



ISAF CSM Retiring After 36 Years in the Army

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Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Capel is handing over the reins of ISAF enlisted leadership in July, when he retires. For the past 36 years, Capel has gotten up in the morning, put on his uniform and been eager to work with Soldiers. For the last 18 months, he shouldered the duty of being the theater's top noncommissioned officer.

"When I joined the Army in October of 1977, I went to Basic Training. And it was shortly after the Vietnam War. But from what I saw back then, the noncommissioned officers had a lot to do in terms of getting Soldiers trained how to survive. I noticed it was their leadership that was so important to getting the mission done and done right," Capel said. "Here in Operation Enduring Freedom, it's no different for the Afghans. The [Afghan National Army] and the [Afghan National Police] rely on their trainers and NCOs in the same way.

"All the Afghan sergeants major in both the ANP and the ANA are doing a great job of getting their G-staff sergeants major positions filled to see to it that they make sure the right soldiers get to the right places and are able to perform the right tasks that are needed

on the battlefield," he said. "It's the G-staff sergeants major who see to it that their soldiers have what it is needed to assist them in doing their jobs. And the [Afghan National Security Forces] have come a long way in developing their NCOs."

Capel said he realized early in his career that he would be staying in the Army.

"Back when I was coming up in the Army, I saw what a difference having good, caring NCOs meant, and when I saw how the noncommissioned officers schools were taking the time to teach the Soldiers how to be professional and care for their people," he said. "It was then I realized I had no plans of ever leaving. I saw some great leaders from when I was in the 82nd Airborne Division and when I was in Panama. Back in 1984, I had the chance to become a drill sergeant and it was there at Fort Jackson (S.C.) that I remember some of the combat veterans who were still around in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

"My time with that group of NCOs changed my life and I learned what was good behavior and what was bad behavior. I learned what I needed to do to change," Capel

said. “So there is nothing better that I love to do than to wear the uniform and I am proud that I had the chance to be a United States Soldier.”

Capel realizes the impact his words have on people and he chooses to be positive with the men and women in uniform.

“I don’t think the folks back home understand all the sacrifices these guys and gals are making by raising their hand in the air and coming out here and trying to make better lives for the Afghan citizens here,” he said. “When you see the heroes, the ceremonies for our fallen, and you take into account the burn victims and those who have lost arms and legs in fighting the enemies of Afghanistan here in the name of freedom, one realizes what an honor it is to serve with these warriors. They give me the motivation to get up every single morning out here.”

Capel, 54, has served in Afghanistan for the past 18 months. He is quick to credit people for helping him to become the senior enlisted leader in theater.

“Anyone who thinks that they got what they earned without the help of a lot of Soldiers, families and civilians is sorely mistaken,” Capel said. “I have been helped by thousands and thousands of people.

“I never turn down a phone call from one of our guys or gals who call me up and seek some help,” he

said. “I may hang up the uniform but my blood is still green and I will continue to help any organization or person in the Army who looks to me for some assistance. I do not see it that I am retiring per say; I am just taking a little break.” ■



Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Capel, International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces – Afghanistan senior enlisted leader, awards a U.S non-commissioned officer a leadership coin at Forward Operating Base Warrior, Ghazni province, Afghanistan. Photo courtesy of ISAF Public Affairs. ■

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