



Community partners celebrate The North Country's recognition as a 2019 Great American Defense Community in Watertown, New York. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

Continuous Transformation of the Army Installation

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We asked ChatGPT, "What should an Army installation in 2030 be like?" The answer was dizzying. A few suggestions included

integrated smart technology, renewable energy, supply chains, human well-being, advanced surveillance, and immersive training technology.¹ Artificial intelligence (AI)

might be able to help, but transformation of installations must involve more simple adjustments than high-tech solutions. Installations in the future will require collaboration from the ground level up to continually transform to support the needs of the warfighting mission.

A good starting point is to ask what an installation must be able to do now and in the future. To guide our approach, Army strategic documents outline the functions and initiatives an installation should work toward through the modernization, installation, and climate strategies and corresponding implementation plans.² To help, the chief of staff of the Army (CSA) has created four focus areas to add direction to the broad nature of strategic documents. Senior commanders must apply the CSA's focus areas to their installation: warfighting, delivering combat-ready formations, continuous transformation, and strengthening the Army profession.³ As the integrator of army services on installations, garrisons integrate components of each focus area and its corresponding Army command.⁴

First, *support to the warfighting mission* is the “why” of every installation. It is why we exist as an Army and therefore why we have installations. Installations must maintain focus on warfighting as we prioritize resources, personnel, and time. Second, *delivering combat-ready formations* for the installation means building ready families. Garrisons support soldiers and families by providing family support services, recreation programs, housing, commissary/PX services, childcare, and youth programs. Garrison resources for “ready families” are building blocks of combat-ready formations. Third, *strengthening the Army profession* for a garrison means fostering a positive climate for the garrison workforce. A positive climate is rooted in leader engagement, predictability, reliability, and leader development. Fourth, to *continually transform* the installation, the workforce needs to innovate at the grassroots level to provide the best services for the warfighting force. These four focus areas build from the bottom up. Innovative employees are engaged and therefore create a positive workforce culture. A strong workforce provides first-class services to build ready families, and prepared families understand how to support the warfighting mission.

Supporting the Warfighting Mission

Installations support the warfighting mission through continuous transformation by efficiently

managing supporting infrastructure to deployment readiness (power projection), training support, and soldier quality of life. To meet this challenge, there are a few things installations must do.

First, an installation must link readiness to quality-of-life initiatives for soldiers and families.⁵ If soldiers have a safe place to live under quality conditions, they are more ready. For the installation, this means optimizing energy efficiency. Efficient systems optimize the use of personnel and funding to create a quality of life for soldiers that supports readiness.

To support quality living areas, an installation must optimize the use of energy in facilities using centralized control systems that are cyber-protected. Facility-related control systems allow centralized monitoring of building temperature and HVAC efficiency. These systems identify problems before systems break, creating a preventative approach and avoiding a reactive approach. Sending maintenance teams to fix an already identified problem or to replace system parts based on equipment life cycles from centralized monitoring optimizes the use of personnel and prevents system failures. Putting facility-related control systems software on cyber-protected systems adds to the security of the installation. Reducing the administrative burden to achieve the authority to operate these systems is a key function to enable energy efficiency.⁶

Third, an installation must plan for ongoing Army structural changes and build flexibility into its unit footprints to anticipate those changes. The 2024 Total Army analysis directs Army structural changes through 2029.⁷ The most significant structural changes to the Army in forty years means we must change unit footprints and fit new units into existing infrastructure. Installations must

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formulate plans to make these moves predictable and work with units to put them on the training schedule at the right time. We must keep a small percentage of excess facilities to create flexibility for renovation and modernization. This small excess allows the installation to move units to modernize facilities. In addition to moves due to structural changes, an installation must plan for energy-resilient upgrading of facilities. Good master planning to create predictability, optimize use

essential to bring together unit operational needs with Army installation requirements and stationing actions. Garrison equipment readiness directly affects power projection capability, and the condition of garrison facilities equates to deployment readiness. This integration is realized by including garrison personnel in boards, bureaus, centers, cells, and working groups of unit campaign plans and likewise having division/corps staff support installation strategic planning efforts.

