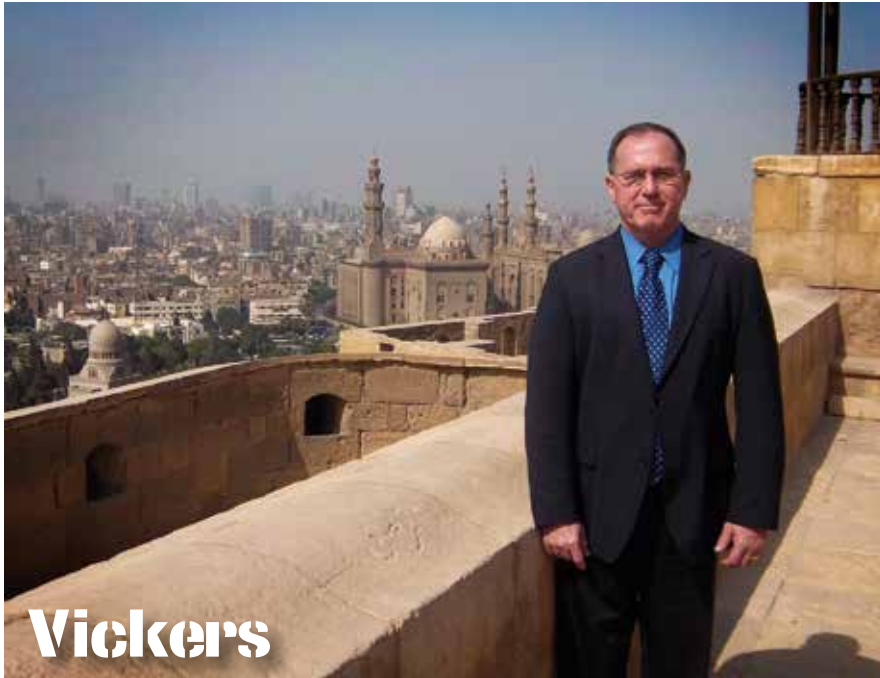


The hallowed halls of higher education may not seem the likeliest place to find people who will be tasked with protecting the United States from danger. The University of Alabama is known more for its Southern hospitality than turning out high-ranking defense officials. But that is precisely what it has done. Michael Vickers, Reginald Hyde and David Craft all earned degrees from UA and embarked on journeys that would lead to prominent positions in national security, entrusted with keeping us safe and secure.

The Best DEFENSE

by Jessie Jones

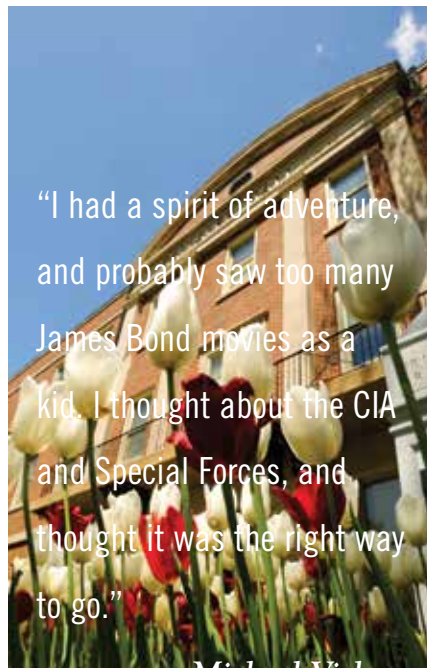


Dr. Michael Vickers, U.S. under secretary of defense for intelligence, stumbled upon UA during his service in the military. He had joined the Army after a couple years of college, and went on to Officer Candidate School, continuing to work on college credits while on military assignments at various locations. "I was getting close to within a year of a degree, and looked around for the best possible program that wouldn't disrupt my career," Vickers said. "I did a lot of research and found out UA had an external degree program through New College that required a year of Alabama credits. You had to do a thesis and attend a few on-campus seminars." That sealed the deal for Vickers, who had graduate school aspirations. He applied and was accepted.

