



Sgt. 1st Class James Garton, an explosive ordnance disposal NCO with U.S. Army Central, observes a Tajikistan engineer wire explosives for an electric demolition during the ARCENT-sponsored International Mine Action Standard EOD level-one course in Tajikistan on June 5, 2014. (Photo by Sgt. Tracy R. Myers)

# ARCENT NCOs Building Relationships with Officers, Other Branches And Other Countries

*By Michael L. Lewis*

**T**hough there are hot spots throughout the globe, U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility — the Middle East — has been the locale for several spots that, during the past 13 years, have been hotter than most. Supporting the land forces in the region is U.S. Army Central, commonly known as ARCENT, whose headquarters at Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., includes NCOs who are expected to be strategic thinkers capable of working alongside officers, be subject-matter experts able to deploy temporarily when needed downrange and be able to build relationships with members of other U.S. military branches and the militaries of other countries. It's a tough job description, but one for which ARCENT's NCOs say they routinely rise to the occasion.

## Covering all the angles

NCOs at ARCENT are quick to dispel the myth that NCOs assigned there don't have much to do. Noncommissioned officers are constantly going in and out of theater to supplement units downrange, said Master Sgt. James C. Brown of ARCENT's G-4 logistics directorate.

"I think the misconception out there is based on the fact that a lot of people don't know what ARCENT does," Brown said. "They don't know that ARCENT really controls everything out there Army-wise in the AOR. So when they hear people are coming to ARCENT [headquarters], they think we're 'taking a knee.'"

"In this unit, you work," said Master Sgt. Amel Brooks of ARCENT's inspector general's office. "If you take your



average inspector general office in the U.S. Army, this office has a bigger footprint than them, including the ones at Fort Jackson (S.C.), Fort Bragg (N.C.) or Fort Stewart (Ga.), because, not only do we cover down on this headquarters, we have the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait — all that is under us. So we get it coming in from all those different angles.”

“Then there’s the fact that this is a three-star headquarters,” Brown said. “A lot of people ask, ‘How much work [is an NCO] really going to be doing at a three-star headquarters?’ But just about everybody here is on a deployable status and TCSes (temporary change of station) downrange. Some deploy more than others, depending on MOS shortages or shortages of personnel with a skill set that is needed downrange.”

Besides helping their U.S. Army colleagues, ARCENT NCOs are also key participants in one of the command’s hallmark missions: building relationships with nations in the region.

“We do a lot of partnerships,” said Sgt. 1st Class Nick Salcido of ARCENT’s public affairs office. “We have 20 countries in our AOR, 18 of which we have regular participation in. Partnership is a big part of ARCENT; it’s a large part of what we do.”

“In May, our office visited with the Kuwaiti inspector general to build a relationship and partnership,” said Master Sgt. William Cintron of ARCENT’s in-

spector general office. “They wanted to learn from us, because they really don’t have established inspectors general like the U.S. Army does. They only do inspections — they don’t do assistance or investigations — and the way they do inspections isn’t like how we do them. So they really wanted to learn from us how we did them, how to do the follow-up and how to correct the deficiencies. That’s a good example of the kinds of partnering we do.”

## A part of something bigger

The relationships NCOs help develop are the building blocks of the larger strategy the U.S. Army is employing with other countries throughout the globe, said Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Greca, the senior enlisted leader of ARCENT’s higher headquarters, U.S. Central Command, headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.

“What I would underline is the multinational approach,” he said. “How do you build coalitions so that people internal to the areas of responsibility solve their problems? Operationally, I had been to both Iraq and Afghanistan, and I thought I understood the AOR. But, frankly, I didn’t understand — every place in that AOR is slightly different. How can we assist as a nation through DIME — through the diplomatic, informational, military and economic elements of U.S. power?”



Cpl. Sara Manning, a military police officer with the 450th Military Police Company, 304th MP Battalion, 290th MP Brigade, U.S. Army Reserve, tests the balance of a Kuwaiti soldier serving with the 94th Al-Yarmouk Mechanized Brigade during an ARCENT-supported training exercise at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, on Oct. 29, 2013. (Photo by Sgt. Jennifer Spradlin)

NCOs also need to understand how the various pieces of the U.S. military contribute in the region, and the Army's place in that mix, Greca said.

