



United Nations Command
Combined Forces Command
United States Forces Korea

BACKBONE UNIVERSITY 2025

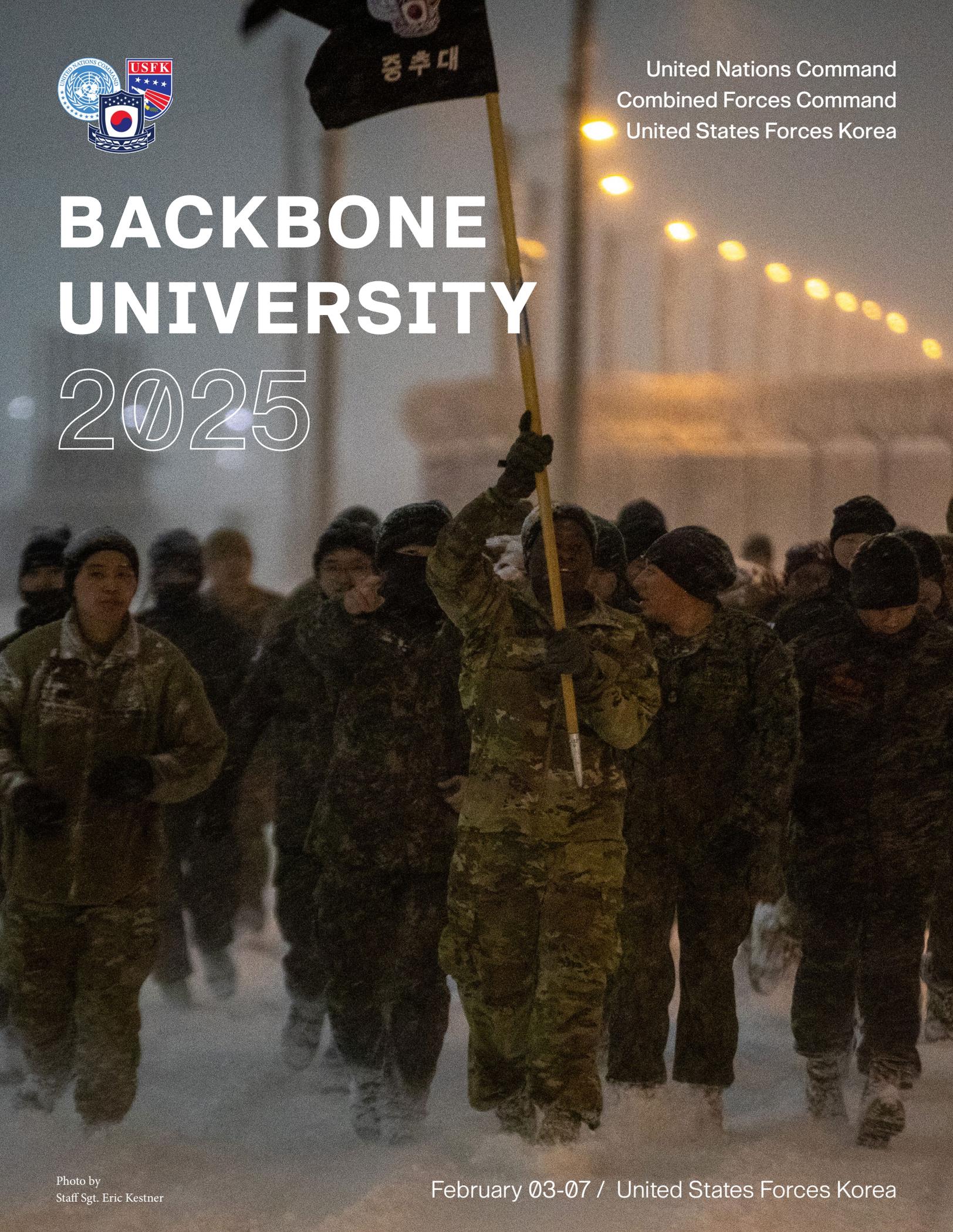


Photo by
Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner

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CONTENTS

FEBRUARY 2025
BACKBONE UNIVERSITY 2025

SUPERVISE

INTEGRATE

COORDINATE

2 BBU Executive Summary

89 NCOs enter.
One team leaves.

3 Main Story

Backbone University alumni share their experiences and takeaways from the course.

