

Selfless SERVICE

BRANDON REESE

*wins the prestigious **Best of the Best Award***

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jered Stetter first worked with Brandon Reese when they were deployed to Iraq in 2008 and Stetter served as Reese's squad leader. While in Iraq, Reese was acting as the gunner for Stetter when they encountered an improvised explosive device that sent shrapnel into the gunners hatch. Reese took most of the blast and afterward asked Stetter to look at his face because he thought he had been hit. Stetter confirmed any injuries were not life-threatening and returned to the radio.

"The next thing I know, Brandon is back on the gun scanning for targets," says Stetter, who now is a warrant officer candidate school course manager at Camp Atterbury, a National Guard training base in Indiana.

"For a brief moment, I had the realization Brandon had not only taken a blast but took the brunt of the blast to his face—mostly percussion and noninjuring—and yet there he was protecting me so I could do my job and not sweat the enemy approaching. This is a classic case of the utmost bravery, loyalty and selfless service many on the civilian side will never encounter. If one thing has ever been true, it is that I owe a debt of gratitude to Brandon Reese."

BY KRISTA BERNS

Reese's dedication in the military and as a service technician for Korellis Roofing Inc., Hammond, Ind., stood out as one of the reasons he was chosen for the Best of the Best Award.

The Roofing Alliance's MVP Task Force presented Reese with the award, which is an extension of the Roofing Alliance's Most Valuable Player Awards. OMG® Roofing Products Inc., Agawam, Mass., and *Professional Roofing* co-sponsor the honor.

BORN INTO THE TRADES

Reese became interested in the military and the construction industry at a young age. He grew up in Jasper County, Indiana, and describes himself as a "normal farm kid" who baled hay and spent time outdoors on his grandfather's 60-acre farm.

Reese's father owned a construction business, so Reese started getting interested in the trades at age 7.

Additionally, his father, grandfathers, cousins and other family members were members of unions as operators, electricians and furniture workers, among other occupations.

A majority of Reese's family members also have served in the military, including his twin brother, Daniel, and sister, Sabrina, who serve in the Air Force.

Reese's military experience began when he was in high school.



“When I was 16, I was laying block for a foundation for a house and had the radio on—it was 9/11,” he says. “There was an armory 20 minutes away, and two weeks after my 17th birthday, I joined the National Guard.”

Reese went into basic training during his summer break then came home and finished his senior year. He did advanced individual training the next summer.

“I originally joined the military for air defense artillery, which then was banned in Indiana because air defense artillery was handled by our Air Force and became kind of an obsolete system,” he says. “I went to military police school, then went to Kosovo for nine months for premobilization and demobilization. I was 19 when I was first out of the country for a nine-month deployment.”

When Reese came home, he went to school for infantry in 2005 and served his weekends for the National Guard. But he wanted more from civilian life.

GOING PLACES

In June 2007, Reese was trying to get into the operating engineers union.

“My grandpa and uncle were in there, but the market was horrible and everyone was getting laid off,” Reese says. “I have a cousin who works as a foreman

at Korellis Roofing, and he said he could get me in the union. I was making \$12 per hour cash, nonunion construction and no benefits, so I came here and applied, and they hired me.”

Reese started as a six-month pre-apprentice and worked in the yard every day, loading and stocking trucks and learning the materials.

When Reese was a first-year apprentice, he left for Iraq for a year. When he returned, Pete Korellis, president and CEO of Korellis Roofing, moved him to the service department.

“I bounced around with different service techs, and that really helped me,” Reese says. “I learned everybody’s way of doing things and was able to decide for myself what worked best. It broadened how I view things and taught me about roof leaks. You have to be fairly intelligent when identifying a leak because you have to figure out how everything works together. If service work got slow, I’d go out to the field with foremen and work on tear-offs, so I spent some time in the trenches.”

As he was moving up at Korellis Roofing, Reese continued serving in the military.

Reese spent 2008 in Iraq, where he started as a gunner on a truck and was promoted to corporal and became a gun truck leader with his own team. He came home and worked for Korellis Roofing in 2009. He went to another military school and left for Afghanistan in summer 2010 as part of an agrobusiness development team.

Although Reese says he sometimes feels guilty leaving Korellis Roofing for months at a time, he appreciates the company’s support.

“I’m blessed to be with Korellis Roofing,” he says. “They take care of me. When I’m overseas, they send care packages, and Pete and his wife, Susan, send cards. Throughout my military career, Korellis Roofing has supported me and allowed me to do what I’ve done—to leave for a year and come back like I never left. Pete goes above and beyond. They work around a lot of things, and it makes my life easier.”

Reese says veterans typically are 10 to 15 percent of the Korellis Roofing workforce.

Korellis, whose son serves in the military, says he is happy to help Reese.

