



About 80 NCOs took part in the Noncommissioned Officer Solarium at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., last week. The NCOs were assigned to work groups to focus on seven key issues facing the Army. First Sgt. Robert V. Craft Sr., mechanical maintenance 1st sergeant with 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, (second row, right) offers his thoughts on mission command. (Photo by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

# NCOs: Chance to work with SMA, peers proves invaluable at Solarium 2015

By Martha C. Koester — NCO Journal

**T**he NCOs who attended the first Noncommissioned Officer Solarium 2015 at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., didn't know what to expect when they were invited to take part in the sergeant major of the Army initiative. About 80 of them, representing U.S. Army installations located throughout the globe, were asked to join and were assigned to work groups to focus on seven problematic issues facing the Army. However, once group presentations began before Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey during the outbreak session May 1, all agreed it was truly an honor to have participated.

During two-and-half days of brainstorming, debating and voting, the NCOs narrowed down recommendations on their given topics, which were to be presented to the sergeant major of the Army. The seven key topics were physi-

cal fitness, talent management, education, culture, training, vision/branding and practicing mission command.

## Exchanging ideas

To the NCOs' surprise, they found they shared very similar concerns and perspectives with the nation's most senior enlisted member of the Army.

"We were given the opportunity to voice what we saw from our foxhole, like me being at Fort Riley, Kan., is different than what my battle buddy is doing at Fort Bragg, N.C., and my other battle buddy is doing in Alaska," said 1st Sgt. Robert V. Craft Sr., mechanical maintenance 1st sergeant with 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment. "To realize that we, at our level, have the ability to effect change is truly humbling. It was an

honor to be here, to be selected from my command, to be viewed as being worthy to share this experience. It's almost like we are a part of history."

Dailey, Command Sgt. Maj. David S. Davenport Sr., TRADOC command sergeant major; Command Sgt. Maj. David O. Turnbull, Combined Arms Center command sergeant major; and Sgt. Maj. Dennis A. Eger, Mission Command Center of Excellence sergeant major, heard from the seven groups of NCOs at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Combined Arms Center.

"For the most part, growing up in the military as junior leaders and even at our [senior] level you get in the mindset at certain times of, 'I may not be able to fix the big picture, but I can fix what's below me,'" said Master Sgt. Keith E. Marceau, current operations NCO, United States Army Pacific. "I never in my wildest dreams thought I would be in an auditorium with my peers in front of the sergeant major of the Army, TRADOC sergeant major and FORSCOM sergeant major, shaping the future. We have the ability to influence the whole Army in many different functions, and I truly believe that the sergeants major took stuff from us that they will implement."

Participating NCOs were eager to share their views with Dailey and offer a snapshot of the Army from the perspective of senior leaders who work directly with Soldiers.

"There was that element of teamwork," said Master Sgt. Sylvorne W. Walters, brigade NCO for 501st Sustainment Brigade, 19th Expeditionary Sustainment Command. "One of the ways you motivate a Soldier is to make him feel like he's part of the fix, and that's exactly what they have done to us — they have allowed us to be part of that."

## Shared mission

Guided by skilled facilitators who kept the NCOs focused on the mission at hand, the Soldiers bonded over shared views and the unusual opportunity to connect with their peers in an effort to help Dailey shape the Army.

"I was just very impressed with [Dailey], sitting there listening to every single NCO whether they were on this

side of the fence or that side of the fence," said Master Sgt. Aaron W. Carter, brigade fires NCO for the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. "He took everything he received; he was constantly writing. He's going to make a difference, and it came from us."

"I really didn't know what to expect. I just knew to keep an open mind," said Master Sgt. Cynthia Hodge, operations NCO for 426th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team. "[I enjoyed] not just working with my branding team but also the other NCOs, my peers and seniors. You feel really humbled because we have an opportunity to make change. I definitely have got to go back [to my installation] and share what I have learned here."

## Changing times

With two wars largely behind them, the senior NCOs welcomed the opportunity to possibly effect change in the Army during the current era of downsizing.

"It's really going back to quality Soldiers over quantity," Marceau said. "[That means] building that talent pool that's going to train Soldiers with limited resources, and having the Soldiers that want to be a Soldier 24/7 instead of 9-to-5."

"The message [my group] hopes that [the sergeant major of the Army] received from us is that in order for us as the NCO corps to re-establish Army standards, we have to hold Soldiers to a standard," Craft said. "[We need to change] the mindset of the Army. We have been an Army at war. Our focus has been deployment. We have forgotten as an Army how to be a Soldier in garrison.

"We have to be given the opportunity to retrain our Army, and the mindset of our Army has to change because we as leaders — as NCOs, as well as officers and Soldiers — the only mindset we have known for the past 14 years is deployment mode. We have to get back to basics, to doing PT, to sergeants' time training, actually taking the time and opportunity to train our Soldiers as opposed to taking the time to prepare for our next deployment." ■



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