Looking ahead with the new SMA

Raymond F. Chandler III takes the reins as the new sergeant major of the Army

STORY BY LINDA CRIPPEN

At a small, rather quiet ceremony that was standing-room-only in the Pentagon Auditorium on March 1, Raymond F. Chandler III was sworn in as the 14th sergeant major of the Army. Friends and family members filled up several rows of seats, and special guests included Secretary of the Army John McHugh; Undersecretary of the Army Joseph Westphal; Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, the vice chief of staff of the Army; Gen. Ann E. Dunwoody, commander of Army Materiel Command; and Holly Petraeus, wife of Gen. David Petraeus, commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan.

Photo by Linda Crippen

Then-commandant of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond F. Chandler III (left), presents a retirement gift to then-Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston in January. The gift is a knob for Preston's dump truck as he intends to return to his farm.
Photo by Sgt. Samuel J. Phillips

"I will obey my first order that the chief gave me this morning, which is to be brief," Chandler joked in his address to the crowd after Gen. George W. Casey Jr., chief of staff of the Army, administered the oath of office to the new SMA. "Gen. Casey, thank you very much for your faith in me, and I promise I will not let you down," Chandler said.

"We have the utmost confidence in Command Sgt. Maj. Chandler and look forward to having him join our leadership team," McHugh said. "He has the right qualities and credentials to assume this vitally important duty that Sgt. Maj. of the Army [Kenneth O.] Preston so skillfully and adeptly performed for seven years."

"Many of the great command sergeants major and sergeants major who serve around the Army today are products of Command Sgt. Maj. Chandler's leadership and development efforts," said Preston, Chandler's predecessor. "He brings a broad breadth of experience, and I have no doubt he will provide the strategic vision and professionalism long associated with this position."

For the last three years, Chandler, who joined the Army in 1981, has served at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. He served as the command sergeant major of the academy before being appointed as its 19th commandant, making history as the first enlisted commandant of the institution. Prior to that assignment, he was the command sergeant major at the U.S. Army Armor School at Fort Knox, Ky.

Casey said he chose Chandler because of his great wealth of experience and talent. "He knows the operational side, the installation side, the institutional side, and reserve component side. He's very, very well-prepared, and it's great to have someone with that depth and breadth of experience leading our NCO Corps. I know he will be a great help to the secretary and me as we go forward."

Acknowledging that several mentors and Soldiers with whom he had previously served were in attendance at the ceremony, Chandler said, "I am humbled. I am a product of your leadership. I am here because you had faith in me, counseled me, coached me and helped me to develop into being a professional."

Referring to the Army as a family, the new SMA emphasized that the entire community must look out for one another and wrap its hands around those Soldiers and families who bear the burden of these men in boots.

"As the Army's sergeant major, I will serve as a scout to conduct reconnaissance for the chief and provide you with information that you can turn into intelligence with the secretary to make informed decisions for our families and Soldiers, so that we can best serve our nation. I will do my best," Chandler vowed.

As the seniormost enlisted Soldier, the SMA typically travels extensively, averaging about 270 days of travel per year. His travels include observing training and speaking with Soldiers and family members throughout the Army. The SMA serves as an advisor to the chief of staff of the Army about all matters concerning enlisted Soldiers. According to protocol, the SMA is considered higher in precedence than three-star generals.

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The SMA also sits on several different boards and panels, and oversees other recurring events that take place throughout the year, for example, the Best Warrior Competition. He also provides congressional testimony periodically; Chandler's first took place at the end of March. He'll spend the first few weeks in office preparing for this single event, Pentagon officials said. And, the new SMA already made his first trip, speaking with the Precommand Course seminar at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., on March 4, where he was joined by Casey and their wives, Sheila Casey and Jeanne Chandler.

Noting that he has some big boots to fill, Chandler assumed the role of sergeant major of the Army following a 7-year tour of duty by Preston, the 13th SMA, whose retirement ceremony was just hours prior to Chandler's swearing in.

As Preston visited the Sergeants Major Academy often during his tenure as SMA, Chandler said he got to know the man from a professional and personal perspective. Furthermore, he's come to admire and enjoy working with him.

