

# 2008 Senior Leaders' Training Forum (SLTF) Addresses Pressing Army Acquisition Issues

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Photos by McArthur Newell, BRTRC Contractor

**A** rmy Acquisition Executive (AAE)/Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology (ASAALT) Dean G. Popps and ASAALT Military Deputy (MILDEP) LTG N. Ross Thompson III hosted the annual SLTF in Dallas, TX, Nov. 17-20, 2008, for more than 100 general officers and Senior Executive Service acquisition workforce leaders. The theme for this year's forum was "Design, Develop, & Deliver! Optimizing ASAALT Capabilities to Support Joint Warfighters." The 2008 SLTF's intent was to provide senior Army acquisition leaders with a forum to discuss current and emerging acquisition programs and policies. Direction was presented through general session briefings, workshops, and breakout discussions. The specific objectives for the training forum as presented by Mark Rocke, ASAALT Deputy Assistant Secretary for Strategic Communication and Business Transformation, were:

- Provide a venue for senior leaders to become better informed on major challenges.
- Discuss merging strategic objectives for the Army and the broad enterprise level.
- Gain a better understanding involving acquisition policies, procedures, trends, doctrine, etc.

AAE Dean G. Popps prepares to read a proclamation issued by the Dallas mayor proclaiming the 2008 SLTF event as Army SLTF Week in Dallas.



## Strategic Challenges

Popps and Thompson set the stage by giving a brief overview of the strategic challenges facing the acquisition community. Popps stated that FY09 will not be business as usual for the Army acquisition community. He emphasized the need to learn to operate in a new budget environment and to educate the new administration about Army acquisition and how we are transforming into a business enterprise.

Thompson emphasized that we are currently going through a lot of change in leadership within the Army acquisition community. He wants senior leaders to work across boundaries and look at doing things for the greater good when it comes to programs and organizations.

The acquisition community received additional funding through Section 852 of the *National Defense Authorization Act of 2008*. The money is to be spent on increasing the quantity and quality of acquisition workforce personnel. "When you go out to recruit for positions, don't just fill them with anyone. Look for the right people," Thompson said. He also emphasized the need to improve position certification. As of the meeting date, 50 percent of acquisition workforce personnel are certified for the position they hold. This is a 10-percent increase from last year, but Thompson feels it is still not good enough. Although he feels certification levels can never be 100 percent, he wants to see the numbers in the mid- to high 70th-percentile range.

## Workshops

A variety of strategic partners and Army staff leaders provided updates and workshop support during the forum. One strategic partner, Kathryn A. Condon, Executive Deputy to the U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC)

Commanding General (CG), gave a brief overview from an AMC perspective. She talked about challenges with Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and advised that BRAC has been an enabler for AMC by allowing construction of state-of-the-art facilities. She recognized the personnel challenges associated with getting the right workforce needed because of BRAC. This should be an opportunity, however, to bring in the bright young scientists and engineers who were previously restricted by the hiring process. According to Condon, it's an opportunity to reshape the workforce for the future.

One obvious question Condon anticipated and answered was how AMC will adapt to operating from Huntsville, AL. She advised that AMC will adapt the same way as other Army organizations that changed locations have adapted, and she did not foresee any change in AMC operations. Condon said that employees do not have to be close to

the Pentagon to make effective decisions. According to Condon, AMC can collaborate with other personnel and organizations still in the Pentagon area and allow them to be AMC's advocate.

Senior acquisition leaders also heard from Levator Norsworthy Jr., Deputy General Counsel, Acquisition, who gave a general overview on changes to laws and policies affecting the acquisition process. Norsworthy said that many things that were regulation or

guidance are now in law. "Certifications at milestones are now in law; we can work with the changes but we need to substantiate," Norsworthy told the audience. "[The] *Nunn-McCurdy [Amendment]* changes imposing more discipline show that Congress is very serious about the way we plan, coordinate, and justify our program expenditures."

SLTF attendees had the opportunity to attend various workshops, such as: Program Startup, Leveraging the Army Business Enterprise Hub, Evolving

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Kathryn A. Condon, Executive Deputy to the AMC CG, gives her presentation to SLTF participants during the 2008 event.

Doctrine for Expeditionary Contracting Challenges, Enhancing Communication for Strategic Effect, Rapid Acquisition Initiatives, International Export Licensing and Foreign Military Sales, Army Contracting: Best Practices and Campaign Plan Update, and Business Transformation: Strategic Project Selection. Highlights below from one of the workshops are indicative of discussions and issues presented in all of this year's workshops.

Nancy Moulton, Business Transformation Director, ASAALT, served as the principal workshop leader and led the discussion on the Business Transformation: Strategic Project Selection. Moulton presented information on the topic "Strategic Project Selection: Lean Six Sigma (LSS) Deployment Status and the Way Ahead."

Moulton advised that LSS changes and policies must be clear to all. According to her, employees frequently spend much time and money solving problems, but really only cure symptoms. To solve a problem, one needs to know the root cause. Not getting to the root cause means never knowing if the problem is truly solved. Sometimes you find out that someone is not doing what you want them to do — not because they do not want to do it, but because they do not understand what you truly want. Moulton allowed the audience to identify major LSS issues and answered many of the audience's questions and concerns. A summary of some of the comments, questions, and concerns are highlighted below:

**Q:** What if you begin a project and save money, but then the project is canceled? Is this not a waste?

**A:** No. The lessons learned can probably be used by the people involved on future projects.



SLTF audience members listen to a presentation by Kristen Baldwin, Systems and Software Engineering Office, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Acquisition and Technology.

**Q:** Some contractors fight against LSS projects. How do you handle this?

**A:** You must show them how LSS can be profitable for them. This may be through how you write the incentive clauses to the contract. They need to receive a percentage of the cost savings in profit or they will resist the effort.

**Q:** We have gotten away from quality systems engineering [SE]. Does LSS interrelate to SE and can it help?

**A:** Yes. LSS can be an effective tool to improve SE. LSS has many useful tools that can be used to benefit PMs.

**Q:** Relative to LSS, what is completion?

**A:** For LSS, completion is when a pilot program has been implemented, proving the improvements in time and/or cost, and when full-scale implementation has been approved.

**Q:** Can PMs tailor the program to meet their needs like PM Ammunition has?

**A:** This flexibility is being incorporated into the program.

**Q:** Historically we have often performed a project but later the organization falls back into the same old ways. Why?

**A:** This is because we have not changed the process and have not institutionalized the resulting process. We have instead worked on a project.

The 2008 SLTF provided an excellent forum for senior Army acquisition leaders to confer on the acquisition issues that our Army faces today. The shared lessons learned and wealth of information communicated at the SLTF will enable our senior leaders to continue to make our acquisition, logistics, and technology community a valuable and important support resource for our Soldiers.

*(Author's Note: The following people contributed to this article: Erica Ford, Alexis Holden, Shirley Hornaday, Polly Merlo, Bonnie Stewart, and Roger Yocom.)*

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