



Army Research Lab's Sgt. Maj. Kevin M. Connor (from left), Staff Sgt. Joseph A. Pike and Staff Sgt. Jose Roldan Jr. listen to a presentation on open software radios in August from engineer Jason Enslin, and Shane Cunico, chief of the Experimental Support Branch, White Sands Missile Range, N.M. (Photo by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

NCOs Gain Electronic Warfare Skills at White Sands Missile Range

By Martha C. Koester

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As Shane Cunico, chief of the Experimental Support Branch, tells it, the work that scientists and engineers at White Sands Missile Range do to develop the Army's next generation of defense systems is dependent on key contributions from Army Research Laboratory's noncommissioned officers.

"We get a lot of input from them on their experiences, from either deployments or through their schooling," Cunico said. "We are dependent on them as intelligence analysts to figure out what the threats are. We are dependent on them to do that research, to do that analysis and say this is how the threat is working. A lot of what you see here is driven by what the intel analysts tell us."

The largest overland military test range in the United States, White Sands Missile Range near Alamogordo,

N.M., is supported by ARL's Staff Sgt. Joseph A. Pike and Staff Sgt. Jose Roldan Jr.

Valuable Skill Sets

The two NCOs' work is particularly valuable because Pike is the first analyst the installation has had in five years and Roldan is the first 29E to serve at White Sands. Roldan's electronic warfare specialist MOS is a direct result of improvised explosive device countermeasure systems, Cunico said.

"[Staff] Sergeant Roldan is one of the first guys that has come in who can actually speak the lingo, and he understands it," Cunico said. "He understands what it means to create a radio waveform and how to use those waveforms. As we're doing analysis, [Staff] Sergeant



Shane Cunico, left, chief of the Experimental Branch, White Sands Missile Range, N.M., discusses Optimized Modular Electronic Warfare Network technology in August with Army Research Lab's Staff Sgt. Joseph A. Pike, center, and Sgt. Maj. Kevin M. Connor, sergeant major for ARL in Adelphi, Md. (Photo by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

Roldan is operating the equipment and can tell when something is right and when something is wrong, and is giving us advice.

"Because Roldan is an electronic warfare specialist, he's gained the knowledge of all these scientists and engineers who have been here for years and years," Cunico said. "That's something that the military hasn't had access to."

Cunico said that expertise is going to pay off for the Army in years to come.

"There's nobody in a leadership position in the Army above the level of captain, I would guess, who has an electronic warfare MOS because it didn't exist," Cunico said. "So as these Soldiers move up through the ranks, the NCOs are going to understand electronic warfare as they become senior NCOs. So it's really critical that they're helping us work, and we're helping them work."

Contributing to the Future

The NCOs couldn't be happier to work alongside White Sands Missile Range's scientists and engineers, knowing they are contributing to projects that will affect the big Army of the future.

"We're going to be affecting generations ahead of us," Roldan said. "We are setting the bar for future Soldiers to come. It's an honor to have that privilege."

"It feels pretty good to know that someone has confidence that we can do this job," Pike said.

As sergeant major for ARL in Adelphi, Md., Sgt. Maj. Kevin M. Connor helps get the word out about Army Research Laboratory's work. Connor works closely with other NCOs such as Pike and Roldan. So when a call for Soldier assistance comes in, Connor knows which NCOs he can pull from for testing.

"The NCOs will be my eyes and ears on the ground, and will evaluate and say, 'Does this make sense' or 'Are we going to use this,'" Connor said.

Eventually, when ARL's NCOs leave their duty assignment at White Sands, they will also spread the word about ARL and their work there.

"We're supposed to be the spokesman for the unit," Pike said. "There are Soldiers out there who don't understand we're developing technology to aid them in the future. So we're supposed to be that voice for the unit, saying 'We used to work at this location, and they're developing these kinds of technologies in order to help not only the Soldiers of today but the Soldiers of the future.'"

Mutual appreciation

The NCOs say that they are grateful for the experience at White Sands Missile Range and the opportunities it has given them.

"I have been very fortunate to be selected to work here at this duty assignment," Roldan said. "There are a lot of phenomenal things taking place here between the scientists and engineers, a lot of upcoming projects. It's

mind-blowing to see the things they have going on and what they're working on here."

The scientists are also grateful for the NCOs' input and say their military perspective goes far in projects.

"[Staff] Sergeant Roldan is our first 29E, and we want to use him as the model for getting other electronic warfare guys here," Cunico said. "These Soldiers are going to learn stuff here at White Sands Missile Range

that they are not going to learn anywhere else. You get a basic understanding when you go to school, but it's coming here when you learn an in-depth use of those defense systems.

"This location provides guys like [Staff] Sergeant Roldan with the opportunity to see stuff he's never going to see in any other facility in the U.S. and gain experience in here that he's never going to get anywhere else." ■



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