



Lancer Brigade Soldiers from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., take a break during a foot march with their counterparts from the Indonesian army during a Pacific Pathways exercise in September 2014 in Indonesia.

NCOs Forge Pathway Toward Partnership In The Pacific

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester — NCO Journal

With deployments to the Middle East slowing, finding ways to give realistic training to Soldiers has become increasingly important. Leaders of the U.S. Army Pacific have come up with a system that allows Soldiers to experience a deployment atmosphere, securing needed training while also cementing bonds with our allies.

As part of the Pacific Pathways system, noncommissioned officers lead Soldiers on monthslong exercises throughout the Pacific area of responsibility. While on the exercises, the Soldiers travel to several countries, spending four to six weeks or more in countries such as South Korea, the Philippines and Malaysia, working and training with those nations' armed forces.

Command Sgt. Maj. Bryant Lambert, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Pacific, said Pacific Pathways exercises are inspiring NCOs at USARPAC because the exercises allow NCOs to do what they do best: train Soldiers.

"Right now, NCOs are ecstatic about Pacific Pathways," Lambert said. "The noncommissioned officers came into the Army to do exactly what we are doing in Pathways. Pathways is definitely inspiring them, building

confidence, the whole nine yards with our noncommissioned officers. Pathways broadens their aperture on how to train with another army without being at war. Our NCOs tell me they are gaining confidence and getting a better perspective on these other countries.

"The important thing about Pathways is that your operational level and your tactical level is exercising mission command," Lambert continued. "There is no other place you can do that. You can't replicate that at a Joint Readiness Training Center. This is real world, volatile, efforts and actions taking place at the operational and tactical level of command."

Staff Sgt. Luis Zayas of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, was part of a Pacific Pathways exercise earlier this year. During the exercise, the division trained with the armies of Thailand, South Korea and the Philippines. Zayas said the exercise was especially useful for the young Soldiers and NCOs who hadn't been deployed before, allowing them to see what it takes to move their equipment from place to place.

"The NCO should always be leading training," Zayas said. "That's what we do as NCOs. But it went even fur-



Royal Thai Army soldiers assigned to the 31st Infantry Regiment, Rapid Deployment Force, Kings Guard, demonstrate how to hypnotize then humanely kill and consume a chicken in order to survive to U.S. Army Soldiers from the 25th Infantry Division during a jungle training exercise in February in Lopburi, Thailand. The training was part of a Pacific Pathways joint training exercise. (Photo by Spc. Steven Hitchcock)

ther with some of our younger Soldiers, who aren't even NCOs, taking charge of training the other armies. Something as simple as teaching their specific job, whether it be how to stack the ammo that we use, how to prep the ammo, and the gunners showing the things that work for them that make them faster at what they do. The teaching went all the way down to the lowest level. They were able to show their counterpart exactly what they do at their level. So it went from the top, all the way down, then back up. It was good.

"Our job is to lead and train Soldiers, and we were not only doing it for our Soldiers, but we were also leading, training and mentoring other countries' NCOs on how to lead, train and mentor their own soldiers," Zayas said. "So the biggest takeaway is that we became more proficient as NCOs."

Rebalance to the Pacific

Pacific Pathways is an important part of the Army's overall rebalance into the Pacific region. The exercises allow the Army to become more expeditionary and demonstrate our commitment to our allies in the region, Lambert said.

"It has everything to do with the importance of future engagements and future opportunities with other countries," Lambert said. "We have established a regional partner engagement with all of these countries, and through that we are going to build defense relationships, we are going to have interoperability, and we're going to help develop our partners' military capacity. We are doing that through Pathways.

"When you really look at Pathways, we are interoperable with other countries, and it gives us an opportunity to exercise readiness and exercise our mission command, our capabilities. We build multinational relationships. It really complements the Army Operating Concept, which enforces the Joint Operating Concept. It's to a point that, if we stay engaged, we can get ahead of any crisis."

