

**Lt. Andre Jones-Butler: overcoming adversity to become a leader, mentor and honoree for supporting civil rights in the Coast Guard<sup>1</sup>**

At one time or another, we have faced adversity in our lives, but how often do we talk about what motivates us to keep going, to tell ourselves failure isn't an option until we reach what we perceive as success? For Lt. Andre Jones-Butler, numerous factors contributed to his perseverance, including sacrifices made and guidance received by family members, as well as the mentors who saw his potential and shepherded him along the way.

As a teenager in Tyrone, Georgia, raised in a single parent household, the distractions that normal 14-year-olds experience led to nearly disastrous consequences that could have dogged Jones-Butler for his entire life. His mother, frustrated, was forced to take action before it was too late. She found the funds to pay for his tuition to Randolph Macon Academy in Front Royal, Virginia, the state of her birth and where she still had relatives.

The military academy was a huge adjustment for a young man who was always free to sneak out the back door of school to cut class. Yet, he found that limiting his freedom and the discipline at Randolph Macon Academy allowed him to focus and be more engaged in class, whereas before he had been bored with the routine and non-challenging education while in school in Georgia. The contact with cadets from in and out of the continental U.S. opened his mind and gave him his first entry into a variety of viewpoints and backgrounds that raised his head to the horizon to seek more knowledge, especially around our country's history.

"Iron sharpens iron," said Jones-Butler. "Being exposed to so many perspectives on different ideas raised my standards and gave me a better understanding of the world."

In addition to the exposure to new ideas, Jones-Butler observed the wealth and financial stability of other cadets and recognized he would have to work hard to achieve something similar. That goal and his mother's actions motivated him to take on the academic and personal challenges of Randolph Macon Academy.

"She made an investment in my future," said Jones-Butler. "Failure isn't an option. I honor the sacrifices she made for me."

Honoring his mother's sacrifices hasn't stopped with his growing career in the Coast Guard; Jones-Butler, who is now a father, is currently pursuing a master's degree in business administration.

In his senior year at Randolph Macon Academy, Jones-Butler faced a dilemma experienced by most high school seniors: to which colleges to apply. While determined to pursue a college degree (his first choice was Purdue University), the scholarships offered would not be enough to cover four years of tuition. His aunt, who was paying for his college application fees and is a former Coast Guard member, made a deal with him: she would continue to pay his fees if he applied to colleges she chose. One of those colleges was the Coast Guard Academy and the rest, as they say, is history.

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After graduation from the academy, a series of mentors who saw his promise assisted with his career advancement. Jones-Butler states those mentors were the driving force in pursuing opportunities out of his comfort level, which led him to where he is today: as safety officer for the Aviation Projects Acquisition Center in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, a command he enjoys and is ready to excel in.

If there's one piece of advice Jones-Butler could give to others, it is this: "Expand your circle of mentors to find opportunities that will advance your skills and qualities that will make you an effective and empathic leader." His experience with mentors compelled him to pay it forward and serve as a mentor to others. Jones-Butler saw a way to move things forward, be a part of the improvements the Coast Guard has made regarding diversity and to take on something that was bigger than himself.