



Odierno Outlines Challenges for New Sergeants Major

By Clifford Kyle Jones

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Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Raymond T. Odierno told the more than 600 graduates of this year's Sergeants Major Course that the U.S. Army's Noncommissioned Officer Corps was the best in the world, but that they faced challenges to keep it that way.

"As I travel around the world and I speak to military leaders of many, many nations, the one thing they want to talk to me about is our Noncommissioned Officers Corps. They want to know why we have such a strong enlisted force. How did we develop it? How did they get to be who they are today? I tell them it requires investment; it requires investment in the development of their competence, their commitment and character, to education, training and providing them the experiences necessary to be successful.

"And just as important, it requires us to empower them, to give them responsibility and hold them accountable. That's what makes our Noncommissioned Officer Corps different from any other. And you are going to lead them. [This is] the best Noncommis-

sioned Officer Corps in the world, and we expect you to carry on the great leadership that is necessary for us to sustain this."

Odierno lauded the curriculum of the Sergeants Major Course and the accomplishments of Class 63. In opening remarks, Command Sgt. Maj. Rory Malloy, commandant of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, noted that this year's graduates were only the third class to complete the new 10-month course, which has transitioned from task-focused work to more intensive academic study.

"We continue to develop a sergeant major who complements their field-grade counterparts in any field, anywhere," Malloy said.

Odierno noted that the U.S. Army wasn't always the envy of the world. When he joined in 1972, he said, the Army was in a state of crisis after a deeply unpopular war in Vietnam. However, he said, through investments in training and combat-readiness and successful operations in Grenada, Panama and then Iraq, "we began to earn



Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Raymond T. Odierno helped hand out diplomas at the graduation ceremony for Class 63 of the Sergeants Major Course on Friday, June 21, at Fort Bliss, Texas. (Photo by Meghan Portillo)

the trust of the people of America.”

But it was after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, that the Army really demonstrated how prepared it was to handle any conflict. Odierno said the Army distinguished itself for its professionalism and tactical and technical proficiency.

“At the same time, we are once again in a time of transition,” he said. Decreasing deployments and shrinking budgets will create new challenges for Soldiers.

“The valor, dedication and discipline you’ve shown over the last 12 years of combat will be even more necessary as we transition our Army. And now is the time for you to give back. We need you more than ever to lead, inspire and develop our young men and women to reach and exceed their potential. You are on the frontlines of our next transition.”

Odierno said he needs sergeants major, and all NCOs, to focus on leadership development, realistic training, good stewardship of resources and ensuring that they sustain the Army Profession.

He said that they must sustain and improve on the Army’s most important competitive advantage: leadership. That is why, he said, he recently released the Army Leadership Development System, a roadmap for developing leaders that focuses on training, education and

experience. For NCOs, he said, the ALDS is “all-encompassing” and outlines a strategy for development taking Soldiers from Basic Training through the Sergeants Major Course.

Training, he said, must be developed to maximize the potential of every Soldier and incorporate the lessons of a decade of war. “We’re not walking away from the experience of the last 12 years; we’re building on it.”

Odierno said NCOs must make sure that maintaining their equipment and upholding financial responsibilities are priorities.

“And finally, and most importantly,” Odierno said, “as an NCO, I need you to sustain the Army Profession.”

He focused on teaching Soldiers character and respect for others. Odierno said the rash of sexual assault and harassment problems, hazing and toxic leadership are threats to the Army and indicate failures of leadership.

“The most basic fundamental to the success of any organization is trust. These intolerable acts destroy trust, and if we let them, they will destroy our Army,” Odierno said. “We cannot allow that to happen. The only way we’ll fix this is with the dedication of a Noncommissioned Officer Corps that takes this on.”

Odierno was confident that Class 63 would meet these challenges.

“Today, we’re the best Army in the world; two years from now, we will be the best Army in the world; five years from now we will be the best Army in the world; in

10 years, we will be the best Army in the world, and it’s because of you. You will lead us as we continue to move forward and continue to set a standard of excellence.” ■



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