His time as a UA student began in the spring of 1980. He was stationed in Fort Bragg, N.C., where he had just completed the Special Forces Officer Course, graduating first in his class. He was waiting to attend the Special Forces Military Free Fall course when he took a few weeks of leave and traveled to Tuscaloosa to attend seminars and meet

with his senior adviser, Dr. Don Snow, a political science professor, now retired.

While working toward his degree in international relations and political



science, Vickers was assigned to Special Forces in Panama, from 1980 to 1983, where he also undertook additional remote coursework through Florida State University and the University of Oklahoma. In all, he has credits from nine universities and colleges, including UA, from which he earned a bachelor's degree, cum laude, in 1983, writing his honors thesis on U.S. intelligence policy.

The question after graduation was what would come next for Vickers, who had grown up in southern California and always had aspirations of being a professional baseball or football player. He realized after high school and community college that he was not going to make it to the next level in sports. "I knew I'd better figure out what to do with my life," he said. Vickers, who played quarterback, was beaten out for the community college's starting position by Mark Harmon, who went on to play at UCLA and become a Hollywood star.

"I had a spirit of adventure, and probably saw too many James Bond movies as a kid," Vickers said. "I thought about the CIA and Special Forces, and thought it was the right way to go. It turns out I really loved it. I stayed 10 years in the Army, always thinking I'd go into the CIA." UA figured strongly in that decision, he said. In 1982, he applied to work with the Central Intelligence Agency, a civilian agency of the U.S. government, and joined its ranks in 1983.

Vickers credits his undergraduate degree from UA for making it possible to continue his education. He went on to earn his MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and his PhD from Johns Hopkins

University. “I was a hot-and-cold student in high school, and as I got more serious in the Army, my grades got really good. The work I did at UA and with Dr. Snow really helped me academically. I credit Alabama for making it possible for me to get into those kind of graduate schools.”

During his time with the CIA, Vickers served as an operations officer in the Latin America Division, the Special Activities Division and the Near East and South Asia Division. Vickers’ time in the latter two was featured in the best-selling book and movie *Charlie Wilson’s War*. “I’m the guy in the movie who supposedly was playing chess with four people at once,” he said. “For the record, that part isn’t true; it’s how the screen writer, Aaron Sorkin, chose to dramatize my story.”

After Vickers left the CIA, he attended graduate school and worked in

the private sector. From 2007 to 2011, he served as U.S. assistant secretary of defense for special operations, low intensity conflict and interdependent capabilities.

Today, Vickers oversees all of the country’s defense intelligence, which totals roughly 75 percent of the U.S. intelligence community. “I have the opportunity to work with our top national leaders, from the secretary of defense to the director of the CIA, on some of the toughest problems we face, whether it’s trying to defeat Al Qaeda or bring stability to Afghanistan or Iraq,” he said. “It’s a great opportunity to make sure our policy makers are informed. It’s a very important time in our country, and it’s a great honor to have the opportunity to do this.”

If it is unusual to find a UA alum working in the intelligence world, finding a pair together at the top of the

“I have the opportunity to work with our top national leaders, from the secretary of defense to the director of the CIA, on some of the toughest problems we face.”

—Michael Vickers

field is rare indeed, yet that is the case with Vickers and Reginald Hyde. As U.S. deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence and security (the civilian equivalent of a three-star general), Hyde, ’80, JD ’83, works directly with Vickers each day.

Hyde always planned to become a lawyer, and briefly accepted a position with a law firm following his graduation from the UA School of Law. It was a job he would never start.

“Although I lived overseas and my dad worked for the United Nations, I didn’t know anything about any of this,” he said. “However, a couple of summers as an undergrad spent in Bangladesh and traveling abroad had me thinking about the world and international relations.” A few courses on campus kept his interest in foreign affairs going.

“At the time, the historical context was that things weren’t looking so good for Uncle Sam around the world,” Hyde said. “The Soviet military was assessed to be the most powerful military in the



Michael Vickers (left) on a trip to Cairo in November 2011

world, and our embassy in Pakistan had been burned. Terrorism was in full bloom in the Middle East and Europe, and even our relations with many traditional allies in Europe were strained.”

