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Uncle meets nephew in Kandahar

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- JL Summerlin called his fleetingly brief family reunion with his nephew at the Kandahar Airfield April 20, "something out of the movies."

Summerlin, an Afghanistan Engineer District-South construction control representative assigned to Forward Operating Base Smart as a provincial reconstruction team member working in Zabul province, was able to find and meet with his 19-year-old nephew, Pfc. Leyton M. Summerlin, at the airbase's USO.

They share the same name, JL explained. "His first name is Leyton, my middle name was Leyton. Everything changed when I changed to JL, but everybody [at home] still knows me as Leyton."

"Two generations of Summerlins who happen to share the same name meet in the same war zone at the same time. That is pretty amazing," JL said. "You see in the movies all the time stories about a father and a son or two brothers reuniting, but I've never heard one about an uncle and a nephew."

After a yearlong assignment, the elder Summerlin returns to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Paul District in St. Paul, Minn. in late April. The younger Summerlin, an infantryman assigned to Joint Base Lewis-McChord's 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division arrived in Afghanistan April 5 and moved with his unit to Zabul province the day after the reunion.

"After a cat-and-mouse game" of finding one another," the Summerlins "hung out at the USO, made a video for our family and had dinner on the Boardwalk," Leyton said.

"Of all places to be taking him dinner, Uncle Leyton is taking nephew Leyton to dinner on the Boardwalk on Kadahar Airfield in Kandahar, Afghanistan," JL said. "It's a pretty unique opportunity to take a family member to dinner. No too many people can say that."



JL Summerlin (right), Afghanistan District-South construction control representative, played a "cat and mouse game" on Kandahar Airfield trying to track down his nephew, Pfc. Leyton Summerlin. The elder Summerlin was on his way back to the United States while the Soldier just arrived in country and was leaving with his unit to Zabul province, the same area where JL served a yearlong tour working with a provincial reconstruction team. (USACE photo by Dave Melancon)

JL supervised several construction projects within Zabul province including Highway 1 repairs, bridge construction and maintenance, road, hospital and school construction projects. The work was mostly funded by the regional commander's emergency response program, he said.

Leyton's platoon will support the "Arrowhead" Brigade key leadership engagement program. While senior Army leaders work with their Afghan counter parts, he and his team will surround the meeting area to protect the participants, he explained.

"I'm pretty ecstatic. I knew JL was in country but for us to be going to the same area is what is really cool," the Soldier said. "We were not really sure would be able to see each other because I did not know where I was going to be."

Before parting ways in opposite directions, the older Summerlin said he offered some advice which will serve his nephew well in Zabul province. Some of these tips included relying on his training, listening to his more experienced noncommissioned officers and officers and "remembering why we are here - to help the people of Afghanistan to improve their lives in every way that we can including kindness."

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