

# NCO Leadership in Iraq:

## *“We’ve still got work to do.”*

By Sgt. 1st Class Roger Dey  
Army News Service

Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph R. Allen, the United States Forces-Iraq command sergeant major, has seen just about everything during his five combat tours and 35 years as a Soldier.

During his time as a noncommissioned officer, he said the one thing that has remained a constant is the expectations Soldiers have of their NCOs.

“If you ask any Soldier out there, they’ll probably tell you they expect their noncommissioned officers to get them to the right place at the right time, with the right equipment to do whatever mission they’re given,” Allen said. “They expect noncommissioned officers, more than any other leader, to protect them from all the stuff that rolls downhill, to provide them with good leadership.”

During a recent trip to Joint Security Station Loyalty with Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, USF-I commanding general, Allen talked to the senior NCOs of the 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery, 1st Advise and Assist Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division. While Austin spoke with troops preparing for a mission, Allen pulled the first sergeants aside for a huddle.

Allen shared with them his certainty that everyone has something significant going on in their lives that might affect their performance. He encouraged them to bear that in mind as they deal with their subordinates.

“The bottom line is, when you think it’s hell that you’re going through, keep going, man, just keep going,” he said. “You only get in trouble when you stop. Keep going, talk to somebody, but keep going. Don’t stop, whatever you do.”

As the U.S. military mission in Iraq



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Roger Dey

Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph R. Allen, U.S. Forces-Iraq command sergeant major, stands with Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery during a recent visit to JSS Loyalty.

continues to move forward, Allen said his job is to make sure the troops are performing at their best and that Soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines understand that, although the mission has changed, Iraq can still be a dangerous place. It’s imperative that everyone stays committed and focused.

“We still partner with the Iraqi Security Forces, border patrols and the Iraqi police,” Allen said. “Yes, we have a new mission set ... but the fact of the matter is, any time a Soldier goes outside the gate, they’re in the same posture that they were at the height of this war. I mean full [per-

sonal protective equipment], ready to defend themselves and their fellow Soldiers each and every day.”

Allen is confident that, thanks to today’s leadership culture, Soldiers are up to the task. He now sees junior NCOs entrusted with life-or-death decisions on a daily basis.

“We empower them to use their own decision-making process to execute their mission. I see that a lot now,” he said.

According to Allen, a big part of the success in Iraq is due to the dedication and commitment of young service members and junior leaders.

And now, with the Iraqi Security Forces in the lead and U.S. forces advising, assisting and training, he said young leaders are still just as critical to the mission.

“We’ve come a long way, but we’ve still got work to do. Our continued success will, in large part, depend on the conduct and professionalism of our force,” he said. “I’m confident that our young men and women will keep doing the right thing and will stay focused and committed to the mission. Got to do it, that’s the job, and we need to work together to be effective.”

Without a doubt, Allen said he believes leaders want to do the right thing.

“We’ve got a great system, but sometimes you’ve got to tweak it. I’ll always make sure Soldiers are getting a fair shake and that leaders are looking out for the Soldier. I’ve done it all my life, and it’s all I know how to do.”

Allen said he recently caught a group of Soldiers off guard by telling them something they weren’t used to hearing from such a senior NCO.

“I work for you,” he told them. “If there’s something I need to do, you need to tell me.”