



Lt. Col. James Raines, commander of 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment, 75th Field Artillery Brigade, renders and receives a salute after completing a weeklong external evaluation 29 March 2019 at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Commanders can now use an updated version of the Defense Organizational Climate Survey, or DEOCS 5.0, that provides evidence-based feedback to help them identify and intervene against a variety of areas critical to command climates including destructive behaviors such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, and associated retaliation. Climate assessment mechanisms like DEOCS are tools in a process toward building positive command climates. (Photo by Sgt. Dustin Biven, U.S. Army)

# Embracing the Need for Command Climate Change

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*The Army is its people, and a strong, healthy, resilient, trained force is the most important indicator of our readiness.*

—Secretary of the Army Christine E. Wormuth

**H**ealthy command climates are essential to who we are and how well we fight. They underpin our effectiveness and endurance in combat.<sup>1</sup> Given the well-established relationship between positive command climates and the reduction in harmful behaviors, we must embrace the need to treat healthy organizational climates as a baseline condition to readiness.<sup>2</sup> This contemporary challenge is more pressing if we consider that future soldiers are also watching. Consequently, a full embrace of the need to build positive climates at scale is part of our “value proposition.”<sup>3</sup>

Part of the issue is how we address climate in fundamental processes. For example, we recently introduced a thought experiment to mid-to-senior-level leaders over a several-month period. We asked whether a unit *should* be able to claim a “trained” rating on a mission essential task (MET) if its command climate was poor. The near-unanimous sentiment was that a unit with a bad organizational climate was either not trained or that a near-term success was unsustainable. Yet, it was universally accepted that a unit *could* be assessed as trained under the current paradigm. It seems our assessments are divorced from the context of our people, thus providing an incomplete picture of readiness.<sup>4</sup>

There is a good reason why this may be the case. Command climates have largely been untethered to any evaluative mechanism until the inception of the command assessment programs. Results-at-all-cost attitudes have rewarded commanders for doing more with less, and in some cases, at the expense of their formations. We must continuously challenge how we assess, promote, and value positive command climates.

Consider first our historical treatment of command climate assessments. A Department of Defense-wide report last year captured a multitude of concerns, and we clearly lack a mechanism that

bolsters confidence in leaders and soldiers alike.<sup>5</sup> Climate assessments have too often been diminished to a compliance exercise, with feedback underused and undervalued. Commanders have been frustrated by limited survey participation, a lack of timely results, and feedback from who they presumed was a disproportionate number of disenfranchised soldiers, some of whom were the subjects of appropriate administrative or disciplinary actions. Such an indictment of one's command can dampen the spirits of the most optimistic leaders, especially at the thought of climate assessments used as an input to their evaluation rather than considering broader context of their efforts to make appropriate, positive changes in light of, for example, issues that existed prior to their taking command. Alternatively, soldiers have been either unaware of the survey and its importance or were incentivized to provide feedback hurriedly and meet “go home” criteria. Unfortunately, others have been convinced that nothing they could say would drive meaningful change.

Taken further, there have been commanders who, despite negative feedback, still denied anything was wrong or argued there is a

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Maj. Benjamin Schneller, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division automations officer, uses a terrain model to demonstrate a proposed course of action during the Leader Training Program at Fort Irwin, California, 10 February 2014. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

zero-sum trade-off with a focus on readiness. We call this “command climate change denial” and believe that it remains present, if not pervasive, often masked in nostalgic comments about units past, hubris, or concerns over weaponizing climate assessment data. Repudiation of the problem is dangerous, and we must address it. Denial contradicts the prominent findings of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee (FHIRC) and the department-wide Independent Review Commission (IRC).<sup>6</sup>

This article embraces the need for expansive measures to build positive command climates at scale that include linkages with readiness constructs. Significant reforms are already underway stemming from the FHIRC and the IRC. We argue that an opportunity exists to complement those efforts by elevating the importance of climate in routine processes to drive behavioral change. We begin by describing the connection between command

climate and leader competence before introducing suggestions for reform, some of which are projected for a pilot across our Army.

