

# East Fishkill *Living*

November 2023

Citizen Soldier:  
*A Salute to  
Caroline Pogge*



Photo by Louisa Viardi

## Citizen Soldier: A Salute to Caroline Pogge

By Jeanne Cotroneo Darrow

Photos by Louisa Vilardi

Glancing at Caroline Pogge's calendar can make your head hurt. Her color coding—green for Army, purple for Fordham, yellow for consulting, pink for volunteerism, tan for personal—makes “some weeks look like an Easter Egg dye kit exploded on the page,” laughs Caroline.


But for someone with dual—and often dueling—careers, organization is crucial. “Add to that a personal life and it's chaos sometimes,” she admits.

Caroline, the Director of Fordham University's Master of Science in Health Administration (MSHA) program and an adjunct professor, is also a U.S. Army Colonel in her 28th year of service. Since June, Caroline has been stationed at the Pentagon, serving on her fifth mobilization. As the Engagements and Policy Chief with the Army's Recruiting & Retention Task Force, she leads a team developing ways to improve recruiting and retention efforts across the total Force (Active Duty, National Guard and Reserves), including shaping related policy and legislative proposals.


Unlike her previous four deployments, this time she's able to come home to East Fishkill for holidays and periodic weekends to spend time with her mother, her brother Steve, his wife and Caroline's three nieces. “Despite my 22-year hiatus, I knew I'd always be back,” says Caroline. “There is something magical about the Hudson Valley, steeped in history and beauty.”

### ROOTED IN WICCOPEE

Caroline and Steve grew up in Wicopee with their brother Eric, who passed away in 2009 after



Currently stationed at the Pentagon, U.S. Army Colonel Caroline Pogge is in her 28th year of service.



Army Col. Caroline Pogge is also the Director of Fordham University's Master of Science in Health Administration program and an adjunct professor.

a 13-year battle with brain cancer. Their father, Bernhard, had immigrated from Germany in the 1950s. Upon graduating from Siena College, he accepted a NASA scholarship to study for his doctorate in materials chemistry at Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey. “That’s where he met my mom, Renate, the daughter of German immigrants,” says Caroline.

They married and moved for what would become Bernie’s 40-year career in chip manufacturing at IBM East Fishkill, retiring as an IBM Fellow. Renate has been selling real estate for over 45 years and volunteered for 25 with the Wicoppee Fire Company Ambulance Squad, a role that inspired Caroline to become a junior responder herself during high school.

College was expected of the Pogge kids, and while their parents had saved, they wanted their children to have some “skin in the game,” each responsible for paying for one year. Caroline initially thought about West Point and obtained a nomination from Congressman Hamilton Fish but was advised to look into Army ROTC. Ultimately, she accepted a three-year Army ROTC scholarship and attended Tulane University, where she studied political science–international relations.

With “a grand vision of becoming a U.S. ambassador and traveling the world,” Cadet Pogge flew to New Orleans in August 1992, one day after Hurricane Andrew, to start her military career, a pivotal moment she calls “one of the best decisions of my life.”

#### THE ARMY OPPORTUNITY

What started as a way to pay for college grew rapidly into so much more. “I gained a sense of purpose, a community with which I deeply connected, and exposure to a rich diversity of people and cultures I otherwise would never have experienced.”

By her senior year, Caroline realized she had “little chance of becoming an ambassador” and began considering other career options. A family friend suggested healthcare administration, given her love of business and caring for others. She graduated from Tulane in 1996 and went straight into the Army Reserve, serving as a Postal Platoon Leader in Chicopee, Mass., before transferring to Command a Quartermaster Detachment in Lexington, Ky., while attending the University of Kentucky. By 1999, she had earned her Master’s in Health Administration and was accepted into an administrative residency within the Guthrie Health System in Sayre, Pa.

Meanwhile, having joined the 411th Civil Affairs Battalion in Danbury, Conn., she completed Civil Affairs Officer training, learning how to essentially be “the middleman between civilian and military populations,” explains Caroline. She put that training to use in her first deployment. She was gone for 730 days straight, 670 of them in the Middle East, commencing with the invasion of Iraq. Caroline was a first responder to the U.N. Baghdad Headquarters Canal Hotel bombing on Aug. 19, 2003, which killed 22 people and injured over a hundred. “I’m incredibly proud of my fellow soldiers, all combat lifesaver trained. Many more people would have died had we not responded so quickly to render emergency care and extraction,” Caroline confidently says.

