



UNIVERSITY OF  
ARKANSAS

School of Law



## Meet Jiajing Thach

Jiajing Thach is fast to help out a new acquaintance with a friendly “just call me JJ.” His warm smile often creates a sense of friendship even in those lacking confidence in the correct pronunciation of his Vietnamese name. The 3L from Van Buren has enjoyed the law school experience. After leaving home at a young age to seek self-development and then traveling the World in service to his country, law school in Arkansas has provided a treasured opportunity to be close to family. Completing his law degree and passing the Arkansas Bar are the next steps in a carefully planned career path. One might say it is his current “mission.”

Thach is a 2007 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. He made the decision to apply during his junior year of high school after viewing a recruitment brochure describing the pillars of self-development incorporated into the academy’s curriculum.

The atmosphere at West Point suited Thach. He enjoyed the academy’s picturesque setting on the west bank of New York’s Hudson River and its proximity to numerous historic sites. He thrived while earning a Bachelor of Science in geospatial information science. The discipline and academic rigor, if not always appreciated at the time, are very much appreciated today, and the hard work brought additional opportunities. For example, Thach, who speaks perfect English, grew up in a Cantonese Chinese-speaking home. Mandarin Chinese studies at West Point earned him the opportunity to teach and counsel children in an English immersion summer program sponsored by Beijing Normal University and Tsinghua University the summer before his third year at the academy.

Thach began his active military service promptly after graduation. Between 2007 and 2010, as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, he prepared for a career as an officer and a helicopter pilot at Fort Rucker, Alabama. He was awarded the Army Aviator Badge for flight qualifications in the Bell TH-67 Creek and Boeing AH-64D Apache Longbow aircrafts and, through a very competitive process,



won the opportunity to fly Apaches. The assignment required an additional 80 hours of flight training that included night tactical flying and gunnery.

“Flying Apache helicopters suited my personality,” Thach said. “The crew is minimal, just a pilot and a co-pilot. The Apache supports troops on the ground. It is a great asset for deterrence. Often adversaries will back down if ground personnel are supported by the helicopter.”

Upon completion of his training, 1st Lieutenant Thach was tapped as platoon leader of a team preparing for deployment to Iraq. The team included five pilots and eight aircraft crew chiefs. He led team members through all aspects of their training including safety, discipline, command and control, health and morale. He also managed the accountability and maintenance of four Apache helicopters and associated support equipment—assets valued at \$140 million. During Operation Enduring Freedom the group conducted 128 combat flight missions.

“The experience was rewarding. I was fortunate to gain this experience early in my career.”

After many experiences, challenges, assignments (including the Republic of Korea), medals and awards, Thach left active duty in 2015 at the rank of captain. His mission-oriented approach to life made graduate school a top priority. Thach applied to the University of Arkansas School of Law because he craved time near his close-knit family. Thach’s parents immigrated to the U.S. after fleeing their native country in the months following the end of the Vietnam War.

Thach has enjoyed law school – finding it “warm and welcoming.” His final semester is devoted to a full-time capstone externship in the Office of the General Counsel for the Fayetteville division of the Department of Veterans Affairs. He helped create the externship, with the assistance of Director of Externships Angie Doss and Health Scholar in Residence Frank Griffin, M.D., which will be available to future law students.

“The status of the legal profession is elevated by people like JJ Thach,” Griffin said. “JJ has impacted many people at the law school by simply being a kind and thoughtful presence. In addition, JJ leaves a lasting legacy to benefit future law students – especially those who are interested in working with veterans – by creating new opportunities with the VA system.”

As is true with all University of Arkansas School of Law students, Thach has been supported by members of the Arkansas bar. He was supervised by area attorneys as a volunteer for pro bono projects such as Arkansas Immigrant Defense and the Benton County Courthouse Legal Help Desk, and he is the 2019-20 recipient of the Arkansas Bar

Foundation’s Col. C.E. Ransick Scholarship.

Thach’s immediate post-graduation plans are to take the Arkansas Bar exam and then pursue an LL.M. – all with an eye toward practicing in a federal agency tasked with procurement or aviation law. He feels called to help obtain the kind of cutting-edge technology that supported his combat missions for future soldiers.