## The Interdependence of Command Climate and Leader Competence

One can tell a great deal about a commander’s leadership style based on actions on a terrain model at a combat training center, especially if the commander gets bogged down in squad-level tactics during the rehearsal. Those formations, some of which arrive and depart with “trained” ratings, tend to degrade more rapidly than their counterparts during the rotation. A commander’s relative comfort in small unit tactics and focus on subordinate compliance can mask an inability to employ one’s formation well. The occasional subordinate command can still be successful, but it is disadvantaged as it fights almost autonomously. Its success is also short-lived



Senior leaders from across 1st Armored Division and Fort Bliss respond to questions during the sixth annual Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Summit on 26 August 2008 at Fort Bliss, Texas. Dr. Gail Stern, the cofounder of Catharsis Productions and coauthor of the prevention program Sex Signals, highlighted the summit as the guest speaker and presented methods to better understand sexual violence and the impact that it has upon people. (Photo by Pfc. Matthew Marcellus, U.S. Army)

without the collective. We suspect that garrison behavior comports similarly.

Selecting the right leaders matters greatly, and we need leaders who are competent in warfighting and building the cohesive teams critical to success in the crucible of combat operations. Our view of competence is that it cannot be detached from command climate, and that a healthy climate buttresses the validity of any readiness construct.<sup>7</sup> The common, static interpretation of success in a one-time iteration of a MET is inconsistent with sustained operations in almost any imaginative conception of future conflict. Instead, we must visualize what it takes for success in, for example, ten engagements over thirty days when a unit loses a routine percentage of the formation and gains a less-than-routine rate of replacements. Such a scenario pushes the limits of trust, discipline, and will. Even commanders with

the proper aim point on the terrain model and who struggle to bolster these indicators will only have fleeting success. Winning matters, but we cannot be successful without our people.

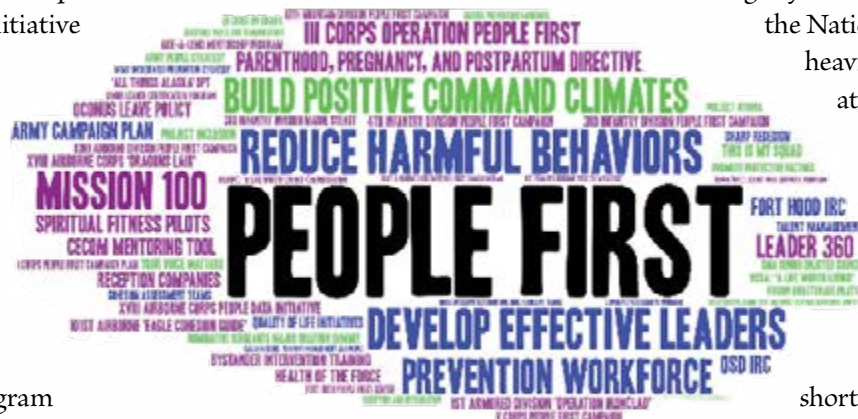
### **A Dichotomy in Putting “People First”**

Following the tragic events at Fort Hood, the institution was justly subject to multiple review commissions. “Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants,” and commission reports revealed that the Army was woefully falling short.<sup>8</sup> The challenges are complex, and addressing the multitude of shortcomings requires competent, open-minded leaders who recognize the relationship between positive command climates and reducing harmful behaviors.<sup>9</sup>

There have been many positive developments consistent with the secretary of the Army and chief of staff



of the Army's guidance to make people the top priority. These include initiatives such as Forces Command's monthly foundational training days, which afford "protected time aimed at permitting Soldiers to have dedicated time to listen and learn from one another, and to understand issues affecting Soldiers' lives on and off duty."<sup>10</sup> Participants in the XVIII Airborne Corps' Dragon's Lair initiative have produced actionable recommendations for improving the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program and how to improve suicide prevention efforts. Fort Bliss also launched its com-



(Graphic by Maj. Gen. Christopher Norrie and Maj. Justin Hunter)

prehensive Operation Ironclad campaign to operationalize III Corps' Operation People First. These combine with many other encouraging initiatives from "Project Inclusion" and "This is My Squad" to several from the Talent Management Task Force. The service is definitively shifting to a proactive mindset toward integrated primary prevention. This attentiveness toward the reduction of harmful behaviors is "integral to sustaining a positive command climate at scale."<sup>11</sup>

However, while putting "people first" remains a rightful enterprise imperative, the concept is still misconstrued by some, and well-intended unit-level initiatives risk becoming short-lived. Some leaders still struggle with the perception of a "people" versus "readiness" dichotomy—a false dichotomy. This is perhaps the most salient observation made by the People First Task Force's Cohesion Assessment Team that has visited units across the Army over the past year. There is a real tension that requires candor and an understanding of what it means to build cohesive teams that live the Army Values and why doing so is critical.

Better litmus tests include whether unit members trust their leaders to have best prepared them for the rigors of sustained combat and would fight alongside them. Will soldiers who find themselves emotionally in a fragile

state trust their first-line supervisor to help? Will soldiers speak up against sexual harassment and sexual assault regardless of rank and hold each other accountable? This is the essence of the cohesive teams that we seek, as described by Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville, "highly trained, disciplined and fit and are ready to fight and win, where each person is treated with dignity and respect."<sup>12</sup> Protecting the Nation's interests depends heavily on protecting people at every level of command and in all units and organizations. Everyone has a role in treating others with respect—and stepping in to correct behavior that falls short. This does not mean a failure to adhere to basic discipline or standards, but it does mean providing a safe, in-

clusive work environment. It does not equate to four-day passes every weekend, but it does imply predictability in training schedules. These assertions are not "squishy." Instead, they demand rigor, dedicated time, and attentiveness to prevention, predictability, developmental counseling, and reception and integration activities. They also require entrenchment in our everyday activities.

## Add "Build Cohesive Teams" as a Mission Essential Condition

Returning to our initial thought experiment, we suggest the addition of a MET-like construct for all units, a baseline condition, titled "Build Cohesive Teams." Doing so causes organizations to consider climate as part of the operations process systematically. Once proposed by Lt. Col. Jeremiah Gipson as "MET Zero," this initiative operationalizes "People First" activities making it translatable to units and outlining the connective tissue with regulatory guidance and doctrine.<sup>13</sup>

We have partnered with the Mission Command Center of Excellence and other stakeholders to develop initial task sets for an active-duty mission essential condition (MEC) pilot this fall. The established "indicator outlines" (like the commonly used training and evaluation outlines) are grounded in

both doctrine and regulatory guidance (e.g., Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy*; Army Doctrine Publication 7-0, *Training*; and Field Manual 7-0, *Training*) and capture existing requirements without being additive. They basically represent a reframing of what we expect from our leaders. The supporting tasks emphasize protective factors that are vital to achieving “a higher likelihood of positive outcomes, such as improved performance or readiness and higher retention and are also linked to a lower likelihood of negative outcomes such as suicide, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.”<sup>14</sup> We believe this approach better addresses the gap in our readiness assessments. It also helps operationalize a response to the well-founded critique of climate and culture thematic in the reports from the FHIRC and IRC.

This incorporation of a MEC also stimulates command elements and higher headquarters to more frequently monitor the health of subordinate units’ climate with the appropriate level of attention. While a commander could theoretically skew his or her unit favorably, much like a traditional MET, the more senior commander benefits from additional information such as climate assessment data, serious incident reports, congressional inquiries, etc. The junior commander would have to justify his or her rating as part of the commander-to-commander dialogue. Lower-performing units might require an external evaluation during an audit analogous to an organizational inspection program or a staff assistance visit. Additionally, the field can share best practices and observations on building cohesive teams through a newly established “Army People Network.” The People First Task Force’s Cohesion Assessment Team is generally based on this concept already.

As we refine the MEC based on feedback from the field, there is an opportunity for universal application across the total force. We also see it ultimately impacting unit status reports. The MEC would lend teeth to

the generalized “personnel” category and context to the “training” category. Even if the new MEC is not included in the algorithm that produces a unit’s overall readiness rating, it would still inform more senior commanders on deployment readiness. For example, if a unit reports the highest readiness rating with a poor climate assessment, it might not be well-suited for an operational deployment. Regardless, it will reinforce the reciprocal relationship between the leader and the organization. As we have argued, a unit cannot meet our visualization of “ready” with a poor climate.

## Evolve the Quarterly Training Brief to the Quarterly People and Training Brief

The Quarterly Training Brief (QTB) is a well-known doctrinal construct that results in a “training



Sgt. 1st Class Pedro Leon (right) provides career advice and counseling to Sgt. Kareena Collins 25 August 2014 during a deployment to Afghanistan. (Photo by 1st Lt. Morgan Perry, U.S. Army)

contract or agreement between the senior and subordinate commanders.”<sup>15</sup> Although the contours are ubiquitous—mission essential task list crosswalk, discussion about a highlighted training event, and a leader professional development plan—there is no strict framework. While the lack of structure provides flexibility, these meetings typically miss the mark in addressing the human element in combat readiness. In some cases, subordinate commanders define success as meeting survival.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, we have designed a doctrinal adaptation that reframes the conversation during this keystone process to focus on people and build proficiency in the MEC.

