



U.S. Army Pacific commander Gen. Vincent Brooks speaks with soldiers of the A4 THAAD about numerous personnel and operational issues during his Aug. 18, 2013, visit to the unit at Andersen AFB, Guam. The A4 THAAD deployed to Guam in as part of the 94th AAMDC Task Force Talon Mission. (Photo by Angela Kershner / U.S. Army Pacific Public Affairs Office)

# Air Defense Command Makes Sure NCOs are Prepared in Pacific

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester - NCO Journal

**A**s the Army continues its rebalance to the Pacific after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the role of air defense in the area shifts as well. Leaders of the 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command are making sure NCOs are prepared for the mission by giving them training, trust and, most importantly, the authority to take charge.

The importance of the command's mission was made clear in 2013 when, in response to threats from North Korea, President Obama ordered the first deployment of a THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) air defense battery to Guam. The creation and deployment of Task Force Talon, the unit that is charged with the defense of Guam mission, was an important demonstration to U.S. allies that the Army is paying attention in the Pacific, said Brig. Gen. Eric Sanchez, the commanding general of the 94th AAMDC.

The 94th AAMDC organized Task Force Talon to be the higher headquarters unit to provide important command and control and sustainment functions for the THAAD battery. The enablers who compose Task Force Talon and support the THAAD battery include a signal detachment, security forces and a headquarters element.

"The THAAD mission is tied to the Army's realignment and trying to bring more to the Pacific," Sanchez said. "It's a great capability. It's the only THAAD battery that's deployed in the Army right now, so it shows the importance that our government has put on the Pacific. It provides great capability for the defense of Guam, which is considered a homeland defense capability. People think about the homeland, and they think of the United States or maybe Hawaii, but they don't really think about Guam; but Guam is one of our territories, and we treat that as part of our homeland defense."



Sgt. Maj. Mario Guerrero, G3 operations sergeant major for the 94th AAMDC, was the second sergeant major to lead the THAAD battery in Guam. He said the importance of the mission was clear.

“The main reason the THAAD battery was deployed in the first place was as a deterrent to those regional threats and also in support of the rebalance to the Asian Pacific area of responsibility,” Guerrero said. “Just having a THAAD battery at a strategic point, as Guam is, that’s a big deterrent to any regional threats. It’s a powerful statement. We don’t really need to do anything else. That force projection is enough.”

## NCOs’ role

With a small group of Soldiers defending the island of Guam, NCO leadership becomes even more important, Guerrero said.

“Task Force Talon at the time was about 10 of us,” Guerrero said. “We’re asking these NCOs to do a lot more than they’re used to — one or two grades above their paygrade. With that many people, they were asked to do what a battalion staff would do. It’s mostly NCOs,



Sgt. Jarius Bruce and Spc. Christopher Quiocho from the 307th Signal Battalion conduct maintenance in March on the Command Post Node. The 307th Sig. Bn. Soldiers provide communications support for the Task Force Talon Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) mission on Guam. (Courtesy Photo)

with a few officers, and they’re doing a tremendous job.”

With the 94th AAMDC headquarters located on Oahu, Hawaii, but with its units spread over a large area of the Pacific in different time zones, it’s difficult if not impossible to pick up a phone and manage NCOs, Sanchez said. Noncommissioned officers are counted on to know their job and take charge.

“As spread out as we are, and the distance that we have from our headquarters to where our units are, the NCOs have to step up,” Sanchez said. “For instance, at the forward-based radar sites, there is a very small ratio of officers to Soldiers. And we have contractors who they have to interact with as well, so that’s another unique piece to what they have to do out there. We’re expecting NCOs to do what normally a lieutenant or captain would do because that’s the way we are set up, especially at those remote sites.”

NCOs in the command know their mission of training Soldiers on the THAAD and Patriot missile defense systems is crucial to the fight, said 1st Sgt. Isaiah Brown, first sergeant of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 94th AAMDC.

