



Command Sgt. Maj. Cornelius Mack (right), commandant of the Sgt. 1st Class Christopher R. Brevard NCO Academy at Fort Richardson, Alaska, assists Command Sgt. Maj. Marion E. Arnett, commandant of the Fort Bliss, Texas, NCO Academy, with an exercise during the Commandant's Pre-Command Course on Sept. 16-20 at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss.

New Course Aims to Prepare Commandants for New Duties

By Martha C. Koester

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After hearing from NCO academy commandants who said that training for their jobs was lacking, officials at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, realized there was a gap in the education of sergeants major who were going to lead the Army's NCO schools.

Based on that feedback, USASMA set out to build a dynamic course to help ease the transition into the role of commandant of an NCO academy. The result was the pilot Commandant's Pre-Command Course, held Sept. 16-20.

With Command Sgt. Maj. Rory L. Malloy, USASMA's commandant, at the helm, course leaders set out to provide a meaningful experience for the command sergeants major taking part in the course.

"A lot of commandants in the past said, 'You didn't prepare me (to do the job),' Malloy told the course's first students. "[Other courses] don't provide useful recommendations. They advise a lot, they recommend a lot of things, but at the end of the day, they are not the one sitting there holding the gavel being held fully accountable for the decision you just made."

The Commandant's Pre-Command Course, consisting of 15 lessons, was designed to augment brigade-level pre-command courses in order to better prepare sergeants major and command sergeants major for the unique duties and responsibilities they will have as commandants.

"We saw there was a gap between the brigade-level pre-command course at Fort Leavenworth, [Kan.], and

what we thought that our commandants needed to be trained on and equipped with to better perform their duties,” Malloy said. “We present [students] with a lot of scenarios to challenge their thinking, and to have them take a critical look from a different perspective, perhaps different than they have ever had in their career.”

With an emphasis placed on interaction, students taking the course were often asked for their input.

“We want you to reach deep, take a deep look at some of these topics — what are all the options? — and then discuss those things,” Malloy told the students.

Course topics were designed to spark discussion.

Students like Command Sgt. Maj. Walton Jones, commandant of the NCO Academy at Fort Polk, La., looked forward to sharing his experiences and hearing about “lessons learned from some of the senior guys.”

“This is a great opportunity that the Army’s investing in commandants, bringing them together to learn what ‘right’ looks like,” Jones said.

Session topics varied from legal issues to the roles of commander versus commandant. Students considered that though a commandant is in charge of the NCO academy, the role is not the same as a commander.

“[Nonetheless], we are responsible for the good order and discipline of that organization,” Jones said.

On the primary role of a commandant, Command Sgt. Maj. Carel A. Tate Jr. of the Staff Sgt. John W. Kreckel NCO Academy at Fort Campbell, Ky., said, “the main mission is to train future leaders.”

Commandant’s Pre-Command Course students also reviewed the definition and basic responsibilities of a commandant.

“Everything is on us. We’re a real animal that no one understands,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Mark E. Porrett, the commandant of the NCO Academy at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. “We’ve also got to empower and groom our cadre.”

Students were frequently urged to familiarize themselves with AR 600-20, which outlines the policy and responsibility of command.

“It’s what gives us authority. But you won’t find anything (in it) about a commandant,” Malloy told students. “It’s very critical to read. ... It ensures good order and discipline.”

Course sessions also delved into joint ethics in the command climate, in which scenarios were set for students to examine and discuss.

Malloy urged students to “understand all the options available, more than just asking counsel what to do.”

“A lot of the tools that students are being given in this course include an in-depth understanding of legal and joint ethical principles. Critical thinking has to be applied in making a decision as they execute their duties,” he said.

Students in the class were also encouraged to network and to share their experiences peer-to-peer since they will they typically encounter the same issues on the job.

“I think every sergeant major, every commandant should go through this course. ... It gives you a lot of information that we didn’t know before we got here,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Marion E. Arnett, the commandant of the Fort Bliss, Texas, NCO Academy, which falls under USASMA. “I have learned a lot. We learn from each commandant, what they do, what they face, something different that we haven’t done yet. We get a lot information from each other.”

At the end of the course, students were tested to see what they got out of it and were asked for feedback to use in future courses.

“I think the Commandant’s Pre-Command Course is going to demonstrate, as these command sergeants major go back and perform their duties as a commandant, that it is probably one of the most important courses we could provide a sergeant major going into these types of duty positions,” Malloy said. “I think you are going to see that they are going to be more successful as commandants as well as provide a better service for our Soldiers who go through our institutions and our NCO academies.” ■



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