“It can get a bit challenging when you have a fine employee like Brandon who has to be gone for sometimes lengthy periods,” Korellis says. “But with his commitment to this country, this is the least we can do for him. I wouldn’t hesitate to do it for others in the military. We certainly appreciate their service and are glad we can help them a bit by leaving the door open for them to come back when they’re ready or finish their commitments.”

However, Reese once was asked to earn his spot after returning from Iraq.

PROVING YOUR WORTH

Dan Kiepora, director of roofing operations at Korellis Roofing, was the service manager when he met Reese.

“He was an apprentice in the service department, and while he was in Iraq, I became the new service manager. When Brandon came back and asked whether he could return to his position in the service department, I told him he would have to prove himself in the field. It didn’t take long after that to see his leadership.

“He stepped up and proved he belonged here. I gave him a truck when he was still an apprentice. He was essential at that time. We were converting everything from paper to electronics, and he stepped up and helped the older guys.”



Reese dons a Korellis Roofing hat while at Khost University in Afghanistan in 2010.

Reese appreciates Kiepura's understanding and support.

"Dan definitely mentored me," he says. "He saw me as an apprentice and wanted me to become a full-time service tech when I was a third-year apprentice. Dan was a prior service Marine, so I appreciated his level of understanding—letting me go do my schools in the military, mentoring me."

Because he straddles two worlds, Reese says he works as hard as he can wherever he is.

"As an apprentice, with every foreman I worked for, I would show up every day and work—and my idea of work can be harder than most people," he says. "You bale hay for a couple summers and know what work is, and when I work, I work. I try to do the best job I can and get it done. If I work harder than the guy next to me, I'm always going to have a job."

Reese sees the benefits of balancing his two worlds—his military training helps with his roofing work and vice versa.

"Being infantry or combat arms, you have a certain structure you follow, and it relates heavily to a roofing crew—you have your foreman, a chain of command, and you see how that follows down through," he says.

"I've also learned patience," he continues. "In the military, I'm training guys about things that are life and death. I try to tone it down a bit for the roofing industry. I push people to be the best they can be, and when I am working with guys who have never worked in the roofing industry, it helps me with my patience."

BECOMING A LEADER

Those at Korellis Roofing benefit from Reese's military experience.

"There's no better leadership than the military," Korellis says. "His training in the military and how he was able to move up in the military gave him the leadership capabilities, confidence and direction to become a leader in whatever his chosen profession was going to be."

That experience has earned him respect.

"His compassion, empathy and experience in the military all play into it," Kiepura says. "He'll get the job done and is not afraid to ask questions. I don't think he'll ask anyone to do something he wouldn't do."

"In service, he usually runs with just one person," he continues. "He figures it out, and we give him younger guys to figure it out with. He's a natural-born leader. He's not disrespectful to them, but he's stern, and they pull

together and get the job done—it very much reflects the military."

Eric Sizemore, general foreman at Korellis Roofing and Reese's cousin who got him involved with the union, says the military has changed Reese.

"When he was back in school, he took stuff seriously, but then he joined the military and really started taking life seriously," Sizemore says. "For his age and what he has, he takes great pride."

HARD WORK

Reese has learned from his experiences and sometimes looks to the military when recruiting for Korellis Roofing.

"I've gotten a few guys in from my guard units," Reese says. "Some have moved on or weren't right for the industry. I don't pretty it up; I'm honest with recruits so they know what to expect, and I have more success with guys if I'm open and honest. It's hot, difficult work, but with the benefits, insurance and pension package we have—if someone works for 25-30 years in the roofing union, he will be able to retire and be secure."

Reese says changes in modern skill sets have made it more difficult to recruit.

"Many people haven't worked with their hands," he says. "You can teach them your way, but roofing is an extremely physically demanding industry, and most people are not used to working in the heat and cold or lifting something that weighs 80 pounds. Some can't read a tape measure. I'm 34, and there's a skill set from when I grew up that has not been handed down to this generation."

Most of all, Reese believes in hard work, and his hard work is reflected in how he is viewed by customers.

"I do the best job I can and treat everyone with respect," Reese says. "I'm honest with customers and try to build a positive relationship with them. Korellis Roofing just landed a \$2 million job at a warehouse facility in Westville, Ind., because of the work the service department has done there. There are places where I've built a good rapport, so that makes me feel good."



Reese at a Local 26 union training center during apprenticeship training

Reese's communication with customers is key.

"He communicates well and is a problem-solver," Kiepura says. "When he finds something, he tells the customer to keep them informed. He goes above and beyond. If he sees something not roof-related, he'll fix it if he can or let them know there's a problem that needs to be taken care of by someone else."

David Langfield, a journeyman roofing worker at Korellis Roofing, agrees, praising Reese's authenticity.

"I think his ability to relate to people and be authentic



Reese and his wife, Heather, on their honeymoon in Ireland

is evident," Langfield says. "Whether you see Brandon in or out of work, you see the same person."

Korellis believes Reese is a great representative for the company.

