



Sgt. David Daerr, right, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, and soldiers with the 9th South African Infantry Battalion participate in Shared Accord 13, a biennial training exercise designed to increase capacity and enhance interoperability across the South African and U.S. militaries. (U.S. Army Africa photo)

# U.S. Army Africa Soldiers Demonstrate Importance of Officer-NCO Relationship

*Meghan Portillo — NCO Journal*

**U**.S. Army Africa's mission is the same as any other command's mission. They keep Americans and American interests safe, in this case, through their actions on the African continent, said Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffery Stitzel, command sergeant major of USARAF, based in Vicenza, Italy. USARAF engages in training operations, programs and exercises with defense forces across Africa in the hope that a secure environment may be maintained and minimal U.S. involvement will be needed when problems arise.

U.S. Africa Command's motto is "African solutions to African problems." USARAF follows this motto and

accomplishes its mission by helping African nations strengthen their own defense capabilities so that they are better equipped to address their own security threats.

"We still have a lot of terrorist organizations that move through the northern part of Africa: elements of al-Qaida, AQIM (al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb), Boko Haram from Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Those issues are the kind of things that make what we are doing in Africa really important."

One of the best ways to strengthen a nation's defense capabilities is by investing in its NCO corps, Stitzel said. But, the change has to come from within. USARAF can't

go in saying, “This is what you need to do; you need to become just like us,” Stitzel said. Rather, the U.S. armed forces must inspire the militaries of our partner nations to want it for themselves, and must help them reach their own goals in their own ways.

“On the continent, what our NCOs really do for us is show foreign countries how they are empowered by American officers to be valued and trusted tools to accomplish missions,” Stitzel said. “These officers in other nations watch us and see that our NCOs allow officers to be less burdened. Our officers have someone helping them; they have more time to think about in-depth things. They’re not really involved in everyday activities and are really thinking at a higher level – the strategic level.”

NCOs within USARAF and the continent’s regionally aligned force can have a profound impact on the future of these nations while they are on missions in Africa, Stitzel said. Whether they are expanding cadets’ horizons in a cultural language program in Senegal, teaching basic medical techniques in Cameroon or helping with gender integration in Botswana, he said American NCOs need to remember that one of the best ways they can accomplish their mission is by being model NCOs in everything they do. Just as NCOs must teach by example when working with their Soldiers, they must be the example that inspires other nations.

## **Finding Common Ground**

The reason the U.S. military is so well accepted on the African continent, Stitzel said, is because these African countries were once European colonies.

“Who else was a colony of someone in Europe? We were,” he said. “They kind of see us as a big brother, and they really like American NCOs because we don’t look down on them. We look at them as peers. There is a professional courtesy that is extended between us, and they really like that, that we share our experiences and [have a similar history].”

Many African nations have gained their independence only in the past 50 years and have developed under the British or French military systems, which traditionally have not empowered NCOs like the United States system does. Stitzel asks his Soldiers to think about where the United States was in 1826, only 50 years after gaining our independence. The country hadn’t even been through the Civil War yet, when the military was just beginning to figure out the role of the NCO, he said.

“Some would argue that the true, professional role of NCOs didn’t come until after Vietnam. We forget that,” Stitzel said.

The role of the NCO has grown in the United States over time as the military has learned from past mistakes and solidified its values and policies. The strengthening of the NCO corps in these African nations must also come about as a result of internal change, Stitzel said.

“Their officer corps has to want to change within the country, and the training must start with their young officers. It has to grow,” he said. “True change, as we are beginning to see in Malawi, will come gradually. Gen. Henry Odillo, commander of their armed forces, said it best when he told the first class of graduates at the Malawi NCO academy, ‘You all are pioneers for our army.’ And that’s exactly what they are. They are pioneers. It isn’t going to be perfect on their backs going through. But they are going to pave a way for the generation that comes after them. I told them, ‘Somewhere in your country, somebody just joined your army who is going to be the sergeant major of the army in 30, 35 years.’”

The Malawian Defense Force has observed the U.S. military and how its NCO corps is utilized. Odillo decided he wanted that for his military, and made it a priority for the MDF. The driving force that made the first class a success at the Malawi NCO academy was the soldiers’ desire for change, Stitzel said.

## **We Can’t Force Our Way**

Being an NCO is about caring for other people and wanting them to learn and figure things out for themselves, Stitzel said. It is USARAF Soldiers’ job to find out what works best for these other countries, even if it is not what our country has done.

“Sure, I can go in there and say, ‘This is how you do it,’ and give them all the equipment,” Stitzel said. “But we have computers in our army. Some of these countries don’t. They may have computers, but they don’t have the access to them that we do. A perfect example is our surgeon directorate, which recently completed medical readiness training exercises in Chad and in Burkina Faso. Instead of sending a team of doctors and surgeons and nurses down there with all of the magical instruments that we have in America, they go down there and do it with only the supplies available in that country. That’s how they figure out how to develop the best practice for them.”

These militaries benefit not only from the treatment individuals receive from the U.S. doctors and surgeons, but from the knowledge they gain from the sergeants major, the master sergeants, the first sergeants and the combat medics, Stitzel said. And this training goes both ways. There are some diseases in these countries that Soldiers don’t encounter in the U.S. They are able to work with malaria or polio patients, for example, and take away a lot from the experience, he said. This is true not only for medics, but for all of the USARAF Soldiers on missions in Africa. They learn to be better teachers as they adapt to the different cultures and adjust to different ways of thinking, Stitzel said.

## **Demonstrating the Officer-NCO Relationship**

“What others can learn from USARAF NCOs is that we can’t force our way of life – we can’t force the way

our Army functions – onto another country. We need to wait for them to ask us for it. And it's not about telling them; it's about showing them," Stitzel said. "We can do it by working together with our officers. I don't want to see missions in Africa completed by just NCOs or just officers; it's got to be together. They are watching us. How do our NCOs and officers interact? How do we show that NCOs are an integral part of our program?"

Just as we should not send only female NCOs to an area struggling with the integration of women into their military, we should not expect NCOs to, on their own, help a military develop their NCO corps, Stitzel said. Officers must be involved, he said, because they are the ones who already have the respect of that nation's force. New ideas are always more readily accepted when the origin is trusted and respected within a culture.

"If the training is about gender integration, we need a gender-integrated team conducting it," Stitzel said. "It's the exact same thing with the NCOs and officers. You

can't just talk about it. You have to show it. It is through our actions that we teach people. Our officers and NCOs need to keep that in mind."

Even if there is a mission that is run by either NCOs or by officers, there are always opportunities to demonstrate the importance of the officer-NCO relationship, Stitzel said. U.S. Soldiers should seize those chances to show how we work together.

"Take myself, for example. Most of the trips Maj. Gen. Patrick Donahue (commanding general of USARAF) takes, I go with him," Stitzel said. "I sit right by him; he introduces me first and demonstrates that respect. And he really empowers me when he sends me out in his stead. When I go down, and they see that I am the senior representative from the general, that's powerful. "When they see it, that's when they want it for themselves. I think when individuals see a behavior they want to model themselves, that's when they say, 'Hey, I want to be like that.' Then they start asking" ■



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