

Senior NCOs, International Counterparts Begin First-Ever Leadership Symposium

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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The value of good leadership wasn't the only thing stressed during the opening day of the first-ever International Training and Leader Development Symposium.

The event, which began Tuesday at Fort Bliss, Texas, with opening remarks from Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey and Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, Army vice chief of staff. In attendance are a slew of U.S. Army senior enlisted Soldiers along with their international counterparts representing about 55 countries.

The objective of the conference, which ends Thursday, is not only to reinforce the importance of a quality noncommissioned officer corps to a country's respective army, but also to foster international partnerships and gird U.S. senior enlisted leaders for the task they face as part of a fluctuating Army in a world rife with tumult. Dailey said the impetus for the conference came about nine months ago while he was in Indonesia meeting with New Zealand, Australian and Canadian counterparts.

"The Australian sergeant major said, 'Hey, mates, let's go get a pint and talk about something,'"

Dailey said. “I said, ‘Hey, 2 o’clock in the afternoon, that’s not an American tradition, but I’m willing to learn international ways.’ So we did just that. We came up with this idea of bringing an international coalition of senior enlisted partners together on an annual basis to be able to build the coalition partnership. The officers already have it, and we thought it was important that our Soldiers see that.”

To help underline that message, Dailey invited Allyn to speak at the conference.

“The vice chief of staff of the Army is the person who helps you get the things you need done on an everyday basis for Soldiers,” Dailey said. “The chief and the secretary, unfortunately, could not come, so I walked into the vice’s office about a week ago, and in Pentagon time that is way late. I said, ‘Sir, I need your help. I have a group of noncommissioned officers, both American and international, that need to hear the voice of senior leadership in the Army.’”

Allyn jumped at the chance. The 35th vice chief of staff of the Army — a role he assumed in August 2014 — said he holds the NCO Corps in high regard, and not merely because his father-in-law was a command sergeant major.



Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, Army vice chief of staff, speaks Tuesday during the opening remarks of the International Training and Leader Development Symposium at Fort Bliss, Texas. The event has drawn dozens of senior enlisted leaders and their international counterparts to discuss the challenges they face in the future. (Photo by Spc. James Seals)

“I had no intention of making a career of service,” Allyn told those in attendance. “I was smart enough to marry a command sergeant’s major daughter. So I was getting noncommissioned officer counseling every single time I went back home. Just think about having a command sergeant major in your hip pocket for life. Is that awesome or what?”

“I actually had a motto when I first joined the Army that I’m not in the Army for a long time, I’m in the Army for a good time. But what’s happened along the way is I’ve been having a good time for a long time. The reason is because of how I’ve been inspired by our Noncommissioned Officers Corps. I tell people the reason I’m still in the Army today is I’m trying to pay back the noncommissioned officers who taught me what right looked like as a young company commander in 1st Ranger Battalion. I’ve been paying back for 28 years and I can’t get the debt down.”

Allyn said one of the main challenges facing today’s senior enlisted leaders is maintaining professionalism and competency in an age in which the Army’s resources are stretched considerably. He pointed to the commitment of all three of the Army’s corps headquarters and eight of its 18 division headquarters to missions throughout the globe under the cloud of a drawdown as evidence of how engaged the Force is. Doing more with less is a notion the Army will face as it moves into the future. It’s something even Allyn’s office knows too well.

“Believe me, Gen. (Mark A.) Milley would much prefer to be here,” Allyn said of the Army chief of staff’s absence from the conference. “But he suffers from the same problem that we all do as senior leaders in the Army — that is an inability to clone yourself and be two places at one time. So what do we do? We empower our team to help represent and expand influence and be the chief of staff of the Army’s representative everywhere we go. Certainly all of you as command sergeants major understand what that’s all about. You are the Army’s support chain that represents all our commanders in the field. You do it ably, you do it professionally and you do it each and every day. That’s what makes our Army such an amazing place to come to work and, really, the most trusted profession in the world.”

Working through a drawdown in the Army is not a new concept. It’s something that retired Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, former Army chief of staff, dealt with during his tenure from 1991 to 1995. Sullivan was present at the conference where he was honored by Dailey and five former sergeants major of the army. Dailey awarded Sullivan with the first-ever honorary sergeant major of the army award during a ceremony. Afterward, he addressed those in attendance.

“I had the unenviable task of making the Army smaller after the first Gulf War,” Sullivan said. “In four years, we lost 400,000, we brought the Army down to about 500,000 active. The glue that held it all together was the noncommissioned officer corps — people out on the front lines, people like you. You are the ones who shoulder the heavy burden.”

To help fulfill that duty going forward, Allyn said leaders have to commit to living and exuding the five essential characteristics of the Army profession — military expertise, honorable service, trust,

esprit de corps and stewardship of the profession. These characteristics are based on the Army Values and help foster trust between Soldiers, leaders, families, the Army and the American people.

“This profession of ours has been built on the backs of extraordinary leaders over the past three or four decades,” Allyn said. “When we talk about, ‘How do we keep this going? How do we ensure that this great profession that we’ve built endures.’ It’s all about (these characteristics). It’s about living and exemplifying leaders of character who make values-based decisions each and every day. It’s living up to the SMA’s initiative with, ‘Not In My Squad.’ ... It is all about inspiring our Noncommissioned Officer Corps to exemplify the first stanza of the NCO Creed each and every moment of each and every day — ‘No one is more professional than I.’”

That professionalism is something that has long been admired by armies of partner nations. Allyn said one of the recurring questions he is asked when overseas is how to grow a noncommissioned officer corps such as the one in the U.S. Army. Allyn said it is a longstanding and arduous commitment that has yielded such an accomplished group of American NCOs. The challenge that the Army has faced in imbuing partner nations with its concept has been immense.

“We’re finding out that this is a lot harder than just putting stripes on a soldier’s uniform and saying, ‘Hey, go do good things,’” Allyn said.

That is part of the reason USASMA has brought together so many international leaders — to learn from each other’s tribulations and to establish a lasting network of international partnership that can prove mutually beneficial during future conflicts and challenges.

“It’s great to be surrounded by so many professionals,” Allyn said. “It’s an incredible honor to have 55 countries joining us here today. As I have served around the globe and particularly in combat environments over this last 20 years, it has been our teammates, our partners and our allies that have stuck with us through some pretty tough times. Their nations have signed on and committed with us.

“(U.S. NCOs should know) just how important you remain to our Army, how important your leadership, your professionalism, your commitment to standards of discipline will be as we try to stabilize a world that is rapidly trying to spin out of control. It’s going to be the actions of empowered and accountable leaders at the noncommissioned officer level who will ensure that we continue to deliver what our nation needs to do.”