5 Senior Leader Engagements

Key leaders from across the Korean Peninsula share their wisdom and experience.

7 Physical Readiness Training

Challenging limits every morning. Every day.

9 Build Adaptive Teams

We go together.
We grow together.

11 HMMWV Egress Assistance Trainer

Rollover! Rollover! Rollover!

13 Medical Simulation Training Center

Casualty Care Under Fire

15 Combat Water Survival Test

Survive in any environment.

17 15 Secrets of Leadership

Number 14 will surprise you...

18 Closing Remarks

CSM Love shares his insight on Backbone University.

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Gen. Xavier T. Brunson, Commanding General of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and United Forces Korea takes a group photo with the 89 E7 students of Backbone University and the support staff that made this event possible, February 6, at the Vandal Training Complex on Camp Humphreys. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo)

BACKBONE UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 89 NCOs Enter. One Combined Team Leaves

Joint operations and international cooperation are an integral part of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The Noncommissioned Officer corps plays a crucial role in this equation, as it serves as the critical bridge between the highest levels of command and the frontline forces. With their unique combination of leadership skills, technical expertise, and hands-on experience, NCOs are essential in facilitating joint operations and executing military missions. From leading small units to bridging the

gap between officers and enlisted personnel, their influence on mission success cannot be overstated.

To that end, United States Forces Korea hosts Backbone University, a week-long developmental experience aimed at bringing together a multinational force of U.S., host nation, and partner nation NCOs from different backgrounds, services and walks of life with the goal of molding them into a combined team, capable of using their experience and unity of effort to tackle any obstacle, rout any adversary, and ultimately win on any battlefield.

During this week, participants learned to work across and through cultural and communication barriers to conquer physical challenges, diversify their operational skillsets, and broaden their understanding of an NCO's position in a joint command environment.

The friendships and memories formed here will not only strengthen the ROK-U.S. alliance, but will bolster combined readiness and lethality, ensuring the safety of our services and our countries.



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Jack Love, command senior enlisted leader for United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea, interacts with service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea during the opening brief kicking off Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 3, 2024. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

BACKBONE UNIVERSITY 2025

Forging Strong Bonds, Strengthening the Alliance

A joint force of 89 Republic of Korea and U.S. senior Noncommissioned Officers came together from across the Korean Peninsula to attend the 2025 iteration of Backbone University, February 3-7, on Camp Humphreys.

Backbone University is a one-week developmental course focused on providing NCOs of the E-7 pay-grade with an understanding of the joint operations environment while instilling valuable lessons on leadership that they can take with them to

improve their organizations and the Military as a whole.

“This week was impressive. The strength of the alliance and the future of our services and countries were in safe and capable hands with these outstanding senior NCOs and chief petty officers leading in our formations,” said Sgt. Maj. Joseph Gaskin, Operations Sergeant Major of United States Forces Korea and Backbone University Director. “For the first time, participants worked together on capstone projects which focused on learning from examples of Republic

of Korea and U.S. Medal of Honor recipients from the Korean War. To see all these senior noncommissioned officers and chief petty officers from the joint and combined multinational force come together this week, overcome language barriers, work together in a mission command centric environment, intent based leadership, solve problems, face a very restrictive timeline, it was very inspiring to me.”

The curriculum allowed participants to engage with senior leaders such as Gen. Xavier T. Brunson, Maj. Gen. William

H. Taylor, and Command Sgt. Maj. Jack H. Love, who were more than keen to share their insights and experiences with leadership, an NCOs purpose and function in a senior commander’s staff, and core lessons they learned along their journey.

“Some of the things that really stuck with me were the 15 Secrets of Leadership from Command Sgt. Maj. Love. I’m going to take those lessons back and give it to my junior leaders and senior leaders so we can get moving on the right direction,” said Sgt. 1st. Class Daltyn Phelps, battery operations NCO, 210th Field Artillery Brigade. “One of the 15 secrets to leadership was inspect what you expect, and that really struck a chord with me coming from the airborne community. A lot of things get overlooked, like hands in pockets, things not being buttoned down or not having the right tools on you. That really struck me because I feel like that’s one thing that we can improve on as senior NCOs.”

Participants started and ended each training day with teambuilding focused events such as: PT sessions led by Marine Forces Korea, Special Operations Command Korea, and Combined Forces Command; dodgeball tournaments and traditional Korean field day events such as three legged races; and the ‘Culminator’, which saw platoons fight through a six-mile-long slog of ice and snow all the while tackling obstacles, and carrying supplies such as water cans and simulated casualties.

“Being in this training is beneficial for me personally, because I have never really worked with different branches before,” said Chief Petty Officer Voss, logistics specialist, Command Navy Forces Korea. “I’m grateful for this

**“WE DON’T FIGHT
YESTERDAY’S
CONFLICT, BUT WE
DO LEARN FROM IT.”**

Command Sgt. Maj. Jack Love
UNC/CFC/USFK Senior Enlisted Advisor

opportunity to work with Army, Marines, Air Force, and also ROK forces, because we have exercises where we have to brainstorm and learn about how the other branches approach problems, and we come up with different solutions that we wouldn’t normally think of, and as a group we produce better products.”

“We had many branches from Korea, the U.S., and even New Zealand working together,” said Master Sgt. Joo-Won Hong, Republic of Korea Air Force, 19th Fighter Wing. “There were a lot of opportunities for me to integrate with our alliance partners and learn different ways to tackle the challenges.”

Ultimately, Backbone University is about building strong, joint teams, reaffirming the strength of the ROK-U.S. alliance, and preparing a stronger NCO Corps capable of dominating the battlefield.

“You know, as you watch these NCOs come together, overcome all the barriers of communication, and draw upon lessons from the past to drive us into the future, the way they engage with the senior mentors who came to

visit each day, the tough questions that they proposed, all of them really inspired me,” said Gaskin.

“This easily fits the purpose of our core of NCOs and chief petty officers; we’re fighting and war winning. The grit these NCOs displayed this week tells me that our alliance is strong, and our future is solid. We’re in capable hands with each one of these people who are leading our formations.”



“The best leaders you’ll encounter are those that don’t keep good lessons to themselves; share your lessons, communicate, and don’t take yourself too seriously.”

*Gen. Xavier T. Brunson
Commanding General, UNC/CFC/USFK*

Above: Gen. Xavier T. Brunson, Commanding General UNC,CFC, USFK, shares his experience during Backbone University 2025, at the Vandal Training Complex February 6, on Camp Humphreys (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

Below: Maj. Gen. William Taylor, Director of Operations for United States Forces Korea, United Nations Command, and Combined Forces Command, awards a coin to a participant during Backbone University 2025, February 4, at the Vandal Training Complex on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo, USFK Public Affairs)



“Commitment is stronger than compliance, you’ve got to know your Soldiers.”

*Command Sgt. Maj. Jack H. Love
Command Sergeant Major, UNC/CFC/USFK*

Senior Leader Engagements

Top: Command Sgt. Maj. Jack H. Love, Command Sergeant Major of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea, and Command Sgt. Maj. Hyuk-II Kwon, ROK CFC Command Sergeant Major, stand with the honor graduates of Backbone University 2025 at the Noncommissioned Officer Academy on Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 6, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

Middle: U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Jack Love, command senior enlisted leader for United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea provides insight on the 15 Secrets of Leadership during a discussion for the U.S. and Republic of Korea service members during United States Forces Korea’s Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

Bottom: Eighth Army senior enlisted advisor, Command Sgt. Maj. Robin Bolmer, addresses and interacts with service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea during Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 6, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)



“Come to work every day knowing that your organization not only depends on you, but is excited to have you leading in their formations.”

*Maj. Gen. William H. Taylor
Operations Director, UNC/CFC/USFK*



Bottom Left: Service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea smile while doing a plank exercise at physical training during Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 4, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

Top Left: A U.S. Soldier performs fireman carry squats using his partner, a U.S. Airmen, for weight during a physical training session led by Marine Forces Korea, during Backbone University 2025, February 3, at the Noncommissioned Officer Academy on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo, USFK Public Affairs)

Top Right: Service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea conduct a kettlebell run at physical training during Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 4, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

Middle: A U.S. Airmen performs a pullup during a physical fitness competition during Backbone University 2025, February 4, at Balboni Field on Camp Humphreys. The competition, part of Backbone University 2025, served to bring E7s from the Republic of Korea and U.S. Militaries closer together so they can better function as a joint-service and multinational squad. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo, USFK Public Affairs)

Bottom: A U.S. Airmen crawls under a human bridge of his squad mates during a physical fitness competition led by Marine Forces Korea, during Backbone University 2025, February 3, at the Noncommissioned Officers Academy on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)



Physical Readiness Training

Left: A U.S. Marine performs pullups during a morning PT event during United States Forces Korea's Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 4, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

Top Right: U.S. and Republic of Korea service members participate in a morning PT event during United States Forces Korea's Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 4, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner, Eighth Army Public Affairs)



Build Adaptive Teams

Top Left - A Republic of Korea and a U.S. Soldier help their comrade scale a shipping container during the Culminator physical training event during Backbone University, Feb. 5, 2025 on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo)

Top Right-Service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea support one another during a three legged race, part of a team building competition for, Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 4, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar)

Middle- Service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea play dodgeball for a team building event during Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar)

Bottom- Service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea firemen's carry each other at physical training during Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar)



**“WINNING MATTERS;
IN FACT, IT’S THE
ONLY OPTION.”**

Command Sgt. Maj. Jack Love
UNC/CFC/USFK Senior Enlisted Advisor



Top: Rival squads race to grab dodgeballs during a dodgeball tournament, for Backbone University 2025, at Collier Fitness Center on Camp Humphreys, Feb. 5 (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo).

Middle: Backbone University participants brave a harsh snow storm while carrying a litter during the Culminator PT event, Feb. 7, on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

Bottom: Service members from the U.S., Republic of Korea and New Zealand attempt to build a tower of spaghetti noodles as part of a personality assessment during day one of Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 3, 2024. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

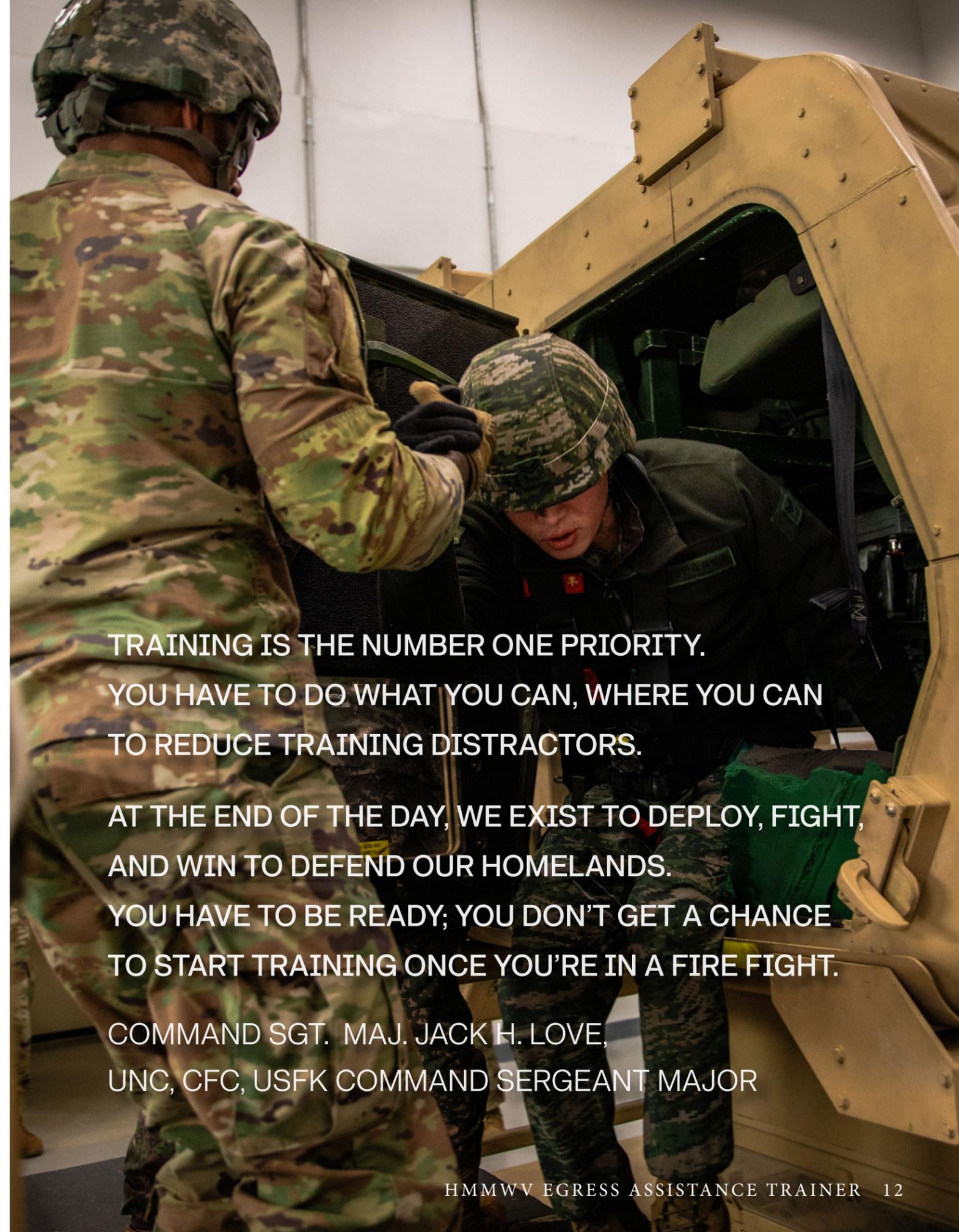


HMMWV Egress Assistance Trainer

Above: U.S. and Republic of Korea service members from the Red Platoon participate in a HMMWV Egress Assistance Training exercise during United States Forces Korea's Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 4, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner, Eighth Army Public Affairs)

Right: U.S. and Republic of Korea service members from the Red Platoon participate in a HMMWV Egress Assistance Training exercise during United States Forces Korea's Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 4, 2025. Enlisted leaders from the Republic of Korea and United States joined together to train, validate and elevate the combined lethality and capability of the ROK-US alliance by strengthening and reinforcing the service members' 10-Level tasks and battle drills while challenging their physical abilities and resilience. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner)

Below: A squad of Republic of Korea and U.S. service members learn how to evacuate a rolled-over vehicle during HMMWV Egress Assistance Training during Backbone University 2025, February 6, at the Vandal Training Complex on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo, USFK Public Affairs)



TRAINING IS THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY.

YOU HAVE TO DO WHAT YOU CAN, WHERE YOU CAN
TO REDUCE TRAINING DISTRACTORS.

AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE EXIST TO DEPLOY, FIGHT,
AND WIN TO DEFEND OUR HOMELANDS.

YOU HAVE TO BE READY; YOU DON'T GET A CHANCE
TO START TRAINING ONCE YOU'RE IN A FIRE FIGHT.

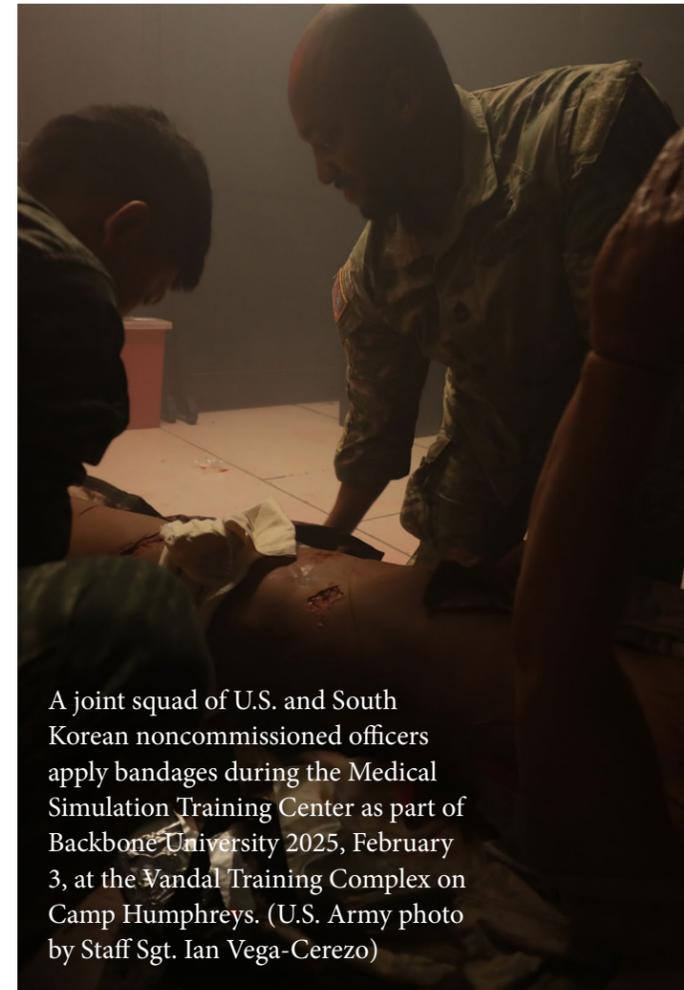
COMMAND SGT. MAJ. JACK H. LOVE,
UNC, CFC, USFK COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR



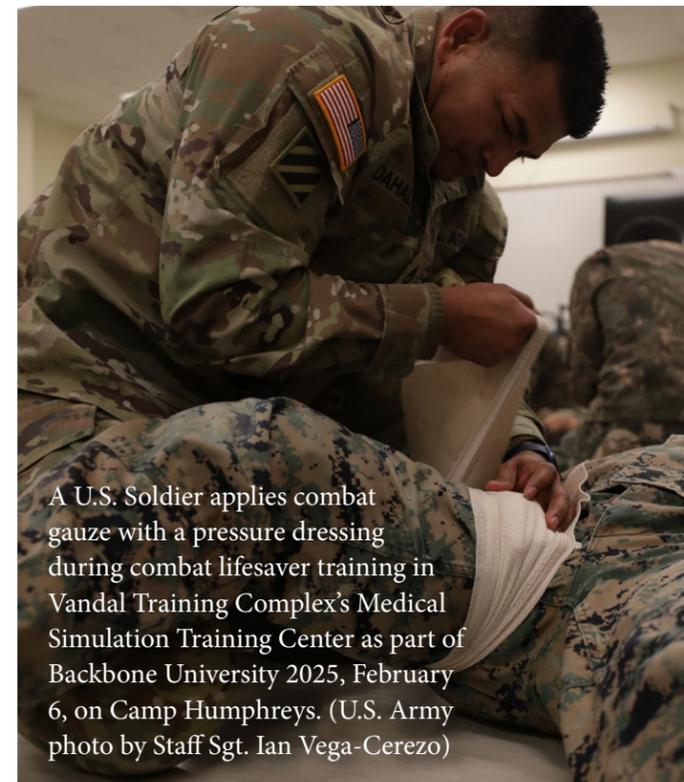
Medical Simulation Training Center

Top : Service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea prepare to move a casualty onto a four-man litter during Medical simulation training for Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner)

Right: U.S. and Republic of Korea service members from the White Platoon assess a casualty in limited light conditions during Medical Simulation Training for United States Forces Korea's Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 4, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner)



A joint squad of U.S. and South Korean noncommissioned officers apply bandages during the Medical Simulation Training Center as part of Backbone University 2025, February 3, at the Vandal Training Complex on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo)



A U.S. Soldier applies combat gauze with a pressure dressing during combat lifesaver training in Vandal Training Complex's Medical Simulation Training Center as part of Backbone University 2025, February 6, on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo)



