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Resources

► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

► [Ask the CEO](#)

► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#)
(web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/ Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

Metro Info

► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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Photo by Ned Racine



Transit Security Officer Rivers Jacques recently returned to Metro from extended Army Reserve duty.

Training Troops for Combat Provides Lessons for Transit Security

By NED RACINE

(Jan. 11, 2007) Lt. Rivers Jacques of Transit Security recently returned to Metro after serving almost four years training marines, sailors and soldiers for combat in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Jacques, a former helicopter mechanic, has 28 years of combined service in the United States Army and Army Reserve. His latest Army Reserve stint, which he described as lasting "three years, 10 months and 29 days," took him to Ft. Carson, Co.; Ft. Bliss, Tex.; and Ft. Lewis, Wash.

Serving as a command sergeant major, Jacques and his battalion trained Army, Navy, Air Force and federal government personnel, both active and reserve, who were deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq. His rank is rare in the Army Reserve, where he estimates only five percent of the 280,000 personnel are sergeant majors.

Jacques' Army Reserve battalion consists of combat support personnel, including soldiers who transport supplies, Military Police, quartermasters and combat medics. As do most Army Reserve units, his battalion concentrates on combat support while the Army National Guard serves combat duty.

Raised in a military family, Jacques joined the Army in 1978, ignoring his family tradition of Navy service.

Pictured here
at a U.S. Army



training camp, Jacques, at right, sees parallels between his responsibilities as a command sergeant major in the Army Reserve and his responsibilities with Metro Transit Security.

Helos, trucks and jeeps

"I chose to be in the Army because it was the only branch that would allow me to become a helicopter mechanic," Jacques said. After spending four years as a helicopter mechanic, he became a tank mechanic, eventually working on everything from five-ton trucks to jeeps.

He no longer repairs vehicles. "I haven't turned a wrench in probably well over 10 to 15 years because I've been in positions of higher authority and responsibility."

Now, instead of working on \$150,000 M-60 tank engines, Jacques strives to ensure his troops are proficient in their specialties, a tall order in an increasingly technological Army. "That is really the role of a command sergeant major: taking care of soldiers and really looking after their health and welfare."

"We tried to implement a lot of realism into our training by using a lot of pyrotechnics," Jacques explained. "When I was in Colorado, we had a Hollywood production company come in and put together some of our pyrotechnics. Because they do it in Hollywood movies, and they blow things up and their fireballs go way up in the air. We tried to do that with our soldiers. Not to scare them—that wasn't the intent—but to put as much realism as possible into the training."

He wanted the soldiers to understand what they would be facing in combat, to keep their guard up, to be a hard target. In hardening a target and building awareness, Jacques sees parallels between his responsibilities as a command sergeant major in the Army Reserve and his responsibilities with Metro Transit Security, where he has been a lieutenant since 2000.

Tactics and techniques

"It's the same thing here at the [agency]," the New Orleans native said. "We're trying to implement new tactics, techniques and procedures to fight the war on terrorism." To better wage that fight, Jacques recently returned from Department of Homeland Security training in Alabama.

And although Metro Transit Security is not a military organization, some of what Jacques has learned in the Army Reserve informs his work at Metro.

“Our tactics are not the same,” he said. “But in terms of situational awareness, in terms of threat assessment, [Metro’s concerns are] very relevant to what we were doing in the military. A device is a device. How do you point it out? How do you know what it is? How do you identify it? Once you do identify it, what do you do?”

“We have to develop a mindset to think like the bad guy,” Jacques said. “I’m really blessed with having the opportunity to have that [military] training, and now I can bring it back to the job. It doesn’t do me any good keeping it to myself. I need to share it with the people who are going to be out there.”