"He lives the Army values," Chandler said. "There isn't an Army value you can name that SMA Preston doesn't live every day. One of the biggest things is selfless service."

Pointing out that Preston was always on the road — meeting with Soldiers, families and personnel outside the Army, telling the Army story, bringing back information, helping make needed changes — Chandler said that Preston's service has been incredible.

"He's done that selflessly," Chandler said. "He's put the Army and Soldiers ahead of himself. I really didn't come to grasp that as much until the last year or so, when I started to think about how often he came to USASMA. He was here almost every month for at least a couple of days … always waking up in a strange bed, in a strange hotel, visiting quarters, moving from time zone to time zone. That's tough; it really is. You never see [Preston] flustered; you never see him short-tempered. He's an incredible person, and someone whom I aspire to be like one day."

NO TIME TO CELEBRATE

Chandler interviewed for the SMA position in November 2010, and after the interview process was complete, Casey called him with congratulations in February. But, the new SMA says there really isn't much time for celebration right now.

"I'm still kind of in shock a little bit, and I'm trying to work through all the

Retired Command Sgt. Maj. John Sparks (left), director of the Institute for Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, congratulates Chandler after he was sworn in as sergeant major of the Army on March 1 at the Pentagon.
Photo by Linda Crippen

things that need to be done in order to move my family and get settled. It's kind of an overwhelming feeling — anxious, nervous. It's an incredibly humbling thing to know that you're going to be able to serve Soldiers and families."

Stepping into the role of SMA with eyes wide open, Chandler said he's careful to not think that he needs to make immediate changes. He said he doesn't have an agenda and likens institutional change to that of changing the course of a battleship. Turning the direction of a ship takes time and effort; it's not immediate.

Chandler said he has no intentions of changing anything that Preston initiated. Foremost, he said he must understand two things before really beginning his work as SMA: "Number one, what the chief of staff of the Army wants me to do; and number two, what currently is being done. If I can understand those two things, then I can determine, if anything, what I need to change or just sustain the current momentum," he explained.

A couple of the initiatives that Preston was heavily involved with were leader development and education. Chandler is very familiar with both since they are crucial elements within the Sergeants Major Academy, the lead for all NCO education throughout the Army.

Leader development and education is "obviously something I've done at USASMA," he said. "I think, from an overall perspective, that will be something I continue with. It's a program that's developed and moving forward in the process. I want to see that continue to move forward."

The SMA takes direction from the Army chief of staff, and Chandler said he anticipated learning what Casey will want him to work on. The chief iterated to him a few things in the brief conversations they had after Chandler was named the next SMA: maintaining the combat edge, building resiliency and sustaining the force.

Casey, who has served as Army chief of staff since April 2007, is scheduled to retire this month. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, most recently the commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, was expected to be sworn in as Casey's successor on April 11. Chief of staff is the highest-ranking position in the Army and also is part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Chandler and Dempsey have a shared history; their working relationship began in 1997. In fact, Chandler said this would be his fourth time working with the general.

"My first experience with Gen. Dempsey was when he was a regimental commander in the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fort Hood, Texas. When he came on as the regimental commander, I was the regimental master gunner. We had a fairly close relationship."

Chandler also served with Dempsey during a deployment to Iraq with the 1st Cavalry Division. Dempsey "was the 1st Armored Division commanding general, and we were in a transition period there," Chandler said. "It was a two- or three-week process when his division was in charge, and we were subordinate to them. Then, when 1st Cavalry Division took charge, 1st Armored Division moved out

Gen. George W. Casey Jr., chief of staff of the Army, opens the ceremony for administering the oath of office to the new sergeant major of the Army on March 1. Seated in the front row are Chandler, his wife Jeanne and their family members.
Photo by Linda Crippen

Then-commandant of USASMA, Chandler addresses attendees at the 2009 Nominative Sergeants Major and Senior Enlisted Advisors Conference at Fort Bliss, Texas, about the redesign of the Warrior Leader Course. USASMA is the lead for all enlisted military education.
Photo by Sgt. Russel C. Schnaare

of the area, but we stayed in touch from time to time after that," he said. Of course, while at USASMA, Chandler also worked closely with TRADOC.