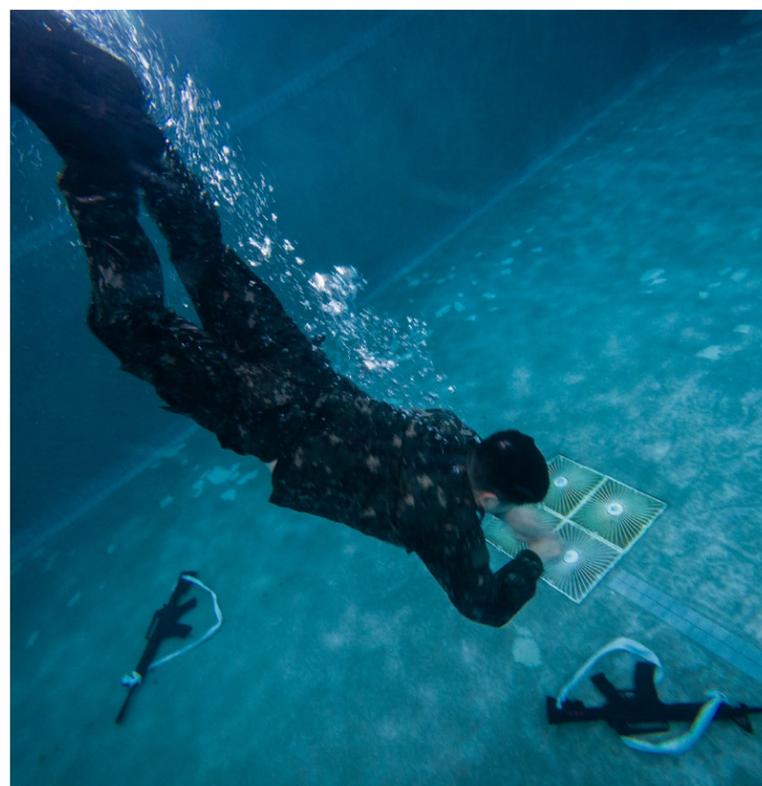
A joint squad of U.S. and South Korean noncommissioned officers Prepare to administer a tourniquette to a casualty during medical simulation training as part of Backbone University 2025, February 3, at the Vandal Training Complex on Camp Humphreys. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Vega-Cerezo)



Combat Water Survival Test

Above: A U.S. Soldier practices proper water breaking technique from a high platform during Combat Water Survival Training as part of United States Forces Korea's Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner)

Right: A Republic of Korea service members dives to retrieve an M-4 Carbine during Combat Water Survival Training, part of United States Forces Korea's Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner)



Top: A U.S. Space Force guardian conducts water survival training during Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar)

Middle: U.S. and Republic of Korea service members from the White Platoon participate in Water Survival Training during United States Forces Korea's Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Kestner)

Bottom: Service members from the U.S. and Republic of Korea conduct water survival training during Backbone University 2025 at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar)

15 SECRETS OF LEADERSHIP

BY: CSM JACK H. LOVE



1. GUARD YOUR INTEGRITY.

If you give it away, it's difficult to get back.

2. KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW AND THEN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

No one knows your true weaknesses better than you.

3. FOCUS ON YOUR SERVICE MEMBERS, NOT ON YOURSELF.

When they do something poorly, take all the blame; when they exceed the standard give them all the credit. It costs you nothing and gains you everything.

4. INSPECT WHAT YOU EXPECT.

You have to find time to inspect anything that is important to the command and ensure that the standard is upheld.

5. PHYSICAL TOUGHNESS.

Guard it. Protect it. Demand Excellence.

6. LIFELONG LEARNING.

Pursue it operationally, institutionally, and demand it of yourself.

7. BUILD TEAMS FOCUSED ON EXCELLING.

The minute you are proud of simply meeting the standard, you have failed. Strive to build a culture of excellence.

8. LITTLE THINGS.

Do routine things routinely and do them well.

9. TRAINING IS THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY.

You have to focus your training on the command's mission.

10. LEAD FROM THE FRONT.

Be in charge. Make Decisions. Remember to listen.

11. WHATEVER YOU ARE DOING TODAY IS WHAT'S IMPORTANT.

Be where your feet are.

12. TRUST.

Earned in drops. Lost in buckets.

