

CSM Borja Reintroduces Senior Enlisted Leader Training Conference Program

By Dottie White and
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“The Choice of Noncommissioned Officers is an object of greatest importance. The order and discipline of a regiment depends so much upon their behavior, that too much care cannot be taken in preferring none to that trust but those who by their merit and good conduct are entitled to it.”

Baron Von Steuben, 1778.

Time has not altered the truth of what Baron Von Steuben wrote at Valley Forge over 230 years ago in his *Regulation for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*. The non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the fledgling American army of 230 years ago enjoyed a level of trust and responsibility that was unheard among their European counterparts. That level of training, autonomy and authority is even more evident in the U.S. Army of today.

Maintaining that level of proficiency for NCOs, especially for those in senior leadership roles, is essential for mission success. Concurrently, each NCO must also receive personal professional development training to keep him or her competitive for advancement. He or she must, in a sense, manage their own career to prepare themselves for promotion.

In late 2007, Command Sgt. Maj. Ralph Borja of SMDC/ARSTRAT recognized that the command had offered no comprehensive collective training for its senior NCOs since 2005. This was not surprising, as SMDC/ARSTRAT is a geographically broad command with Soldiers scattered across the globe. Borja set out to gather senior NCOs from SMDC/ARSTRAT's far flung locations for a comprehensive training conference. Here each of the attendees could be brought up to date with current command missions, technology programs and organizational changes. They could also be briefed by human resource experts in their own branch and the NCO corps as a whole.

Planning for the conference began more than six months prior to the event. Expertise and logistical support from all staff elements and both brigades blended during a series of In Progress Reviews (IPRs) in late 2007 and early 2008. The IPRs ensured that each planning detail for the conference was discussed, assigned and executed in the most efficient manner. The dates for the conference were set for March 23 – 28, 2008, with Vandenberg Air Force Base selected as the host installation. 100th Missile Defense Brigade personnel assigned to Vandenberg provided excellent on ground support in the months leading up to the conference.

On March 23, more than 100 SMDC/ARSTRAT NCOs from the United States, Germany, Korea, Southwest Asia and the Marshall Islands began arriving in California. The “duffers” in the group gathered at the Vandenberg golf course on that Sunday afternoon for a golf tournament, always an excellent means of boosting esprit de corps.

The conference commenced at 8 a.m. on March 24 at Vandenberg Air Force Base's Pacific Coast Club. "We are gathering together this week for a little bonding, teamwork, socializing and sharing of experiences with our brethren who are here at today's conference," said Borja. "This is what it's all about — dialoguing and interacting with one another, getting advice and input ... the whole nine yards."

Lt. Gen. Kevin T. Campbell, commanding general, SMDC/ARSTRAT, spoke to the group about the importance of their mission. He remarked about their great courage and enthusiasm and how they know there is no giving up on the battlefield.

"We have these detachments spread around the world operating 24/7 – whether it's providing communications or imagery or a special space capability, which we have within our combat formations – these things are ongoing all the time, so there is no stopping or shutting down for the weekend," said Campbell. "I'm impressed each time I go out there to see the professionalism, leadership and enthusiasm amongst your Soldiers doing what they have to do.

"I can say after a year and three months in this business, not once have we failed a COCOM [combatant command] or an Army Unit in providing a service we said we were going to provide," Campbell said. "A lot of that is about you in this room. It's about you leading the troops, making sure they are trained and ready, day in and day out. I commend you for what you do every day, and your mission is every day, 24/7."

Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth O. Preston spoke to the group about the big picture of what is going on in the Army. He also focused on the current pace of deployment that the Army is currently under and what the future holds as it's tied to predictability and stability for Soldiers and their Families and also strategic messages about telling the Army story.

Other sessions on day one included an overview briefing on the Defense Integrated Military Human Resources System (DIHMRS) by MSG Marlin Simms; a research, development and acquisition overview brief by Michael C. Schexnayder, deputy to the commander for RDA; and a Future Warfare Center brief by Terry Nelson, SMDC/ARSTRAT Battle Lab. Day two sessions kicked off with a war fighter overview brief by CSM Thomas R. Capel, 82nd Airborne Division, who flew to Vandenberg from Afghanistan to share his experiences from the combat zone.

Day two also included briefings from SGM Thomas S. Gills and SGM Arlita Crawford from the Human Resources Command who discussed NCO and enlisted promotions; Ms. Lorese Dudley, SMDC/ ARSTRAT Safety Office provided a safety overview briefing; and Col. Kendal Cunningham, SMDC/ARSTRAT G-3, discussed command priorities and objectives for fiscal years 2008-2009.

The second day concluded with a former SMDC/ARSTRAT Command Sergeants Major discussion panel with SGM. Randall Williams as the moderator. Former SMDC/ARSTRAT CSM Wilbur V. Adams (April 2000-March 2003) and William O.

“Bill” Morgan (February 1996- June 1997) provided opening remarks followed by questions from the NCOs in attendance.

On the final day of the conference, the senior NCOs split into two groups to go on a staff ride and tour at the Satellite Development Plant in El Segundo, Calif. SMDC/ARSTRAT historians used the two-hour bus trip to El Segundo to tell the story of the Army’s part in space exploitation with emphasis on Redstone Arsenal’s critical role in the earliest satellite launches in 1957. At the Boeing Satellite plant SMDC/ARSTRAT Soldiers received briefings on current Boeing satellite technology developments and were able to see up-close how this unique facility operates and Wideband Global SATCOM (WGS) satellites in production. These same satellites will be controlled and operated by SMDC/ARSTRAT Soldiers in the near future.

An after action review (AAR) questionnaire completed by attendees indicated that the conference was an effective tool for the professional development of the command’s NCOs. As stated by Sgt. Maj. Randal Williams of the SMDC/ARSTRAT G-3 in the analysis of the AAR comments:

The overall planning, resourcing and execution of the training conference was a tremendous success. Feedback from the after action reviews were candid and very constructive. The SMDC/ARSTRAT coordinating and special staff, along with input from the 1st Space Brigade and the 100th MD Brigade staff, under the guidance and direction of the SMDC/ARSTRAT CSM have a formidable framework for increased success for next year’s training conference, as well as into the future.



1st Sgt. John H. Bruce, G-3 SMDC/ARSTRAT, Colorado Springs, Colo. discusses the issue of uniform changes with SMA Preston.



During a break at the Senior Enlisted Leaders Training Conference at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth O. Preston (center), SMDC/ARSTRAT Command Sgt. Maj. Ralph C. Borja (left) and 1st Sgt. Kenneth L. Mackey Jr., (right) from the U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll discuss an article in the *Army Times* about the 20- year-rule regarding retirement. The article said service members in the future may have to wait until age 55 before re-cooping the benefits of their 20 years of service. SMA Preston said there had been talk over the years to do that but any changes in the retirement system will have to be passed through Congress and if such a change passes, not everyone will be affected; some service members will be grandfathered.



U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command's Command Sgt. Major Ralph C. Borja (left) meets with two former SMDC/ARSTRAT command sergeants major, Wilbur V. Adams (center) and William O. Morgan (right) during the Senior Enlisted Leaders Training Conference March 23-27 at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif.