



People First

Insights from the Army's Chief of Staff

■ *By Gen. James C. McConville*

Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. James C. McConville attends the 2019 Army Navy Game in Philadelphia, Pa., Dec. 14, 2019. (Photo by Sgt. Dana Clarke)

The events of 2020 put a spotlight on how essential Army sustainment is to our nation's defense, more than at any other time in our history. From tension with Iran in January to February's dynamic force employment of troops to Defender Europe to the outbreak of COVID in March to civil unrest beginning in May and natural disasters over the summer and into the fall, the great talent of our sustainment professionals was on full display year-round to our fellow Americans, our partners and allies, and our strategic competitors. People are the United States Army's greatest strength and most important weapon system, and it is because of our people – our Soldiers, Families, Army Civilians, veteran Soldiers for Life, and retirees – that we were ready to respond to each of these crises. The idea that investing in people is an investment in all priorities, especially readiness, is why former Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy announced last October that “people” would officially become the Army's new number one priority. The Secretary and I constantly promote a philosophy of “People First,” and we published the first Army People Strategy in October 2019. So what exactly does it mean now for people to be our first priority?

The U.S. Army's official priorities are a signal to both external audiences and Army leaders. They communicate how the Army intends to drive transformation and how Army institutional planning will nest within national, DoD, and joint strategic guidance. By prioritizing people first, the Army is signaling that investing resources in our people initiatives is the most effective way to accomplish our constant mission – to deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars by providing ready, prompt, and sustained land dominance by Army forces across the full spectrum of conflict as part of the Joint Force.

We are implementing a 21st century Talent Management System in order to better assess, assign, and promote talent within our Army. This year we launched Project Inclusion, our effort to ensure we are an organization that is truly inclusive and everyone feels like a valued member of the team. We will also continue to aggressively resource improvements in five quality of life areas that get after taking care of our people.

In addition to resourcing these programs, we are engaging with leaders across the force to change the way they think about

taking care of people. Army senior leaders are emphasizing building cohesive teams and the Golden Triangle, which is our effort to reinforce how leaders take care of Soldiers by building a connection with the families and buddies of those they lead. Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston is leading “This is My Squad,” to get everyone engaged in thinking about their team, no matter what rank or position they are in. The bottom line is, we have to get leaders thinking about the connections they are building with their Soldiers, families and buddies in order to build a climate of trust and respect, where we all take care of each other.

Readiness

People are central to how we will look at our readiness. We understand that the readiness focus has put significant demands and stress on our units, leaders, Soldiers and families. Therefore, we are going to start the implementation of the Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model (ReARMM) to balance the operations tempo of our forces.

ReARMM includes reviewing our requirements, working with combatant commands to right size those requirements in both force size and duration, as well as reducing or eliminating the demanding training gates that lead up to CTC rotations or rotational deployments. This means the focus for training will be on the foundation: the individual, team, squad, and platoon levels. I have found that those units that have spent more time focused on their foundation, have had great success at CTC rotations because they have built strong cohesive teams of highly trained, disciplined, and fit Soldiers.

We have a high level of readiness, but if we want to maintain it over the long run, we must focus on our people.

Modernization

People are also central to how we transform the Army. Modernization is not just about new equipment. Modernization means changing doctrine, organizations, how we train, new equipment, and most of all, how we manage the talented people in our Army. We made sure the right Soldiers were involved in our new cross-functional teams under the Army Futures Command. This ensures our designs are Soldier centric, and we are getting critical feedback early in the design and procurement process for new systems.

Talent Management

We are doing a lot to move from an industrial age personnel management system to a 21st century talent management system. We are in a war for talent and we have to compete for talent in the future. We need the best and brightest to come into the Army who represent the diversity of the nation.

We also need the most senior level positions in the Army to include the talented officers across all branches.

Talent management means capturing the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and even preferences (KSB-Ps) of individuals during their career. Using more information about individuals will enable us to align them to positions where they will feel valued and contribute more productively. That is what the programs that we are putting in place are going to do.

Assessments

We established several assessment programs that have completely changed the selection process for some of our most consequential command and acquisition leader positions. Since 2019, we conducted two battalion commander assessment programs. This year we ran our first colonels assessment for brigade commanders, an acquisition leader assessment program, and we are working on the first sergeant's and sergeant's major programs.

Selection for battalion and brigade level commands is one of the most important personnel decisions that the Army makes. These programs expand our understanding of each officer's talents and assess their potential and fitness for command. To me, these are the most consequential leaders in

our Army. It is within the battalion that most of our Soldiers are influenced and inspired to continue their service.

Assignments Process

The Army Talent Alignment Process (ATAP) is a decentralized, regulated, market-style hiring system that aligns officers with jobs based on preferences. By October 2019, the majority of active duty officers and units participated in the ATAP for their summer 2020 assignments. Officers use AIM 2.0 to access the ATAP until it becomes available in the Integrated Personnel and Pay System – Army (IPPS-A).

This process uses more detailed information about officers and units than the traditional distribution system. Rather than just being assigned to a specific assignment without really having much input, now with ATAP individuals can see what assignments are available and compete for them.