In fact, Dempsey played a role in recommending Chandler as the first noncommissioned officer commandant of USASMA. In a January 2010 interview with *The NCO Journal*, Dempsey and other TRADOC officials explained the importance of assigning a command sergeant major as commandant. In fact, the general said, doing so wasn't just a mere investment, it was a definitive statement to the Army that NCOs are responsible for NCO education.

"In my view, what we [did was] elevate the prestige and the sort of aura of USASMA," Dempsey said. "And, it's our intent in the future to bring about the sort of change in support of USASMA — that they are recognized, they are resourced. It's acknowledged that we have to make a commitment with this organization."

Chandler expressed gratitude about Dempsey's faith and confidence in him. "Obviously, I'm honored that he thinks of me that way, and I look forward to having an opportunity to serve with him again," Chandler said.

Knowing your commander and being able to anticipate his or her thoughts is integral to the NCO profession. Chandler said that from an NCO perspective, you've got to know what your commander's mind is, how he thinks, what his concerns are, his strengths and his weaknesses. And ultimately, it's about the relationship.

In fact, if you already know the person, there's no need for the "feeling-out process" in order to understand where they're coming from, he said. Explaining that he's a straightforward kind of guy, Chandler said he just needs to know what the task is and its purpose, and he can figure out how to get it done. At this level — not only as SMA but also for sergeants major in general — he said there are no worries about getting promoted. This autonomy allows senior NCOs to give candid feedback to their commanders.

The fact that Dempsey and Chandler have served together in the past gives them a professional rapport that puts them at an advantage, despite neither having served in the Pentagon before.

"There are ways that we have to [learn and] understand the environment in which we're going to operate. If there's one less distraction, or one less thing we're trying to understand — in this case, each other — then we'll be more effective and efficient," Chandler said.

Speaking of the Pentagon, the new SMA confessed that he's a bit nervous and anxious about going there. As it is the highest echelon in the Army, decisions are made there that affect every single Soldier.

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The Sergeants

1st

◀ **WILLIAM O. WOOLDRIDGE**, the first sergeant major of the Army, was sworn in on July 11, 1966, and served until his term ended in August 1968. This World War II and Vietnam War veteran infantryman was born in Shawnee, Okla., on Aug. 12, 1922.

2nd

◀ **GEORGE W. DUNAWAY**, the second sergeant major of the Army, was sworn in on Sept. 1, 1968, and served until his term ended in September 1970. This Special Forces WWII and Vietnam veteran was born in Richmond, Va., on July 24, 1922 and passed away Feb. 6, 2008.

3rd

▶ **SILAS L. COPELAND**, the third sergeant major of the Army, was sworn in on Oct. 1, 1970, and served until his term ended in June 1973. Originally a tanker, this WWII, Vietnam and Korean War veteran was born in Embryfield, Texas, on April 2, 1920, and died Dec. 4, 2001.

4th

◀ **LEON L. VAN AUTREVE**, the fourth sergeant major of the Army, was sworn in on July 1, 1973, and served until his term ended in June 1975. This WWII and Vietnam infantryman veteran was born in Eeklo, Belgium, on Jan. 29, 1920, and died March 14, 2002, in San Antonio.

5th

▶ **WILLIAM G. BAINBRIDGE**, the fifth Sergeant Major of the Army, was sworn in on July 1, 1975, and served until June 1979. This WWII and Vietnam infantryman veteran was born in Galesburg, Ill., on April 17, 1925, and died on Nov. 29, 2008.

6th

◀ **WILLIAM A. CONNELLY**, the sixth sergeant major of the Army, was sworn in on July 2, 1979, and served until his term ended in June 1983. This tanker is a Vietnam veteran and was born on June 2, 1931, in Monticello, Ga., where he currently resides.

7th

▶ **GLEN E. MORRELL** was the seventh sergeant major of the Army. He was sworn in on July 1, 1983, and served until July 1987. This Special Forces/Ranger Vietnam veteran was born in Wick, W.Va., on May 26, 1936. He currently resides in Cocoa Beach, Fla.

