology background, she was immediately interested.

“This job was a way for me to utilize my knowledge, challenge me and put me out of my comfort zone,” Robak said.

She is currently stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego, CA. Her primary job is to brief student pilots and winged aviators on how their bodies physiologically respond to high altitude environments and G-forces. In addition, she also briefs pilots and aircrew about how proper exercise and nutrition influences human performance and about potential visual illusions aircrew may experience in flight.

She trains students in a controlled environment, in hopes they will be prepared when encountering real-life survival situations. Pilots and aircrew may experience hypoxia within flight, which is an oxygen deficiency to the body. To incorporate realistic training to the students, she uses a Reduced Oxygen Breathing Device to simulate this condition. She also instructs pilots and aircrew on techniques such as water survival skills, night vision goggles, and laser training. During her time in the Navy so far, she has learned how to fly (with a winged aviator), captain a Beechcraft T6-B turbo prop airplane and take flight in a TH-57 Sea Ranger helicopter.

During her time at CMU, Robak had the opportunity to teach labs for Anatomy, Health Fitness, and Strength and Conditioning as a graduate assistant. She says the teaching experience helped her adapt into her career more smoothly. She often asked her students what they wanted to do for their future career. She encourages students to consider non-traditional options. “Once I stepped back and explored, I found something that was a better fit for myself,” Robak said.

She says the Exercise Physiology Program at CMU prepared her in ways she could have never imagined. “I believe this is a steppingstone to something greater,” Robak said, “If it wasn’t for this program, I wouldn’t have the amazing career I have now.