"He's mild-mannered, well-spoken, polite and concerned," he says. "Customers like him, and we get a lot of compliments about him."

STAYING BUSY

Reese's activities outside of Korellis Roofing also are impressive.

Reese still is in the National Guard and serves his weekend each month. However, he also is an advanced leader course instructor at the 138th Regiment Regional Training Institute at Camp Atterbury in Indiana.

Master Sergeant Theodore Kasten, chief instructor at Camp Atterbury, supervised Reese for almost two years.

"SFC Reese has an outstanding relationship with his fellow soldiers and is clearly admired by his students," Kasten says. "He is often contacted by his students long after the end of the course for advice not only about the army but also about general life issues. He is a great mentor, and I am confident he will continue to be successful throughout his career."

Reese also works with Helmets to Hardhats, a national nonprofit program that connects National Guard, Reserve, retired and transitioning active-duty military service members with skilled training and quality career opportunities in the construction industry. Its purpose is to help military service members successfully transition back into civilian life.

And Reese shared the benefits of being in the military and the roofing industry by participating in a video recruitment program organized by the United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers in 2018.

When Reese has free time, he spends it hunting, riding his Harley and going to Cubs games with his wife, Heather, an avid Cubs fan.

Additionally, Reese works on developing his property—27 acres he bought five years ago.

"Every weekend I have off, I'm working on that," he says. "I'm building the pole barn and a two-bedroom apartment attached to it for my mother-in-law, and then we're going to have a house built on the same property. Part of the pole barn will be a heated shop, and the back third will be for tractors and storage."

Reese is doing all the work—except the heating—with some help from his father.

"It comes from growing up with my dad running the construction business and learning things from him," Reese says. "Hopefully, one day, when we have kids, I can say: 'I built that, and you can, too.' It's the satisfaction of building something yourself."

COMPANY CULTURE

At work, Reese's satisfaction comes from various factors.

"I like working outside," he says. "I'm not an office person. And what I like about service is I'm not at the same job for months on end. It's physical, but I'm using a lot of mental skills. I enjoy meeting people and the satisfaction of going somewhere and being able to find the problem and say: 'You're good to go now.' It's a rewarding job."

Reese works on many projects, sometimes heading to six jobs in one day. One of his favorite projects was recoating nearly 200,000 square feet on a commercial property on the south side of Chicago.

"It was something we'd never done," he says. "It was a steep-slope metal roof with two layers of coatings and an eave height of 40 feet off the ground. It was 100 percent tie-off because there were no guard rails. To complete that with no accidents was rewarding."

Reese also appreciates Korellis Roofing's family culture.

"They take care of their own," he says. "They want what's best for us. We have our own training facility. Korellis Roofing is employee-owned, so they put money back into the company to help it grow and make it better rather than staying stagnant. Pete listens to everyone's opinions, and it's nice to be part of that."

Additionally, Reese appreciates the company's focus on safety.

"The company pushes safety as the No. 1 concern," he says. "They go above and beyond here at Korellis Roofing. Pete provides everything we need, and if we don't have it, he'll get it. A lot of shops don't have that. I've never felt like I had to choose between safety and getting the job done."

Reese hopes to continue working for Korellis Roofing in the future.

"If I'm roofing in five or 10 years, I'll still be at Korellis Roofing," he says. "I would like to pursue being a foreman here."

Korellis hopes Reese will stick around.

"He's not your typical roofing worker," he says. "I hope to see him retire from Korellis Roofing. There are always opportunities for advancement here, so maybe he'll come out of the field and be in the service department administration, project managing or estimating."

Kiepora can see a future for Reese in the service department.

"I could see him being the service manager," he says. "We hired somebody in the service department so we could move him up. Hopefully, when I retire, they'll just move him up one more step. That would be ideal, but really, the sky's the limit."

DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT

Winning the Best of the Best Award has helped Reese see all the possibilities.

"Never in my wildest dreams when I started working here 12 years ago did I think I would be in the position

I am now—being an MVP winner, let alone Best of the Best," he says. "I'm honored. It was an amazing experience. I just show up and work—I do my job. I may work harder than some people, but this company is full of great employees who do their best every day. It's nothing special; it's just the path I chose. I have a job and I do it—in roofing and the military."

Those who work with him in the military and the roofing industry see more.

"SFC Reese's actions truly encompass all the Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage," Kasten says. "Moreover, his dedication and commitment to his country, state, fellow soldiers and his students is contagious. I have served our country for almost 29 years, and his ability to empathize with his fellow soldiers and citizens during their hardships while simultaneously encouraging and motivating them to accomplish more than they thought possible is unmatched."

Korellis believes Reese truly is an extraordinary person and employee.

"I admire what he does and has done, his military commitment and work ethic," he says. "He's an honorable person. If all my employees were like Brandon, I would have a really easy job." 🇺🇸



Josh Kelly of OMG® Roofing Products, Agawam, Mass., presents the Best of the Best Award to Reese.



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