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Jae Arda: Continuing the Legacy



On a sunny Wednesday afternoon, Jae and I met in a meeting room at The Citadel campus library. The room held a bay window and a pillow-filled window seat, which could have been the perfect spot for grabbing a coffee and having a chat with a girlfriend. And that's exactly how talking with Jae felt—like greeting an old friend and catching up on lost time. We greeted with a hug and made small talk as we settled into our places in front of the video camera to begin the interview. Soon, I learn that Jae is an expressive communicator—she talks with her hands, and even she apologizes for doing so at one point. As she reminisces on her time in the military, there is a smile on her face and a laugh in her voice. Through our interview, I learned that she is tough, feminine, supportive, dedicated, and honored to be one of the few and the proud.

Janice “Jae” Arda has spent most of her life on or around military bases. A self-proclaimed Marine Corps brat, she was born on the Marine base in Cherry Point, North Carolina. From there, she has lived in Virginia, Arizona, California, and Illinois. Now, she and her husband have settled in Charleston, South Carolina.

Jae and her grandparents



“I’ve been all over,” she laughs before launching into the details of her enlistment.

At twenty years old, Jae continued what she deems the “family tradition” of being a Marine and enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve. She followed a long line of relatives in joining the service, including her great-grandfather, grandfather, father, and many uncles. Her father served 20 years as a Marine, and a maternal uncle was killed in the Beirut bombings.

Jae attended high school in Chicago. During her high school years, she was on the wrestling team and the track team, for which she pole vaulted.

There was no female wrestling team, so she was one of a few females who helped round out the team. Pole vaulting also included limited females, so the girls—since they had no coach—trained with the boys. However, being part of male-dominated team sports unknowingly prepared her for life as a Marine.

In the Marine population, approximately seven percent are females; needless to say, women do not have a large presence in the Marine Corps. In Jae’s deployment company, there were ten other women—only eleven women out of more than two hundred deployed Marines. The women had a separate sleeping area and bathroom. They were encouraged to travel in pairs, especially in a foreign country, and were required to leave the bathroom fully clothed, with towel-only coverage allowed, after a shower. Though dominated in numbers by males, Jae said

that the Marines “felt like home to me.” Her sports background and growing up with brothers made her comfortable being in the minority.

Jae has a competitive spirit and strove to meet, if not beat, the male physical training requirements. “I made it known that I wasn’t willing to, you know, cut corners just because I’m a female, make excuses just because I’m a female.” Not only did she excel at the women’s requirements, but she beat the men’s pull-up requirements and run times. Having the support of a fellow female Marine gave Jae a push to succeed. First Sergeant Boccolucci, admired by many on base, encouraged exceeding her own physical standards. Boccolucci would post her most recent physical accomplishments for Jae to see and strive for. She personally inspired Jae to be the best Marine she could be.



Jae initially enlisted with an active duty contract, but then changed it to a reserve contract. Little did she know that she would be part of a unit activated for deployment at the end of 2008. After returning to Chicago from MOS (military occupational specialty) training, she spent only three months getting settled before receiving the call that she would be deploying.

“I knew it was a possibility; I didn’t know how quickly it was going to happen,” she says, adding that 2008 was one of the final pushes of troops deploying to Iraq.

Overseas, Jae was involved in the Iraqi Sovereignty campaign. Officially deployed in February 2009, she spent seven months overseas communicating the disposition of “end items.”

“End items,” she clarifies, are “major items that we use that either shoot, move, or communicate.” These items include “trucks, radios, comm equipment, rifles, [and] other major

items that [Marines] use.” Jae and her team were responsible for repairing these items, shipping them back to the United States, sending them to another unit for repair, or demilitarizing the dysfunctional pieces of equipment. When her deployment was complete, she returned to the base at Rock Island, Illinois, and continued her maintenance work. The maintenance shop on base was a third and fourth echelon shop, which allowed her to learn more in-depth repairs on necessary items. While completing her contract on base, Toys for Tots season was beginning.

“In between maintenance, we were going to Toys for Tots events,” she recalls. Jae goes on to explain that the Marine Reserve gets to participate in many fundraising opportunities for the non-profit. “We basically stand there, looking pretty in our dress blues,” she laughs. However, it’s not only standing and looking pretty. Jae and her unit visited many businesses looking for corporate sponsors, donors, and donations and were even involved in the bagging of toys for the multiple families receiving the toys closer to Christmas Day.



Working with Toys for Tots

Jae was meritoriously promoted twice. Her first promotion occurred because of her abilities to encourage her fellow Marines. Many times, she came in—unpaid—to train with members of her unit who were having difficulty meeting some of the physical standards. One of her best memories was training with a Marine who, though he initially struggled with his run time, met the minimum requirement on his third, and last possible, attempt.

Her second promotion, however, came as a surprise. “There’s a formation being called, and First Sergeant Boccolucci is getting an award, and I’m like, ‘Yeah, alright, this is a cool formation. I love First Sergeant Boccolucci!’ After she walks away, they call me up. I thought,

‘Oh, am I in trouble? Oh, crap...what did I do wrong already?!’ ...Next thing you know, I was getting promoted. And I forgot to salute him on my way back, I was so dumbfounded!”

With so many positive experiences as a female in the Marines, does she have any advice for women interested in joining the service?

“Do respect yourself. It’s one thing to be one of the guys, and it’s a whole other thing to, just, kinda let the guys trample over you because you think that’s what they wanna hear, saying things that you think they wanna hear. Still have some respect for yourself, and actually stand up for when you know things aren’t right.” When she mentions knowing when things aren’t right, she is referring to the scandal and backlash some military branches are feeling in regards to integrating males and females. Currently, the Marines are the only branch still segregating men and women during boot camp. While the ability to train alongside each other during events is present, communication between the battalions is not allowed.

Being naturally competitive may help in becoming a successful female service member, too. Jae encourages women to be prepared to join the service. Mental and physical preparations are required to truly succeed during boot camp, training, work, possible deployment, and even life after the military.

Though the military receives a wide range of criticism, servicemen and women must make their experience special, and that experience is different for everyone. Jae not only had the support of family and fellow Marines, but also had the drive to be one of the best. During her time of service, Jae was a positive model for those around her, pushing fellow Marines to their highest standards and embodying the idea of a team. She is a great example of a Marine and a leader, and she is someone I would happily follow into battle.