Our transformed conception of the QTB, the Quarterly People and Training Brief (QPTB), is intended as a structured but candid discussion between commanders, so they each agree on the current state of readiness, the way forward, the resources needed, and the risk involved in their approach. It stimulates the senior-ranking commander to clearly provide his or her visualization for subordinate units and direct people-related focus areas. Doing so better helps a unit's leaders understand how their commander sees them in time and space—or in the context of the regionally aligned readiness and modernization model. It can also assist the senior-ranking commander in better operationalizing his or her command philosophy. These are departures from the status quo as outlined above.

This transformed meeting requires a degree of self-study from commanders at all levels and candor. For example, while arguments regarding the company-level degradation of unit training management have merit, a QPTB audits the publication of and adherence to higher headquarters' training guidance. We cannot expect companies to provide predictable training schedules if higher headquarters have not done its part. This turbulence is self-inflicted and occurs with impunity. Commanders might apply the same rigor to other focus areas in their visualization process.

Imagine if a brigade commander were to articulate a specific interest in the first-class reception and integration of soldiers and families or quality counseling. We would expect increased attentiveness applied by subordinate commanders. This dynamic can be expounded upon at echelon and perhaps negate redundancy with the commanders' ready and resilient council.<sup>17</sup> The QPTB could reduce requirements and give commanders time back.

Importantly, we must also change how we leverage data in these meetings. The Army uses descriptive statistics daily, expecting command teams to leverage their experience to determine causality with precision on the fly. While we can do so when it comes to operations with a degree of success, there may be a capability gap in our ability to do so concerning people, where the causal chain is less evident, and experiences may belie judgment.

Part of the challenge is seeing ourselves. There is data available to commanders, but even more recent initiatives such as the



To view *People First Task Force: Integrating People and Training—Considerations and Concepts*, visit <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2022/08/18/5be2ea41/22-06-672-people-first-task-force-handbook.pdf>.

commander's risk reduction tool kit are nascent and require maturation.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps a more pressing challenge is teaching commanders how to have a more productive conversation with the data they have. We have proposed using a “people dashboard” to serve as an input to the QPTB and help drive these conversations, blending accessible quantitative and qualitative data. It can also integrate feedback from various assessment tools and risk management systems (e.g., Army Readiness Assessment Program [ARAP] and Enhanced ARAP, accident and accident reporting).

Such a dashboard can stimulate discussion about people-related issues usually relegated to “command and staff” venues and shift our focus away from compliance-related metrics. For example, consider our emphasis on the timely awarding Army Good Conduct Medals with little emphasis on “good conduct” per se or our historical focus on assigning sponsors without connection to actual quality reception and integration. The status quo is often an intellectual silo. An evolved QPTB, complete with a people dashboard, would replace the existing QTB and provide the venue to discuss a unit's now-comprehensive mission essential task list. Not only will this drive a meaningful discussion on training with the context of their people, but it might also improve the quality of training overall.



The QPTB recently underwent an initial active-duty pilot that undeniably led to a more fruitful discussion. A Center for Army Lessons Learned handbook titled *People First Task Force: Integrating People and Training—Considerations and Concepts* further describes these concepts and other tools that leaders can use to improve the integration of people and training.

## Implement Command Climate Assessment Reform

The proposals thus far have been intended to enable a meaningful dialogue on climate assessment feedback and provide a tether to evaluative mechanisms.

We must constantly evolve our efforts to address climate. Doing so better equips leaders to understand and inculcate prevention, and ensures they have the tools to respond appropriately to support those within their unit. We believe that the success of these initiatives is contingent on climate assessment reform that also enables review longitudinally. Importantly, we conceptualize climate assessment mechanisms as *tools* in a *process*. The tools, which include the department-standard Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) mainly, should be augmented by periodic checks (e.g., pulse surveys, sensing sessions) as part of a larger systemic process (e.g., MEC, QPTB, leader counseling) to drive change. How we measure climate matters, and again, the Army lacks a trusted measurement tool for organizational climate. There are things we can do internally and things we must continue to work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense to accomplish. Some of our proposals are under implementation now.

