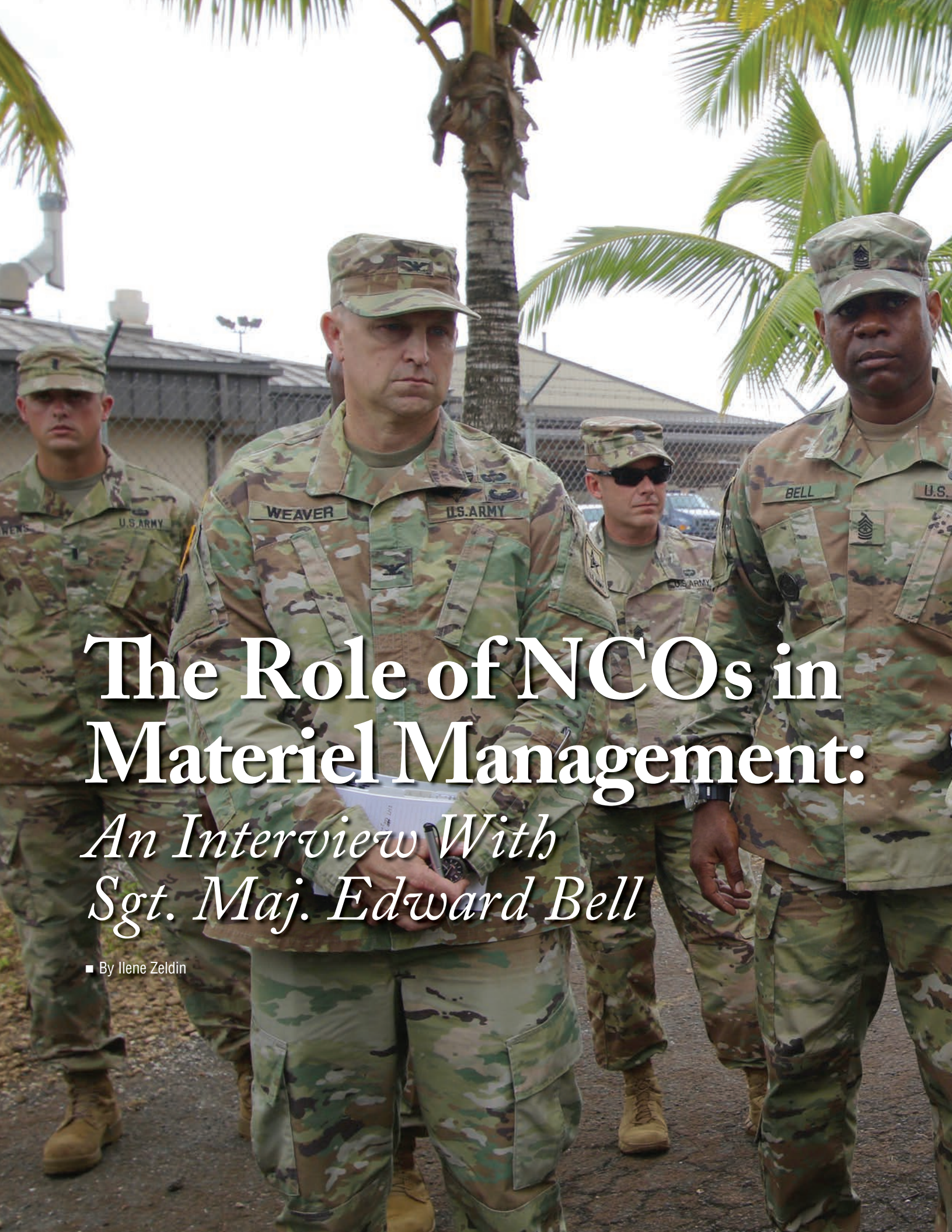


# The Role of NCOs in Materiel Management:

## *An Interview With Sgt. Maj. Edward Bell*

■ By Ilene Zeldin

*Lt. Gen. Aundre Piggee and Sgt. Maj. Edward Bell meet with Warrant Officer Patricia Washington during a visit to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, in Hawaii. (Photos by Sgt. Ian Ives)*

The sergeant major of the Army G-4 explains how noncommissioned officers are playing a larger role than ever in materiel management.

When it comes to materiel readiness, Sgt. Maj. Edward A. Bell, the sergeant major of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff G-4, knows that noncommissioned officers (NCOs) are the backbone of the Army's success. In this interview, he discusses the role of NCOs in materiel management and how it has changed as the Army has changed. He also explains how he brings input from Soldiers in the field to his teammates at the Pentagon to ensure that materiel management policies improve readiness.

***What recommendations would you give to enlisted Soldiers about materiel readiness?***

What I advise Soldiers to do is to make sure they are always prepared and technically sound. Listen to your leaders and take advantage of every opportunity. Materiel management is really the foundation for logisticians enabling the warfighter. Without good materiel management we would hinder the efforts of the Army to respond when and where required.

