

# PEO Soldier NCO Obligated To Return Life-Saving Gear

By Martha C. Koester - NCO Journal

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If it hadn't been for some great noncommissioned officers who provided a steady influence early in his career, Master Sgt. Corey M. Ingram might not have made it to Program Executive Office Soldier and the job he loves.

Ingram is a senior enlisted advisor to Project Manager Soldier Protection and Individual Equipment, or PM SPIE, which is part of PEO Soldier at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. PM SPIE oversees development of helmets, body armor, uniforms, parachutes, and other clothing and protective equipment.





The advanced combat helmet that saved Staff Sgt. Joseph McKenzie's life shows damages. Master Sgt. Corey M. Ingram presented McKenzie with his battle-scarred helmet during a ceremony in October at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Armando R. Limon, U.S. Army)

"I have had some really good NCO mentors," Ingram said. "When I was a younger Soldier, I wasn't the best Soldier. An NCO snatched me by the scruff of my neck and said, 'You're not doing it right. I see lots of potential in you, and I'm going to be your mentor for the rest of your career,' and he honestly was my mentor for the rest of my career because I ended up being stationed with now retired Command Sgt. Maj. George R. Manning about three times. Then, I had three other really great mentors at Fort Sill [Oklahoma] which I really learned a lot from — Sgt. Maj. Thomas Miller, Sgt. Maj. Taylor Poindexter and Sgt. Maj. David Carr."

He credits the four NCOs with shaping his career and putting him on the path to PEO Soldier.

"Where else can you go and touch the Soldier every day?" Ingram said. "Not just one or two Soldiers, but the whole Army at the same time. It's incredible."

It's Ingram's job to offer the voice of the Soldier to Col. Dean Hoffman IV, who is Program Manager Soldier Protection and Individual Equipment. Everything at PM SPIE is designed for Soldiers, and feedback is important. Ingram regularly solicits feedback from Soldiers during equipment fieldings, where units test the latest in what the Soldier touches, wears or carries. The results are taken to officers, then sent to scientists, who work to improve equipment for Soldiers.







Master Sgt. Corey M. Ingram, left, senior enlisted advisor for Project Manager Soldier Protection and Individual Equipment, holds the advanced combat helmet that helped save Sgt. Christopher Thompson's life. Participating in these ceremonies helps Ingram raise awareness to PEO Soldier's PM SPIE. (Photo courtesy PEO Soldier)

"The stuff that I do here really makes a difference in a Soldier's life because the equipment we give them is going to keep them warm in the Arctic and it's going to keep them alive in combat," Ingram said. "I didn't know what this place was when I got here. Soldiers need to know that there's an organization here that is specifically designed for them and their protection."

## Raising awareness

Ingram is on a mission to make Soldiers aware of his organization.

When a Soldier is injured in combat, the Soldier's equipment is collected and sent to a lab for analysis, all in an effort to determine whether the Soldier's equipment was instrumental in defeating the threat it was designed to thwart. If the Soldier requests the equipment's return, PEO Soldier reunites Soldiers with the equipment credited in saving their lives.

"Every time I go and give back a piece of equipment to a Soldier, I let them know where it came from and how it was tested," he said. "I'm not specific, but I let them know it was tested extensively. 'If you wear this, it will save your life.'"

Ingram and Hoffman traveled in October 2015 to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, to reunite Staff Sgt. Joseph McKenzie with the battle-scarred helmet that saved his life four years ago in Afghanistan.

"I am glad to get this back," McKenzie said at the ceremony. "It is a piece of history; my

history, anyway. It was a piece of my life that was pretty intense.

“For some of you guys who have not been downrange yet, this is kind of a wakeup call,” McKenzie told Soldiers at the ceremony. “Make sure you take this stuff serious because you never know what is going to happen.”

In March 2011, McKenzie of the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, was hit by a bullet “right where the night vision goggles mount on the helmet,” he said.

Hoffman explained to the Soldiers at the Schofield Barracks ceremony that the Army does all it can to provide them with the best possible protective equipment so they can come home to family and friends. Inspectors randomly select helmets and hard armor plates from each production lot and shoot them to ensure the equipment meets Army standards, Hoffman said.

A week and a half after he was shot in the head, McKenzie said he “was back in the gym, thanks to my helmet.”

“If McKenzie hadn’t been wearing his helmet, he wouldn’t be here,” Ingram said. “That was four years ago. Now, he has a 17-month-old son and a wife.”

His stint at PEO Soldier has impressed upon Ingram many times the importance of wearing combat equipment, he said.

“I had a guy shot in the chest, and my former boss, Col. Glenn Waters of Fort Sill, Oklahoma, his side Small Arms Protective Insert was returned to him. He was shot in the side during combat, and you could see where the bullet went into his side plate. I had no clue that I would be the one giving those things back. Col. Waters had a side SAPI that had been damaged in combat, and now I’m here. Now I know where it came from. It came from this office.”

## **Leadership skills**

As Ingram winds down his 27-year career in the Army, he plans on finishing his Ph.D. in multidisciplinary human services with an emphasis on public policy. He said he will take with him a great sense of satisfaction, knowing that he was able to have an impact on Soldiers’ lives in combat. Someday, he even hopes to throw his hat in the ring and run for political office. Ingram is confident in his leadership abilities, having learned them as an NCO.

“Learning leadership as an NCO has really prepared me for life after the Army because as an NCO you deal with Soldiers and people every day, you counsel every day, so it was natural for me to fall into the human services path,” he said.

Education is also very important to Ingram, and he urges other NCOs as well as his successor at PEO Soldier to further their studies. Ingram credits his drive to solid NCO mentorship and

rejects any excuse to not get an education.

“The excuses of ‘I don’t have time; I’m in the field,’ no. I got probably 60 credit hours on deployment,” Ingram said. “There are always computers. ... ‘Don’t tell me what you can’t do, [I tell Soldiers.] Tell me how you’re going to do it because there is always a way.’

“My mother, aunts and uncle grew up in Grenada, Mississippi, and they were amongst the first 277, as they called them back then, ‘colored children’ integrated into the white school system in the 1960s,” he said. “They were harassed, they were beaten and they had bricks thrown at them. My grandmother said to me, ‘I only wanted my kids to have the same thing that the other kids had.’ That’s why I want to get all the education I can so that their sacrifices were not in vain.”

## **Contact PEO Soldier**

PEO Soldier encourages Soldiers to communicate their questions and ideas, said Debi Dawson, PEO Soldier Strategic Communications. “Ask the PEO NCOs” is a website that Soldiers may use to email questions about uniforms and equipment. Soldiers may find it at [www.peosoldier.army.mil/feedback/contactForm.asp?type=csm](http://www.peosoldier.army.mil/feedback/contactForm.asp?type=csm) (<http://www.peosoldier.army.mil/feedback/contactForm.asp?type=csm>). Soldiers are also urged to reach out through the Soldier Enhancement Program at [www.peosoldier.army.mil/sep/index.asp](http://www.peosoldier.army.mil/sep/index.asp) (<http://www.peosoldier.army.mil/sep/index.asp%20>) where Soldiers may propose a technology or equipment item.