First, we have proposed adjustments to regulatory guidance (as shown in the table). Army Regulation 600-20, Appendix E (see figure, page 18), which describes intended survey audiences, is largely not adhered to. For example, many are surprised to hear that the only organization that is supposed to administer a climate assessment to its entirety is a company.

## Table. Summary of Proposed Climate Assessment Reforms

- Update Army Regulation 600-20, Appendix E.
- Encourage localized policy letters to provide sufficient time to complete assessments and increase sample size.
- Enforce commander-to-commander counseling on assessment feedback and action plans.
- Enforce leader-to-soldier out brief of assessment feedback and action plans.
- Change assessment timing to occur before changes of command.
- Expand access to prior command climate assessments for the incoming commander.
- Add climate-related language to the OER and NCOER with an emphasis on the rater and senior rater narratives.
- Work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense on parallel reform.

(Table by authors)

Higher echelons of command are supposed to only administer the survey to subordinate command teams and staff elements. Units commonly distribute surveys beyond these parameters, leading to survey fatigue and noisy data that dilute attempts to establish meaningful thresholds.<sup>19</sup> The thresholds will never be reliable or accommodate a comparison between like units if regulatory guidance is not followed uniformly.

If the premise is accepted that the arbiters of command climate exist generally at the battalion and below, then regulatory guidance must reflect more appropriate survey audiences (e.g., staff sergeant and above for battalions; every soldier for companies). The audiences for brigade-sized units and above should remain consistent with current regulatory guidance. This requires enforcement. Subsequently, localized policies should establish parameters for assessments that include expectations of providing sufficient time to complete assessments, increasing sample sizes, ensuring out briefs up and down the chain of command, and expectations of reporting any delays in the production of assessment results. There are examples of this already occurring (e.g., III Corps Policy Letter #19, “Command Climate Assessments and Action Plans,” 29 April 2021).<sup>20</sup>

Next, we have recommended changing the timing of the DEOCS assessments to lead and not lag



## E-2. Requirements and explanation of terms

See table E-1.

Table E-1 Command Climate Assessment guidance		
Command level	Frequency (days)	Requirements
Company or equivalent	RA: 60 days and annually thereafter	1) Inform the members of the organization of the upcoming assessment 2) Survey for entire organization (minus leadership team) 3) Use other assessment tools, as needed 4) Prepare CCA summary and action plan
	USAR: 120 days and annually thereafter	5) Brief to commander or supervisor at next higher level (no later than 30 days (two MUTA (60 days)—4 for USAR) after receipt of survey results) 6) Conduct formal feedback session(s) with organization (same as requirement 5) 7) MEO professional enters data into MEO database (no later than 35 days (three MUTA (90 days)—4 for USAR) after requirements 5 and 6)
Battalion or equivalent	RA: 60 days and annually thereafter	1) Inform the members of the organization of the upcoming assessment 2) Survey for battalion staff element and company command teams 3) DRS roll-up of subordinate organization (companies or equivalent) survey responses and comparison of historical data 4) Use other assessment tools, as needed 5) Prepare CCA summary and action plan
	USAR: 120 days and annually thereafter	6) Brief to commander or supervisor at next higher level (no later than 30 days (two MUTA (60 days)—4 for USAR) days after receipt of survey results) 7) Conduct formal feedback session(s) with organization (same as requirement 6) 8) MEO professional enters data into MEO database (no later than 35 days (three MUTA (90 days)—4 for USAR) after requirements 6 and 7) 9) Monitor compliance of subordinate organizations

(Figure from Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy* [2020])

### Figure. Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, Appendix E

a commander's evaluation, providing one of many inputs to that evaluation. The climate assessments would be amplified by periodic pulse surveys offset from DEOCS. Additional surveys, such as the IRC's recommended "pulse," would be sequenced at intervals between DEOCS and on an as-needed basis.<sup>21</sup> These unit-driven assessments would provide an azimuth check, enabling course corrections as needed while demonstrating to soldiers the importance of their feedback and resolve to address concerns.

The 2013 National Defense Authorization Act mandates conducting a climate assessment within 120 days of assuming command.<sup>22</sup> This led the department to expand the use of DEOCS as a baseline.<sup>23</sup> However, while new commanders receive feedback on their organization's climate, that climate is either a by-product of the environment established by their predecessor or a confusing hybrid with their own. This dynamic exacerbates command climate change denial.