"As our Army goes to 450,000 Soldiers, we can't do it alone," he said. "It's been pretty eye-opening [getting to know the component commands]. As I formerly understood CENTCOM, I didn't understand the NAVCENT (U.S. Naval Forces Central Command) piece, and I didn't understand the AFCENT (U.S. Air Forces Central Command) piece. Certainly, I understood that there are airplanes and ships out there. But to truly understand how, day-in and day-out, they are supporting the commander's intent and providing support internal to the AOR has been eye-opening. I just had no idea."

Neither did many of the NCOs who relocated to Shaw when ARCENT moved there from its former home of Fort McPherson, Ga., which was closed as part of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process. Shaw, already the location of AFCEC's headquarters, was seen as a natural place for ARCENT to call home, too. But the co-location of the two commands resulted in a culture clash at first, Brooks recalled.

"When we first got here, we had a big cookout at one of the hangars, and it was Air Force sitting on one side and Army sitting on the other — completely separate," he said. "But, hey, we're supposed to be here together. So one of our Soldiers went above and beyond. He helped develop a Shaw Air Force Base soccer team — an Army and Air Force joint team. That sergeant first class took initiative and helped build that joint relationship, showing the Air Force what we do and letting the Air Force show us what they do."

That interaction is exactly what Greca envisions as the ideal throughout the larger joint command.

"You can sometimes get wrapped up in the little world, the little place, the little cubicle, the little team that you're exposed to, and not appreciate what's going on on the outside," he said. "If our NCOs pay a little bit more attention and truly talk with our joint brothers and sisters on our right and left flank, it would give them an appreciation for the other services and our role and how we fit into the team," he said.



Sgt. Edgar Sanchez (center), an EOD NCO, and 1st Lt. Mitchell Amoriello, an EOD operations officer with the 75th Ordnance Disposal Company, 79th Ordnance Disposal Battalion, 71st Ordnance Group, conduct a practical exercise with a Tajikistan engineer during the International Mine Action Standard EOD level-one course in Tajikistan on June 3, 2014. (Photo by Sgt. Tracy R. Myers)

That appreciation includes learning the different duties and responsibilities of NCOs in the two service branches that call Shaw home, Salcido said.

"In the Army, it is better to be multifunctional rather than to be so niche, because we often have to cover down on so many different kinds of positions," he said. "In the Air Force, you have to test in your job in order to advance to the next rank. So you tend to have individuals who are very knowledgeable about their particular career field, rather than being a jack-of-all-trades, which is to our benefit in the Army."

Being knowledgeable in areas outside of one's primary military occupational specialty helps keep NCOs relevant, said Master Sgt. Christopher Pair of ARCENT's G-6 signal directorate.



"I'm a 25W (telecommunications chief) now, but I need to know the 25B job, which is computers; I need to know the 25Z job, which is (video teleconferences); I need to know the 25L job, which is cable installer. I've got to know all their jobs. So it is different [than in the Air Force]."

But the exposure to other U.S. military branches and the militaries of other countries is providing invaluable insight into a wide-angle view of the world, which can benefit NCOs throughout their careers, Brooks said.

"Being in a line unit, you see the small picture. But you have to look at the big picture," he said. "If, when I leave here, I go on to be a first sergeant, I will be getting my team leaders, my squad leaders, my platoon sergeants to see the bigger picture. I think that will help them better train their Soldiers, because they'll understand the bigger picture."

"Other units, it's all about the micro. Here, it's about the macro, the overall picture," Pair said. "That's what I'll definitely take back and tell others: Stop looking at the micro and start looking at the big picture, because the big picture is going to directly affect the smaller picture. With the big picture in mind, you can prepare a lot better for whatever comes your way."

## Not typical NCO duties

Perhaps the biggest difference of NCOs' work at ARCENT headquarters versus elsewhere in the Army is the interaction they have with officers, Brooks said.