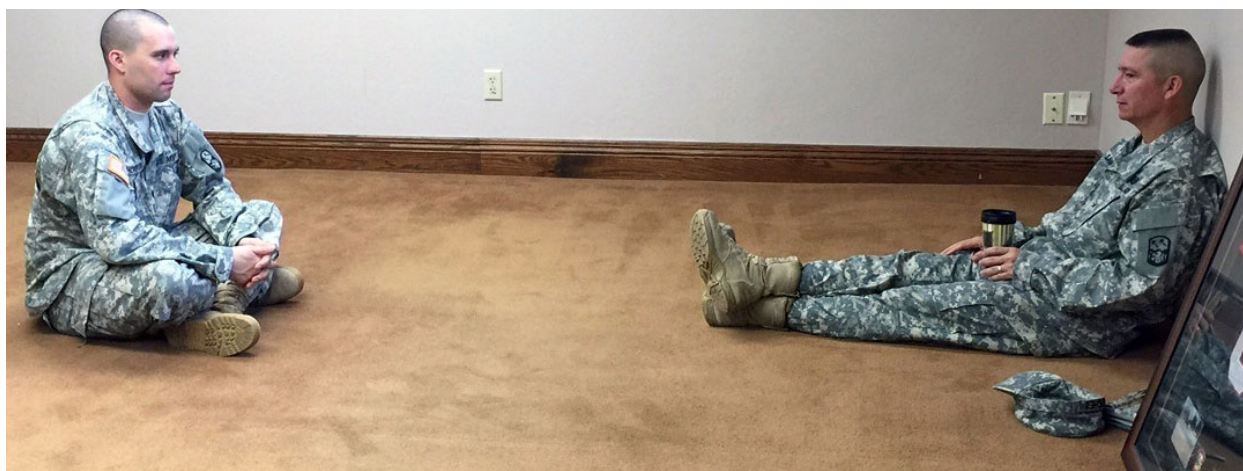
“We are the cornerstone to prepare our Soldiers for combat,” Brown said. “The NCO role is key in our defense mission because NCOs continually train Soldiers to demonstrate deterrence to the enemy. Our NCOs always stay prepared, and they motivate our Soldiers to do the mission they set out to do. Bottom line is, the NCO corps is the centerpiece that makes us run, function and be combat-ready.”

“From the HHB perspective, we make it a strong point to train our Soldiers and make them understand the importance of certifying and maintaining our equipment,” Brown said. “So from the NCO perspective, they take it to heart as far as conducting maintenance, corrosion prevention on our equipment, understanding the importance of being able to be up and ready to support our N-hour sequence. From an NCO perspective, they fully understand the importance of training and being ready.”

## NCO readiness

To prepare NCOs for the responsibility they will have to take on in case of an attack, leaders of the 94th AAMDC make sure NCOs and Soldiers are included in and trained on all tasks. To let every Soldier know he or she is important to the mission, Sanchez started a shadow program. As part of the program, a junior Soldier follows him throughout his day, including to high-level meetings.

“At the end of every day that I had these shadows, they all were amazed at what our mission truly was and the things that we do,” Sanchez said. “That can get lost if you are just behind your desk or just working the wires to put the computers together. But I tried to show them, hey, that wire put in my computer is helping me provide mission command over a great span of distance



Spc. Nathan G. Thompson, an intelligence analyst with 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, U.S. Army Pacific, spends one-on-one time with Brig. Gen. Eric L. Sanchez, the 94th AAMDC commanding general, Jan. 14, 2015, during Sanchez's leadership development program at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. Thompson, the first Soldier to participate in the program, shadowed Sanchez during the 94th AAMDC headquarters' transition from Fort Shafter to the joint base. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kimberly K. Menzies, 94th AAMDC Public Affairs)

and a pretty important mission. So I think they get it, and we try to reiterate that every chance we can."

Most units preach trusting their NCOs, but often that trust is not operationalized, said Command Sgt. Maj. Finis Dodson, the command sergeant major of the 94th AAMDC. The 94th command makes sure NCOs really are allowed to take on their duties independently.

