



Garrison commanders work at the intersection of the strategic, operational, and tactical realms on a daily basis. (Illustration by Michael M. Lopez, Army University Press)

Garrison Imperatives

A Proposal

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Serving as a garrison commander or command sergeant major is unlike any other leadership position in the U.S. Army.¹ It is challenging and difficult, as few leaders have significant experience with the installation management mission prior to accepting the colors of a U.S. Army garrison. Garrison leaders have multiple bosses and support multiple Army major commands daily. To exacerbate the challenge, no Army doctrine exists to guide garrison leaders, who are essentially city managers and mayors, in how to execute this critical mission. Because of

these challenges, successfully commanding a garrison requires a different mindset and paradigm than leading a traditional brigade or battalion. Similar to small units in Army special operations forces (SOF), garrison leaders often straddle the intersection of tactical, operational, and strategic efforts in execution of their mission—garrison commanders make decisions at the tactical level within the strategic support area that have long-term and far-reaching impacts in the operational and strategic spheres. This article is written to help provide broad fundamentals and a

proposed set of imperatives, like Special Operations Command's "SOF imperatives," for garrison leaders as they navigate and lead their garrisons and installations.² A secondary objective is to provide that same common framework for the staffs of the Installation Management Command (IMCOM) and Army Materiel Command (AMC) so they can understand the unique challenges faced by garrison commanders.

There are two areas that are worth describing that define the role and office of the garrison commander. First, most Army leaders have served at every echelon of an organization prior to assuming command of a brigade-sized element. As a result, their experience is both deep and broad about what that organization can, should, and will do. This is not the case with a garrison. Garrison commanders must learn a new language, multiple organizational and institutional

synchronizing the services of every one of these organizations to serve the installation and community. Success in this area requires garrison commanders to fully embrace executive and strategic leadership and often involves influence rather than authority. Garrison imperatives include the following:

- ◆ Understand the local operational environment.
- ◆ Understand the strategic environment.
- ◆ Understand funding streams and authorities.
- ◆ Provide and resource critical services.
- ◆ Ensure long-term sustainment.
- ◆ Foster close relationships with the local community and the media.
- ◆ Enable continuous strategic flexibility.
- ◆ Build the bench.
- ◆ Pick your battles.
- ◆ Have fun!

“Garrison commanders must learn a new language, multiple organizational and institutional cultures, and the details of their subordinate organizations on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis.”

cultures, and the details of their subordinate organizations on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis. Many of the garrison commander's direct-report leaders may have twenty or more years' experience in their own career field as well as in the specific position in which they serve. This may (and probably should) require a garrison commander to adjust his or her leadership methods and styles to ensure mission accomplishment. Second, garrison commanders serve as the senior commander's senior executive for the integration and synchronization of services on the installation. In addition to integrating the services provided by garrison directorates, there are the garrison's "enterprise partners": the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, the Defense Commissary Agency, Logistics Readiness Center/Army Field Service Battalions, privatized housing partners, privatized Army lodging, and the civilian personnel action center. The garrison commander is the sole focal point for bringing this team together, building a coherent and common understanding of the mission, and integrating and

Understand the Local Operational Environment

Garrison commanders must understand their local operational environment. This will be dominated by the senior commander's mission and requirements, but also includes mission and support requirements for other tenant units as well as understanding local politics and culture off the installation.³ Furthermore, IMCOM serves as the operational-level headquarters within the strategic support area and has a significant impact on the garrison's operational environment.

Garrison commanders must, first and foremost, focus on supporting the mission(s) of their senior commander. Supporting the senior commander's mission is the expanded purpose that should undergird all garrison operations and garrison commander decisions. Garrison commanders should understand the senior commander's desires and direction for the entire installation and then operate within that commander's intent. Garrison commanders must develop a close working relationship of mutual trust with their senior



Col. James J. Zacchino Jr. (center) assumes command of the Fort Drum Garrison from outgoing commander Col. Jeffery Lucas 23 July 2021 during a ceremony at LeRay Mansion on Fort Drum, New York. (Photo by Sgt. Kevin Dunnaway, U.S. Army)

commander to achieve this. To this end, it is critical the garrison commanders and senior commanders meet frequently. Second, garrison commanders should focus on support for additional tenant units that are often but not always subordinate to the senior commander but may have a more focused set of objectives and priorities. Garrison commanders should work closely with the senior commander's staff to take all but the most critical decisions about the installation and its management off the senior commander's plate while keeping them fully informed.