During a May visit to USARPAC headquarters at Fort Shafter, Oahu, Hawaii, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey got a close-up look at how USARPAC's efforts to engage with our partners in the Pacific is paying dividends. Dailey said he came away impressed with how NCOs are building relationships in the Pacific.

“First and foremost, we need to maintain partnerships,” Dailey said. “The world is complex. We see that every single day, and it’s not good to show up when there’s a problem. It’s better if you have formed a relationship, built a strong bond with an organization, a foreign nation, and there’s a level of trust that exists there. When that level of trust exists, and that interoperability exists, it’s much easier for us. We’re an Army in preparation. We must not forget, our main mission is to deter war, and when we’re globally engaged like we are now, it helps us in accomplishing that mission.”

Communication and interoperability

One of the first roadblocks to successfully training with a foreign army is communication. But during their Pacific Pathways exercise in early 2015, NCOs and Soldiers quickly learned how to adapt and overcome language differences, said Command Sgt. Maj. Charles Anderson, infantry sergeant major for the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division.

“To get through the language barrier, well, soldiers are soldiers,” Anderson said. “You put them together in an environment, they’ll figure it out, and they did every time.



U.S. Soldiers assigned to C Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, move a casualty toward a designated casualty collection point with their Republic of Korea (ROK) Army Soldier counterparts during a platoon live fire training in March near the demilitarized zone in South Korea. (Photo by Spc. Steven Hitchcock)

“We went in with the understanding that other armies aren’t built exactly like ours,” Anderson said. “But interestingly enough, all three of those countries worked off our doctrine. So they were built similar, just the roles were sometimes a little different. We’d show them our way. They showed us their way. Sometimes we met in the middle, sometimes we just stayed in our two separate ways.”

While in South Korea, the Soldiers often had KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army) soldiers available to help them translate, and in the Philippines, many of the foreign soldiers spoke English. While in Thailand, however, NCOs and Soldiers used phone apps, technology and other means to communicate. Zayas said he and his Soldiers found some unorthodox ways to make themselves understood by the Thai soldiers.

“In my job, mortars, it’s a lot of math involved,” Zayas said. “Math is a universal language, so when it came down to it we would just kind of write what we were trying to say on paper. They would look at it, and say, ‘Yeah, we’ve got the same thing.’ There would be no actual speaking going on, but we would all understand what was being said.

“The biggest thing that I learned during Pathways was about how to communicate with the other nations’ soldiers,” Zayas said. “We also had to learn about interoperability. With us not having our equipment there, we had to be able to get on their equipment and learn their systems.”

Learning how to operate another country’s equipment while finding ways to communicate helps grow the NCOs from both countries, said Command Sgt. Maj. Benjamin Jones, command sergeant major of the 25th Infantry Division.

“They had a unique opportunity to engage with all of these countries,” Jones said. “As folks continue to be assigned to the Pacific Pathways, this allows them the amazing opportunity to engage. Because in Pacific Pathways you’re dealing with real problems; you’re dealing with real people; you’re dealing with partnership, interoperability. You’re really, truly getting after what defines an organization in action. You’re a unit in motion with real people, real equipment, building relationships in the Pacific.”

Exporting professionalism

As U.S. Army NCOs travel to countries around the Pacific, it’s always important for them to remember

that they are exporting professionalism, Lambert said.

“When you come to the Pathways, it’s not associated with a combat environment, so our noncommissioned officers have to think through the scenarios, have to truly look at what ‘partner’ actually means,” Lambert said. “When you are partnering with other countries, and working with the interoperability piece, our noncommissioned officer is really learning and being developed.

“We are dealing with trained, uniformed armies,” Lambert said. “What we are doing is partnering with them. You respect me like I respect you. Their leadership and culture are totally different from ours, and we’re not trying to make them like us. We are trying to establish a bond and maintain a relationship. Our NCOs are exporting professionalism when we train with these other countries. It builds confidence in our noncommissioned officers.”

Other nations’ armies look at the U.S. Army’s NCO Corps and ask, “How can we get our NCO corps to that level,” Lambert said. They want to know how to integrate women into their armed forces and how to improve their NCO academies. The U.S. Army NCO Corps shows them the way forward.

