

## **AUSA 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Region Breakfast**

**Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Washington, D.C.**

**CSM Philip F. Johndrow**

**7 October 2009**

**(Remarks as Prepared)**

Mr. Ulin, thanks for that kind introduction...

I appreciate the opportunity to spend some time with you this morning. Distinguished guests, AUSA Region 5, 6, and 7 members, thank you all for attending today.

When Mr. Bob Ulin invited me to share some thoughts with you this morning, I immediately accepted. There is no better way to thank an organization that gives so freely of their time and efforts to the people that are so close to our heart... the American Soldier. This is quite a diverse group here with us today; representing 3 AUSA Regions, 39 chapters, and 20 states. Thanks to AUSA Region 5 for hosting today's breakfast and bringing together Region's 6 and 7.

AUSA is a very important organization for our Army. You are the voice for America's Army and your initiatives for forging professional education and support to Army families are unparalleled.

Your annual awards recognizing Soldier excellence, whether it's for the NCO and Soldier's of the Year or recognizing outstanding performance as a Drill Sergeant or in Soldier Recruiting or as the Best Ranger Team; these not only recognize outstanding individual Soldier performance, but highlight the dedication to duty and selfless service that is representative of your organization and the Army as a whole.

Long before this year was deemed "the Year of the NCO", AUSA recognized the critical roles Noncommissioned Officer's play as the "backbone of the Army" through The Bainbridge Medal. As you all know, this medal was named for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sergeant Major of the Army, SMA William G. Bainbridge. It recognizes the special role of the Noncommissioned Officer in America's Army – their responsibilities, accomplishments and the critical role they play in the defense of our Nation. Most importantly, though, it highlights the important contributions that NCOs make to America long after they take the uniform off.

The Secretary of our Army designated 2009 as the Year of the NCO. The Year of the NCO recognizes the leadership, professionalism, commitment, courage, and dedication of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps. Less than 1/2 of 1% of Americans serve in the military and, for them, these attributes and distinctions of the NCO Corps are nothing new. This is an opportunity to share with the other 99.5% of America the roles, responsibilities, and the quality of service of our NCO Corps. For over 200 years, the Noncommissioned Officer Corps has been the standard keepers for our Army – training, leading, coaching, and mentoring Soldiers. It's not a coincidence that the United States Army NCO Corps is the envy of Armies around the World.

As a Squadron CSM, we worked with an Iraqi Intelligence Captain. He told me, "I always knew you guys would us beat because of your technological advantage. BUT after working with you and learning how strong your NCO Corps and Soldiers are, I realize now that we could have switched equipment and you still would have beaten us."

What makes us different? Our Leaders. At the Combined Arms Center our number one priority is Leader Development.

We've undertaken a very broad based and comprehensive reworking of the Army Leader Development Strategy across all ranks, including DA Civilians. This is by no means a small undertaking, but a timely and necessary task. This will allow us to grow our leaders now...and for the future.

As our Nation continues into an era of uncertainty and persistent conflict, the lines separating war and peace, enemy and friend, have blurred and no longer conform to the traditional boundaries we once knew.

Understanding how to operate successfully in this complex and ambiguous environment of the 21st Century is critical to the development of our leaders.

As Secretary Gates said this past June at West Point, "The Army has always needed agile and adaptive leaders with a broad perspective and range of skills. Now, in an era where we face full spectrum of conflict...we cannot succeed without military leaders who are just as full spectrum in their thinking." This means our Army has a requirement to develop leaders that are capable of operating effectively and efficiently across the full spectrum.

Our country needs agile and adaptive leaders to lead us in this ever-changing world. The decentralized nature of conflict in the 21st Century means we will require smaller units to operate in more culturally complex situations requiring even greater cultural awareness from every Soldier.

As the operational environment becomes more complex, leaders at much lower levels must gain an appreciation for the operational picture. This shifting balance of operational and tactical views, combined with decentralization, requires more, not less, leader development.

We have one of the most experienced and well trained NCO Corps in recent history... BUT, we must be mindful that we don't make the mistake of substituting experience for education. Experience is critical, as long as it is the right experience, and our training is outstanding, as long as it is the right training. What prepares leaders to make decisions in a complex uncertain environment is the combination of education, experience, and training. Education, Training, and Experience are the principle pillars of the New Leader Development Strategy.

