

# National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency NCOs Impact Global Threats

By NGA Office of Corporate Communications

Feb. 9, 2018



Sgt. First Class Margaret Schexnider, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency's Time Dominant Operations Center, briefs Vice President Mike Pence on an indications and warning target during his visit to NGA on September 13, 2017. (Photo courtesy of National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency)

The U.S. Army's geospatial community may be small, with about 4,000 enlisted Soldiers and 400 warrant officers spread between military intelligence and engineer branches, but it provides

an outsized impact to the nation's most pressing challenges.

At the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, joint-service military personnel provide timely, relevant, and accurate geospatial intelligence in support of national security throughout the Department of Defense and intelligence community. This support provides valuable information to key decision makers at the combatant commands and their subordinate joint and component task forces, as well as the Army's corps and division level of operations.

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Todd Jackson, the senior enlisted advisor for NGA's director of operations, highlighted the importance of noncommissioned officers assigned to NGA.

"NGA provides a dominant GEOINT service to our nation and our joint warfighters. The Army's contribution is an integral part of this, whether it be through Army operational forces generating geospatial data and analysis to be consumed by NGA or by assigning Soldiers to NGA in support of our nation's intelligence and defense missions," Jackson said. "The realities of our rapidly changing global threat environment involving national to tactical operations demands that military services assign the best NCOs to NGA."<sup>1</sup>

The NGA nomination process involves selecting NCOs within NGA's geospatial professions, namely the 35G Imagery Analyst and 12Y Geospatial Engineer military occupation specialties, to support NGA's core mission of analysis and production.

Imagery analysts examine maps and gather intelligence information. Geospatial engineers build 3D terrain models from information the imagery analysts gather, thus allowing commanders a line of sight on their targets.<sup>2</sup>

### **NCO Responsibilities**

Ralph Erwin, senior geospatial intelligence officer, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, said that NGA's physical and security clearance requirements ensure that NCOs assigned to the agency are "the top of the line."<sup>3</sup>

According to Jackson, the NCOs at NGA address today's threats while pursuing tomorrow's unknowns.

"This takes an innovative mindset, adaptability, and high level of maturity," he said. "With the level of exposure to senior government officials and military leaders, along with strategic level professional development, these NCOs will return to the Army's operational forces better prepared to lead Soldiers in unified land operations across all domains of battle."<sup>4</sup>

Directly supporting the broader National System for Geospatial Intelligence mission (the enterprise comprised of national, international, commercial, and academic contributors and consumers of geospatial intelligence) is only one of the many missions NCOs can take part in while assigned to NGA.

U.S. Army Sgt. Peter Lasky, a warning analyst at the NGA's Time Dominant Operations Center, enjoys the unique opportunities to support critical combatant command requirements.

"I provide direct analytic support to our nation's most pressing intelligence issues," said Lasky. "We operate 24/7 year-round. This isn't something a 35G would have the opportunity to do outside of NGA."<sup>5</sup>

## Training Opportunities

Military members are offered a wide array of training courses through the NGA College ([https://www.nga.mil/Partners/Academic\\_Opportunities/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.nga.mil/Partners/Academic_Opportunities/Pages/default.aspx)), as well as through other instructor courses and DoD partner education platforms, which are specifically tailored to the GEOINT and intelligence analysis tradecrafts and career paths.



Pictured from left to right: Sgt. 1st Class Margaret Schexnider, Sgt. Peter Lasky, and Staff Sgt. Crystal Chapman. The NGA nomination process involves selecting NCOs within NGA's geospatial professions, namely the 35G Imagery Analyst and 12Y Geospatial Engineer military occupation specialties, to support NGA's core mission of analysis and production. (Photo by Anthony Boone, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency)

"I analyze cyber activity to specific points on the ground," said Staff Sgt. Crystal Chapman, an

analyst in NGA's Cyber Analysis branch. "I did not have a background in GEOINT cyber-correlation before coming to NGA, so I enrolled in advanced imagery and geospatial analysis training courses, as well as a Chinese pronunciation course in the agency's foreign language program. These all helped me improve my tradecraft skills and gave me more confidence as an NCO."<sup>6</sup>

An additional resource NCOs can benefit from is the constant exposure to the civilian workforce and national-strategic to operational level mission areas.

"I'm the only military service member in my section, so I'm working with civilians who have 15 to 30 years of analytic experience," Chapman said.<sup>7</sup>

## **Sharing Experiences**

NCOs and civilians are able to share their experiences, allowing the NGA to support its customers better.

"Embedding Soldiers within NGA is a great opportunity not only for them but for their civilian colleagues too," said Sgt. 1st Class Margaret Schexnider, Tennessee Department of Corrections noncommissioned officer-in-charge. "Soldiers are better able to understand the elevated levels within intelligence operations, and civilians, without prior military experience, gain a new perspective of the joint warfighters they support."<sup>8</sup>

NGA maintains a worldwide presence, with employees supporting commanders and staff in each combatant command and within the Army's corps and division headquarters. NGA also deploys personnel to support overseas contingency operations such as Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan. However, for many civilians, their NCO colleagues are their introduction to military personnel.

"We learn from them as much as they learn from us," said Lasky. "We might offer unique knowledge about intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms from our time in the force and how different types of imagery is received. Sharing tactical and operational experiences benefit the broader NSG mission. We take what we learn here and incorporate it into our next assignment as leaders."<sup>9</sup>

The normal three-year NCO assignment to NGA can include a deployment to support worldwide operations or could parlay into an opportunity at another combat support agency.

"When people think of military occupations for enlisted Soldiers, they don't typically think of non-combat positions in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics category," said Schexnider. "We make up a very small population among NCOs in the entire active Army and the opportunity to directly support several key elements of NGA's mission – from counterterrorism to humanitarian and disaster relief – is one some Soldiers never get to experience. Being in the Army for as long as I have been, I always heard about the strategic

experience. Being in the Army for as long as I have been, I always heard about the strategic side of the community, but never really understood what that means for me as a Soldier."<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

From supporting NGA's mission to seeking in-depth education opportunities, NCOs assigned to NGA play a large role in many key elements such as operational security, counterterrorism, and disaster relief. They ensure the agency's success by supporting a wide variety of missions, even in the environmental aspect, such as efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade in Africa.<sup>11</sup> Through their assignments, they learn their strategic role in the intelligence community and share tactical and operational experiences with their civilian counterparts to benefit the broader NSG mission.

## Notes

1. Sgt. Maj. Todd Jackson. Interview with NGA Public Affairs Office. December 2017.
2. Ralph Erwin. Interview with Crystal Bradshaw, *NCO Journal*. November 2017.
3. Erwin. Interview with Crystal Bradshaw.
4. Jackson. Interview with NGA PAO.
5. Chapman. Interview with NGA PAO.
6. Staff Sgt. Crystal Chapman. Interview with NGA Public Affairs Office. December 2017.
7. Chapman. Interview with NGA PAO.
8. Sgt. 1st Class Margaret Schexnider. Interview with NGA Public Affairs Office. December 2017.
9. Lasky. Interview with NGA PAO.
10. Schexnider. Interview with NGA PAO.
11. Michelle L. Hankins, "Trouble Under the Trees: GEOINT Helps Fight a Different Kind of Battle in Africa," *Pathfinder Magazine*, vol.14, no. 4 (2016): 10-13, <https://www.nga.mil/MediaRoom/Pathfinder/Pages/Archive.aspx> (<https://www.nga.mil/MediaRoom/Pathfinder/Pages/Archive.aspx>).