

## **NAVY Veteran Volunteers at the Farm That Reached Him Through Trees for Troops While Stationed in Kuwait**

Retired Navy veteran, Mark Watts, continues his 29 years of service by volunteering each year at the very farm that supplied a Christmas Tree to his base during his 2007 deployment to Kuwait.

“Receiving a live tree in the middle of the desert was inspiring. I got to see its effect on myself and the people around me. We share everything in the military. If someone gets a box of goodies – it goes out to everyone. There’s some incredible good in the military that you don’t see everyday walking down the street. The tree was placed in the commons area where everyone passes by, and people would come to look at the tree and lean in to smell it. When you’re deployed 8,000 miles away and your family is at home, it hits an emotional trigger and takes you back to trees you harvested with family and those types of memories. People serve in the military from diverse backgrounds, and some individuals have never had a tree for themselves, so this is their first experience,” explained Watts.

Watts knew in the summer of 2007 that he was going to deploy, so Dick Darling opened his facility to the family in the summertime to let them choose a family Christmas tree before he left. “Dick let us place an American flag on the top of the tree we chose, which generated a lot of interest from tree farm patrons,” said Watts. “The Darling family contributes so much to the military and the people who serve!”

Watts says that the other neat thing about T4T is that growers across the country get a seedling and nurture it for years before harvest and donation to the military. The impact on the receiving end is amazing. “It’s an honor to serve with the folks in the military branches, and deep down we’re all the same and the impact is profound.”