

SMA visits, talks professional development with Soldiers in Italy

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The 15th Sergeant Major of the Army visited Soldiers and senior enlisted leaders assigned to U.S. Army Garrison-Italy tenant units to discuss his Army-wide leader development initiatives.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey hosted two town hall meetings during his visit from Nov. 16-18 to Vicenza, Italy. The first was directed toward Soldiers in the ranks of staff sergeant and below; the second was directed toward sergeant first class and above. The intent was to share with them the changes that have been made, how it affects their careers, and the future of the profession.

Dailey first talked about Soldier readiness, the Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Mark Milley's number one priority. Dailey said NCO-led, individual and collective training is vital to the responsible drawdown of the force.

Sustain and retain the best

Dailey said the way to sustain and retain the best enlisted Soldiers is through NCO professional development schools. He said changes were being made to ensure noncommissioned officers throughout the Army received the training opportunities for career advancement.

The first professional development school Soldiers attend is called the Basic Leader Course. In this course, junior Soldiers in the ranks of private first class through specialist, sergeant, and in some cases staff sergeant, receive tactical-level leadership training needed to lead small groups of Soldiers.

The next school is the Advanced Leader Course. The curriculum of this course is intended to develop junior leaders, in the ranks of sergeant through staff sergeant, by exposing them to the operational-level leadership training needed to lead squad and platoon sized units. In addition, this course is branch-specific and is intended to develop the skill and proficiency of a Soldier's military occupational specialty.

The Senior Leader Course, intended for Soldiers in the rank of sergeant first class through master sergeant, provides leadership, technical and tactical skills, knowledge and experience needed to lead platoon- and company-sized units.

Currently, the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy is the only NCO professional development school acknowledged by military and civilian organizations as an accredited academic institution. However, some colleges do recognize and provide lateral credit for successful completion of BLC, ALC and SLC.

Dailey said there are plans to increase the level of accreditation of all professional development schools. He added that in order to develop leaders "we must take opportunities to invest in the person."

Investing in the person

"Someone saw the potential in me," Dailey said, during a flashback story of how he was inspired to serve beyond his initial contract.

According to Dailey, in order to maintain the stewardship of the profession leaders must invest in their Soldiers. He said it is for this reason the Army is changing how leaders are evaluated.

On Jan. 1, the Army released a revised version of the Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report intended to better assess the performance and future potential of enlisted leaders.

Dailey said the new evaluation will help restore balance to the reporting system. He added that previous reports indicated 80 percent of NCOs were evaluated as, "among the best." Dailey said that system took away from those who truly earned top marks on their evaluations.

America's perception

According to Dailey, last month was the first time in 20 years the Army ranked as the number one choice for civilians seeking a career in the military.

Dailey accredited this to ongoing efforts to change the way Americans perceive the Army. He gave an analogy that explained the perception of pride.

"All Marines, even those kicked out of service, if asked, proudly say they are 'Marines for life,'" Dailey said. "We can train, educate and promote a Soldier through retirement; then pay them for the rest of their life, and we still suck."

Dailey further explained perception with word-cloud graphics, which depicted words associated with each service. "Educated" was a word associated with both the Air Force and Navy, while "Dangerous" associated to the Marines and Army. The most disheartening word Dailey said was "Average", which was only associated with the Army.

Other words associated with the Army were "ordinary" and "low skill," which led Dailey to ask attendees, "Why is it less than other services?"

One attendee stated that while serving as a recruiter, he noticed people's perception of the services began the moment they enter a recruiter's office. Dailey agreed, and then added approximately 69 percent of those who join were influenced by current or former service members.

Setting the example

As the most senior enlisted leader of the Army, Dailey understands that every decision he makes will have an effect on those he leads.

"Good, bad, right or wrong, my presence influences people," Dailey said, and on Nov. 17 Dailey's influence would have a lasting effect on one Soldier's career.

During his visit Dailey promoted Spc. James Sheridan, a USARAF command driver and native of Wayne, Mich., to the rank of sergeant.

"It was an honorable experience," Sheridan said. "Dailey's willingness to take time to recognize a junior Soldier sets an example for all NCOs to follow."

"If he can make the time, we can, too," said the newly promoted sergeant.