***In the summer you visited the Pacific theater with Lt. Gen. Piggee. What did you see in the field concerning materiel readiness?***

In the Pentagon, sometimes you make assumptions that what you are doing is effective. However, I find that the best method for me to confirm these assumptions is to be actively engaged out in the field.

By spending time with the 8th Theater Sustainment Command, 25th Infantry Division, and the 225th Brigade Support Battalion, we were able to watch them perform their core functions in materiel management operations. We also saw how GCSS–Army [Global Combat Support System–Army] is enhancing our capability and capacity to support warfighters. By talking to Soldiers and leaders, we confirmed our assumptions that sound supply management systems and processes are key to readiness.

***In November, the Army will finish fielding Increment 1 of GCSS–Army. What is the reaction in the field, and is it making the Army more ready?***

Absolutely. It is making us more ready. GCSS–Army is a great innovation. It gives us real-time data that can be viewed at echelons of logistics operations from unit motor pools, property book offices, and supply support activities at the tactical level all the way up to the theater sustainment command at the operational and strategic levels. The majority of people we talk to are very happy with the system. When there are recommendations and things they think can make us more efficient, they always give us feedback, and we have our G-4 team follow up.

***Early in your career you were a warehouse specialist. If you had used GCSS–Army back then, how would it have affected your job?***

I started out as a [military occupational specialty (MOS)] 76V, which was a warehouse specialist, and then we converted a couple years later to [MOS] 92A, which was an automated logistical specialist. Back then the systems were manual. We would exchange information on a floppy disk. Systems were old. It took an extensive amount of time to conduct common supply functions.

We spent a lot of time on teleconferences or driving across post to confirm supply actions with item managers or the higher source of supply. We could not respond to the demands of our customers in a timely manner. We did not have real-time data. If we had GCSS–Army back then, our customer wait time would have been significantly reduced.

***How has materiel management changed?***

In the past, commanders depend-

ed on the corps and division materiel management centers [MMCs] for the management of materiel. Their mission-essential tasks were to manage all classes of supply, ensure integration throughout every echelon within the supply and maintenance activity, and ensure proper oversight, management, and prioritization for all efforts in supporting mission readiness throughout their organizations.

Manning those units were more than 200 senior-level commissioned officers, warrants officers, and NCOs. They had a wealth of experience, appropriate institutional training, and operational assignments by the time they were assigned to an MMC. No question, early logistics successes in Panama, Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Afghanistan, and Iraq were the result of dedicated materiel management within the MMCs.

Throughout the past 15 years, the Army has transformed several times. This was because of different national defense strategies, budget modifications, and new leadership priorities for a more mobile and lethal Army. These transformations resulted in smaller MTOEs [modified tables of organization and equipment] and grade plate reductions that relied on the same level of expertise and management with less seasoned personnel.

This means the NCO Corps has to play a larger role. We are depending on our NCOs for all aspects of logistics analysis, planning, management, distribution, and materiel management execution.

***How are NCOs preparing for the challenge?***

Our NCOs are learning how to stay proficient in their materiel management skill sets through all three learning domains: institutional, organizational, and self-learning. This makes them the best multifunctional logistics assets for operations.

Leader development and required institutional training has enhanced their abilities in conducting logistics analysis, forecasting, and planning. This has aided [the Army] in reducing large on-hand quantities of supplies, and it is making the Army more mobile and cost effective through all phases of military operations.

It is rewarding to watch our NCO Corps. We are called the backbone for a reason. We are making positive impacts on effective materiel management, which enables readiness for our Army and the nation.

***How will a multidomain battlefield affect materiel readiness?***

In a multidomain, contested environment, military organizations have to be ready to operate away from their headquarters. Large base camps like Bagram Airfield, Camp Taji, and Kandahar Airfield may no longer exist in future combat zones. Being co-located with supply support activities or being in an area with contractors or contracted carriers delivering supplies will be infrequent at best.

So our NCOs need to be masters of their crafts. They must have the right repair parts and supplies on hand because of possible limited reach-back capabilities.

***During your career, you have worked directly with officers and warrant officers. How do they interconnect with NCOs when it comes to materiel management?***

The NCO Corps is empowered through our warrant officers and officers. The warrant officers give us the technical expertise and advice that we need in order to be effective. And our officers have the trust and confidence that gives us the opportunity to extend operations deep into the battle.

Without that trust, support, and confidence we would be limited in our abilities to assist with effective materiel management. This would slow down the process to build and sustain capabilities when and where required. Our success is truly built upon this concept of being a team of teams that empowers.

*Sgt. Maj. Edward Bell reflects on the role noncommissioned officers have in improving materiel management.*

***You were a Soldier on the ground many times in Iraq and Afghanistan, carrying out policies made by senior leaders. Now as a senior leader, how do those experiences help shape your thought processes?***

The thing that I am able to do now is to put things into context and understand how our policies and plans impact our Soldiers. My career has allowed me to have the opportunity to lead and engage our Soldiers in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Egypt.

This opportunity to serve in the Pentagon gives me a unique perspective of understanding the second- and third-order effects that our plans have at the tip of the spear. My experiences serving Soldiers in the field shape my recommendations on how we should support them.

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