Southern Miss soldier-students organize Strategic Port Symposium in Gulfport

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One recent graduate and another current student at The University of Southern Mississippi helped organize an important one-day gathering of 13 federal, state and local agencies to discuss the criteria necessary for the Port of Gulfport to become designated a “strategic port” by the Defense Department.

Army Maj. Craig M. Sumrall, a recent graduate of the online Master of Science in Logistics, Trade and Transportation and Army Capt. David E. Leiva, a candidate for the Master of Science in Economic Development, coordinated the event. Both are stationed at Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center just south of Hattiesburg.

The 2013 Joint Warfighter Training, Readiness and Logistics Symposium for the South Mississippi Defense Corridor was at the port with key stakeholders from the military services along with public and private sectors represented to highlight the potential logistical and synergistic and interagency capabilities of the Joint Services that present themselves in South Mississippi.

“We see a world of possibility for a symbiotic relationship between the Port of Gulfport and the Defense Department,” said Sumrall, who has overseen the movement of 200,000 soldiers and their equipment overseas and back. “While other ports are strategically positioning themselves to welcome the post-Panamax commercial ships, the Port of Gulfport can offer an alternative to expensive legacy systems come 2015.”

Leiva, who serves as the Special Plans and Projects Officer, said the resounding concurrence at the symposium was good preparation for the following day when the pair presented at the Naval Air Systems Command’s International Transportation Compliance and Hazardous Material meeting held at Keiser Air Force Base in Biloxi. The presentation was titled, “Ports, People and Potential: Rethinking Military Logistics in the 21st Century.”

“Quite frankly, I don’t think the crowd of 250 people expected to hear and see a strategic briefing that added them to expand the purview of logistics to include the macroeconomic and geopolitical forces on the horizon,” said Leiva of the audience of international military officers who are attached at their respective embassies. “But that’s where the coursework, classroom discussions and lectures at Southern Miss led us.”

This fall, Sumrall and Leiva will submit a white paper to Army Logistics University. “Barriers to Creative Thinking: Preconceptions and Functional Fixations of Army Logisticians.”