

# Student apprentice serves nation, supports the war fighter

(Photo shows men in lab; caption...

*Photo by Merv Brokke*

**LAB EXPERIENCE--** Dakota Joseph Eldridge, a junior from Arab High School, and participant in the Science and Engineering Apprentice Program performs integration of Test Program Set changes on a Kiowa Warrior Line Replaceable Unit as his mentors Brit Frank, chief, Systems Support Branch, Engineering Support Division, Engineering Directorate; and John Elrod, electronics engineer, Systems Support Branch, supervise. According to the SEAP website, the program provides students with opportunities in and exposure to scientific and engineering practices and personnel not available in their school environment.

**By MERV BROKKE**

*AMRDEC public affairs*

High school students spend their summer vacations in as many ways as there are students. Of those who seek employment and strive to improve their skills and abilities in preparation for future careers, many look to the Army's Science and Engineering Apprentice Program as a means to earn money while serving the nation.

The Aviation and Missile Research Development and Engineering Center is one of many research facilities across the country where students can work directly with mentors on meaningful projects that support the war fighter.

According to the Army Educational Outreach Program Overview, the Army has long recognized that a scientifically and technologically literate citizenry is this nation's best hope for a secure, rewarding and successful future. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics will continue to play a dominant role in all aspects of everyday life in the 21st century and for this reason, the Army created the AEOP which greatly expands and integrates an array of Army educational opportunities for the future generations of America's work force and their teachers.

One of these students is Dakota Joseph Eldridge.

Eldridge is a junior at Arab High School who participated in the Science and Engineering Apprentice Program under the mentorship of AMRDEC employees Brit Frank, chief, Systems Support Branch, Engineering Support Division, Engineering Directorate; and John Elrod, electronics engineer, Systems Support Branch.

The Science and Engineering Apprentice Program, sponsored by George Washington University and the Department of Defense, is an eight-week summer program for high school and college students. This opportunity provides students with valuable experience needed to make informed career decisions.

"I learned a lot about electrical engineering through what work I did. I was not very familiar with electrical components and it gave me a greater idea of what I would like to major and pursue a career in," Eldridge said.

The mentor's role is multifaceted and doesn't end after an assignment is given. A mentor is a supervisor, teacher, coach and role model.

"One of Eldridge's tasks was to aid in the development and integration of a Test Program Set for the Improved Master Control Processor Unit, Line Replaceable Unit for the Kiowa helicopter (OH-58D)," Frank said.

War fighters depend on their equipment being ready to operate around the clock and under the harshest conditions around the world.

“Eldridge gained insight into how technology is used to maintain readiness of equipment in the field,” Elrod said.

According to the SEAP website, the students contribute to the research of the laboratory while learning research techniques in the process. This “hands-on” experience gives students a broader view of their fields of interest and shows students what kind of work awaits them in their future career.

“I like how we would meet and do group projects,” Eldridge said. “Every member of the SEAP program would be highly involved. That made the program more enjoyable and helped me gain a higher understanding of the various areas of engineering.”

For Eldridge, working in the SEAP program at AMRDEC was an awesome experience; one he hopes to continue and recommends to his friends.

“I really liked the program a lot and, yes, it is very beneficial to engineering students in the fact that it allowed you to see true engineering in practice,” he said.

High school students wishing to participate in this year’s SEAP Program, here at Redstone, must apply by Jan. 29. For more information, visit the Army Educational Outreach Program website at <http://www.usaeop.com/index.htm>. (*AMRDEC release*)