College wasn’t in Brian Fountaine’s cross hairs when he rolled into Iraq in 2003. As a tank commander, he was focused on patrolling the bustling main road bisecting the country for the improvised explosive devices that lay everywhere, unseen: between curbstones, in dog carcasses, under fistfuls of sand.

After two years and 11 close encounters with exploding IEDs, Fountaine, then a 24-year-old sergeant, was pulling a U-turn in a Humvee when an IED blew up beneath him, shearing off both legs below the knee. Using his belt as a tourniquet, he remembers, he felt no pain.

Instead, he got mad. And ultimately, he got even. After surviving a near-fatal blood clot, he channeled his rage into recovery.

“I’m a stubborn SOB,” Fountaine says. “I don’t believe in luck or fate. It’s about human perseverance.”

In time, the trials of getting fitted for prostheses—a set for walking, another for golf, yet another for scuba diving—would give him a new mission: designing limbs. Why not use 3-D printing technology to build them at low cost?

Today, as a design student at Northeastern’s College of Arts, Media and Design, Fountaine has that target well within his sightlines. He aims to graduate in 2015 with help from a recently expanded scholarship fund—one created by a band of Northeastern brothers, the alumni of the former Phi Gamma Pi fraternity.

Salute to Service

In 2006, after leaving Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Fountaine had a life to get back to. He rafted through the Grand Canyon with other disabled vets. He sought out the counseling and veterans’ benefits that were his due. He found a soul mate, and married her. He earned an associate degree in graphic design. And in 2012, he transferred to Northeastern, where nearly 500 veterans and their spouses and children currently study, about a third of them aided by the Yellow Ribbon Program, an extension of the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

When an email went out in the fall of 2013 announcing the Phi Gamma Pi Veterans Scholarship, Fountaine was one of 25 students who applied. In January, he and four others received checks that should make earning their degrees easier by defraying tuition and other expenses, or by helping them pay off debt.

According to Northeastern’s Veteran Services Specialist Andy McCarty, a former airman, the university has an exceptional track record of providing services to vets and their dependents. “As President Aoun has said, we want to be a magnet for these students,” says McCarty, whose job includes linking individuals to services and building community.

However, many vets still have unmet financial needs, he says. “The public assumes our government pays the bills, but most of our vets don’t qualify for Yellow Ribbon or have limited GI Bill eligibility. Medical bills, equipment needs, transportation—all number of hurdles can make earning a degree challenging.”

The Phi Gamma Pi brothers saw this gap in assistance and voted to support vets with proceeds from the sale of their fraternity’s once-grand house in Brookline to Boston Children’s Hospital. The fund will provide several scholarships a year “for perhaps a decade,” says Alan Small, E’79, the group’s president.

For Fountaine, the scholarship will fund a Dialogue of Civilizations course in Ireland at the Burren College of Art this summer. “My plan,” he says, “is to continue my recovery—and to find myself again through a piece of charcoal, or the bristles of a paintbrush.”