It also misses a feedback mechanism that would be useful in evaluating commanders' potential for future service and addressing climate-related issues through an

ongoing dialogue (e.g., Did a commander "move the needle"? Did the higher headquarters assist an overwhelmed commander?). Addressing these questions should be the focus of a renewed emphasis on commander-to-commander counseling that includes climate assessment feedback. It would be better to learn about red flags earlier in an officer's career and coach or develop that officer instead of having him or her learn about it during a command assessment program. Officer evaluation reports, and perhaps noncommissioned officer evaluation reports, should also include such language in the sections most relevant to promotion boards.

The timeliness of feedback in the current model is also too late to assist incoming commanders with establishing organizational priorities. Waiting for feedback several months in, as is the current practice, mortgages critical time. Not only should they have access to the most recent climate assessment, but we should also expand their access to at least the past five years' data, which current business rules prevent.<sup>24</sup> This access would better enable the incoming commander to understand an organization's culture. While there are numerous characterizations of what

constitutes the difference between climate and culture, a simple explanation is to consider climate as temporal, whereas culture extends over multiple commanders.

Lastly, while we can advance these changes as an institution, we must continue to work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) to better represent the Army's needs in future DEOCS increments, shaping its development and implementation. We envision such efforts to include, at a minimum, exploring novel approaches to increase survey accessibility to soldiers and gaining expanded access to the Army's data to respond to senior leader inquiries. Aggregated protective risk scores, for example, might drive decisions on future resource allocations. We must also help develop a suite of tools to assist commanders build viable action plans. The Army's Center for the Army Profession and Leadership has already done tremendous work in this area with their "Command Climate Navigator."<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

We began this article by describing a thought experiment, and we will end with a counterfactual. What if we maintain the status quo? We believe that failing to place the requisite premium on organizational climate will impede our critical effort to prevent harmful behaviors. We will subsequently sustain a hollowness in our readiness assessments and risk our ability to attract future generations of soldiers. The stakes are high and

require a comprehensive approach beyond the recommendations discussed here.

We value results-driven leaders and, like all large organizations, are inherently resistant to change. We expect cynics to bemoan the connection between climate and readiness as if it is zero-sum. Again, command climate change denial takes many forms. We hear these assertions already, but we suspect this is because of the ambiguity in how soldiers and leaders interpret "People First." Simply put, "People First" means building cohesive teams that are highly trained, disciplined, and fit.<sup>26</sup> It does not mean "me first," but it requires humble leaders to recognize the vital linkage between competence and a command climate. People are the antecedent condition in any readiness construct—and they are our greatest strength. Otherwise stated, we cannot win without an enduring focus on them.

Our humble prescription in this article is to offer a series of reforms that elevate climate in keystone processes to drive changes in behavior. Initial feedback on the MEC and QPTB is positive. We recognize these ideas are not a panacea, but they can drive changes in behavior by establishing a tether to our evaluative mechanisms. We hope that they are met equally with commitment and resolve. ■

*The views expressed in this article are the authors' and not the views of the United States Army or Department of Defense.*

## Notes

**Epigraph.** Christine E. Wormuth, "Message from the Secretary of the Army to the Force," Army. mil, 8 February 2022, accessed 26 August 2022, [https://www.army.mil/article/253814/message\\_from\\_the\\_secretary\\_of\\_the\\_army\\_to\\_the\\_force#:~:text=We%20should%20strive%20to%20connect,important%20indicator%20of%20our%20readiness.](https://www.army.mil/article/253814/message_from_the_secretary_of_the_army_to_the_force#:~:text=We%20should%20strive%20to%20connect,important%20indicator%20of%20our%20readiness.)

1. We thank Lt. Col. John Gabriel, who shared his thoughts on the mission essential task proficiency, climate, and endurance during large-scale combat operations over a series of phone conversations in November–December 2021.

2. Wormuth, "Message from the Secretary of the Army." Wormuth describes the reduction of harmful behaviors as "integral to sustaining a positive command climate at scale." There is also a significant body of literature reinforcing this relationship. See Dennis McGurk et al., "Destructive and Supportive Leadership in Extremis: Relationships with Post-Traumatic Stress During Combat Deployments," *Military Behavioral Health* 2, no. 3 (2014): 240–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2014.963765>; James

J. McGuffin et al., "Military and Veteran Help-Seeking Behaviors: Role of Mental Health Stigma and Leadership," *Military Psychology* 33, no. 5 (2021): 332–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2021.1962181>; Amanda L. Adrian et al., "Integrating New Soldiers: The Role of Leaders and Unit Members," *Military Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2018): 131–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2018.1425064>.

