

# In 4 Months, SEAC Troxell Has Traveled World Representing Enlisted Interests

By Jim Garamone Department of Defense News

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Army Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell, senior enlisted advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speaks to Marine Corps Gen. Joe Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, aboard a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter in Hawaii. (Photo by Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominique A. Pineiro)

Army Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell took over as the senior enlisted advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff four months ago, and the former senior U.S. military enlisted leader in South Korea has already visited 12 countries with his boss, Marine Corps Gen. Joe Dunford, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Jordan, Egypt and Israel.

“It’s been a fast train, but I absolutely enjoy it, and it’s everything I thought it would be,” he said.

As SEAC, Troxell is responsible for advising the chairman, vice chairman and defense secretary on the health of the force and enlisted utilization and development. He is the third person to hold the position, succeeding Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan Battaglia.

Troxell said his job is to engage with troops around the world — to take the pulse of the enlisted force and then report back. That is what is important to his boss, he said.

Troxell has four main goals.



Army Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell, left, senior enlisted advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., center, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, listen to a brief during a visit to the North Camp in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt. (Photo by D. Myles Cullen)

The first, and most important, is to assess the health of the enlisted force and report back, he said.

His second goal is to be an “integral, relevant and responsive” member of the Joint Staff. The SEAC represents enlisted members of the staff, he said, but also ensures the Joint Staff directors know what the SEAC’s role is and how he can help them.

The third part of his job is simple, Troxell said: “When the chairman says, ‘Let’s go,’ I go.”

“When he is engaging troops, I’m there,” he said. “Both of us talking with troops sends a great picture of officer-enlisted relationships.”

That picture sometimes gets clouded, Troxell said, and enlisted leaders can be marginalized.

“The chairman having me with him on key visits to troops reinforces the importance of having this position,” Troxell said.

And finally, Troxell said, he has to be the voice of the enlisted force, especially in Force of the Future ([http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0315\\_Force-of-the-Future](http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0315_Force-of-the-Future)) initiatives.

“When we talk about [the] women-in-the-service review or any of these working groups that are considering initiatives, I’ve got to be in those meetings and I’ve got to provide the voice for every enlisted member out there on whether this is a good way to go, or not a good way, or what’s the best way to get after this initiative,” he said.

## **Voice of the Joint Force**

As SEAC, his responsibility lies with the joint force, not with individual services. And he considers the joint force healthy.

“There’s room to improve, obviously, on readiness and in our joint warfighting, but I think the force is doing well,” Troxell said.

Communication is key to the health of the force, the SEAC said.

“Here’s what I’ve learned in four months on this job,” he said. “If it’s good or bad, if the troops know what’s expected of them and they know what the future is going to be, they may not like it, but they’ll accept it and get after the mission, and they will accomplish it in a professional manner.”

The same is true of service members’ families, he said.

“If families know what’s happening and they know what to expect for their service members, they may not like it, but they’ll accept it and drive on,” he said.

Troxell said he saw this during a visit to Incirlik Air Base in Turkey. In the lead-up to an ordered departure of dependents from the base, there was some complaining, he acknowledged.

“The families didn’t want to leave,” he said. “But in the end, they understood that this is the best course of action to provide for the safety of our families with ever-growing threats around the base. Although they didn’t like it, they accepted it, and in the space of 72 hours, we moved all those families out.”

He hopes to return to Incirlik soon to see how the base is managing.

## **Dealing with Budget Cuts**

Everywhere he goes, Troxell said, he is asked about budget cuts.

“As we move forward in a resource constrained environment, we’ve got to demand greater

efficiencies and effectiveness out of what we're doing with the forces we have," he said.

Troxell said all levels of the military have to embrace resource-informed planning.

"What I mean by that is that enlisted leader out there has to say, 'What are the requirements being asked of me? How many people do I have to accomplish this mission? What are the resources I have available?'" he said.

The leader has to look at the risk to the force and for mitigating measures. Then he or she needs to provide recommendation back to the commander.

"Now, if the risk is too high, those NCOs have to be honest," he added. "They have got to be the best stewards they can be of their personnel and their resources."

## **Striving for Excellence**

Part of that is continually striving for excellence, Troxell said.

"If 60 percent is the passing standard, we can't shoot for 60 percent," he said. "We've got to continue to empower leaders at every level — especially at the lower levels — to be better stewards and to plan. The more we do this resource-informed planning, the more we strive for excellence, we're going to save money, we're going to save resources, and we will have the readiness we need."

Training is a particular emphasis for Troxell, and he said he is looking specifically at enlisted joint training.

"Nobody in the world trains, educates, empowers and provides opportunities for men and women in the military like the United States," he said. "No one empowers their enlisted leaders like we do."

Developing leaders has to remain a priority for the U.S. military, Troxell said.

"That means when it's time for them to go to school, we have to make it happen," he said. "We have to get them trained, get them certified, so they can perform these duties."

It has been tough to do, given the operational tempo of the last 15 years, he acknowledged. The pressure of operations meant the military took risks with service members' careers to ensure there were enough people downrange.

"We have to look at that another way now: Can we assume risks for the mission to allow people to go to school?" he said. "We also have to ensure we are continuing to adapt our organizational culture."

The military also needs to incorporate the new ways of learning at all levels of training, he added.

## Joint Professional Education

Troxell said he is considering expanding the joint professional education model for enlisted personnel.

“I had a prime training and education opportunity,” he said of his previous job as the command senior enlisted leader in Korea.

Based in South Korea are the 7th Air Force, the 8th Army, Naval Forces Korea, Marine Forces Korea and Special Operations Component Korea, he said.

“I established what I called Backbone University — a little two-day course to bring in young NCOs to expose them to how to operate in a joint environment — what the other services do — and then how to operate in a multinational environment, because we brought the Koreans in, too,” he said.

“[It was a] huge home run,” Troxell said. After the course, young NCOs “had the bandwidth” to understand what was happening and why it was important, he said.

“I think we can expose them to joint operations a bit earlier than we do — around the E-5 rank,” he added.

Changes are coming, too, to the Senior Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education program, the sergeant major said. It is split into two sections — one for the E-6/E-7 community and another for the E-8/E-9 community — and Troxell said he sees opportunities for more junior personnel to take advantage of the courses.

“I certainly think we can get a lot better at building a more broadened noncommissioned officer or petty officer than we have,” he said.