

From the CSM

Garrison life and leadership: Are we ready for it?

By Command Sgt. Maj. Neil Ciotola
U.S. Army Installation Management Command

The Army has realized huge successes in the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters of operations. We have done this through the selflessness, sacrifice, tenacity and capacity of our uniformed Soldiers, our families and our great civilian workforce. We have welcomed far more Soldiers home this year, with ever-increasing dwell time, than at any other point during the past seven to eight years.

Now these young Soldiers, after having invested themselves in sustained combat operations over the course of one, three, five or even more combat deployments, express disaffection and frustration at the prospect of returning to garrison life. Many contemplate leaving the military rather than face what they perceive to be a less rewarding, exciting and challenging future. The situation is exacerbated by some senior officers and enlisted leaders who profess that we must not “go back to doing business the way we used to.”

So we have two apparently unrelated perspectives expressed by senior and junior Army leaders that actually have everything to do with each other. If we fail to acknowledge the capacity that resides in our deployed formations and the Soldiers within their ranks, we raise questions about the training and development processes that have brought much of the success we have experienced during this period of sustained hostilities. On the other hand, if we fail to adequately articulate the unlimited reward to be gained by investing oneself in the development of our next generation, we fail to manifest in the minds of present and future leadership the true reward of service in our Army.

A great many profound and positive changes have taken place in the Army during the past 10 years. We are a smarter Army. We are a better-equipped Army. We are a far more responsive and agile force. We have quantified and qualified the programs and services necessary to care for ourselves and our families (at home and while deployed). Finally, and most importantly, we have accrued a vast amount of insight and experience in treating and caring for our emotionally and physically wounded and the families of our fallen.

If we have the courage and conviction to separate fact from fiction, I contend we can clearly see that which has served us well in the past, that which we ought to retain, and that which has in-

creased the capacity and resilience of the force (Soldiers, families and civilians) and ought to be embraced now and in the future.

We have in our ranks three generations of Soldiers who have only known this reality: train, deploy, fight, redeploy, reintegrate, rebuild, train, revalidate, deploy, fight, etc. Those three generations have endured considerable stress and hardship, while simultaneously participating in a seemingly unlimited, ongoing national investment in defense and homeland security in the name of fighting terrorism. That investment amounted to more than \$1 trillion during the past four years in the Army alone.

Over the same period of time, we have raised three generations of young troopers who have seen the manifestation or enhancement of family support services included in the Army Family Covenant. They’ve experienced an unprecedented level of local community support as embodied in the Army Community Covenant and seen expansion and enhancement of quality-of-life initiatives, including Survivor Outreach Services, Residential Communities Initiative and the First Sergeants’ Barracks Program, to name but a few.

And finally, we have three generations of troopers who have seen the ranks of our

civilian and contracted workforce swell in order to disencumber our expeditionary forces of various garrison duties so they could better prepare for and then deploy into our combat theaters.

We as a nation now find ourselves confronted with a national debt in excess of \$14 trillion, much of which is attributable to our protracted commitment to the Global War on Terrorism. We cannot continue to do business as usual, literally and figuratively speaking. As the civilian workforce begins to shrink under congressionally mandated spending reductions, we are now in the process of assessing and reintroducing Soldiers into many facets of our garrison operations.

History shows us that after every great conflict in which we committed large portions of our Army, we have ultimately withdrawn back onto our garrisons and allowed the nation to redirect its wealth to other critical programs, or pay back the debt it has accrued as a result of sustained combat. That time on our installations is used to absorb lessons learned from the previous conflict and retrain ourselves for the next time the nation calls. As we have done throughout our history, we once again will do.

Where we had large numbers of Department of the Army and contracted security guards controlling installation access, we

If you wanted to be a leader in this Army, you said, in effect, you wanted to be responsible for human life. If you thought otherwise, you thought wrong.

will now see greater numbers of Soldiers once again manning our gates. That this concerns some makes me, for one, scratch my head. We as Soldiers guard and secure ourselves, our installations (at home and abroad), our bases, our outposts, our patrol bases, our forward lines of troops, our flanks, etc. Guarding and securing is not a waste of time; it is a fundamental duty that we as guardians of the republic have done and will continue to do. Seeing Soldiers at our gates ought to remind everyone of our charge as selfless servants who stand at the frontiers.

Where we've seen large numbers of civilians — working in our dining facilities and military personnel offices; patrolling the streets of our installations with Department of Defense Police; cutting grass and cleaning the areas where we live, work, and train; processing and training our newest recruits; managing our barracks spaces; operating our ranges and training facilities — we'll see ever-increasing numbers of Soldiers performing those duties. These demands are not new to our Army, and they are not an attempt to deliberately, callously or cold-heartedly place a devoted civilian employee on the unemployment. Instead, they are a fiscal imperative, and something our Army has done repeatedly during the course of its 236-year history.

That we find ourselves confronted with a fundamentally different fiscal reality does not mean we will casually terminate the litany of programs that have sustained our Soldiers and families during this era of persistent conflict. What it does mean is our senior leaders will have to make some tough decisions on what programs and activities need to continue intact, which we can combine with other programs, and which we will scale back or terminate with acceptable risk.

In this new, more garrison-centric reality, we are reviving some important training opportunities that languished during the years of intense deployments. The potential will once again exist for a noncommissioned officer in the generating or deployable force to grab a detail of Soldiers in the wee hours of the morning, move to a range and establish it in preparation for a day of training. This activity is training in its own right, and it satisfies two requirements. First, it reduces cost, and second, it imbues the noncommissioned officer and troopers with the knowledge necessary to establish these training venues in deployed theaters. That we'll once again have noncommissioned officers training

individual augmentees or units destined for deployment is not just a product of fiscal limitation, it's what we sergeants do. We train Soldiers, and the only way to get good and remain good at it is to do it, do it right and do it repeatedly.

To those who are either considering or have decided to separate when confronted with extended periods in-garrison, I say if you're determined to depart the Army regardless of my perspective or the collective wisdom of even greater leaders in our military, I thank you for your service, your sacrifice and your selflessness, and wish you well in all your future endeavors. If you're sitting on the proverbial fence as it relates to future service in a fundamentally different operating environment — in-garrison —



Photo by Bill Murray

Command Sgt. Maj. Neil Ciotola, IMCOM command sergeant major, and the Fort Sam Houston Army Support Activity Color Guard await orders during the IMCOM Headquarters uncasing ceremony Oct. 5, 2010, in San Antonio, Texas.

I say these two things: Nothing worth doing is easy or glamorous; and, from those to whom much is given, much is expected and much is required. You may have seen the relevance, as I did, in all you were engaged in our theaters of operation. You may have been determined to deploy in an effort to care for the men and women under your charge. You may have been committed to the fight for no greater reason than the fact that you gave your word.

Whatever may have added substance or satisfaction to your service to this Army, there is yet tremendous satisfaction to be found in shaping the hearts and minds of our youth — the next generation of young troopers. If you thought it was fulfilling saving and securing the lives and livelihood of an Iraqi or Afghan

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