The time tested foundations of what it means to be an NCO will remain unchanged; teaching, coaching, and mentoring. Training and experience are recognized as the basis for NCO development, but we also recognized there needs to be an increased emphasis on education and a life-long learning mindset to help grow the already broad-skilled NCO Corps.

With the evolutionary nature of full spectrum operations during an era of persistent conflict, NCOs are asked to do more now than ever and at an even lower echelon of leadership. Historically, NCOs performed tactical leadership within the construct of platoon tactical operations, but now are required to understand "the how" and "the why" their actions support and integrate into the overall campaign.

Now sergeants and staff sergeants are the primary integrators of tactical effects, both lethal and non-lethal. Not only the effects of the organic weapons available in their teams, squads, and platoons, but also from a host of supporting external assets.

Senior NCOs must invest the time and energy to grow the next generations of leaders by providing the right mix of opportunities at the right time in their career progression. We must foster a culture of continuous learning and an expeditionary mindset:

- We must develop NCOs that are grounded in leader competencies.
- We must instill a warrior first attitude by fully developing leader competencies in addition to task-based skills.
- We must develop critical thinking and problem solving skills that encourage flexibility and adaptability.

Many of the initiatives and proposed changes will make many think... “This is not your Father’s NCO Corps!”. The fundamentals from your Father’s era are still abundantly present yet tailored for the increased responsibilities of the current and future of the NCO Corps.

The education of the NCO Corps is comprehensive including the NCO Education System (NCOES), Civilian Education (i.e. College of the American Soldier), and self development.

The Self Development Program consists of three distinct approaches:

- Structured, meaning required learning events
- Guided, meaning recommended learning events
- Personal, meaning self-initiated learning events

All three are progressively sequenced across an NCOs career. This provides a modular approach to NCO Development in manageable chunks spread across the NCOs career.

We must transform NCOES to allow for flexibility of attendance and completion of training at more beneficial times and locations. A tailored approach will provide accelerated development that prepares individual NCOs to operate above their current grade by starting development sooner and migrating content at least one level down and increasing the use of advanced technology.

We must leverage technology using web-based delivery systems, yet balance that technology with the human aspect that makes our NCOs great.

We must look at how we can change our courses to gain efficiencies, reduce redundancy, and maintain quality.

Change is already happening. In fact, at the Combined Arms Center, this year was the first ever appointment of a Noncommissioned Officer to serve as the Commandant of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy.

CSM Raymond Chandler became the 19<sup>th</sup> Commandant during a ceremony in June. CSM Chandler is the right NCO, at the right time to guide the course in developing agile and adaptive NCOs ready to meet the challenges of full spectrum operations.

One of the great initiatives that helps with this new increased level of education of our NCO Corps is the College of the American Soldier (CAS).

This program links the American Council on Education (ACE) accreditation with specific degree requirements, allowing a Soldier to quickly see what NCOES courses will transfer as equivalent credit at any point in their career from basic training through the Sergeant Major Course. This streamlines NCO degree completion by listing precisely what the college will grant for each credit source, and provide a list of other guaranteed ways to meet degree requirements.

This degree program is available to all NCOs at any point in their career, but maximum credit for Army leadership schools is based on completion of NCOES up to the SMC.

The Army will continue to expand existing civilian higher education degree choices to provide Career NCOs with a broad preparation degree option not tied to enrollment in a MOS specialty degree. This enhances NCO education, leadership and warfighting capabilities and grows the multi-functional Soldier characteristics.

The focus for developing agile and adaptive leaders represents the basis for how the Army leader development process will consistently deliver the right mix of education, training, and experiences to deliver the leaders of tomorrow.

A successful leader development program builds critical and creative thinkers with the courage to exploit opportunities. This strategy will build the agile and adaptive leaders our Soldiers deserve... courageous, selfless serving leaders.

We've done our best to recognize these courageous, selfless servants at the Combined Arms Center. Back in May, we honored two outstanding NCOs by inducting them into our prestigious Fort Leavenworth Hall of Fame – only one other NCO has ever been inducted in the 40 year history of the program. CSM Larry Smith and SGM William McBryar joined the ranks of previous inductees who distinguished themselves in service to our Nation.