“To support the warfighting mission, an installation garrison must integrate personnel and services to support unit campaign plans and operational planning.”

of facilities, and permit energy-efficient upgrades will save money while building readiness.

Fourth, due to continuous changes in structure and modernization of facilities, an installation must provide public transportation to support changing unit footprints. Most soldiers come to their first unit without a car, and families in transition often need transportation. Army structural changes will not make unit footprints ideal or “campus-like” at all locations. Flexibility to optimize facilities will require ready, reliable, and frequent public transportation on base. Public transportation is a complementary effort to the Army food strategy to provide “campus style dining” on Army installations.⁸ Fort Cavazos has recently implemented a free transportation service on base to improve quality of life and mitigate risks to soldiers and families in transition.⁹

Finally, to support the warfighting mission, an installation garrison must integrate personnel and services to support unit campaign plans and operational planning. A garrison Department of Public Works integrates regularly with the division or corps engineers, unit command sergeant majors, and barracks managers. In the same way, garrison engineers and master planners share information with operational units to ensure long-term plans meet the requirements of the installation’s operational needs. Garrison human resource services support installation reception companies daily. Garrison plans and training support work with division and corps G-3s. Personnel integration is

Build Ready Families

Warfighting is enabled by ready families.

Delivering combat-ready formations requires active measures to prepare military families for the expectations of the military profession. Communication is a key component of helping both single soldiers and military families access services to manage the unique, and at times difficult, requirements to thrive as a military family. Efforts that support ready families include supporting transitioning soldiers and families with reliable, accessible, and accurate information about housing, health care, schools, childcare, spouse employment, and community safety before they arrive at a new location. Installations must help build ready families in five ways.

First, an installation must build communication strategies focused on transitioning service members while also supporting informational requirements of soldiers and families on the installation. The first impression of an installation is online. Transitioning service members research their new duty station online when they receive orders or when they are considering reassignment. Additionally, a well-formulated communication plan for an installation helps Army recruiters give information to citizens considering service. They can use online resources to help a potential soldier see what life is like in the Army. Finally, communication strategies create information advantage through “the proactive release of accurate information [that] ... increases friendly force resiliency.”¹⁰ We



Fort Drum family members make mindfulness jars, worry monsters, sensory bags, and other stress relief items at the Family Advocacy Program's inaugural Chillfest event 25 August 2022 at LeRay Mansion on Fort Drum. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

inform to build trust and confidence. Social media, installation websites, and command messaging all contribute to mitigating the risk to families in transition. Installations must transform to provide access to services online as the first touchpoint of communication to build family readiness.

Transitioning service members seek information focused primarily on housing, health care, child-care, schools, spouse employment, and community safety. Installations must include these categories in their communication strategies and online presence. Additionally, installations must be aware of other informal social media sites and actively seek to counter misinformation in those spaces. Another risk area to building ready families exists during “hidden transition” or transition in military families that creates risk between PCS moves. Hidden transition includes having a child, significant illnesses, marriage, divorce, career-changing discipline measures, or changes in child custody, to name a few. These are periods where installation services like family support, financial readiness,

and prevention services should be one click away for a soldier or family in need.

Third, an installation must integrate prevention services to support both soldiers and families to foster community safety. Consistent instances of suicide, substance abuse, and domestic or child abuse can stem from complex problems that are intertwined in relationships, financial stress, or transition stress. As the Army recognizes the need for soldier and family readiness groups, we must ensure that our prevention services are accessible to soldiers and families and integrated to maximize the availability of that service. Installations can create efficiencies in Army community service programs for families with human resource functions for soldiers under the prevention mission.

Fourth, an installation must harness the support of family members to link spouse employment to the garrison workforce. Military spouse employment in a garrison is a key component to deliver services to build ready families. Of the garrison workforce on Fort Drum, 15 percent is composed of active-duty



Command Sgt. Maj. Jeremiah Delrio, the senior enlisted advisor of Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 10th Mountain Division, guides a HMMWV off a ramp 25 April 2024 at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) on Fort Johnson, Louisiana. JRTC provides units with realistic predeployment training in simulated large-scale combat operations to build readiness to support globally deployable missions. (Photo by Spc. Salvador Castro, U.S. Army)

Army spouses, and their employment is predominantly in child development centers, the area of greatest need.¹¹ Spouses employed in child development centers are twofold support of spouse employment because their work as a childcare provider enables another spouse to work.

