

Young Alumni Excellence AWARD

By Sam Hastings



MAJ. (RET.) ANDREW VAN TIMMEREN '10

Maj. (Ret.) Andrew Van Timmeren '10 traces the start of his career back to a moment he can't fully explain. Growing up in western Michigan with no military background, he woke up one morning in seventh grade certain of two things: He wanted to fly airplanes, and he wanted to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy.

"I couldn't tell you how I even knew the Air Force Academy was a thing," Van Timmeren says. "I chalk it up to a calling."

From there, the right people seemed to appear at the right time. His high school guidance counselor, whose son had attended USAFA, helped Van Timmeren prepare academically, and his father supported him through the application process. When Van Timmeren earned an appointment, his swim coach surprised him with the news at senior night.

However, his certainty wavered soon after he arrived at the Academy. During the first week of basic cadet training, overwhelmed by the environment, Van Timmeren met with a chaplain to discuss leaving. The chaplain advised him to finish basic training before deciding.

"That unlocked the competitor in me," Van Timmeren says. "I decided to stay, and that was a meaningful turning point in my life."

He arrived as a recruited water polo player but eventually stepped away from the team after discovering soaring. Flying gliders gave him both an escape from the demands of cadet life and the foundation for his future career. He soon became a soaring instructor pilot.

As an instructor, he learned to remain calm, adjust when plans changed and take responsibility for another person in the

aircraft. The experience mattered so much that he had the soaring patch engraved inside his class ring.

"I feel like I was a better Raptor pilot because I flew gliders," he says.

Van Timmeren also served as Cadet Wing commander during his final semester, leading more than 4,000 cadets. The role taught him to set a vision, communicate clearly and empower others. More importantly, it reinforced a lesson that shaped every stage of his career: You can't have leadership without a relationship.

After graduating with a degree in political science, Van Timmeren attended pilot training at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma. On a mentor's advice, he placed the F-22 Raptor at the top of his preference list, although he believed it was unlikely. He was selected for the aircraft and went on to serve as an operational, instructor and evaluator pilot.

In 2014, he deployed to the Middle East as ISIS gained ground in Syria and Iraq. During the deployment, he and another Academy graduate flew the first daytime F-22 combat sortie. He later participated in the Raptor's first deployment to Europe and returned to train future pilots.

His understanding of leadership deepened after Hurricane Michael struck Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, in fall 2018. Van Timmeren's home was damaged, and the 46 people he led were scattered during evacuations, many unsure whether their homes still stood. The experience stripped leadership down to its most basic purpose: caring for people.

"Nobody's talking about the peak of Maslow's hierarchy of needs if I don't know

where I'm living tonight because my house is gone," he says.

Around the same time, Van Timmeren began experiencing double vision. After moving to Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia, he reported the symptoms and was grounded, which led to his medical retirement at age 32.

The unexpected end of his flying career opened another path. While serving in a staff role, he attended a briefing from Blue Force Technologies about developing a high-performance unmanned fighter. The concept immediately captured his attention.

After retiring and moving his family back to Michigan, Van Timmeren joined the company and helped lead its autonomous aircraft efforts. Blue Force Technologies was later acquired by Anduril Industries, but Van Timmeren continued to lead work related to the Collaborative Combat Aircraft program. In 2025, the team's Fury aircraft completed its first flight, a professional milestone he ranks just behind flying fighters.

Receiving the Young Alumni Excellence Award surprised and humbled Van Timmeren. He sees the recognition as part of a throughline that began at the Academy and spans the relationships that have guided him.

"The foundation was laid at the Academy," he says. "I can't be more proud."

Today, Van Timmeren is an executive at Astro Mechanical, helping develop another autonomous aircraft. Though he wears a different uniform, he remains focused on supporting the fight.

"The only thing I wanted to do, whatever the job, was still make an impact on my friends," he says. 