

Castle Ball: 412th Theater Engineer Command Warfighter Seminar

By Major Jesse H. Stalder

With a comedic style reminiscent of a Bob Hope USO tour, the 52d Army Chief of Engineers, Lieutenant General Robert L. Van Antwerp, delivered the keynote address during the annual Castle Ball at the Vicksburg, Mississippi, Convention Center on 5 June 2010. The ball, which consisted of Vicksburg engineer community members and 412th Theater Engineer Command Soldiers, was the culmination of the 412th's Warfighter Seminar that started on 2 June.

Van Antwerp used his keen sense of humor to highlight some of the significant events currently on the way in the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). For example, he talked about the Asian carp, a type of fish that engineers in Illinois are trying to keep from getting into the Great Lakes. "I am waiting for some chef to figure out how to cook this thing just right," Van Antwerp said. "It eats everything and starves the rest of the fish out."

He also talked about the 8, 213 individuals that USACE hired from the private sector at the end of 2009. "There was an incredible amount of talent out there, and we got a ton of it," Van Antwerp said. "We are going to hire 8,000 people this year, and we are on track to actually exceed that ... we have never hired on this scale in my lifetime."

He then talked of modifications currently being made to the Panama Canal that will change economies in the

world. A new lock system scheduled for completion in 2014 will have a major impact on the 928 deepwater ports in the United States, according to Van Antwerp. "That lock is 1,600 feet long and it is going to be about 120 feet wide," he said. "The current Panamax ship carries 4,600 containers . . . The Panamax ship of tomorrow going through the new lock system will carry 12,500 containers; it is that much bigger." In the future, ship designers will only design vessels that will fit the new Panama Canal lock system. The new Panamax ships must have a hull that is deeper by 5 feet, and all ports will be 53 feet deep, according to Van Antwerp, so that most U.S. ports will need to increase their present depths of 52 feet by 1 foot.

As he often does at the start of a presentation, Van Antwerp assigned an audience member to be his timekeeper and coached her on how she should tell him that his time was up. When the time had elapsed, she stood up and said, "Chief, thank you for your general remarks; you are generally out of time." 

Major Stalder is the deputy public affairs officer for the 412th Theater Engineer Command at Vicksburg, Mississippi, where he has been assigned for two years. He holds a bachelor's in education from Washington State University and a master's in educational leadership from City University, Bellevue, Washington.

Lieutenant General Robert L. Van Antwerp interacts with audience members during his keynote address at the Castle Ball at the Vicksburg Convention Center in Vicksburg, Mississippi.



Photo by Specialist Lisa Soule, Mobile Public Affairs Detachment