THE SGM-A FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM ROLE IN PREPARING THE ARMY OF 2040

By Sergeant Major Kathryn J. DeUnger

As we prepare the Army of 2040 for future large-scale operations, we should look to a more educated senior enlisted leader who is technically and tactically proficient but is also capable of strategic-level thinking and planning in high-tempo joint operations. The Sergeants Major Academy (SGM-A) mission is to "provide the Army with agile, adaptive senior enlisted leaders of character, competence, and commitment to be effective leaders. These leaders, grounded in Army and joint doctrine, exploit opportunities by leveraging and applying Army resources."[1] The purpose is to "prepare master sergeants and sergeants major to elevate from a tactical level of thinking to an operational and strategic perspective, thus preparing them for leadership positions in organizations executing unified land operations. What [SGM-A graduates] learn prepares them for leadership positions in joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational organizations (JIIM) as well as battalion, brigade, and division through echelons-above-corps (EAC) staff sergeants major command levels."[2]

But who will educate these future senior enlisted leaders? If we want the best-educated future sergeants major and command sergeants major possible to lead the Army of 2040, then they should be educated by the most talented and experienced current sergeants major. The Noncommissioned Officer Leadership Center of Excellence (NCOLCoE), Fort Bliss, Texas/SGM-A Fellowship Program targets sergeants major who have the potential and a strong desire to educate future sergeants major. The NCOLCoE/SGM-A Fellowship Program is a merit-based scholarship program in which select sergeants major compete for up to 30 scholarships per year to pursue either a master's degree in adult education through Pennsylvania State University or a master's degree in instructional design, development, and evaluation from Syracuse University, New York. Both degree programs consist of a 30-semester-hour online curriculum focusing on the knowledge and skills required to develop professionals who work with adult learners in the academic disciplines of distance and continuing education; program planning, research, and evaluation of adult learners; and course design and development.

In addition to the master's degree coursework, the NCOLCoE Faculty and Staff Development Office instructs the fellows in the following courses: Common Faculty Development–Instructor Course, Common Faculty Development–Developer Course, Project Athena Coaching Workshop, and Digital Learning Instructor Course. These courses provide future SGM-A educators with an opportunity to become enhanced, adaptive leaders and world-class faculty members with the capability to educate others to win in a complex world.

Each year, the U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Fort Knox, Kentucky, releases a military personnel message detailing the criteria and eligibility for consideration for the SGM-A Fellowship Program as well as deadlines for submission. To support this process, the National Guard Bureau conducts screening interviews (either in person or via video teleconference) for applicants with approved packets. The NCOLCoE/SGM-A Fellowship Program Selection Panel then convenes at Fort Bliss to identify the best-qualified candidates for the final selection of fellows. Selection results are released to the field once the commandant of the NCOLCoE/SGM-A Fellowship Program, and Human Resources Command approve them.

The intent of the SGM-A Fellowship Program is to provide our most talented and motivated sergeants major with the level of knowledge (in conjunction with their vast experience) required to educate our future leaders to meet the Army's objective of developing agile, adaptive, and innovative leaders who thrive in conditions of uncertainty and chaos. The Fellowship Program is something that must be continued in order to most effectively prepare our sergeants major to educate our future enlisted leaders. To achieve this goal, we must have a group of quality candidates from which to select each year.

The success of the Army of 2040 is heavily reliant on our future enlisted leaders. The time to create a positive culture and narrative about the SGM-A Fellowship Program is now. The level of education, knowledge, experience, and expertise we invest in this program is commensurate with the level we can expect in return from the master sergeants and sergeants major who successfully complete the program.

Endnote:

[1]"Sergeants Major Academy (SGM-A)," *NCO Worldwide*, <https://www.ncoworldwide.army.mil/Academics/Sergeants-Major-Academy/>, accessed on 23 May 2023.

[2]Ibid.

Sergeant Major DeUnger is the assistant chief of education for the SGM-A. She holds a master's degree in education in lifelong learning and adult education from Pennsylvania State University. She is a graduate of SGM-A Class 67.