3. Center for a New American Security, "Virtual Fireside Chat: Honorable Christine Wormuth," YouTube video, 8 February 2022, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.cnas.org/events/virtual-fireside-chat-honorable-christine-wormuth-secretary-of-the-army>.

4. Jody Daniels, "Changing Culture: Moving from Metrics to Readiness," U.S. Army Reserve, 5 April 2022, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.usar.army.mil/Portals/98/Documents/CAR/Changing%20Culture%20FINAL%2004052022.pdf?ver=Kz91X-Qs2nuVg-IrGeqLRQ%3D%3D>.

5. Rachel Clare et al., *Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) Redesign: Phase 1 Overview Report* (Alexandria, VA: Office of People Analytics, October 2012), accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.opa.mil/research-analysis/quality-of-work-life/>

[workplace-climate/defense-organizational-climate-survey-deocs-redesign-phase-1-overview-report/](#).

6. *Hard Truths and the Duty to Change: Recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2 July 2021), accessed 26 August 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jul/02/2002755437/-1/-1/0/IRC-FULL-REPORT-FINAL-1923-7-1-21.PDF/IRC-FULL-REPORT-FINAL-1923-7-1-21.PDF>; Christopher Swecker et al., *Report of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee [IRC]* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 6 November 2020), accessed 26 August 2022, [https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/forthoodreview/2020-12-03-FHIRC\\_report\\_redacted.pdf](https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/forthoodreview/2020-12-03-FHIRC_report_redacted.pdf).

7. Everett Spain, Gautam Mukunda, and Archie Bates, "The Battalion Commander Effect," *Parameters* 51, no. 3 (2021): 101–14, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol51/iss3/10>. There is a significant body of literature on a leader's central role in creating a healthy work environment to drive organizational success. We also acknowledge there are examples of competent leaders who displayed toxic attributes and were able to achieve results. Recent research suggests that battalion commanders have an extensive influence in retaining high-performing officers and on the retention and attrition of their officers altogether. This influence, positive or negative, has a cascading impact on future formations.

8. Louis D. Brandeis, *Other People's Money and How the Banks Use It* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1914), 92.

9. Center for a New American Security, "Virtual Fireside Chat: Honorable Christine Wormuth."

10. Paul Boyce, "Time, Trust are Teamwork Foundations for FORSCOM's Monthly Training Days," Army.mil, 8 December 2020, accessed 26 August 2022, [https://www.army.mil/article/241497/time\\_trust\\_are\\_teamwork\\_foundations\\_for\\_forscoms\\_monthly\\_training\\_days](https://www.army.mil/article/241497/time_trust_are_teamwork_foundations_for_forscoms_monthly_training_days).

11. Wormuth, "Message from the Secretary of the Army to the Force."

12. Gen. James McConville, quoted in Michelle Tan, "McConville: Army Stronger After 'Challenging' Time," Association of the U.S. Army, 12 October 2021, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.ausea.org/news/mcconville-army-stronger-after-challenging-time>.

13. Jeremiah Gipson, "Mission Essential Task Zero: Place People First," From the Green Notebook, 15 February 2021, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2021/02/15/mission-essential-task-zero-place-people-first/>.

14. "Protective Factors," Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.defenseculture.mil/Assessment-to-Solutions/Factor-Products/Protective-Factors/>; for more on protective factors, see "The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/social-ecologicalmodel.html>; Clare et al., *Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) Redesign: Phase 1 Overview Report*, 115–95.

15. Field Manual 7-0, *Training* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], June 2021), 3-6, accessed 26 August 2022, [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/ARN32648-FM\\_7-0-000-WEB-1.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN32648-FM_7-0-000-WEB-1.pdf).

16. For an excellent overview of modern QTB dynamics, see Joseph E. Escandon, "Better Training Begins without PowerPoint,"

*Armor* (Spring 2021), 19–25, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.benning.army.mil/armor/eArmor/content/issues/2021/Spring/2Escandon21.pdf>.

17. For more information on the CR2C, see "Commander's Ready and Resilient Council [CR2C]," Army.mil, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://home.army.mil/apg/index.php/about/CR2C>.

