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### **Marine Veteran, Purple Heart Recipient, Appreciates Supportive GWU Staff, Faculty**

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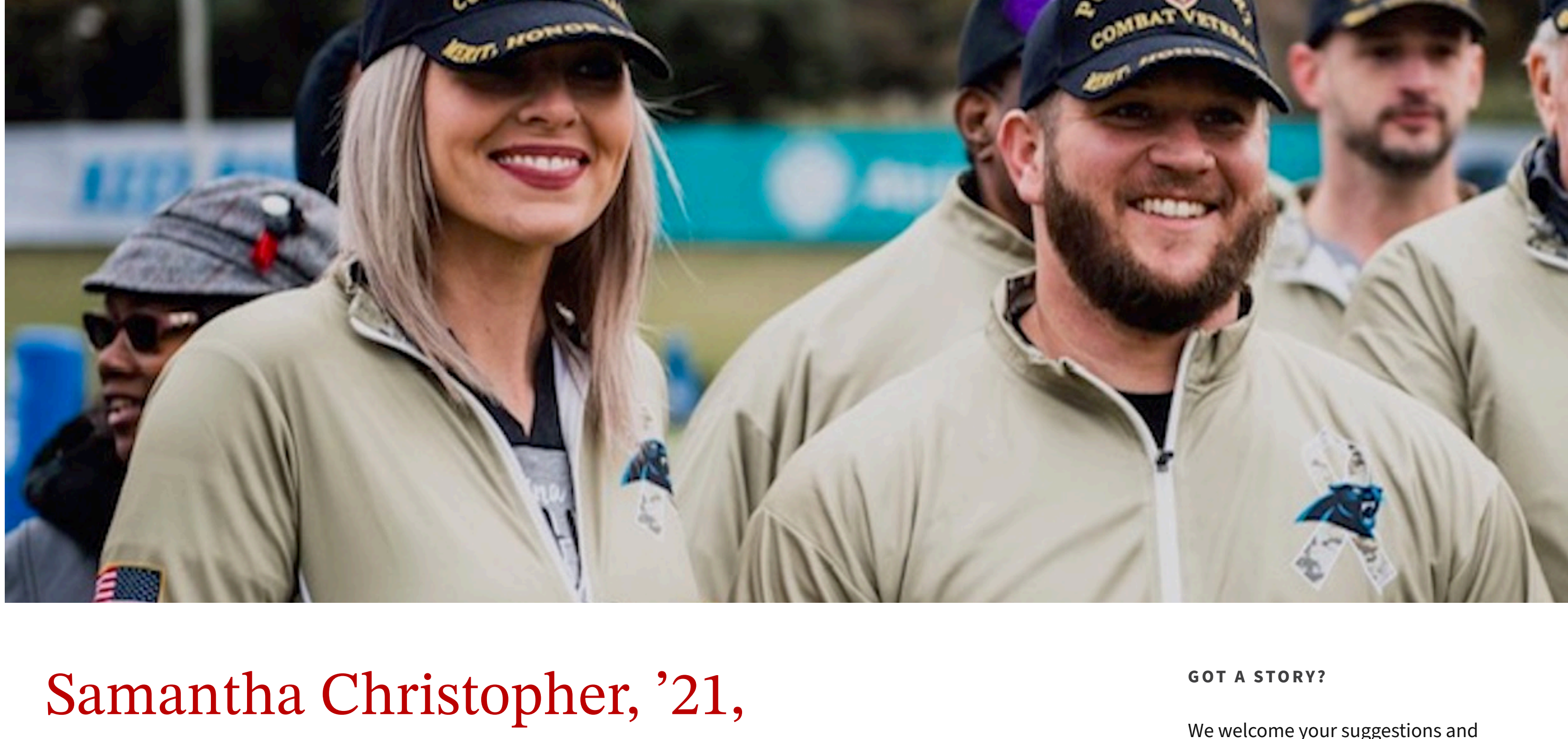
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BULLDOG PROFILES

Marine Veteran, Purple Heart Recipient,  
Appreciates Supportive GWU Staff, Faculty

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON NOVEMBER 3, 2020



Samantha Christopher, '21,  
Prepares to Serve as Nurse in  
Civilian World

Gardner-Webb Campus Veteran's Day Service and Recognition >

On a mission in Afghanistan in 2013, Marine Staff Sgt. Samantha Christopher, of Grover, N.C., and her platoon became the target of a large scale attack. "In a matter of seconds, there were 73 casualties, and I felt helpless in that situation," recalled the Gardner-Webb University student. "I knew I wanted to help more but did not have the medical knowledge or background to provide advanced care. A few other Marines and I helped carry the casualties onto the helicopters landing and taking off every 1 to 5 minutes. It was in that moment that I felt called to serve as a nurse."

