



FRCSE Sailor anything but blue to join Angels



Aviation Ordnanceman 2nd Class (AO2) Danielle Swinton, left, and AO2 (SW) Aldrick Kittles prepare to move an M299 launcher at Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Detachment Jacksonville's Armament Repair Division. Kittles has been selected to join the Blue Angels as a crew chief in September. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)

Jacksonville, Fla. – Waynesboro, Georgia is only about 400 miles from Pensacola, Florida, but for Aviation Ordnanceman 2nd Class (SW) Aldrick Kittles, it may as well be in another galaxy.

Through hard work and determination, the Fleet Readiness Center Southeast (FRCSE) Detachment Jacksonville Sailor has made it out of a hard-scrabble upbringing, and is headed to the world's premier flight demonstration team.

In September, Kittles will join the Navy's Blue Angels as a maintenance crew chief.

"He's been inspirational to the other Sailors here," said Senior Chief Aviation Ordnanceman Mark Sarna, Kittles' supervisor at Detachment Jacksonville's 700 Division. "To know where he's come from, where he's at and where he's going is truly amazing."

By his own admission, Kittles' childhood in Waynesboro, Ga. was less than ideal.

"It was a bad environment," he said. "I saw things I shouldn't have seen and lived with things I shouldn't have had to live with."



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For a while, it was football that seemed to be his ticket to a better life. As a standout safety, Kittles was part of the 2011 Burke County High School Georgia state championship team. But in his senior year, his close friend and teammate was killed in a car crash.

“We were planning on playing college football together, but I couldn’t play football anymore after that happened,” Kittles said. “College just wasn’t an option for me after that because my mind just wasn’t focused enough at that point.

“But I knew I had to leave. I had to go somewhere.”

“Somewhere” ended up being the United States Navy, where Kittles said he originally planned to serve only four years.

“I joined and I guess I just did everything correctly,” he said. “I wanted to get the most out of it.”

He started out as an undesignated seaman aboard USS Ft. McHenry (LSD-43). The demands of that job set him on a path from which he wouldn’t deviate.

“I had to do everything: paint the ship, bring everything onboard the ship,” he said. “It was 24/7, and I kept that mentality when I came here.”

In Jacksonville, Kittles threw himself into the job. He took on collateral duties and volunteered.

“As soon as he checked in, his motor has been running 150 miles per hour,” Sarna said. “I just tried to point him in the right direction, and he took off.”

His fondness for a fast-paced work environment and a commitment to excellence led Kittles to apply for a position with the Blue Angels. At the end of a week-long interview process in May, Kittles still didn’t know if he’d been accepted. He returned home just in time to make the birth of his first child, a son.

Then the call came.

“At first they messed with me and told me I wasn’t selected,” he said. “Then they asked me if I had my seabag packed.

“I said no, but I’ll pack it now!”

Initially, Kittles will join the Blue Angels at their home base in Pensacola, Florida before leaving for training at El Centro, California in January. It’s a journey he’s looking forward to.

“This is the way I can do the things I want to do in my naval career,” he said. “I want to be an officer one day, and this will help me get there.



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“Sometimes I just can’t believe where I’m at in my life now,” he said.



Aviation Ordnanceman 2nd Class (SW) Aldriick Kittles, right, works to replace the rails on an M299 launcher, as Aviation Structural Mechanic 2nd Class Jesse Buroker performs a non-destructive inspection at Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Detachment Jacksonville's Armament Repair Division. Kittles has been selected to join the U.S. Navy's flight demonstration team, the Blue Angels, as a crew chief in September. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)