

Lunch with *The* Command Sergeant Major of the Army Reserve

By Sgt. First Class Darren Patterson—Public Affairs Supervisor

When Command Sgt. Major Alex Ray Lackey, Command Sergeant Major for the U.S. Army Reserve, left his Old Kentucky Home in Bowling Green more than two years ago to accept the top non-commissioned officer's position, he made it clear the door to his new office would always be open. "If you ever get a chance to visit me at the Pentagon, just give me a call," I had remembered him saying to the soldiers of the 100th Division where he had been Command Sergeant Major before moving to D.C. Having worked alongside Sgt. Major Lackey at Division Headquarters in Louisville, I decided to accept the offer during a recent visit to the Pentagon.

Rather than just dropping in, I e-mailed the Sergeant Major and received a response the same day. "Sure," the response read, "I have to testify in Congress, but I am sure I can find time to meet with you." Since the Army Reserve's top enlisted man receives more than 100 e-mails a day, I was quite impressed that I received such a quick answer. I later found out that he insists on answering each message personally.

A couple of days later we scheduled lunch.

I arrived in D.C. during the month of February with a fellow Army Reservists on AT (Annual Training). After driving around a maze of concrete road barriers, my colleague and I found a place to park. While briskly walking to the entrance of the wounded Pentagon building, we noticed the Military Police were "locked and loaded" covering various avenues of approach on the highways surrounding the huge five-sided building.

Once inside the building, the security guards ensured we were thoroughly screened and given proper temporary passes. The guards unexpectedly briefed us on the importance of the timely submission of NCOER's and OER's. A real value-added approach to security, I thought.

After negotiating several corridors, we discovered why the building has been referred to as the "Puzzle Palace". The Pentagon is full of life. Everyone was moving quickly, with determined, mission-focused images chiseled on their faces. Finally, we found the Office of the Chief, Army Reserve and greeted the Sergeant Major.

The Sergeant Major immediately gave me a block of instruction on the "Pentagon Walk," which is somewhere between quick-time and double-time march. As we walked briskly toward the Pentagon Dining Room, Lackey described the added demands on his schedule since September 11th.

"Since 9-11, I have constantly traveled around the world visiting with deployed members of the Army Reserve," he said. "I am the master of my own schedule, but often feel I have to be everywhere at the same time."

As we sat down to eat a quick lunch, I had the opportunity to ask Lackey a few questions regarding the position he holds, and the demands on his time.

What are the demands of being the Army Reserve's Top Non-Commissioned Soldier?

He described the job as rewarding and enjoyable, but often a challenge when it comes to protocol. "I am an 'old country boy' from Kentucky, and it has been a challenge getting accustomed to the protocol surrounding the many events I attend. It has been a personal struggle, but I have become more comfortable in the past year."

As you travel around the world, what is on the minds of our soldiers?

"Afghanistan and Training. Many soldiers tell me they want to go to Afghanistan," he continued. "They are all highly motivated and moral is high", explained Lackey. Other concerns Lackey has heard involve the amount of annual training days needed to accomplish a specific mission. "In the field, more days are always needed to train to the highest standard," he added.

How did Sept. 11th affect the future of the Army Reserve?

"Perhaps the Army Reserve will be allowed more service support and combat support units. More military police, chemical corps, special operations force and civil affairs appear to be needed," he said.

"For leaders, focus on what your soldiers need, not want", "For all members of the Army Reserve, prepare your self mentally, physically, and financially for the missions you may be asked to perform", "Don't forget, family members, fellow employees and employers should be prepared, also"



Command Sgt. Maj. Lackey answers all his own e-mail

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