"The main thing for an NCO is, are you really empowered?" Dodson said. "Are you really trusted? Are you valued? And in this command, the NCOs are valued, they are empowered and they are trusted. They are afforded opportunities, so the NCOs see that they are value-added. And that goes to the coming Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report. You have to have some way to show that you are capable of doing complicated tasks, not just the basic, routine NCO tasks of yesteryear."

Trust in the Army's noncommissioned officers is not only important to the mission and to building a strong NCO corps, but it can ease any number of problems that crop up, Sanchez said.

"I heard a lot of concern from my colonels and lieutenant colonels about the turnover we are going to have this summer, with some gaps before the next officer comes in after the last one has left," Sanchez said. "I just told them, 'Now is the time we need to power down to our NCOs.' Too often as officers, we think we need to do it all ourselves or think that we are the only ones who can do it. So, during the past few months, we have powered down a number of things. My biweekly SITREP (Situation Report) that gets sent up and out to all my leadership is now done by an NCO. It goes through QA/QC (Quality assurance/quality control) with my chief of staff or my deputy commander, but it starts out at the sergeant and staff sergeant level. Just another example

of where the NCOs are stepping up to do some of the normal staff functions that normally would be done by an officer. And as far as I'm concerned, I don't see any difference when it comes to me. It's ready for prime time. I hit send, and it goes out."

Sgt. Maj. Johnny Woodley, G3 current operations sergeant major for the 94th AAMDC, saw the process in action during his time as part of Task Force Talon.

"We had a sergeant managing a budget of more than \$10 million — a sergeant, by himself," Woodley said. "Normally that's officers who do that. NCOs are truly the backbone of air defense for THAAD down in Guam."

The NCOs in the command are taking the opportunities given to them and running with them, Guerrero said.

"Compared to when I came in the Army, the type of NCO who is in the Army nowadays is much more autonomous; they know what they need to do," Guerrero said. "If they need some guidance, they'll ask for some guidance. But for the most part, they know what's expected of them, and they'll go ahead and take charge. Any unit that is part of the 94th, there is constant leader development, constant staff development, because of the nature of the work they do on a daily basis."

## Broadening experiences

In addition to being empowered to take on tasks, NCOs in the 94th AAMDC get the broadening experiences of frequently working with allies, as well as jointly with the other military branches. The command answers to both the Army and the Air Force and is headquartered on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

Working so closely with the Air Force, as well as the Navy and Marines, helps NCOs get a wider view of the fight, Dodson said.

"We are one of the few units here in the Pacific to have that constant dialogue with our Navy, Air Force and Marine counterparts," Dodson said. "They work side-by-side. On THAAD, they are right there with the Air Force, and they work with the Navy also in Guam. They figure out how to get things done. And that's what really builds adaptable leaders and NCOs in our command."

"Every component of the military, we engage with," Dodson said. "There is no, 'I'm just going to do Army work.' For us, we're producing a leader for the Army who can be put anywhere and perform. Our leaders know how to adapt. They know the basics of what each one of those services brings to the fight and how they can capitalize and use those resources to the betterment of our mission. That's really beneficial as we downsize. Do we really have somebody who is adaptable? Do we really have somebody who is innovative and creative? Can they go out there and engage? You talk about a broadening assignment: Everything we do is broadening."

The Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 94th AAMDC, are a good example of how NCOs in the command engage with many different services and countries. The Army battalion is located on an Air Force base in Japan, leading to many opportunities for cross training and working together, Brown said.

"We've had bilateral training, where officers, NCOs and Soldiers have gone over and trained and spent the week with a Japanese force on their base, doing training, living with them," Brown said. "It's been a great opportunity. It's definitely made us closer. We even had the chance as first sergeants to watch them run drills on their Patriot equipment. It was a great event because they definitely do it differently, but it was effective."

"Not only do we socialize and operate with the Japanese forces, but there are a lot of functions where the NCOs cross-talk with the other services," Brown said. "HHB did an exercise with the Marines recently for Warrior Leader time. That was all NCO-led across the Marines, the Army and the Air Force. Being here on an Air Force Base, with the Air Force, Marines and Navy all being here, there is a lot of cross-coordination between the branches and the local Japanese forces. It has really brought all of the services full circle around each other to make things happen. They come to us for support, and we go to them for support, and that's a key relationship to have."

Command Sgt. Maj. Stephan Mumpower, the command sergeant major of 1st Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 94th AAMDC, said working closely with allies and sister services helps the mission.

"We definitely share lessons learned amongst one another," Mumpower said. "We all have the same issues here when it comes to maintenance. With the sea air

out here in Japan and how it affects the equipment, we share lessons learned on corrosion and how to take care of the equipment."

Woodley agreed that the sharing led to a stronger NCO corps, as well as a stronger U.S. military in general.

"The Army, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard, we created a joint NCO leadership panel," Woodley said. "We as senior leaders would go and talk to the Airmen's Leadership Course students before they graduated. We would share our leadership styles and leadership techniques to every class that was about to graduate, so they could see how leadership is across services. It paid big dividends for us because we are sharing knowledge across branches."

## Hearts and minds

With NCOs spread across the Pacific, often in remote areas, it's up to them to also take on the "hearts and minds" missions that may not usually fall to someone at their level, Sanchez said.

"Our headquarters being in Hawaii and everything else being forward of the dateline requires that our NCOs step up and do things that may be out of their comfort zones," Sanchez said. "But it is making them a much stronger NCO corps. We have first sergeants and others out there engaging with mayors of cities in Japan and Korea. We have a sergeant major in Guam that's interacting with governors, high-level people and congressional delegations that come through."

Woodley said he witnessed that effort firsthand while serving on Task Force Talon.

"The average THAAD battery, and the average air defense battery, is about 1 percent officers, maybe 2 percent," Woodley said. "So, you're asking a small group of officers to put out information, and the larger group to take that information and execute. With THAAD being a new weapons system, you don't have many people who are trained to do it, so you're asking even more of the young Soldiers. These guys are doing a phenomenal job. They are doing more than just their daily job; they are also taking on the responsibility of winning hearts and minds in Guam because they are the largest active-duty Army force on Guam. So, they are doing that by going out and establishing Partners in Education with local elementary schools. They are integrating into Junior ROTC programs for future soldiers who may want to join the Army. Our NCOs are doing a huge amount of work that you would normally see at the officer level."

The dedication of the NCOs in Guam permeates every aspect of being a good Soldier, Woodley said. As an example, he talked about their efforts on Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP).

"We decided we didn't want to just give lip service about SHARP," Woodley said. "We wanted to see if we could come up with some kind of program to get everybody learning about SHARP. We came up with





U.S. Army Spc. Adam Jones, from left, Spc. David Tatarwicz and Spc. Shawn Fincanon with Battery A, 2nd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, Task Force Talon, 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, demonstrate stretching techniques, Feb. 21, 2015, before Special Olympics athletes at the Machananao Elementary School practice for their events. The Soldiers volunteered at the Machananao Elementary School as part of the unit's volunteer initiative, Partners in Education. (Courtesy Photo)

the SHARP Soldier and NCO of the Quarter. We had 10 Soldiers in the first board we conducted, so you had 10 Soldiers out there studying. They were asking each other questions about SHARP and learning more about SHARP. It worked so well we've continued it, and the 94th command has adopted it, as well."

As the Army rebalances to the Pacific, the NCOs of the 94th AAMDC are making sure their skills and weapons fit securely into the mission. The various services'

strengths complement each other, leading to a powerhouse of weapons systems in the Pacific, Dodson said. It's a deterrent to our enemies, plus a challenging, exciting experience for Soldiers.

"Not too many people can say they get to work with the other sister services and our allies and do their mission every day. Not too many can do that," Dodson said.

Not many can, but the NCOs of the 94th AAMDC are everyday. ■

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