

News

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Face of Defense: Warrant Officer Mentors Soldiers, Students

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KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan, Feb. 27, 2014 – An Army Reserve soldier deployed here is a teacher in civilian life, and he puts those skills to work mentoring younger soldiers.

“I do it for the youth,” said Warrant Officer Randy Jones, utilities operations and maintenance technician officer for the 760th Engineer Company out of Marion, Va. “There’s just no substitute for being able to pass your knowledge to the next generation and help make a difference in a young adult’s life.”

Jones said he’s always happy when something happens to show him his mentorship took hold. “It’s a great feeling when a student you taught 15 years ago calls you on the phone and thanks you and invites you out to dinner with their family,” he said.



Jones, an Asheville, N.C., native, was 17 when he joined the Army in 1986. After spending two years on active duty, he was released from service during a force reduction and decided to go into the construction business like the rest of his family.

While working in the industry, Jones said, he gained many certifications and licenses and was content making his career in construction. But that all changed one day while he was reading a newspaper.

“I really don’t know what got me into teaching,” he said. “I was happy at my current job, but saw an ad in the paper one day for a teaching position and applied. The next thing I knew, I was hired, and it’s turned out to be one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

Although his primary focus is on teaching, Jones said, he still operates a construction business and has built more than 50 homes in the past 15 years. “Being an educator is great,” he said. “Not only do I get to teach what I love doing, but the hours are flexible enough to allow me to continue my own business.”

Jones has taught workforce development, formerly known as “shop,” to high school students in Winston-Salem, N.C., for the past 18 years. He said he always has urged his students to look into joining the military for the benefits and experience it provides.

"I advise all my students to look into all their career options when they finish their schooling and point out the many benefits the military has to offer," he said. "Nearly 20 years after I first joined, I began thinking, 'Hey why don't I take my own advice?'"

Since joining the Army again, Jones has served as a drill sergeant and warrant officer, which has given him the chance to continue to teach. He said he takes a similar approach to teaching both soldiers and students.

"To me, there is no difference in teaching a high school student or a soldier," Jones said. "I can be as hard on them as I need to be, but at the end of the day, I always make sure to tell them they are doing a good job."

Army Spc. Christopher Fussell, a horizontal construction engineer with the 124th Engineer Company, said he benefits from the mentorship he gets from Jones. "I feel comfortable and confident when he is teaching me something new," Fussell added.

Jones said his many years of teaching have taught him how to be patient.

"Chief' is a great mentor," said Army Pfc. Christopher Carter, a carpentry and masonry specialist with the 1223rd Engineer Company. "He watches how we do things and gives us feedback showing us a safer and more efficient way, if possible."

It's important to work with his students until they get it right, and it's his job to ensure that happens, Jones said. Teaching poses numerous challenges, he said, but all can be overcome with a little bit of effort."

"The biggest challenge in teaching is showing the student what they are capable of, by building their confidence they can start to believe in themselves," Jones said. "Sometimes it takes a little longer, but it's definitely worth the effort."

"[Jones] has taught us to take pride in our work and pay close attention to detail," said Army Spc. Laquan Johnson, a carpentry and masonry specialist with the 760th.

Jones works with six other soldiers at the 489th Engineer Battalion's wood shop.

"I'm really proud of my soldiers working in the shop," he said. "They have managed to produce some great works and have really come together as a family, despite being from all over the U.S."

Jones noted that teaching isn't a one-way street. He said he has learned a lot from his soldiers during this deployment and looks forward to getting back home to see his family and start teaching another group of students.

"I never thought I would be a teacher, but looking back, I can't imagine doing anything else but teaching," he said.