

ALUMNI HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE Zane Stickel

Zane Stickel is a retired U.S. Navy Commander and combat veteran whose 21-year career spanned aviation, intelligence and special operations. Today, he continues to serve the nation as a Solutions Architect for Amazon Web Services, advising a major U.S. government customer on mission-critical cloud technologies. Locally, he gives back as a volunteer wrestling coach in Northern Virginia, mentoring young athletes in the same sport that shaped his life.

At Gahanna Lincoln High School, where he graduated in 1996, Zane distinguished himself as both a scholar and an athlete. He was co-valedictorian, a National Honor Society member and a Columbus Dispatch Scholar Athlete. On the mat, he was a two-time state qualifier, placing third as a senior, and still holds the school takedown record nearly three decades later. He earned national recognition as a USA Wrestling Junior National All-American and Cadet National Freestyle Finalist. In 2024, he was inducted into the GLHS Athletic Hall of Fame.

Zane carried that drive to the U.S. Naval Academy, where he was a three-year starter for the Division I wrestling team, a multi-time All-Service Academy champion, and third-place finisher at the Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Conference. Excelling academically, he graduated with distinction with a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and later completed a Masters in Computer Engineering at the University of Pennsylvania while coaching Division I wrestling.

After earning his "Wings of Gold," Zane qualified as an Electronic Warfare Aircraft Commander, Mission Commander and Instructor Pilot. Assigned to Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Two in Spain, he flew combat missions over Iraq and reconnaissance operations worldwide. Selected for special operations aviation, he supported U.S. forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa and beyond.

His career advanced through leadership positions of growing responsibility. As Operations Officer for one of the Navy's largest aviation squadrons, he oversaw more than 400 personnel and 12 aircraft. He later commanded a Joint Special Operations Aviation

Detachment, directed manned intelligence programs for U.S. Special Operations Command and ultimately served as Operations Officer and Deputy Commander of a Joint Special Operations Task Force.

Fran Iwanski, Zane's Director at Joint Special Operations Command, recalled: "Whether a leader or a follower, Zane was always a teammate first. He didn't ask anything of others he wasn't willing to do himself. Even five years later, the policies and programs he created are still best practices, and the people he mentored continue to follow his example of excellence and dedication."



Zane's family also reflected on his sacrifices. His mother, Dianne, and wife, Bethany, shared: "He faced many challenges during his 20 years in the Navy. He was always humble and proud of his service. He was separated from his wife and children for months at a time, often with little communication, living in tents or shipping containers. Still, he was grateful to do this job to protect his country."

His service earned him numerous awards, including two Defense Meritorious Service Medals. He is also among the few Navy aviators ever awarded the Army's Broken Wing Award for safely recovering an aircraft after an in-flight emergency.

Zane and his wife, Bethany—a fellow Navy veteran and licensed mental health counselor—live in Falls Church, Virginia, with their two children, Isaac and Selah.

MESSAGE TO CURRENT GLHS STUDENTS:

"Surround yourself with people who believe in you. stay true to your values and pursue your goals with courage and effort. You will sometimes fall short, but in striving, you will grow stronger, and you may find your greatest fulfillment comes from serving others."