

A Chemical Corps First: Command Sergeant Major Selected To Serve at the Four-Star Level

By Ms. Anne Marek

Command Sergeant Major Patrick Z. Alston, former command senior enlisted leader of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and U.S. Strategic Command Center for Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction (SCC-WMD), was selected as the new command senior enlisted leader of the U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). Command Sergeant Major Alston is the first U.S. Army Chemical Corps command sergeant major to work for a four-star commander.

Serving at the four-star level “. . . was something that I never strived for and something I thought I’d never have the opportunity to do,” said Command Sergeant Major Alston. “It’s just unheard of for a Chemical guy to make it to the four-star level—much less at one of the 10 COCOMs [combatant commands].

COCOMs are historically combat arms guys. To be a non-combat arms guy and make it to a COCOM level—it is really, really a distinct privilege.”

According to Alston, the selection of a Chemical Corps Soldier for this post indicates how much the military has changed from the time of the Cold War when the U.S. adversaries were large, known, fixed countries. “Those days are gone; now we’re fighting terrorists,” he said. “You really don’t know who the enemy is. You don’t know where the enemy is coming from. I think selecting individuals that are not traditional command sergeants major does send a message to the world that the times are changing, our policies and procedures are changing, our engagements are changing, and that what the President has preached—that the greatest threat to our country is a terrorist with some type of weapon of mass destruction—lines up to this selection.”

Having served as the senior enlisted leader of DTRA/SCC-WMD since 2008, Command Sergeant Major Alston offers an enlisted perspective on operational issues and missions in the global effort to counter and eliminate



weapons of mass destruction. “Command Sergeant Major Alston’s selection for this position is a true reflection of his leadership ability, judgment, hard work, many contributions and ‘can do’ reputation,” said Mr. Ken Myers, director of DTRA/SCC-WMD. “No one has a background that is better suited for the USSTRATCOM position than Command Sergeant Major Alston.”

Only two enlisted positions—Sergeant Major of the Army and Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman—are senior to the position that Alston now holds at USSTRATCOM. According to Command Sergeant Major Alston, that thought is a bit overwhelming, “but you have to stay grounded. And you have to remember that it’s only by the grace of God that you were able to move to that level. He saw something in you to say, ‘You are ready for this,’ and then you have to use that in a positive aspect. You really have to use this opportunity to reach back and help others.”



Ms. Marek is a writer-editor with the Public Affairs Office, DTRA/SCC-WMD, Washington, D.C.