Local politics and culture play a significant role in shaping the garrison's operational environment. State, regional, and municipal elected leaders, local business leaders, and local advocacy groups color how the installation interacts with the community. Garrisons within the

continental United States are often a key, if not the primary, driver of the local economy off the installation and therefore have the interest and attention of local leaders. Garrison commanders must build and maintain proper and legal relationships with them; garrison commanders must understand their wants, needs, and desires. These will occasionally be at odds with the desire and intent of the senior commander and/or garrison commander. Understanding the local politics and culture will allow garrison commanders to find mutually supporting efforts and initiatives with local leaders and can provide unique and innovative solutions to problems.

IMCOM is the operational headquarters within the strategic support area. As such, IMCOM and its Army major command-aligned directorates are key influencers for policy and resources with AMC as well

as other strategic enablers. Garrison commanders must build and leverage relationships with the IMCOM staff and IMCOM directorate staffs; this will allow them to generate a common and comprehensive understanding among them of what support and resources their garrison needs.

Understand the Strategic Environment

Garrison commanders also operate in the strategic realm. Decisions and initiatives that garrison commanders conceive and begin in their two-year command tour are frequently unrealized until several garrison commanders later. Likewise, garrison commanders will see the final execution of initiatives from prior garrison commanders come to fruition during their command tours. Because of this, garrison commanders must get comfortable with the fact that a significant part of their contribution during command will be in setting conditions for future success and beginning major efforts and initiatives. They must understand the levers to use, how to influence decisions in the long term, and who has decision authorities for projects, programs, and resources in the current fiscal year and ten years or more beyond. Specifically, garrison commanders must understand how to influence and drive decisions as a subordinate command to IMCOM and AMC in the strategic support area that supports multiple Army major commands (e.g., four-star commands) and often requires Army senior leader, Department of the Army, Department of Defense, and congressional support.

Garrisons exist within the strategic support area. The assumption of the American homeland as a broad haven for our forces is no longer valid, and garrison commanders have a vital role in enabling readiness. Through management, development, and maintenance of Army installations as power projection platforms and mobilization-force-generation installations, garrison commanders enable Army strategic and enterprise-level readiness and mission accomplishment. Because of this, garrison commanders must be attuned to the strategic environment and the decision-making processes that support national strategic objectives for the Army.

Garrisons that are outside the continental United States (OCONUS) in IMCOM-Pacific and

IMCOM-Europe, especially those in foreign countries, exist within operational support areas. Their services and operations directly support forward-deployed forces and their accompanying families. While the services provided to senior commanders may not greatly differ from continental United States garrisons, the context and urgency may differ. Proximity to nations that are competitors or adversaries also introduces considerations for OCONUS garrisons serving as intermediate staging bases and potential for noncombatant evacuation operations. Additionally, relationships with host nation officials, locally and nationally, play a much larger role in the OCONUS garrison's strategic environment.

Finally, garrison commanders, in conjunction with their senior commander, IMCOM and AMC leadership, and Army senior leaders, must actively engage congressional representation in their state and district. This is often driven by the need to clearly communicate Army priorities and requirements to congressional representatives and their staffs during the budget development process each year. Garrison commanders should

understand that senior commander and even Army priorities for resources (operation and maintenance, military construction, etc.) may differ from congressional officials' priorities. Congressional officials are often interested in local and regional issues that impact the garrison directly, but also may be incorporated into legislation or inquiry. It is critical for garrison commanders to understand and stay aligned with senior commander and Army priorities in their engagements with congressional representatives.

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Understand Funding Streams and Authorities

Garrison leaders manage multiple funding streams and influence several others that are relevant to the garrison and installation. These funding streams have different authorities associated with them for their expenditures. Garrison commanders must understand what each funding stream resources and the associated authorities for each of these, whether it is funding for base operating systems, sustainment, renovation, and modernization, or senior commander operations and maintenance funds. A garrison commander with a broad understanding of funding across multiple program evaluation groups, subactivity groups, and management decision and evaluation packets is able to intelligently solve problems for both their senior commander and the garrison.

This understanding will also enable garrison commanders to tactfully engage senior commanders and their staffs when a proposal cannot be supported by garrison funds while working to find a solution that satisfies the senior commander.