Major *of the* Army

8th

JULIUS "BILL" GATES, the eighth sergeant major of the Army was sworn in on July 1, 1987, and served until his term ended in June 1991. This Special Forces Vietnam veteran was born in North Carolina on June 14, 1941. He currently works as a liaison for the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La.

9th

RICHARD A. KIDD, the ninth sergeant major of the Army, was sworn in on July 2, 1991, and served until his term ended in June 1995. This tanker is a Vietnam veteran and was born in Morehead, Ky., on June 24, 1943.

10th

GENE C. MCKINNEY, the 10th sergeant major of the Army, was sworn in on July 1, 1995, and served until October 1997. He was born in Monticello, Fla., on Nov. 3, 1950.

11th

ROBERT E. HALL, the 11th sergeant major of the Army, was sworn in on Oct. 21, 1997, and served until June 2000. This air defense artilleryman is a Desert Storm veteran and was born in Gaffney, S.C., on May 31, 1947.

12th

JACK L. TILLEY was sworn in as the 12th sergeant major of the Army on June 23, 2000, and served until Jan. 15, 2004. Originally a tanker, this Vietnam veteran was born in Vancouver, Wash., on Dec. 3, 1948.

13th

KENNETH O. PRESTON was sworn in as the 13th sergeant major of the Army on January 15, 2004, and served until March 1, 2011, as the longest-serving SMA. This tanker is a Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran and was born on February 18, 1957, in Mount Savage, Md.

14th

RAYMOND F. CHANDLER III was sworn in as the 14th sergeant major of the Army on March 1, 2011. Before serving as the first enlisted commandant of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, this armored cavalry NCO had multiple deployments. Chandler was born in Whittier, Calif.

Chandler, then USASMA's commandant, speaks with then-Sgt. Maj. Terry Burton and his family before an awards ceremony at USASMA last June.
Photo by Sgt. Russel C. Schnaare

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"It's not an environment I'm comfortable with," he said. "Most people aren't comfortable outside of their comfort zone. It'll be all right, though. I won't spend much time in that building anyways."

FOR THE FUTURE

When asked where he sees himself or the status of things a year or two from now, Chandler said the Army can't overlook the challenges it is faced with.

"We've got an opportunity over the next couple of years to do some good things, to re-energize and focus on things we've lost sight of," Chandler said. "The reason we lost sight of them is because the Army has been so busy during a protracted period of time, and we really need to focus on those pertinent issues in order to accomplish them. Because of deployment cycles, those things that we do when we return home have had to be subordinate to preparing for the next rotation."

Beginning this October, he said, the Army will have some of its first units experiencing two years' dwell time before they deploy again. That extended time at home will allow Soldiers more opportunities for professional education, unit training, as well as much needed quality time with families. It will also allow the Army to implement some programs that have been put on the back burner because of time constraints.

Another issue close to Chandler's heart is leader development. "We need to re-focus, making sure that we are building the bench of leaders that we need for the next 20 years. That's really our investment," he said. "The Soldiers we assess today, we've got a plan to get them to be sergeants major. The development of those individuals has to come in not only operational assignments, but also institutional, education and self development. We've got to focus on their futures."

Training for full-spectrum operations is another focal point, as the new SMA explained that the force may be called upon to fight wildfires in the western U.S. or perhaps another major combat operation. Within that training, he said, the Army must incorporate building blocks to develop the agile, adaptive, critical, creative thinkers that NCOs should be.

Chandler said the Army also needs to focus on incorporating Comprehensive Soldier Fitness across the force and with families and the civilian workforce. "It's hugely important that we build on this thing we call resiliency in the overall fitness we want for Soldiers and families. You can only get so far with the time that you have available. Hence, if you have more time available, we can build more resiliency into the force."

The SMA said it's crucial that the Army deals with the root issues that stem from the long-term deployment cycle it's been in, for example, "suicides, Soldier-on-Soldier violence, discipline issues, etc.," he said. "Those are some of the things I hope to play an active part in within two years of becoming SMA. I hope to help the Army see itself — both good and bad — and really focus on taking care of each other and this institution so we can fight and win our nation's wars," Chandler said.

