

Director Leads Battle Staff into New Era

By Martha C. Koester - NCO Journal

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Sgt. Maj. Richard L. Tucker, right, director of the Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, with Master Sgt. Thomas D. Yaudas Jr., center, give representatives of the Israel Defense Forces an overview on the course in the spring at Fort Bliss, Texas. (Photo by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

Sgt. Maj. Richard L. Tucker, director of the Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, credits many military leaders for an amiable leadership style he honed during his decades-long Army career. But it was a former platoon sergeant at then-Fort Lewis, Washington, who showed him what taking care of Soldiers was really about.

“Regard your Soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look on them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death.”





Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hughes and Sgt. 1st Class Tannia I. Dillon review their notes during a Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course exercise in the spring at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. (Photo by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

That's what this former platoon sergeant did, Tucker said. He embodied the ancient philosophy of Chinese military strategist and philosopher Sun Tzu, which greatly influenced Tucker. It was the way each Soldier was welcomed into the fold and the little things Tucker saw his former platoon sergeant do that went a long way with Soldiers.

This philosophy would set the tone for Tucker's leadership, whether as a platoon sergeant, first sergeant or later as director of USASMA's Battle Staff NCO Course at Fort Bliss, Texas.

"I have been fortunate in my entire career as a leader," Tucker said. "When I was a squad leader, I had great team leaders. As a platoon sergeant, I was really lucky. Down to the lowest private, they were outstanding platoons. The squad leaders, the team leaders, they made my life easy."

Changing the formula

When Tucker first came to the Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course after graduating Class 59 at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, he noticed the curriculum had not evolved along with the Army and suggested a revamp of lessons was in order.

"We developed a couple new classes," Tucker said. "Some of the existing classes were updated, and some things were added to make the classes more relevant."



Students of the Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course strategize during a class exercise in the spring. The military decision-making process is a culminating block of instruction in the course. (Photo by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

"We teach Army doctrine as a whole," he said. "What you get is classroom discussion and information-sharing. All students bring a unique plate to the table. One of the biggest things these NCOs learn when they come to our course is where to find the information if they don't know the answer. Research is one of the biggest things."

The military decision-making process became the culminating block of instruction within the course. Though some students may see it as overwhelming, Tucker said the military decision-making process is essential for NCOs.

"The role of the NCO has transformed over the past 15 years of war," Tucker said. "Sergeants major are part of the planning process when the unit is planning the mission. Seventeen, 18 years ago that wasn't necessarily so."

Master Sgt. Andrea Thomas, BSNCO Video Teletraining manager, could not agree more with Tucker.

"A lot of times I tell my students we are more than just NCOs who make sure chow is there, guard duty is happening or the sleep tents are up," Thomas said. "We can be part of that thinking and brainstorming process to help make those military decisions. Trying to close that knowledge gap is important, because we are a valuable asset to the Army."

VTT is also a large part of BSNCO because it allows instructors to reach NCOs in distant locations, whether students are sitting in a classroom at Fort Dix, New Jersey, or Italy. The technology behind VTT allows for maximum interaction between the instructors and students, even though they may be separated by an ocean.

A United Front

Tucker said none of the improvements would have been possible without contributions from the many NCOs and civilians who worked as the course writers, developers and manager. They helped get the Battle Staff Course to what it is today – 159 academic hours over the course of four weeks. The NCOs on staff, whether deputy director or instructors, are instrumental to its success.

"I pull them in 10 different directions, but they are very flexible, very professional," Tucker said. "I have been very fortunate.

"All of my instructors are sergeants first class and master sergeants," he said. "They are senior NCOs. ... Give them the task, and let them figure it out."

Battle Staff instructors are equally as grateful to have Tucker at the helm.

"We have such camaraderie here in the Battle Staff," Thomas said. "He trusts us, and that just speaks volumes.

"One team, one fight, and we truly believe that here," Thomas said. "We want everybody to feel like they are a member of the team and that they can contribute and make this course a success. Tucker has done that. He has turned this course around. And the people, even though we are from all walks of life, we are still brothers and sisters in arms and that's how we live every day when we come here."

The BSNCO touches more than 1,500 students a year, and Tucker sees to it that every resident course is filled to capacity.

"Usually what happens is that at a certain point during registration the staff will start looking to see how many students we have," Tucker said. "I will start calling every brigade sergeant major. I call the division sergeant major. I start calling every sergeant major I can think of [to fill classes]."

BSNCO is essential to every NCO's career, Tucker said. The students come from all walks of Army life, including the aviation, legal and medical branches, as well as military police and cooks.

"I believe it allows an NCO to see another side of the Army," Tucker said. "It allows you to see things on a bigger scale and look at things in a new light. When they get back to their units, they will start to ask, 'What were they thinking when they planned this?'"

Students such as Staff Sgt. Craig A. Sears, a supply sergeant, said he couldn't wait to immerse himself in BSNCO after trying to get into the course for the past two years.

"I think it's important to understand the overall staff aspect and what goes into an actual battle staff," Sears said. "A lot of times you kind of get into a situation where you have the command team, you have leadership positions — you're a sergeant, commander, platoon sergeant — but you don't see the behind-the-scenes of what the staff does. Now you get to understand what actually drives the unit, where are all the tasks coming from, the observation post orders. I think that's huge.

"What I'm learning here is actually going to be an addition to what I have already learned, so it's just going to help mold me, to make me a better NCO leader," Sears said.

In September, Tucker will wrap up a nearly 30-year career with the Army. He often tells the NCOs at BSNCO that he's glad he is able to end his career on an assignment with a group of quality NCOs like them.

"I look forward to coming to work every day because of the crew in Battle Staff," Tucker said. "We have made an impact. We have made changes that will continue to make an impact. And at the same time, to have been able to work with a group of professionals like them, you really can't ask for any more than that."