ATAP gives officers the opportunity to choose from a wider variety of assignments which best suit their KSB-Ps. The organizations have access to a greater number of available officers to preference the right people for their teams. We believe this collaborative and

transparent process will ultimately enhance job satisfaction, improve readiness and help us retain a larger portion of the talent that is critical to our Army in the years ahead.

Promotions

The way we promote is changing. We established merit-based promotions to recognize top performers. We started it this year for majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels. We also established the brevet promotion program, which selects officers for temporary promotion to serve at the next higher

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rank for critical positions. This program allows us to lessen critical shortages of officers to better leverage the talents of junior officers, and to incentivize retention of those officer's with specialized education and experience.

Project Inclusion

The strength of the Army comes from its diversity. Diversity and inclusion are extremely important if we want to keep the talent we have. When you look at the force, about 20% of the Army is African-American, about 14% is Hispanic and 8% Asian-American, and about 17% of the force is women. Diversity is a statistic we need to continue to improve, but

the focus is on our culture of inclusion. Inclusion means that everyone feels like valued members of the team and that they have the opportunity to rise to the highest levels.

Developing and maintaining qualified and demographically diverse leadership is critical for mission effectiveness and is essential to national security. The Army must foster a culture of trust where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, where everyone takes care of each other. All Army leaders must foster an equitable and inclusive environment that builds diverse, adaptive, and cohesive teams that enable the Army to build and sustain readiness.



Army Chief of Staff, Gen. James C. McConville, addresses a rifle squad from 2-506th Infantry, 3rd Brigade Combat Team Rakkasans, 101st Airborne Division, at Bell Flight's Arlington, TX facility on October 28, 2020. The soldiers provided invaluable feedback on the V-280 Valor cabin configuration that will inform Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft requirements from the user perspective. (Photo by Mr. Luke J. Allen)

Project Inclusion is our initiative to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion across the force. This effort will capture from our Soldiers, families, and civilians processes or practices that inadvertently discriminate. It also focuses on our policies, procedures, and resources that will enable us to grow into a more diverse and inclusive team. We are looking at ways to improve how we recruit, retain, develop, and employ the diverse talents of our people. This ensures the Army is an organization that is truly inclusive where everyone has a path to success.

Quality of Life

We also have an obligation to provide our people with the quality of life benefits commensurate with their quality of service. Last year we committed to five quality of life priorities. Quality housing both for families and our Soldiers in the barracks, world-class healthcare, quality childcare and youth services, meaningful employment for spouses, and fixing the PCS moving challenges. Not only have we applied resources and updated policies, but we are getting leaders engaged in oversight across these areas.

Cohesive Teams

There are three areas that I am most concerned about that are breaking trust with the American people and hurting our Soldiers: sexual misconduct, suicides, and racism. These are what building cohesive teams and the Sergeant Major of the Army's 'This is My Squad' initiatives get after. The squad is a representation of any team or section a person belongs to. It focuses leaders to the individual level and how they are developing cohesive teams where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and everyone takes care of each other.

I believe when we have all leaders focused on those two things, who take care of each other and treat each other with dignity and respect, that will break the cycle on the corrosive issues that break trust and harm Soldiers. Issues like sexual harassment or sexual assault, racism, or extremism, and even suicide.

Leaders will start to recognize when someone's going through a hard time, and can be there to help them through tough transitions or get them the appropriate help. We cannot rely on online training to get after these issues. We need to rely on every leader to develop the emotional intelligence to get after how they take care of our people.

It's about building cohesive teams. It's about having tough conversations to make sure that leaders understand everyone's perspective. More importantly, it's about getting to know each other's story and have a deep understanding and appreciation for each other. It's amazing to meet so many Soldiers and hear stories about where they come from, how they overcame diversity, and why they chose to serve this nation.

Every Soldier has a story, and we need to listen to that story. The strength of our Army comes from the diversity of our people. That is why we need to focus on people and make sure everyone feels that they are a valued member of the team.

Work-Life Balance

There are many different philosophies and debates on work-life balance. One thing I can say for sure, is that everyone in the Army should have a life. I made this chart when I was a squadron commander with my spouse and we've been using it ever since. It started off as our agreement to each other how to prioritize the events in our life along with the events of Army life. I want our people to have work-life balance. I teach this whenever I have a chance to talk to leaders. There are events in the Army and in life that we must help our Soldiers prioritize. Sometimes given the right circumstances, that means telling your Soldiers to go – be with your family or friend, they will never forget that you were there for them. We will forget tomorrow that you missed a day at work. We want people to be committed to our organization, and we need our leaders committed to taking care of our people.

Conclusion

We win through our people. People want to be on winning teams. People want to have purpose in their life. That's why people must be a priority. Through the Army People Strategy and Talent Management we can improve how we acquire, develop, employ, and retain talent in our Army. Our emphasis on diversity and inclusion will ensure everyone feels like a valued member of the team. And our focus on leaders to build cohesive teams with This is My Squad, will help us be an Army team we are all proud of.

Gen. James C. McConville serves as the Army Chief of Staff. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. He holds a Master of Science in Aerospace Engineering from Georgia Institute of Technology and was a National Security Fellow at Harvard University in 2002.

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