



*I am pleased to share the following blog post, written by Team Rubicon Clay Hunt Fellow Crista Casas. Content courtesy of Team Rubicon. To learn more about their mission of continued service through disaster response, visit [TeamRubiconUSA.org](http://TeamRubiconUSA.org).*

*Don't miss the series finale of [Chain of Command](#), airing this Monday night, February 26, at 9/8c, only on National Geographic.*

By: Crista Casas

*“What is it that we’re going to leave to those that follow our footsteps...the unfinished job?”*

In this quote, General Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, challenges leaders in National Geographic’s *Chain of Command*. A unique insider’s view into the current war against ISIS, the documentary series highlights the struggles our service members encounter at each level of command: from Private First Class to inside the walls of the Pentagon. As a veteran of the Iraq War who experienced the many facades of command - as a Marine, woman, minority, Platoon Sergeant, and now serving in disaster response - I feel

the many nuances of our modern war are well exposed in *Chain of Command*. More importantly, it daringly uncovers the culture bred in war, the humanitarian crisis we face, and the work we have left to do as veterans in modern society.

Two years ago, as I prepared for another deployment overseas, I wrote my thoughts:

*I drop my life for the feeling of my uncomfortable combat boots, the feeling of the cold rifle I can wrap my fingers around... [I'm] looking forward to the unknown, the chance to do something no one has done. I think of those I've loved and left behind... is it worth it? Why should I leave it all for the thrill of proving myself strong, of standing among men who [might] think I shouldn't fight next to them, of foregoing the pleasures in life so I can hurt? Alone in all this, no one sees the world like I do, no one sees the beauty of America like I do... that is, until I stand in front of my Marines, and I know deep inside we're all the same...the brothers and sisters who came back from the sands on the other side of the world... despite our demons and nightmares... we're the first to go back. No one can explain why we do what we do. I'll never be the same...although I might seem like just another girl, another daughter, another sister... deep down I'm just another soul in the desert... who never let politics or society determine what I do. I do what I do so the lights can shine over San Francisco.*

When my military career ended I lost everything. I never imagined that it would feel or be like that. My life turned to shambles quickly. However, I rebuilt it thanks to an organization I found purpose in, and also by continuing to serve my community.

Last month, I stood in the cold as a firefighter, working an oil well fire in Northern Colorado. Though no longer the desert cold or the cold of my M16, it was comfortingly

similar. A year before that, I was in the jungles of Ecuador, hiking through mud up to my knees alongside veterans and first responders delivering medical aid to remote earthquake-affected villages. Last September, I stood looking over maps of hurricane-hit Beaumont, Texas, in the makeshift Command Center of Team Rubicon, a veteran-led disaster response organization. I strategized how to get hundreds of volunteers mobilized and organized to work and clear out the homes of survivors of Hurricane Harvey.

In firefighting and in disaster response, I found a new calm in chaos, a new brotherhood. Yet, I'm not alone: there's over 70,000 Team Rubicon veterans, first responders, and civilians serving with me.

As I watch *Chain of Command*, I see young officers make decisions that will shape our world, while a special task force in Washington D.C discusses humanitarian implications of our war. I'm reminded that the war on terror will not be over for a long time. Generations of veterans now face the duty to reshape America, and the many countries left in disaster and pain, our own more increasingly so.

However, we have also been bred into humans who "at the end of the day...can't be paralyzed by tough choices," as General Dunford says. These men and women, like me, need a purpose: another war to fight. Organizations that are healing the world by repurposing veterans' skills through community service or disaster response, such as Team Rubicon, are that fight. It gives us purpose and the opportunity to serve again, while using the skills we gained in the military: endurance, leadership, tenacity, and audacity.

*Chain of Command* is a much needed, fresh, yet stark reminder that war is ongoing, and it's not just in the Middle East. There are men and women still putting their lives at stake, taking out the enemy, and trying to prevent more enemies from rising. It's a wake-up call, not just to the stakeholders involved, but to every citizen. It is a reminder that it is our duty to rise and make the world better for our future, to serve our communities, and to consider

what our actions will leave behind.

*Crista served 11 years as a Sergeant in the United States Marine Corps as a Logistics Specialist. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Near Eastern Studies from the University of California-Berkeley. Crista has been a volunteer leader with Team Rubicon for the past two years, serving as an International Team Leader, Wildland Firefighter, Sawyer, Northern Colorado Administrator, and is a Clay Hunt Fellow. When she is not responding to disaster, she works as a firefighter for Windsor-Severance Fire Rescue.*

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