In addition to the above funding streams and authorities, garrison commanders should understand and be able to apply funding streams that are not from traditional Army sources. As an example, the Exchange (Army and Air Force Exchange Service) is an enterprise partner on every installation across the Army worldwide. The Exchange brings assets with it that can assist garrison commanders in solving problems with “other people’s money.” Often, the Exchange will sponsor or lead installation events in

which it bears most of the cost of the event, but the installation, broader community, and garrison directorates are able to participate in and benefit from. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the Exchange at Fort Leonard Wood sponsored a “Halloween Drive-thru Trunk or Treat” to take the place of traditional trick-or-treating in the housing areas. Almost every garrison directorate, unit, and organization on Fort Leonard Wood voluntarily participated by

manning a station at the event and interacted with over one thousand families. All of this was done at a minimal cost to the garrison with disproportionately positive results for the families in the community. In addition to sponsoring events, the Exchange donates proceeds directly to the installation’s Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation based on the Exchange’s annual retail sales. There are also other organizations, both governmental and local,

that may want to host or participate to include funding events that are beneficial the garrison and the community, such as the Armed Services YMCA, the United Services Organization, local advocacy organizations, and military service organizations (Sergeant Audie Murphy Club, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, etc.).⁴ Garrison commanders who understand the opportunities and benefits that working with these organizations presents can generate greater results for the installation while deepening relationships across the community.

Finally, garrison commanders are critical partners for both privatized housing ventures and privatized lodging on the installation. Both organizations provide critical services for the installation and community. Garrison commanders have a direct role in the budget and financial



U.S. Army Installation Management Command Distinctive Unit Crest

solvency of privatized housing partners but cannot allocate appropriated funds to support them. As such, garrison commanders must leverage their influence as partners to provide top-quality housing for Army families now and in the future as well as resolving tenant-landlord issues that invariably arise. Understanding the local privatized housing partner's budget, how the reinvestment account and basic allowance for housing feed into the budget, and how the partner's corporate business model works will allow garrison commanders to find solutions in support of the overall mission.

Provide and Resource Critical Services

The core of the garrison mission is to provide city functional and mission support services to the senior commander, installation-specific mission and objectives, and the installation community. Garrison commanders are the integrators of these services and must synchronize these services across the installation. Garrison commanders, in conjunction with senior commanders, should identify the highest priority services for the mission and installation and resource them accordingly. Garrison teams are the only ones who consider the full gamut of support to the community: soldiers, civilians, families, military retirees, and commercial enterprises. A thorough high-quality analysis of the community's needs coupled with creative ways to provide them will ensure critical services are properly resourced. This will facilitate mission accomplishment for the senior commander and a happy home life for the residents of the installation.

Plan for Long-Term Sustainment

Due to the short length of command tours, garrison commanders and senior commanders often focus on what can be accomplished in that two-year time frame. This can lead to the lack of a sustainable program, service, or project that will languish and sap resources in the future. In deciding which initiatives to support and execute, garrison commanders must direct and ensure that long-term sustainment of the project is considered and planned for prior to approval of the project. Critical to this is for garrison commanders to designate responsibility to one of the garrison directorates and determine the best means to fund the project's sustainment in the out years.

Foster Close Relationships with the Community and the Media

Garrison commanders must know and be known in the local community, including at the regional and state levels. This includes on the installation and off-post, with local chambers of commerce and businesses, local elected officials, and schools. This could also include regional industry and business leaders that may have an impact on the community and installation. Developing and maintaining these relationships generates opportunities and options for creative solutions to complicated and complex problems that garrison commanders will certainly face.

Likewise, garrison commanders should, in conjunction with the public affairs officer, develop relationships with local and regional media. This serves two purposes: (1) it can act as a source of information and early warning for emerging issues and crises, and (2) it allows for freedom of action for the garrison commander during a crisis to clearly communicate and engage quickly. Garrison commanders who routinely engage the media can rapidly assess the risk involved in an emerging issue, report to higher headquarters appropriately, and get to a positive resolution. Critical in this is a garrison commander's clear understanding of themes and messages from the Army's Office of the Chief of Public Affairs as well as issues and concerns from the Army's Office of the Congressional Legislative Liaison. With this thorough understanding, garrison commanders should seize the initiative with the media to get the Army's and their installation's story out first in front of emerging issues.

Enable Continuous Strategic Flexibility

Garrison commanders must guide the installation strategic development plan and installation master plan to enable continuous strategic flexibility. These are akin to "avenues of approach" that provide flexibility for the Department of Defense, the Army, and their senior commanders to meet the emerging issues and capabilities in the short- and midterm. Garrison commanders also use these processes to ensure that decisions in the current year do not desynchronize congressional appropriations and Army systems to manage and prioritize them (e.g., Facilities

Investment Plan, housing investment programs). By keeping an eye toward future Army requirements, garrison commanders can generate contingency options and capacity to meet emerging needs.

