



Former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston, right, listens to the senior enlisted panel. Pictured in the panel are, from left, Command Sgt. Maj. James Norman, command sergeant major of U.S. Army 1st Corps; Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell, command sergeant major of U.S. Forces Korea; Sgt. Maj. William Stables, sergeant major of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific; and Lead Sgt. Daribish Oyunbold, senior enlisted advisor of the Mongolian Armed Forces.

Senior Enlisted Panel Discusses Ways To Succeed During Joint, Combined Missions In Pacific

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester — NCO Journal

A standing-room-only audience of more than 100 officers and noncommissioned officers, including former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston, was on hand for the first senior enlisted panel at the Association of the United States Army Institute of Land Warfare LANPAC Symposium and Exposition on Tuesday in Oahu, Hawaii.

Command Sgt. Maj. Bryant Lambert, command sergeant major for U.S. Army Pacific, organized and led the panel. Lambert said he thought it was pivotal, during this third year of the Land Power in the Pacific symposium, to include the noncommissioned-officer point of view.

“I thought it was important that we have a senior enlisted advisor perspective on some of the concerns and barriers that we are having out there in the Pacific when we are executing interoperabilities,” Lambert said. “We’ll be looking at the relationships that we are building, not just multinational, but also with our other services.”

With so much to talk about, the panel took place over an entire day, with 90 minutes of discussion in the morning and another 90 minutes of discussion in the afternoon.

Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell, command sergeant major for U.S. Forces Korea, kicked off the morning session, talking about how he works in a combined, joint environment, striving every day to cement the U.S. partnership with the Republic of Korea.

“When we talk about interoperability, my definition is the ability, confidence and comfort for a noncommissioned officer to operate in any environment, whether it’s their service environment or working around partner security forces or working with other services,” Troxell said. “The way I think we get after that is through horizontal communication. We do a great job at vertical communication. . . . What we have to get better at is horizontal communication in the joint and combined perspective.”

“What we want is the ability to have that service identity and understand that as an Army there are things we have to stand alone on, but also, that we are never going to face another fight alone,” Troxell said. “It’s going to be in a joint capacity, and also a multinational capacity.”

After more than a decade of war, Soldiers in the U.S. Army are experienced in conflict, Troxell said. The challenge now is to make those Soldiers realize that, as the Army focuses on the Pacific region, their role changes to that of ambassadors.

“What we’ve got to continue to get better at is shaping and deterring conflict,” Troxell said. “As we look at rebalance in the Pacific and regionally aligned forces, we are going to be in a phase 0 or phase 1 type of environment, more than we are going to be in a combat environment. So we have to shape our noncommissioned officers so that they understand that they are ambassadors for our country out there. Their ability to influence whoever they’re partnering with, whether it’s a joint force or a combined force, is imperative.”

“We have to set the example as senior noncommissioned officers of stepping out of our comfort zone to make progress in a combined and joint environment,” Troxell said later during the panel. “All it takes is one senior enlisted leader to not respect that culture, that refuses to eat that nation’s food or something like that, it sends a

huge message across this entire Pacific that we have some U.S. Soldiers out there doing things they shouldn’t.”

Sgt. Maj. William Stables, sergeant major of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific, spoke of the need to let junior leaders take charge, despite the risk that sometimes entails.

“Regarding the NCO, what I wanted to do is pull a phrase from our commandant’s planning guidance,” Stables said. “The staffers wrote it perfectly. ... ‘Errors by junior leaders stemming from overboldness are a necessary part of learning. We should deal with such errors leniently. There must be no zero-defects mentality. Abolishing zero defects means that we do not stifle boldness or initiative through the threat of punishment. It does not mean the commander does not counsel subordinates on mistakes. Instructive criticism is an important element in learning, nor does it give subordinates free license to act stupidly or recklessly.’”

Lead Sgt. Daribish Oyunbold, senior enlisted advisor of the Mongolian Armed Forces, spoke of the increased demands on his army’s NCOs, and how those demands forced them to spend more time training NCOs before a deployment. Working with other nations’ militaries has helped his NCOs see problems and solutions in a more mature way, Oyunbold said.

“Mongolia was closed off from the rest of the world until 20 years ago,” Oyunbold said. “And as Mongolian



A standing-room-only crowd listened to the first senior enlisted panel of the Association of the United States Army Institute of Land Warfare LANPAC Symposium and Exposition. (Photos by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

citizens are traveling around the world and bringing back a lot of different perspectives, knowledge, ideas and participating in the multinational environment, our NCOs are seeing things in a different way. They've grown more mature and analyze things in different ways. It's really valuable to every single NCO. It's brought a lot of value to our nation."

After Oyunbold talked about the ways in which his NCOs are now required to make decisions on their own, Lambert tied the discussion together.

"Regardless of the Army that you are a part of, noncommissioned officers are the ones on the ground, making those decisions, because the officers can't be everywhere at every time of day," Lambert said. "That's why the noncommissioned officer is there — to instill discipline and ensure the commander's intent is getting accomplished."

Warrant Officer Mark Motribo, the sergeant major of the New Zealand Army, talked about the need to invest time in learning about partner nations.

"You know, we study the enemy," Motribo said. "We spend a gross amount of time studying a threat group. We need to invest a certain amount of time learning about our partners. You're going to have to have patience to cultivate and expand the relationship. It takes time, and you do have to put some energy into it."

Stables added that, in addition to the up-front effort to build partnerships, NCOs need to remember the importance of how the mission wraps up, as well.

"We're all guilty of this, but on the back end of that mission, we don't take enough time to celebrate the accomplishments of that unit," Stables said. "That's part of building a relationship. You will work with a lot of those people again, so if the mission has been successful, it's incumbent on the sergeant major of the unit to tell the commander, 'We have got to do something for everybody to remember.'"

Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Sweezer, command sergeant major of the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, was part of the audience for the panel, and stood to tell the panel members that

he learned a lot from their discussion. He added that he only wished he had heard some of it before he traveled to Thailand, Korea and the Philippines recently as part of the Pacific Pathways initiative.

"I lived it and experienced it with our team," Sweezer told the panel. "In Thailand, we had the language barrier. But, Soldiers are Soldiers. They figure it out. The technology, whether it be apps, iPads or phones, no matter what country we partner with, they will figure out how to communicate, whether it's actions, words or technology helping them."

Warrant Officer David Galloway, senior enlisted advisor for the Australian Army, told Sweezer and other NCOs who work with partner nations through Pacific Pathways to remember to cherish and keep active the connections and relationships they make, so that they don't fade away.

"When you finished your Pathways, and you moved out of those areas of the Pacific, what have you left behind?" Galloway said. "That's what you need to ask your NCOs. What connections have you left behind?"

Command Sgt. Maj. James Norman, command sergeant major for U.S. Army 1st Corps, closed the afternoon session with a reminder of what the discussion means as the U.S. Army and partner nations move forward.

"I think we've all come to the conclusion that we will never do something as a single country or a single service," Norman said. "These joint task forces don't occur by happenstance. So, it is paramount that we train together, train to build interoperability, train to build relationships, train to foster our ability to move through the Pacific."

Also participating in the panel were Chief Warrant Officer NG Siak Ping, senior enlisted leader for the Singapore Armed Forces; Command Sgt. Maj. Charles Tobin, the command sergeant major of the 8th Theater Sustainment Command; and Command Sgt. Maj. William Bruns, the command sergeant major for Communications Electronics Command. The LANPAC conference concludes Thursday. ■



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