With a well-traveled background, Hyde thought maybe he could help. “I never intended to do this as a career. I viewed this as my military service, and a great adventure. I planned to get out within five years.” What started as an adventure with the CIA in 1983 turned into a 28-year career. “This business is so fascinating you just keep getting seduced into it, and before you know it, you’re off to the next big thing,” he said. “Then you look around and another five years have gone by. It has given me the opportunity to be a witness at the crossroads of many historic events over the past quarter century, and hopefully to have had some impact in protecting U.S. national security.”

Hyde’s career has been a storied one. From 1985 to 1998, he served four tours of duty abroad, in Europe, Eastern Europe and the Near East, including Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Two of his assignments were as chief of station, the senior intelligence officer assigned to a country and responsible for all intelligence activities within it. Prior to accepting his current position, he worked as an executive vice president of In-Q-Tel, the strategic venture arm of the intelligence community that uses venture capital techniques to acquire cutting-edge technology.

Officially named to his current position in March 2011, Hyde considers it the high point of his career. “At this point in the game, to be in this kind of job, and the rank I’m at, you couldn’t



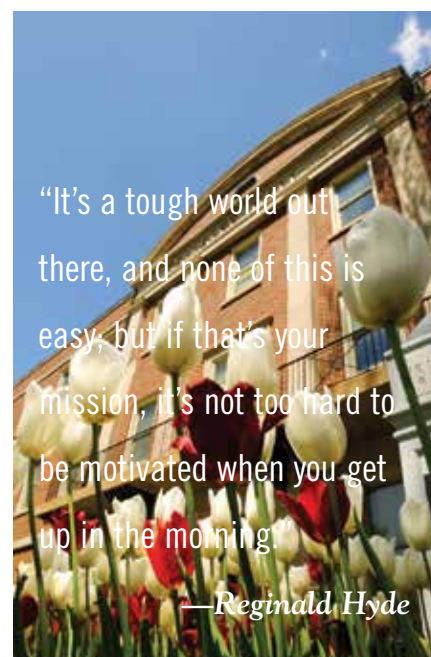
ask for more,” he said. “Mike Vickers and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates were looking to bring in someone with my background to lead the Intelligence and Security portfolio under USDI.” For Hyde, the scope of the job represented new opportunities and challenges. “The icing on the cake was that Mike Vickers is one of the sharpest and best people in Washington and the intelligence community, so I jumped at the opportunity.”

His day-to-day activities are wide-ranging, but he finds the variety stimulating and challenging. “My favorite parts of the job are the mission and the people,” he said. “The mission is critical. It’s about protecting 300 million Americans. It’s about protecting U.S. national security and it’s about providing timely, high-quality intelligence to senior policymakers. It’s a tough world out there, and none of this is easy; but if that’s your mission, it’s not too hard to be motivated when you get up in the morning.”

Hyde said his time spent in Tuscaloosa—nine years as a student—was nearly the longest he’d lived in one place, second only to his stint in Wash-

ington. He considers the campus a second home in many ways. “My years at the University had a tremendous impact on me. I had a rich classroom experience, but I learned so much more at the Capstone,” he said. “The human intelligence business is about people, and in my four years as an undergrad, I got a great education in people and dealing with people through my fraternity, Sigma Chi, and other campus activities, and that has been tremendously valuable to me.”

In all of his travels—to more than 70 countries during the course of his career—one thing always stands out. “Of all the beautiful places I’ve seen around the world, our campus, and the Quad in particular, is one of the most beautiful. I try to come back. Even now, when I visit, usually the day after a football game, I’ll go



up and sit on the steps of the library just to look at it all, while it's quiet."

Both Vickers and Hyde said it is a good time to be serving the country. "Nothing is perfect. In this business, you can always have problems, but today we are at a high point," Hyde noted. "With all the work that has been done post-9/11, our intelligence capabilities are far superior to those that existed for most of my career. It is very gratifying to be able to lead in this environment and to have been present to be a part of and observe all the progress that has been made."