Chandler's three-year tenure at the Sergeants Major Academy will likely reverberate for some time. Indeed, he leaves some unfinished business that he confessed he would have liked to see through to conclusion. One is a large contract for Sergeants Major Course instructors. Academy officials have been working with TRADOC to get funding and budget approval from the Department of the Army.

The second loose end, he said, is the in-sourcing of USASMA contractor positions to Department of the Army civilian positions. Chandler explained that the conversion is part of the academy's overall reorganization.

"It's really the second in a three-step process to get the academy where it needs to be," he said. "We started off with reorganizing what we could with what we had.

We contracted some positions that we are now going to convert to DA civilian positions. And now, we need to start working on the funding for those other positions that we couldn't contract for."

The last thing Chandler would have liked to have seen come to fruition while at USASMA was the completion of the redesign for the Battle Staff NCO Course, which is currently being revamped.

"I'll keep an eye on those things as sergeant major of the Army," he said. "There are things at the academy level, TRADOC level and DA level. Obviously, I'll be an advocate for those things that come to the DA level. But, I don't want to run USASMA from the SMA office."

INFLUENTIAL MENTORS

Over the span of almost 30 years, one can imagine the number of significant leaders and mentors a Soldier might experience throughout his or her career, and Chandler confesses that he's had several.

He credits retired Command Sgt. Maj. John Sparks, the director of TRADOC's Institute for Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development, for helping him "become the person he is today."

Sparks was the command sergeant major of 1st Squadron, 3rd Armor Cavalry Regiment, when Chandler was a first sergeant. "I've known him since 1996. He's really has been a mentor and my best friend. He's served as a guide for me and epitomizes what it means to be a mentor in my personal and professional life."

Another important person in Chandler's past was Gen. Robert Williams, who was the commanding general at Fort Knox, Ky. When his boss left for another assignment, Williams put Chandler in charge of the Armor School.

"He told me, 'Ray, you're in charge. Just tell those folks down there what to do, and if you run into any problems, let me know.' I learned what it meant to really have the trust of a very senior officer to do what noncommissioned officers do best, which is to act," he said.

As Chandler's face grew serious, he took a long breath and let out a deep sigh while looking down at his wrist. "I wear this bracelet. It has five names. ... They're all Soldiers who were with me in 1-7th Cavalry who didn't come home. I put it on and take it off every day," he explained in hushed tones.

"For each of those names, I remember the exact moment we found out they had been killed. Each of them serves as a role model for me. They are part of who I am. I think about the sacrifices they made, the sacrifices their families made, and it serves as a guide to me to really understand what it means to be a Soldier."

And then there's Jeanne, the SMA's wife. "She is my personal hero," he said. "She didn't know anything at all about the Army before she married me. She had a wonderful career; she definitely didn't need to marry me, but she chose to.

"It's a hard life to be the spouse of a Soldier. A lot of people don't have any real idea. Soldiers get the accolades, the handshakes in airports. The spouse and children have to deal with mommy or daddy coming or going, the constant low-level anxiety when they're deployed. Something may happen, or there may be a knock at the door. That's a hell of a burden to carry around," he said somberly.

Chandler said his personal message to Soldiers out in the force is to be true to yourself. Your leadership style will naturally develop as you grow and learn more, but he emphasized to always be true to yourself.

He also stressed that being willing to listen more than wanting to be heard is crucial.

"Be open-minded … and care. People have a tremendous willingness for wanting their leaders to succeed. They want to see you do well. Let them help you do so."

Furthermore, Chandler said that having a confidant, someone with whom you can speak candidly, is a necessity.

"You need to be able to have a frank discussion with yourself and someone else whom you believe will be honest with you if you are running into a point where you might be compromising your values. You have to be able to talk openly and honestly. You may not have the best answer on your own, so find that person you can talk to, who can be an honest broker for you. Be true to yourself, and listen more than you speak."

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Chandler and his wife, Jeanne, speak at the Spouse Orientation Course last August. The course is held each year for spouses of the students who attend the 10-month Sergeants Major Course.
Photo by Sgt. Russel C. Schnaare