

Understand the joint force, says CJCS

By Jim Garamone, / Published December 02, 2016

WASHINGTON --

Military members must not lose the unique skills, culture and traditions of their individual services, but they will need to understand the joint force at lower ranks, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said here yesterday.



Marine Corps Gen. Joe Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, second from left, makes a point during a wide-ranging discussion with the Defense Senior Enlisted Leadership Council at the Pentagon, Dec. 1, 2016. To the left of the general is Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey, to the right is Army Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell, the senior enlisted advisor to the chairman, and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Steven S. Giordano. The council consists of service and combatant command senior enlisted advisors. DoD photo by Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominique A. Pineiro

In a wide-ranging discussion with the Defense Senior Enlisted Leadership Council at the Pentagon, Marine Corps Gen. Joe Dunford said troops working in the operational force are already exposed to jointness.

"I haven't been anywhere in the last 15 years -- anywhere -- where I haven't been on a joint team," Dunford told the council, which is made up of the most senior NCOs in DoD, and chaired by Army Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell, the senior enlisted advisor to the chairman.

Joint Force World

Dunford said more junior noncommissioned officers are working with a joint force world already. They need to be able to speak that joint “language” to employ joint capabilities. They also need to understand how to integrate service capabilities at the tactical level. These will be the keys to mission accomplishment, he said.

The senior enlisted leadership agrees with the chairman. Troxell noted that the service handbook stresses the importance of the individual services to the joint warfighting environment. “They have to be proud to be soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen,” Troxell said. “But they also need the training and experience and leadership to understand what the joint force brings to the fight and how to employ it.

“It is critical to expose them to operating in the joint environment as early as possible,” Troxell said. “And we think that is around the buck sergeant/petty officer 2nd class level.”

In Afghanistan and Iraq, many junior NCOs found themselves working in a joint, intergovernmental and international world. In western Iraq during the surge, soldiers in Hit were under command of a Marine general, received indirect-fire support from a Marine unit, and got close-air support from Marine or Air Force or Army assets. Navy electronic warfare specialists aided them in anti-improvised explosive device efforts.

International Partners

American troops are increasingly working with international partners. The the counter-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant coalition has 39 nations contributing to the effort against the terror group. U.S. trainers in Erbil, Iraq, find themselves working alongside Italian, German, British, Hungarian, and Spanish troops.

“The entire force is increasingly operating in the joint environment and an intergovernmental environment,” Dunford said.

Today, the chairman noted, Army and Marine Corps sergeants or Air Force staff sergeants in pay grade E-5, known as “buck” sergeants, or Navy or Coast Guard petty officers of equivalent rank, often have the same responsibility he had when he was a lieutenant.

Dunford highlighted operations in U.S. Africa Command as a case in point. He said that on any given day, there are about 20 deployments by U.S. teams to Africa Command. In many cases, the senior person on the team is an E-6 or E-7. The team may come from one service, but the recovery unit could be from another, and the medics from another, and the quick-reaction force may come from still a different service.

These young men and women need to understand how to fit all these capabilities together to further the mission.

Values Individual Services’ Uniqueness

“Still, I am at a point in my life where I really value the uniqueness of the services and I don’t want to crush that with jointness. It won’t make us better,” Dunford said. “I think each one of the services brings a unique culture and unique skills to the fight. And the idea of jointness is integrating those capabilities to create an effect, not creating one organization that looks the same and acts the same.”

Service members don't reenlist in the joint force, the general said. They reenlist in the Army or Navy or Air Force or Marine Corps or Coast Guard, he added.

"We need our noncommissioned officers -- early on in their military life -- to thrive in the joint operating environment," Dunford said. "It's about warfighting. It's about creating effects on the battlefield."

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