SGM McBryar enlisted in 1887, a young African American, who desired to serve his county and live the American Dream. He served with absolute distinction during a time before anyone recognized the term "equal opportunity". Over 70 years before Martin Luther King Jr. said he had a dream of "a nation where [people] will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.", SGM McBryar overcame incredible inequality and adversity. He ultimately earned a Medal of Honor for bravery while fighting Apache Indians in 1890. He served in places that you only read about in history books; places like Cuba, the Philippines, and the Nation's rapid westward expansion.

CSM Larry Smith's induction was deeply personal for me for several reasons. Tough, hard-nosed 1SG Smith was able to mentor and shape a young lanky kid from Montana named Johndrow into the Soldier and person I am today. His "tough love" and tough, standards based approach to leadership helped to mold the building blocks for so many young Soldiers, NCOs, and Officers. We couldn't possibly have known at the time, but those tough lessons he taught were the bedrock for how to survive and win in combat in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. Even after retirement, CSM Smith continued his selfless service as the president of the Henry Leavenworth Chapter of AUSA and the Executive Vice President for Enlisted Affairs for the 5<sup>th</sup> Region AUSA. I can't begin tell you how humbling it is to follow in the footsteps of these outstanding NCOs, Leaders, and Selfless Servants.

Just a couple of weeks ago we had CSM Hickey come through the PreCommand Course and he reminded me of Specialist Ross H. McGinnis, a 19 year old Soldier from Knox, PA, an ordinary young man, did something extraordinary for his fellow Soldiers in Iraq.

Ross was a gunner in a HMMWV on a Baghdad street when a grenade was thrown from a rooftop and dropped into the turret on his truck. He immediately yelled, —grenade to the other four crewmen in the truck.

Ross started to jump out the top to safety when he looked down and realized his buddies hadn't heard him through the intercom system – they weren't responding to his warnings; they didn't realize the imminent danger they were all in.

Ross immediately dropped back down into the turret and selflessly smothered the grenade with his body, absorbing the full impact of the blast himself. He died minutes later from his injuries. His buddies all survived, virtually unscathed because of his heroic actions.

For his actions that day he received our nation's highest award the Congressional Medal of Honor. SPC McGinnis didn't join the military with these other Soldiers. He hadn't known them for years before the Army. It certainly isn't a coincidence that 4 out of the 6 Medals of Honor for Iraq and Afghanistan have been awarded to NCO. Their bonds were formed while serving together... this story of valor has been told differently throughout our history...

I recently attended an event with both Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, and Vietnam, Korea, and World War II veterans. I had the opportunity to witness the interactions between these groups of "old" and "new" Soldiers and found it quite illuminating.

At the surface level, these two groups appeared to be completely dissimilar; different types of wars, different weapons, different battlefield complexities, the list goes on and on. You would hear the “old vets” saying they could not fight the way the “modern” Soldier fights on the current and complex battlefield, while the “young vets” would say they could not have fought under the conditions that the “old vets” fought under.

However, when you listened to them tell their stories to each other, you could see the commonalities come rushing to the surface. No matter the circumstances, no matter the equipment, no matter the conditions, each group found a way to adapt, overcome, and to ultimately accomplish the mission.

It is as true today as it was during World War II and era’s past, Soldiers will always fight for their fellow Soldiers. It’s that camaraderie born of shared experiences and hardships that ties all generations of Soldiers together.

Our NCOs Corps is stronger now than in recent history because of the experiences and lessons learned from each generation. Those experiences and lessons have created the building blocks for our current and our future generations to stack upon.

For those of you out there in the crowd, like the CSM Smiths’ and in the spirit of The Bainbridge Medal, thank you for your continued service even after you’ve hung up your Army Green and taken your boots off for the last time. We are your legacy and your efforts to pave the way for each of us have not gone unnoticed or unappreciated.

I’d also like to thank you for paving the way as we continue on our journey. We have grown as an organization because of your lessons. We owe you a great deal for all you have done for us. We tend to focus on the men and women of today, and their sacrifices. If not for the men and women of the past, then we would not have the knowledge, the training, or the capabilities we have now.

You have pointed us in the right direction and we can’t thank you enough for your sacrifices.

Thank you to AUSA for all that you do and continue to do for Our Soldiers, Our Army, and Our Nation!