To do this, garrison commanders must provide a clear and compelling vision around which a strategic development plan can be built. In other words, the strategic development plan must operationalize the strategic vision for the installation. While most likely managed by the garrison plans, analysis,

employees while identifying and developing leadership skills in potential supervisors. Supervisor and leader development programs build on employee development to strengthen the organization and continue to develop leadership skills for mid-level leaders. Talent management programs, personally managed by garrison commanders and deputy garrison commanders, should develop emerging leaders as potential directors and deputy garrison commanders as well as identify and encourage the development

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and integration office, strategic development plans must clearly address Army senior leader, Army major command, IMCOM, and senior commander priorities. Garrison commanders must include input and address mission requirements and future development concepts and resources from the senior commander's organization, tenant units, and the key players in the garrison (public works; plans, training, mobilization, and security; emergency services; family, morale, welfare, and recreation; logistics readiness center; and privatized housing partners).

Build the Bench

Garrison commanders must take an active role in workforce development and talent management at their garrison, within IMCOM, and within the civil service. They should build and maintain workforce development programs that develop both hard and soft skills to improve performance in employees' current positions; they should also look to develop employees' skills in preparation for assignments with greater responsibility. At the same time, garrison commanders should identify talented employees and provide them developmental opportunities and assignments.

Investment in the garrison workforce can and should be at several levels. Workforce development programs should strive to develop skills to improve the performance and broaden the skill sets of

of enterprise-level civilian leaders. Garrison commanders should also consider a “pay it forward” mentality for workforce development and talent management—the employee in whom they invest may deliver the return on investment at a different garrison or on an IMCOM/AMC staff.

Pick Your Battles

Garrison commanders must engage change discriminately. There are inevitable second- and third-order effects that garrison commanders may not initially realize, and garrison staffs and directorates cannot or do not see. Change must be tied to a requirement or improving service delivery and performance as opposed to a commander's desire or preference. Just because a garrison CAN do something, does not necessarily mean it SHOULD do something. Keep in mind that often, once a garrison takes over a requirement, mission, or task, it has now “always been garrison's job” and divesting of that responsibility will be difficult for future garrison commanders. This is especially important when considering actions for which garrisons are not resourced or fall above common levels of support. Additionally, garrison commanders will never be able to please all stakeholders in the community. When garrison commanders *do* change something, it must be thoroughly vetted, planned, and resourced.

Have Fun!

Very few soldiers grow up in the Army with a career goal of serving as a garrison commander or command sergeant major. However, upon completion of their command tour, many garrison commanders and command sergeant majors comment that it was one of the best jobs they had in the Army. Garrison commanders are the face of an organizations that truly serve the “people.” There is almost nothing on an installation that garrison commanders do not touch or influence. The opportunity to lock in long-term improvements are something commanders in brigade combat teams, training brigades, and other commands will not experience.

As garrison commanders, leaders get to meet people, build relationships and friendships, and get the unique and “cool” opportunities that other commanders do not get. While these are all in service of a garrison’s mission, they are often enjoyable and truly enrich the experience

of serving as a garrison commander. These relationships and experiences also serve as great memories of military service, continue to build and strengthen local connections between our military and our Nation, and often last well past a garrison commander’s command tour.

Garrison command is exceptionally demanding and equally rewarding. While the challenges are legion, the opportunity to drive lasting change that directly impacts soldiers, families, and the Army’s mission is one that cannot be surpassed. The imperatives described above are the start of establishing a doctrinal foundation upon which future garrison command teams will find unparalleled success. While garrison commanders must have a different set of lenses for viewing their mission and organization in partnership with their senior commander, Installation Management Command, and Army Materiel Command, garrisons form and remain the core of how the Army fights and wins our Nation’s wars. We are the Army’s home. ■

Notes

1. For simplicity, the term *garrison commander* will be used throughout this article. It includes the garrison command team of the garrison commander and garrison command sergeant major.

2. “SOF Imperatives,” United States Army Special Operations Command, accessed 29 August 2022, <https://www.soc.mil/USAS-OCHQ/SOFImperatives.html>.

3. Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *Army Command Policy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2020). Some

garrisons work under the direction of a senior responsible officer, who executes some of the senior mission commander responsibilities in AR 600-20 on behalf of a senior commander. This is often the case at outside the continental United States garrisons or small garrisons within the United States.

4. Garrison commanders should always consult with their legal advisors before committing to an event with one of these types of organizations.