"The role of the NCO in your average line unit? Your role here is much more broad than there," he said. "NCOs have a huge role here. Sometimes, you're doing the work of a field-grade officer, sometimes that of a senior NCO. You're never going to just stay in the NCO's lane here."

To be successful means understanding your unique role within the organization and cultivating a culture of trust, Greca said.

"When you talk about a shared understanding, everybody understands the environment that he or she is working in," he said. "You build cohesive teams based on mutual trust, and that trust goes up and down; it's not only trusting subordinates, it's the subordinates trusting their leaders."

"It's about understanding that you're on a staff, understanding the staff's functions, and being productive in that," Brown said. "It's easy to become complacent here, so you should make yourself relevant. Insert yourself into what is going on."

Being a valuable asset to a staff requires NCOs to become more of a strategic thinker than they may be used to, Greca said.

"We need our NCOs — we even need our junior Soldiers — to think," he said. "There was a time when the expectation was you just acted. There was this battle drill

concept where, without thought, you just reacted. But in today's environment, the environment requires leaders and Soldiers to think.

"[The Army] talks about discipline and initiative internal to mission command, and that discipline piece gives a military solution to a problem set that a service member is exposed to," Greca said. "So he or she has to be able to think. The environment is complex, and if you don't have those service members out there putting a deliberate decision-making process against a problem, the results are — well, we just can't have that happening."

"In school, we learn about the military decision-making process," Brooks said. "Here, you're doing the military decision-making process, and you have to know your role in that process."

That means taking into consideration a multitude of variables, Greca said.

"How can you be value-added for that commissioned officer?" he said. "They often talk about noncommissioned officers as the executors — the commanders specify the task, and we ensure those tasks are accomplished to a high level. Regardless of where you're at, I think that remains constant, however the tasks change. Maybe you've got a greater emphasis on force protection, because you're in a deployed environment and you have to secure a piece of tactical infrastructure on which your organization is sitting. How do you ensure that your personnel recovery [standard operating procedures] are solidified? How do you ensure there's no needless loss of life internal to those environments, where there are a lot of moving pieces? Equipping — how do you ensure our Soldiers have the best equipment on hand to be prepared for their particular mission?"

"Then, you certainly have professional development," Greca said. "Every day, we're charged with ensuring the professional development of our enlisted formation is done correctly. How do we ensure they are best positioned, not only for them personally but for the good of the Army? We're doing a multitude of things, and you have to prioritize the tasks the commander gives you — what's important at that time and place? That means you have to really understand the environment in which you're working and your commander."

An NCO must find a way to balance their staff duties with their normal NCO duties, Salcido said.

"In a lot of the operations and planning scenarios, we're doing a lot of the work of the field-grade officers. We're pretty interchangeable in that way. And that's where part of the challenge comes being an NCO. Ensuring sergeant's time training takes place is a challenge, because some in a field-grade officer-heavy environment don't see the value in that. Just making sure some of those things happen for the junior Soldiers

— prepping them for boards, doing mock boards before the real board — that stuff becomes more of a challenge than it might be in another unit.”

Though the headquarters environment is officer-heavy, ARCENT officers quickly come to appreciate the value of NCOs — if they haven’t before — through the work of the NCOs on staff there.

“In our office, the officers really listen to the NCOs. We NCOs have a huge say-so,” Brooks said. “Our officers will come to us and will ask us questions. During sergeants time training, our officers are welcome to come, and they learn things there, too.”

“The officers will definitely seek you out,” said Sgt. 1st Class Jared Oberman of ARCENT’s G-33 current operations division. “They’ve definitely expected a lot

from me, and I would like to say that I’ve been able to pull through and show them what an NCO is capable of doing, because they sure as heck haven’t stopped giving me stuff to do.”

Greca said that is indicative of the ever-growing confidence officers have in NCOs.

“I think the trust has risen and continues to rise,” he said. “I think part of that is because the capabilities of our NCO Corps and our enlisted Soldiers have increased. They’ve been given more responsibility, and they’ve excelled in taking that responsibility and have run with it. I think what we have proven to our commissioned officers is that we’re capable, agile and adaptive, and given the requirements, we will achieve the mission.” ■



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