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TSA's Brown Earns INSA Award

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Homeland security may not have been Michael A. Brown's first calling in life, but it may well have been the call for which he was destined.

Brown, a March 2011 graduate of the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS), received the John W. Warner Homeland Security Award from the Intelligence and National Security Alliance (INSA) at the organization's annual awards dinner on Dec. 8 in Washington, D.C. The award is presented annually to first responders and domestic government employees across the national security and intelligence fields.

The award was more than just a career milestone – it capped a saga rooted in the death of his father at the hands of Basque ETA separatists on Sept. 11, 1985, and a career change after working in the financial industry.

His father's presence was palpable as he stood at the podium with his wife, children, mother and in-laws in the crowd.

"Of course, I felt like my dad was there," said Brown, who works in the Transportation Security Administration's Office of Global Strategies. "I feel like every time I put on a neck tie I am bringing him with me."

Brown's experience as a child and the events of Sept. 11, 2001 shaped his desire to serve his country. After earning a business administration degree from The George Washington University he had charted a firm course in the business world. But pending the birth of his first child in 2004, he began to crystallize a new career path.

"I had this epiphany about where I wanted to take my professional career," Brown recalled. "I didn't personally know anyone who was fighting terrorism. I didn't know many police officers or fire fighters. So I made a conscious decision to get into government."

The first step toward a new career began by enrolling in the Rutgers University master's degree program in public administration.

Brown directed his professional interest on public service through stints in a budget office for the City of New York, and the Critical Infrastructure Protection Section of the New Jersey Office of Counterterrorism. After working for a government client in the consulting industry, he joined TSA, where he is now responsible for developing and implementing transportation security strategy, as well as monitoring day-to-day operations for attachés stationed abroad.

During his time at TSA, Brown has led interdisciplinary reviews of systemic vulnerabilities in national programs, coordinated TSA's insider threats mitigation efforts, developed InfoBulletins across transportation sectors and agency offices for TSA and the Department of Homeland Security, and supported the implementation of an intergovernmental National Security Presidential Directive.

Brown further bolstered his academic credentials in earning a CHDS master's degree. His award-winning thesis, "Freed: Ripples of the Convicted and Released Terrorist in America," explored the societal implications of releasing convicted terrorists after they have served their prison sentences.



Kathleen Kiernan of the CHDS faculty introduced Brown to INSA, as an opportunity to stay intellectually engaged in homeland security issues.

“Michael symbolizes the true magic of CHDS, a practitioner environment in which earned experience fueled with a passion to change the world is backed with academic rigor and the results are evident,” Kiernan said. “Michael has made a significant contribution to the literature base and has compelled a public confrontation and a dialog on a threat heretofore nearly invisible.”

Brown participated in a working group comprised of homeland security professionals in writing an INSA white paper titled “Intelligence to Protect the Homeland,” published for the ten year anniversary of 9/11.

He likens that working group experience to a CHDS classroom: “We had the opportunity to debate real-time issues about homeland security intelligence with professionals from multiple disciplines. The dynamic was somewhat similar to what I experienced at NPS/CHDS.”

Brown cited professors Lauren Wollman and Kathleen Kiernan for their unwavering guidance and support. Moreover, Brown credits his CHDS experience for enhancing critical thinking skills through understanding the taxonomical phases of learning. Additionally, interacting with fellow students from a diverse range of professions was helpful in understanding differing perspectives.

“It is a very simple concept but it’s something I have internalized – being able to recognize the different frames people have, and how those frames shape them,” Brown said. “Everybody comes from a different place. The NPS/CHDS classroom taught me to clearly recognize the similarities and nuances between disciplines, and broadened my conceptual thinking. It has helped me recognize the gaps between perspectives and also avoid ‘group-think.’”

Amid the career and academic achievements, Brown has never forgotten that day in 1985 when he learned of his father’s death. This past summer, he worked with a group called Project Common Bond which works with children who have lost family members to terrorist acts. He noted that the world that seemed so far-flung 26 years ago has become smaller because of technology.

“In 1985 there was no Internet; it was all very lonely,” he said. “Now, the world is a much smaller place. We’re more connected on this planet than we have ever been. With that connectivity comes great things because we are engaged with each other. But it also introduces challenges. As we have more contact, we have more conflict. This is why the CHDS program is amazing – to recognize that conflict and identify solutions to resolve it.”

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