18. For more information on the CRRT, see "Army Publishes Guidance on the Use of the Commander's Risk Reduction Toolkit [CRRT]," Army.mil, 3 May 2021, accessed 26 August 2022, [https://www.army.mil/article/245912/army\\_publishes\\_guidance\\_on\\_the\\_use\\_of\\_the\\_commanders\\_risk\\_reduction\\_toolkit](https://www.army.mil/article/245912/army_publishes_guidance_on_the_use_of_the_commanders_risk_reduction_toolkit).

19. "DEOCS: Frequently Asked Questions" (Patrick Space Force Base, FL: Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, 28 April 2021), accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.tecom.marines.mil/Portals/90/SpecialStaff/Equal%20Opportunity%20Advisor/OPA-DEOCS-SurveyAdminFAQs-20210429.pdf>. Former versions of DEOCS thresholds were admittedly arbitrary.

20. "III Armored Corps/Fort Hood Policy Letters," U.S. Army Fort Hood, accessed 1 September 2022, <https://home.army.mil/hood/index.php/about/iii-corps-fort-hood-policy-letters>.

21. The pulse survey stems from IRC recommendation 3.7a. According to the IRC report, the "survey is not meant to replace the DEOCS, but rather to supplement it as a new means for leaders to conduct 'spot checks' with an on-the-ground look for timely action specific to sexual harassment and sexual assault. The pulse survey should be conducted between required administrations of the DEOCS." *Hard Truths and the Duty to Change*, 48.

22. Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *Army Command Policy* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 24 July 2020), 140, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/images/pdf/Policy/600-20%20Army%20Command%20Policy.pdf>. Subsequent climate assessments were directed to occur at least annually to prevent and respond to sexual assaults. AR 600-20 requires commanders to conduct a climate survey within "60 days and annually thereafter." Evidence suggests command climate surveys are not administered as prescribed by Appendix E.

23. "DEOCS: Talking Paper" (Patrick Space Force Base, FL: Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, March 2022), accessed 26 August 2022, [https://www.defenseculture.mil/Portals/90/Documents/A2S/OPA-DEOCS\\_Talking\\_Paper\\_20220328.pdf?ver=oFA31YZYg7811uLSs4QyYw%3D%3D](https://www.defenseculture.mil/Portals/90/Documents/A2S/OPA-DEOCS_Talking_Paper_20220328.pdf?ver=oFA31YZYg7811uLSs4QyYw%3D%3D).

24. According to regulatory guidance, "The Military Equal Opportunity professional will secure copies of all command climate assessment executive summaries, action plans and results will be stored in a controlled container for 5 years." AR 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, 139.

25. "Command Climate Navigator," Center for the Army Profession and Leadership, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://capl.army.mil/Developing-Leaders/command-climate-navigator/ccn.php#/>.

26. *Posture of the United States Army, Before the Comm. on Armed Services, United States Senate*, 117th Cong., 1st Sess. (15 June 2021) (statements of the Honorable Christine E. Wormuth, Secretary of the Army, and Gen. James C. McConville, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army), accessed 26 August 2022, [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20210615%20-%20HON%20Wormuth%20and%20GEN%20McConville%20-%20SASC%20Army%20Posture%20\(Cleared\)](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20210615%20-%20HON%20Wormuth%20and%20GEN%20McConville%20-%20SASC%20Army%20Posture%20(Cleared)).



## Letter to the Editor

Army University Press  
7 September, 2022

Dear Editor:

Although I agree with the concepts put forth in "Embracing the Need for Command Climate Change," I found there to be a greater issue.

I have discovered that no matter how bad the results of command climate surveys taken over substantial periods of time and with multiple agencies are, if the leader (in my case the senior civilian leader) is repeatedly singled out in writing and the senior leadership does nothing about it, there is the greater problem. Some senior civilian leaders get results at any cost and the senior leadership looks the other way, despite what the Soldiers and civilians have pointed out in multiple command climate surveys. As I articulated to the Secretary of the Army at the time, he valued perceived competence over character.

This, I think is a greater problem. I think that until the Army assigns accountability, even for its senior civilian leaders, it diminishes any progress made to achieve a good command climate.

Thank you.

Don Salo  
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Military Personnel and Quality of Life

(Recipient of the "2015 Secretary of the Army Award for Diversity and Leadership" and led an organization to be named a "Top Workplace" by the Washington Post, the only organization recognized within the DoD)

Letter to the Editor from the Hon. Don Saio, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Military Personnel and Quality of Life