Like Hyde, Dr. David Craft never imagined his career would turn out quite the way it did. His college roommate was a member of the ROTC, and suggested Craft sign up for it, too, as a fun elective. "I never dreamed I would join the Army," he said. "I was the first in my family to go to college, and we had no experience or understanding of serving the country as a commissioned officer."

But the training corps caught his interest. "There was an energy that attracted a lot of people," he said. "During my junior year, there were 1,200 people in ROTC. It was a large, liberal arts approach that captured people it otherwise never would have, and I wound up going into the military because it felt natural."

Along the way, Craft found another love in the study of microbiology, when he took a class in the subject his sophomore year. "It changed my approach to what I wanted to study," he said. "It was basically just another available science course for me as a biology major, so I took it—and it absolutely fascinated me." Craft changed his major and graduated with a bachelor's in microbiology in 1979 and again with a master's degree in 1981.

He entered the Army on active duty as a microbiologist in 1981, beginning a 30-year career in the military. "Once I

"It was basically just another available science course for me as a biology major, so I took it—and it absolutely fascinated me."

—David Craft

found out you could be a microbiologist in the Army, my mind was made up," he said.

After spending two years on active duty, Craft discovered an Army program that would allow him to work on his doctorate while he remained on active duty. He jumped at the opportunity to further his education and career. "The second year I applied to the program I was selected; and then you choose the school you want to go to and the Army gives you up to four years to complete the PhD." He finished his doctoral program in three years, graduating in 1989 from the University of Georgia.

The extra education and training paid off. Craft, who retired as an Army colonel in October 2011, spent the last 12 years of his career in the Washington, D.C., area, mainly at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.

At the medical center, he served as the microbiology laboratory director, and led the Army's clinical testing associated with anthrax attacks that occurred in the United States in 2001.

Reginald Hyde visited the Temple of Aphaia on the Greek island of Aegina during one of his many journeys abroad.



Craft:



These had included mailings to several media offices and to two U.S. senators. Five people were killed, and nearly 20 others infected. "My lab at Walter Reed was the only CDC/public health certified confirmatory lab in the D.C. area, and any support for hospitals in D.C. also came to me," Craft said. "The CDC actually deployed their personnel from Atlanta to my labs in support of the Brentwood postal processing station where the contaminated letters were processed, releasing spores into that facility."

Craft served as the microbiology consultant to the Army surgeon general from 2002 to 2006. In 2004, his research efforts enabled him to be the first to describe the emergence of multi-drug resistant bacterial infections in traumatically wounded soldiers returning from combat zones.

From 2006 to 2008, Craft took on a different type of role when he commanded one of two deployable bio-

logical, chemical and nuclear response units in the Army—the 9th Area Medical Laboratory at Edgewood Arsenal, Md. "Our mission was to deploy worldwide in support of the Department of Defense to detect, confirm and manage a nuclear, biological or chemical weapon release," he said. "A main focus was biological detection, in that many Army units had some capability and training in nuclear and chemical detection, protection and countermeasures, but very little

in biological weapon understanding and response."

Following his retirement, Craft accepted a position as the director of microbiology and associate professor of pathology at the Milton S. Hershey Medical Center and School in Hershey,

Pa. Although he makes his home in the north, his Alabama ties still run deep; both of his children are currently enrolled at UA. Sarah will graduate with a master's degree in advertising and marketing in May and Nathan is wrapping up his freshman year studying business.

Craft's glad to be passing on the legacy of his college days, he said, which he credits with his love for and service to his country. "The idea of the tradition and legacy of the University is a lot like the legacy and tradition of our country," he said. "The old traditional schools have that air about them; they promote legacy and service, and it leads people like me to think, 'I want a career in something that looks like that.' The military was that for me. The University was that for me. They are institutions you can be proud of." ■



David Craft traveled to an Army clinical research site located next to Obama Children's Hospital in Kenya.