

Army War College Welcomes New Deputy Commandant for Reserve Affairs

By Elena Patton, Public Affairs Office 13 July 2020



Brig. Gen. Janeen Birckhead, USAWC Class of 2013, serves as the USAWC Deputy Commandant for Reserve Affairs.



Brig. Gen. Janeen Birckhead engages with high school students at a STEM conference. The event functioned as an opportunity for students to learn more about National Guard leadership and Army opportunity in Science-Tech-Engineering-Math fields.

Brig. Gen. Janeen Birckhead, in her new role as USAWC Deputy Commandant for Reserve Affairs, is charged with the unique task of advising the commandant and the curriculum with respect to roles and

responsibilities of the reserve components of the U.S. armed forces. In addition to her National Guard duties with the state of Maryland, she—having learned from her own RC experience—provides students with advice regarding the challenges they face as RC students at the War College.

“I work very closely with all the departments to make sure . . . the War College understands some of the challenges that come with being a reservist of guardsman, and trying to ensure that students get the best possible outcome from their experience at the War College,” said Birkhead.

At the Army War College, about 20 percent of the U.S. resident student body is in the Reserve Component—National Guard and Reserve. More than three quarters of the Distance Education Program student body are reserve or guardsmen. Birkhead focuses on these students and enhancing their military education because, in addition to their military duties, these individuals often times have civilian jobs and attend school simultaneously.

“Many times that particular aspect or understanding might be lost on somebody,” said Birkhead, graduate of the USAWC Class of 2013.

Her own experiences calibrated her advisory skills for this position, “I attended a war college distance learning program, and when I started my war college experience, I was deployed to Afghanistan.” said Birkhead. “Having that insight and passing it onto the student is important.”

Birkhead, therefore, is keenly aware of the challenges the RC students face. One of the major obstacles centers on the students’ writing skills. “I found that the library and the writing center at the War College are certainly key to being successful at the War College, she said. “So I think it is important that we continue to communicate to [students] that resource is there for them. It might take you a few extra steps to access that resource because you are not on base to go there and do that face-to-face, but I have found them to be accessible during my experience at the War College, I certainly relied upon those resources.”

Birkhead utilizes her voice and resources to improve her students’ educational experiences. “Of course bringing some of my perspective and background and talking about the diversity of what we need to bring to the War College to make sure all voices are being heard and a well-rounded education is being provided is important,” said Birkhead.

Even during COVID 19, her students do not falter. “As far as the platform and being able to do things in a distance way, and being able to collaborate with these different platforms, a Distance Education student is going to be more adapt to doing that because we do that all the time,” said Birckhead.

The students’ reserve component experience also enriches the classroom environment. “It adds a different perspective to the classroom when you bring that reservist perspective because they usually have a job that might be totally different than what they do in the military so they come to it with a different understanding and can provide additional information that adds to the learning,” said Birckhead.

She discussed her own experience as an example.

“I work for the office of Special Trustee for American Indian and we talk about how that intersects with some of the things we do with the National Guard, supporting going out to reservations, supporting medical at reservations, and infrastructure. So we are able to add different perspectives on that,” said Birckhead.

Like the RC students she works with and advocates for, Birckhead juggles her position at the War College with her duties as a commander in the Maryland National Guard. “I am always looking for providing ready soldiers for the war fight. That is our primary mission. Second to that and just as important is our mission to the state, being ready as with COVID when the state calls, being able to respond to natural disasters, or civil disturbance,” said Birckhead.

The biggest challenge Birckhead faces, regardless of the circumstances, is maintaining the well-being of her soldiers.

“The challenge here at home is making sure we have resilient soldiers who have families who can, regardless of COVID, operate without that family member,” said Birckhead. “We have a robust chaplain corps, along with our family readiness group, and our behavioral health team. We are constantly engaging soldiers about issues, whether it be financial or whether it is mental health or welfare checks.”

Birckhead also emphasized that this support extends beyond the National Guard. “One of our biggest themes is, ‘We are in this together.’ And I want to stress that. It is a whole of community, a whole of government. The community has really stepped-up to support the National Guard,” said Birckhead.

