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NCO believes in being positive influence

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CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE Q-WEST, Iraq — Staff Sgt. Walter J. Ashcraft believes a non-commissioned officer should be a positive influence for his Soldiers, and care for them.

“Being a non-commissioned officer is being a leader, a motivator and a person of positive influence for those around you,” said Ashcraft, a 23-year-old native of Tucumcari, N.M. “An NCO is an individual that cares for all Soldiers and strives to accomplish the mission.”

Ashcraft, a network systems switches operator and maintainer, Bravo Co., 16th Special Troops Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, is on his second deployment to Iraq.



“I have seen a huge change from my first deployment to this one,” Ashcraft said. “During my first deployment we were mortared on a daily basis. During this deployment the hostility has dropped and the moral of soldiers I work with seem to be higher.”

This current 15-month deployment to Q-West, Iraq, has been an opportunity for him to grow as an NCO, Ashcraft said.

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“This deployment has developed my leadership ability,” said Ashcraft. “I have been cross-trained on multiple communications systems. I helped prepare Soldiers with competition and promotion boards by setting up mock boards and study groups at the company level. During my previous deployment I was a new PFC (private first class) straight out of AIT (advanced individual training). I lacked experience and knowledge. I am a staff sergeant now and I have had time to learn and grow into a leader.”

Ashcraft said a good NCO makes a big difference to Soldier, and it made a difference for him.

“The NCO that has made the biggest impact on my career is Sgt. 1st Class Delmar Olson,” said Ashcraft. “He has been a friend and a mentor since before I joined the military. He has always been there to give me advice and guidance. As I transcended from one rank to another he was always there to encourage me and help keep me going in the right direction.”

Ashcraft, who is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in graphic design, said he works to encourage his Soldiers to get military and civilian education.

“I feel that the best way to influence a Soldier is to lead by example” said Ashcraft. “I cannot expect my Soldiers to be motivated or show proper respect, if I disregard these attributes. One way that I have impacted Soldiers is by motivating them to work on military and civilian education.”

Ashcraft offered some advice to new NCOs.

“Take the time to listen and get to know your Soldiers,” Ashcraft said. “As an NCO, your leaders will be coming to you to take on more responsibility. There may be times when

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you feel lost or overwhelmed, but remember that you are not alone. Do not be afraid to ask questions and seek guidance from your peers, and leaders.”