

ARMED FORCES



MERIT AWARD

For Immediate Release, November 4, 2019

Armed Forces Merit Award 2019 finalists revealed

Fort Worth, Texas, November 4, 2019 - Five individuals have been named as finalists for the 2019 [Armed Forces Merit Award](#) presented by the [Football Writers Association of America \(FWAA\)](#).

The announcement of the 2019 recipient will be made via a 10 a.m. (CT) teleconference next Monday (November 11) on Veteran's Day by Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl Executive Director Brant Ringler and FWAA President Matt Fortuna.

Two of the five individuals for the 2019 [Armed Forces Merit Award](#) presented by the [FWAA](#) were also finalists in 2018 when Robert Morris University president [Dr. Chris Howard](#) was announced last November as the seventh recipient.

U. S. Air Force Academy Coach [Troy Calhoun](#) and wide receiver [Casey Stewart](#) of Shenandoah University lead the list of five individuals named as 2019 finalists after each advanced to the final round of voting in 2018. Calhoun is an Air Force veterans and Stewart is a National Guard reservist.

Others 2019 Armed Forces Merit Award finalists are defensive lineman and Marine veteran [Alexander Findura](#) of Bloomsburg College of Pennsylvania, defensive lineman and Navy veteran [Damian Jackson](#) of the University of Nebraska and Army West Point fullback coach and Army veteran [Mike Viti](#).

The Armed Forces Merit Award's selection committee is made up of five FWAA members and two representatives from the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl. A total of 33 individuals and five programs were nominated for the 2019 award that was created in June 2012 "to honor an individual and/or a group with a military background and/or involvement that has an impact within the realm of college football."

[Dr. Howard](#), a 1991 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, was a Rhodes Scholar and received the 1990 Campbell Trophy, the highest academic award in the nation presented to a senior college football player. He currently serves on the selection committee for the College Football Playoffs.

[Nate Boyer](#) of the University of Texas, Austin was the initial recipient in 2012. Other recipients were [Brandon McCoy](#) of the University of North Texas in 2013, [Daniel Rodriguez](#) from Clemson University in 2014, [Bret Robertson](#) of Westminster College (Fulton, Mo.) in 2015 and [Steven Rhodes](#) from Middle Tennessee State University in 2016.

[Kansas State](#) and its football team were honored in November 2017 as the sixth recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award for the university's partnership with the United States Army that created a bond between the school's athletic department and the Iron Rangers at Fort Riley.

Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the FWAA - 2019 finalists

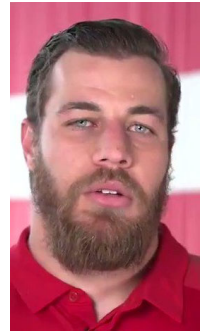
Troy Calhoun is the only coach that knows what it takes to play football at a service academy and then make the transition from the professional level to oversee a program at the Football Bowl Subdivision level. In 12-plus seasons at Air Force after playing at the academy for four seasons (1985-1988) and then coaching in the National Football League with the Denver Broncos (2003-2005) and Houston Texans (2006), Calhoun is currently fourth in service academy football coaching wins (93) behind **Fisher DeBerry** (169, 23, seasons, 1984-2006 at Air Force), **Earl Blaik** (121, 18, 1941-1958 at Army West Point) and **Ben Martin** (96, 20, 1958-1977 at Air Force).



Alexander Findura is a junior defensive lineman at Bloomsburg University where he currently leads the team in tackles for losses (11) and is second in solo tackles (26) and third in total tackles (44). In 27 career games, he has amassed 70 total tackles (34 solos) with 17.5 tackles for losses. Findura started his collegiate career at Georgia State where he was redshirted as a freshman in 2011. With a family history of military service (father in the Navy and grandfather an Army veteran), Findura joined the Marines in the summer of 2012.



Damian Jackson has played in only one game at the University of Nebraska but has served as a valuable member of the team. Jackson served as a member of the Navy SEALs for four years after graduating from Shadow Ridge High School in Las Vegas, Nev., in 2010. He was not a member of the football team in high school but did participate in baseball and soccer. In an April 2018 article in [Bleacher Report](#), Adam Kramer quoted then-new Nebraska coach Scott Frost as saying, "I hope he plays a lot, and we'll let those pieces fall where they may. But I know how valuable he's going to be regardless of how many snaps he gets. I love having him on this team."



Casey Stewart lives a double life. He is a student-athlete at Shenandoah University where he is a co-captain on the Hornet football team, and at the same time, he's a soldier in the National Guard. As a senior wide receiver, he has caught 46 passes this season for 752 yards and five touchdowns. He currently ranks fourth on Shenandoah's career reception list with 133 catches and is second in both receiving yards (2,110, 17.0-yard average per catch) and touchdown receptions (26). He earned all-league honors as a junior.



Mike Viti, who is in his fourth season as an assistant coach with the Army West Point football program and fifth overall on staff, co-founded Legacies Alive (LA), is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to strengthen and support the Gold Star families of our nation's fallen heroes and brings national awareness to the life and character of all service members who paid the ultimate sacrifice. Viti oversees the strategic and executive director of the organization.