After nearly a year in Iraq, she and another U.S. Army captain were extended for a second year to serve as business development officers with the Humanitarian Operations Coordination Center based at the U.S. Embassy in Amman. “I went from wearing a dingy uniform for days at a time and showering only once a week to donning business attire and engaging with embassies and businesses to re-establish investment in Iraq,” says Caroline, calling it “a surreal transition to say the least!”



Caroline offers to provide insights to anyone considering military service. “The military can truly launch a life, often in directions you never even considered.”

Her second deployment came in November 2007, serving as a Civil Affairs Team Leader supporting reconstruction in Iraq. Her third came five years later, this time as the 411th Civil Affairs Battalion Executive Officer, responsible for the Battalion staff and periodically representing the Commander at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti in Eastern Africa.

Upon returning from deployment in 2005, Caroline was recruited to Geisinger Health System in Danville, Pa. She spent 10 years in various executive administrative roles before moving back to East Fishkill to help her mother after her father died in 2015.

By 2016, Mom had settled into a new routine, and Caroline longed to return to the classroom. She applied to several doctorate programs and was surprised to be accepted into Harvard’s TH Chan School of Public Health. While working full-time on her doctorate in Boston, she was also enrolled in the distance learning program at the U.S. Army War College, earning a second Master’s (in Military Strategic Studies) in July 2018 and her Doctorate in May 2019. “The Doctorate enables me to teach the next generation of healthcare administrators,” says Caroline, calling her job at Fordham “truly the best job out there!”

*continued on page 16*

We would like to thank **THE DARLIND COMPANIES** for bringing you this cover story.



While teaching staff operations at the Ugandan Junior Command and Staff College in 2012, Caroline was often visited by the soldiers' curious children who passed by on their way to and from school. (Photo courtesy of Caroline Pogge.)

### TWICE THE CITIZEN

Perhaps her greatest challenge is serving as a “citizen soldier,” tracking two distinct careers and identities. “Reserve soldiers are known as ‘Twice the Citizen,’ as we somehow balance military and civilian careers with our personal lives,” she says.

Still, she’s managed to stay competitive in both professions, by being “open and honest with my civilian and military employers about my commitments,” she reflects. “Thankfully, they gave me space when I needed it, encouraged me to stretch when I thought I couldn’t, and supported me when it seemed like all three parts of my life were

pressing me to the brink.” In 2021 to 2022, for example, she had to leave Fordham for a fourth deployment, leading a “small but mighty team” of civil affairs soldiers assigned to the U.S. Army Europe and Africa (USAREUR-AF) Headquarters in Wiesbaden, Germany.

When planning with her colorful calendar, Caroline starts with what she calls “the big rocks”—her military training schedule, Fordham school schedule and family events—then adds in time to recharge, like her recent scuba-diving trip to Bonaire or a weekend in Cape Cod searching for Great White sharks with fellow Norwalk Maritime Aquarium dive team volunteers. “I map out my year as much as possible but still have to be flexible, like the military motto ‘Semper Gumby.’”

A member of the Manny Bacon American Legion Post 1758 in Hopewell Junction and the Veteran of Foreign Wars Private William B. Wilson Post 666 in Beacon, Caroline offers to provide insights to anyone considering military service. “The military offers a wealth of opportunities for young people,” she says, “providing not only technical but leadership and life skills. The military can truly launch a life, often in directions you never even considered.”

For her many achievements and acts of heroism, Caroline has been awarded numerous medals, service ribbons and awards. But the greatest recognition is often a simple “thank you.” Says Caroline: “If you see a serviceman or -woman wearing something to indicate their service, please take the time to thank them—even ask them about their time in uniform. It’s often a significant part of our life’s story.” ♦

# Building Quality Projects with Local Skilled Tradesmen

PROUD SPONSOR OF THE FAMILY FEATURE



**GENERAL / DESIGN BUILD**  
**CONCRETE CONTRACTORS / TILT-UP**  
 Industrial, institutional, healthcare  
 and municipal construction



**Darlind**  
 ASSOCIATES, INC.

EST. 1977



In  
 Memory of  
 Butch Darrow  
 1942-2018

(845) 223-5115 • DarlindAssociates.com • LaGrangeville, NY