“The (Bangladesh Army) noncommissioned officer academy is run by a one-star general, and all of the instructors are officers,” Lambert said. “We are going to bring them here to Hawaii, and we want them to see our academies and get a perspective, because they couldn’t visualize it. I was in a room with them for about two hours, and they couldn’t visualize non-commissioned officers being empowered to actually run the academy. And they will see that there are no officers in our NCO Academy.

“I told them when you empower your noncommissioned officers, your officers are going to have to learn to lead in that type of environment,” Lambert said. “It’s no longer where the NCOs are not critical thinkers. They are critical thinkers and you empower them to make decisions.”

Zayas said he saw that principle in action on the ground during his Pacific Pathways tour. The foreign armies were able to grow and improve just by watching how U.S. Army NCOs operated.

“Every army, the biggest thing they want is our NCO Corps,” Zayas said. “They wanted to be what our NCOs are. They stood back and watched a lot what we did. From my perspective, we weren’t doing anything outside of what we do as NCOs, but I think they were impressed with how we conducted ourselves and how very little management is needed when Soldiers know the right direction to go.”

Keeping connections

During a senior enlisted panel in May at the Association of the United States Army Institute of Land Warfare (LANPAC) Symposium and Exposition in Oahu, Hawaii, senior enlisted leaders from around the Pacific got together to discuss the hurdles of interoperability and working together.

Warrant Officer David Galloway, senior enlisted advisor for the Australian Army, warned that — without follow-up — all those connections made during joint training will be lost.

“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?”

NCOs who were part of the Pathways rotation said, so far, they have been able to keep those connections



U.S. Soldiers from the 25th Infantry Division and soldiers from the Republic of Korea army participate in demolitions training during a joint exercise in March near the demilitarized zone in South Korea. (Photo by Sgt. Christopher R. Baker)

alive, often through the modern tool many use to stay in touch in 2015: Facebook.

Sgt. Stephen Waller, 2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, said he experienced a lot of culture shock when he first started the exercise, but he jumped into the opportunity to learn and has stayed in touch with some of the soldiers he met from other countries.

"We've stayed in touch with some of the guys on Facebook," Waller said. "From time to time, they say hello and post stuff, and we post stuff. We met a lot of good people. It was a fun experience."

Zayas said his experience was similar.

"I'm Facebook friends with at least five or six people from throughout Pathways," Zayas said. "One major from the Philippines has the same last name as me. We're in about 100 pictures together on Facebook. We did make good partnerships."

"The thing is, if I come back here later in my career and we do another Pacific Pathways, and, say, the platoon sergeant who I was working with is now the battalion sergeant major or brigade sergeant major, I can send a quick Facebook message to see if they are going to be involved in what we are about to do," Zayas said.

Building readiness

With Pacific Pathways, USARPAC leaders have hit upon a way to build relationships with our partners in the Pacific, while also offering NCOs and Soldiers a great

training tool for their own development. Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Sweezer, command sergeant major of the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, said Pathways helped his team in many ways.

"You talk about building adaptive leaders, and Pacific Pathways did that," Sweezer said. "It built the capability to respond to things in the Pacific. We got partnerships, we got combined arms maneuver in, which is good training. We can build on our readiness, whether it's maintenance, our personnel readiness, family readiness; it just tied into everything we do."

SMA Dailey said during his visit to USARPAC headquarters that Pacific Pathways was an important part of the Army's mission to be regionally aligned, plus offered excellent training opportunities.

"Pathways is really the way to get at, not just building readiness, but extending readiness," Dailey said. "It does a couple of things. We're regionally aligned and globally aligned with our Pacific partners out there. It also gives our noncommissioned officers at the unit level the experience they need prior to ever having to serve in that theater of operation, and it extends the readiness from the training plan. So when we train in our units and train up to the National Training Center, by sending those organizations out on our Pathways, they're getting real, live training every single day, working in their jobs, in real, live scenarios, building partnerships with our partner nations. That's the success of Pathways." ■



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