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BULLDOG PROFILES

Alum's Varied Educational Experiences Contribute to His Professional and Personal Success

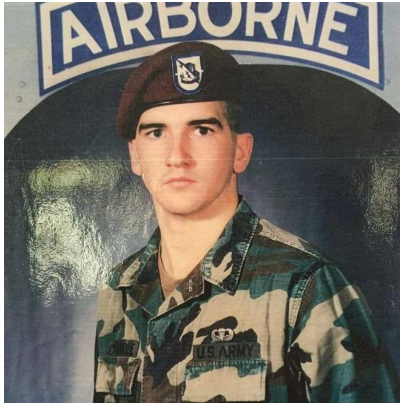
BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JULY 18, 2021



Justin Clapsaddle, '07, Utilizes Master of Accountancy as School Administrator and Artisan

Justin Clapsaddle, a 2007 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, has never regretted any investment he made in his education. His teachers have ranged from Army sergeants and military professors to accounting instructors, bank executives, and artisans. Each one contributed to his success as a school administrator, knife maker and small business owner.

The Murphy, N.C., native and resident enlisted in the Army when he graduated from high school. He rose to the rank of specialist and was a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division. He applied to West Point Military Academy in New York and attended there for a year. Not wanting to enlist for eight years, Clapsaddle came back home and got a degree in middle grades education.



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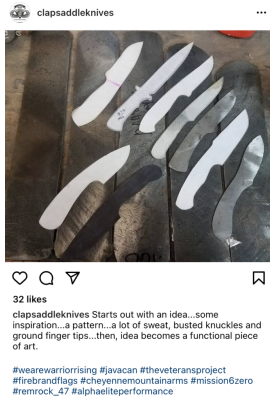
He taught for a year, then transitioned into the banking industry. “I wanted to get into business and wanted an advanced business degree,” he noted. “Gardner-Webb’s Master of Accountancy (MAcc) program fit my schedule, as I was working full time, and I needed a program where I could earn my degree online.”

He found Gardner-Webb through a web search. “At the time I was working in banking, and traveling in a four-state territory for work,” he reflected. “In the evenings when I got to the hotel room, I had time to work towards my degree. The program we used was great; the professors were accessible. I could call, email or chat and get any help needed. Earning my degree from GWU gave me confidence to speak with our CFO, to speak the lingo, and to have conversations more efficiently, and contribute back, it’s a give and take.”

After receiving his MAcc in 2007, the housing market collapsed. Around the same time, Clapsaddle read an article by Sports Illustrated columnist Rick Reilly that changed the way he looked at his work schedule. “To sum it up (Reilly) states, ‘No one is going to think about what they did at work, it’s the little moments at home with family,’” Clapsaddle said. “My kids were younger, and I didn’t want to miss those moments. Life is what you make of it.”

Clapsaddle returned to education in 2009, serving as a teacher, principal, and academic administrator. While working as a principal in 2012, his children played sports. Most every afternoon he waited at school until 7 p.m. for them to get out of practice. To pass the time, he discovered a hobby that soon became a passion and a business. “I met this guy in town, Mike Wilson (Wilson Knives, Hayesville, N.C.), and he showed me how to make knives,” he related. “I started out making six knives for Christmas presents, and I fell in love with it.”

As Clapsaddle made more knives and his presence on social media grew, he was contacted by a friend from West Point, Jason Van Camp. Van Camp was looking for a way to give back to fellow veterans and started Warrior Rising, an organization that helps U.S. military veterans and their families by providing them opportunities to create sustainable businesses. “We call it becoming a ‘Veterpreneur,’ and it gives veterans the opportunity to use our military skills and training in the civilian world,” Clapsaddle stated. “They reached out to me, invited me out to Napa, invested in my business, and it took off from there.”



He continued, “It has been a great blessing to our family, and while Warrior Rising has been very generous with their investment into my business, the biggest payoff has been the relationships. I’ve met so many talented and accomplished veterans through my association with Warrior Rising. They push me to be better and do more. Now, I am trying to return the favor by donating knives and my time to assist other veterans in their journey.”

While perfecting his craft, he started to wonder if he could make knives from metal that was reclaimed from vehicles and equipment once used in combat. To get started, his father-in-law gave him some metal from a Jeep used in the Battle of the Bulge. To make a knife that cuts and perform well, Clapsaddle learned how to take the harvested war metal, add a layer of Damascus steel and utilize a process of forge welding known as San Mai. Damascus steel is made by combining various types of contrasting steels and folding, twisting, and forming a pattern. In addition to the knife from the Battle of the Bulge, the collection he calls, “War Metal Forge,” has knives made from metal once used in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

In 2018, Clapsaddle became the director of Nutrition and Transportation for Cherokee County Schools in Murphy. His transportation responsibilities involve working with a small group of people to coordinate bus routes. Their goal is to use the county’s resources efficiently. As director of Nutrition, he and the nutrition supervisor manage 13 schools in Cherokee County. In this area, he crunches numbers, shuffles paperwork, and moves food from one cafeteria to the next. “We are a business and need to be profitable,” he said. “We recently created a new program called Super Snack; all kids can eat free, which is invaluable to the families we serve. I love coming to work each day because of the people I work with—the principals I work with. I feel like I am a servant leader to them. I work for them and the students—and that’s from my military days. I love that I can make their experience better.”

Finding the balance between his full-time job and owning a business requires dedication, teamwork and an entrepreneurial spirit. He is thankful that his family enjoys helping him around the shop. “My wife (Tiffany) helps with making sheaths. My oldest son (Bryce) welds for me. My daughter (Aubrey) is taking on my social media and website, and my youngest son (Garrett) has given me ideas for designs.”

For more information, check out Clapsaddle Knives on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/clapsaddleknives/photos/?ref=page_internal)

(https://www.facebook.com/clapsaddleknives/photos/?ref=page_internal) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/clapsaddleknives/?hl=en)

(<https://www.instagram.com/clapsaddleknives/?hl=en>).



▲ Knives made from metal taken from a Jeep used in the Battle of the Bulge.