13. ATTITUDE.

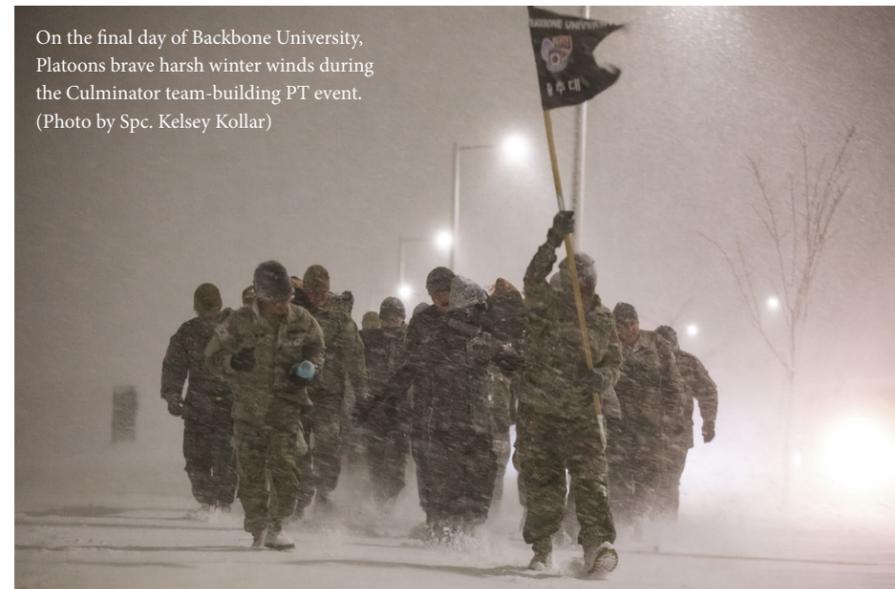
Be positive!

14. REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN.

Never lose your sense of humor.

15. ONLY YOU CAN FIGURE IT OUT.

The true secret to leadership is an answer only you can discover.



On the final day of Backbone University, Platoons brave harsh winter winds during the Culminator team-building PT event. (Photo by Spc. Kelsey Kollar)

Relecting on Backbone University 2025

By Command Sgt. Maj. Jack H. Love

89 Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Petty Officers (POs) arrived at Camp Humphreys, Korea to attend the 4th Annual Backbone University (BBU). All of them serving at the Platoon Sergeant/E7 level-from the ROK/US Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, Special Operations and Space Force, for a 5-day training exercise.

This collective group of NCOs dedicate themselves to the defense of our homelands. These NCOs encompass the values, ethics, and standards that guide military personnel in their conduct and behavior; they are leaders, trainers, coaches, and confidants who hold a unique position that bridges the gap between Commissioned Officers and enlisted personnel, playing a pivotal role in maintaining the tactical and operational efficiency, discipline, and morale of service members. NCOs ensure that service members are not just following orders but understand the mission, the Commander's intent, the why of the operation and the unique importance of their roles. In essence we explain why---what they

do matters. More importantly we hold them and ourselves accountable for accomplishing our mission.

As Senior NCOs we must reinforce the importance of our chosen profession and why the profession exists--whether as part of an all-volunteer force or one requiring compulsory service. BBU allowed us five days where Command Senior Enlisted Leaders (CSELs) spent 24/7 immersed with our BBUNCOs, we covered briefings on the Joint, Combined and Multinational force, daily rigorous physical training, medical simulation training, combat water survival, sharing experiences about combat, shared vulnerabilities, and discussed different leadership styles and approaches from each service.

My Ranger buddy, the UNC/CFC/USFK Commander, Gen. Xavier Brunson, spent over an hour talking to BBU NCOs about the importance of the ROK/US Alliance; the changing character and complexity of warfare, the importance of being experts at the basics; marksmanship, physical fitness, medical lifesaving skills and the power and importance of

“IT’S UP TO US AS NCOS TO RAISE THE BAR HIGH, AND VIGOROUSLY ENFORCE STANDARDS AND DISCIPLINE.”

PL/PSG relationships. They also received briefings from the ROK SEAC, UCJ3 Director of Operations, and the 8A CSM.

These NCOs are the future. Spending the week with them gave me tremendous pride; their professionalism, willingness to continue serving, their intelligence, humility and care for their fellow service members is unmatched; they all have the skill, will and teamwork needed to fight and win, in large scale combat operations, anywhere in the world.

For over 74 years, the Republic of Korea and the United States have worked shoulder-to-shoulder, along with our allies and partners to secure the defense of this Peninsula and to advance the values and ideals foundational to our way of life. That's only made possible by exceptional Servicemembers, like the NCOs who attended BBU. I hope each of them learned something about a different service, forged new friendships with peers, or learned different ideas on how to lead, both from each other, their facilitators, and the CSELs. Gen. Brunson and I are incredibly proud to serve alongside each of these phenomenal NCOs. The future of our military is in great hands moving forward, this I am sure of.

CSM Jack Love

Under One Flag,
Katchi Kapshida,
Fight Tonight.

UNDER ONE FLAG

하나의 깃발 아래



KATCHI KAPSHIDA

같이갑시다