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For Immediate Release

January 28, 2013

## **El Camino College Student Success Story: U.S. Marine Corps Veteran and ECC Graduate Lee Jones Transfers to University, Gains Career as a Commercial Pilot**

When Lee Jones ended his active service with the U.S. Marine Corps, he knew he needed a college education to achieve his career goals. He enrolled at El Camino College one month after his service ended in 2008, and was concerned that his extended time away from the classroom would hinder his success. That concern did not last long.

“El Camino College helped me fit in by giving me the tools I needed for college, while adding on to my military experience,” he said. “My transition from military life to college life was smooth. I was not the greatest student in high school, but at El Camino College, I made the Dean’s List a few times and graduated with a 3.2 grade point average. I think that’s pretty good for someone who never attended college before.”

Now a commercial helicopter pilot in the South Bay, Jones earned an associate degree at El Camino College in 2010 and will continue his education at Embry–Riddle Aeronautical University, where he plans to earn a bachelor’s degree in professional aeronautics.

“This degree fits right in with what I’m doing,” he said. “It combines all my military aviation experience and commercial aviation experience, and accepts all credits and degrees from El Camino College. This next step will be challenging, but I’m looking forward to it.”

The transition from serving in the military to civilian life has its challenges, Jones said, especially dealing with his diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. He credits El Camino College teachers, counselors, and staff from the ECC Veteran’s Center with helping him find out what he needed to do to move ahead both academically and personally. He attended ECC on the GI Bill and regularly visited the Veteran’s Center to ask questions or work on the computers provided to veteran students.

Directly after graduating from high school in his Florida hometown, Jones joined the Marines and served from 2002-2008, where he worked as a helicopter and jet mechanic and completed two tours in Iraq and a tour in Japan.

His determination drove him to take a full load of classes each semester at El Camino College and earned his associate degree in two and half years – he took one winter session off to get married.

Though his degree plans changed along the way – he started as an accounting and economics major, but soon changed to communications – his determination to succeed never wavered.

“I soon realized that I wanted be a pilot; my education at El Camino College showed me that I wanted to be a teacher as well,” Jones said. “I wanted to be clear and concise in my communications. I wanted to be a safer pilot and flight instructor, so people can understand me.”

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