In May 2021, when she receives her Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN) from GWU, Samantha will answer the call to serve for a second time. The first time was in 2009 when she enlisted in the Marines. "I joined the military, because I wanted to do something greater than myself," she affirmed. "Looking back, I see where every closed door was God's divine plan to keep me on the path he had for me."

Samantha and her future husband, Sgt. Benjamin Christopher, were deployed to Afghanistan in January of 2013 with Combat Logistics Regiment 2 from Camp Lejeune, N.C. She was awarded the Purple Heart after she suffered a traumatic brain injury when her vehicle hit an improvised explosive device (IED). Two weeks after her incident, Benjamin sustained a traumatic brain injury when his truck team was struck by an IED for a second time that deployment. He was also awarded the Purple Heart. Samantha said there are less than six "Purple Heart" couples in the United States.



On Aug. 26, 2013, she and Benjamin were married. He left the Marines, works as an HVAC installer, and started Christopher's Carp Lake, a fishing business on their property in Grover. Samantha continued to serve five more years with the Marine Corps Reserves.

"My husband and I knew from the beginning that what we experienced together was special," Samantha related. "We knew this was something we were going to carry for the rest of our lives. Most veterans know there is a special bond formed that is only understood by those who were on the battlefield. We understand each other and we have the same triggers. We healed together and we grew together—and are still growing."

Because the suicide rate for veterans is 1.5 times higher than civilians, Samantha and Benjamin know how it's important to support each other. "We have an unspoken rule that when one of us is getting attacked in our minds with thoughts of suicide, we tell the other one immediately," Samantha noted. "We are stronger together, and our warrior mentality keeps us fighting for our marriage. Marines never quit!"

She chose Gardner-Webb's Hunt School of Nursing for its small town atmosphere and strong Christian values. "Gardner-Webb was the first and only program I applied for," she affirmed. "The admissions staff and faculty is beyond helpful and caring. How many students can say their teachers and staff personally cover them in prayer, by name? I can count on several occasions when I have sat in their offices and cried and felt safe enough to talk about my struggles with war and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)."

She continued, "I know if I am struggling, I don't have to carry that burden alone. They truly carry the light of Jesus, walk out their faith, and embody his characteristics on a daily basis. I have never felt more at home and certain that Gardner-Webb is where I am supposed to be. I don't think I would have survived nursing school anywhere else. As a student in the Hunt School of Nursing, I am reminded every day to look up to where my help comes from and to tap into my source of strength in Christ Jesus."

Learn more about Gardner-Webb Admissions for Military Personnel. >

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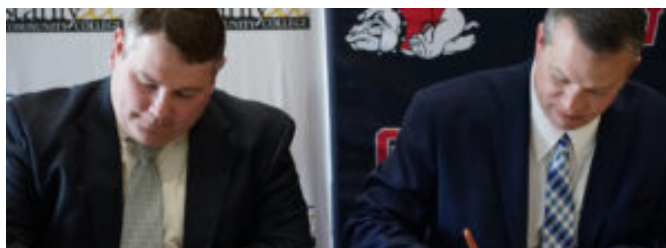


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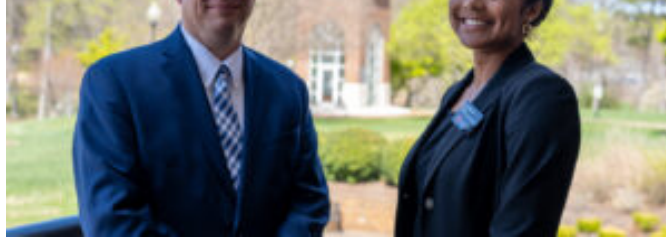


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