Fifth, an installation must work with local communities to foster family support services throughout the surrounding communities. A large percentage of military families live off military installations in the surrounding communities. Building ready families involves working with local communities, schools, recreation centers, and organizations to deliver services to families in the surrounding communities. This includes supporting local communities with information to attain federal funding with programs like the Defense Community Infrastructure Program or Department of Education Impact Aid to area schools for support to military child dependents.¹²

Maintain a Positive Workforce Culture

Installations must strengthen the Army profession by creating positive work environments under ethical, active, and engaged leadership. These leaders create cultures where people want to come to work because they generally enjoy what they do, understand their purpose, and reach their full potential in a safe and positive work environment rooted in dignity and respect.

The installation must create predictability for its workforce through sharing reliable information through consistent communication. Like any command, a garrison and its services are run by a professional workforce that deserves reliable command information, predictability in its mission, and leader development opportunities to support promotion, progression, and job satisfaction.

Third, installations must recruit talented workers from transitioning soldiers, active-duty military

spouses, and the local community to support a positive culture. Like the military shortfalls in recruiting, shortfalls in recruitment of a garrison workforce created reductions in hours of service and increased the workload in certain areas. Harnessing the available workforce from military spouses and transitioning service members is a key component to maintaining a workforce to provide adequate services to soldiers and families. Lack of attention in this area can become a weak point in support to soldier quality of life. This recruiting effort should highlight opportunities created in the Department of the Army civilian workforce through leader development, benefits, and upward mobility.

Innovate

The fuel of “continuous transformation” at garrisons is innovation at the lowest level. Innovation occurs through empowerment to bring ideas to positively change an organization. This works best from the bottom up and within individual workspaces. Innovation is hard work that is often prevented through dated policies and engrained processes that can be positive for the organization, but not in every instance.

Encouraging innovation and sharing of ideas across installations will help foster change where it is needed.

An installation must innovate at its own level and use these efforts to inform changes and policies at higher command levels. Innovation is part of line of effort three of the *Army Installation Strategy* (innovate and modernize) that includes the effort to “transform installations” and “reward innovation.”¹³ Innovation can create simple but effective changes when an empowered workforce can make decisions to improve and submit feedback that is acted upon. The following are a few examples of innovation at the installation level.



Fort Drum's Directorate of Public Works' in-house work crew moves eleven-ton concrete sections into place 25 May 2023 at Range 23 on Fort Drum. They replaced two 1,100 ft. walls and an entire rail system that make up a moving armor target emplacement. Range 23 is an aerial gunnery and convoy live-fire range that can be configured for a variety of combined-arms training scenarios. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Putting people who often work together in the same workspace facilitates an efficient use of garrison structure and facilities while avoiding stovepipes of information. At Fort Drum, the Department of Public Works, Department of Resource Management, and the Mission and Installation Contracting Command all

work in the same building. This places our biggest user of resources with the manager of resources and with the command that formulates the contracts for the resources. Benefits include rapid and timely allocation of available resources with quick feedback loops for staffing of contracts to support the installation.

Installation garrisons provide retirement services regionally. Recent relocation of our retirement services office closer to the front door and on the first floor of a large administrative building has made this office easy for retirees to access, increasing our amount of services rendered.

Like retirement services, we have merged Army community service functions with our Department of Human Resources. This merge has improved services to both soldiers and family members by locating similar services in the same offices. This includes linking casualty assistance and survivor outreach programs, prevention programs, employment readiness and transition assistance, financial readiness and Soldier for Life programs, and streamlined access to services by consolidating similar resources in the same facilities such as substance abuse, family advocacy, victim advocacy, new parent support, and exceptional family member program.

Budget flexibility is another area of innovation that increases the efficiency of transforming installations. Installations may have adequate funding to provide services, but they do not have the flexibility to move money to an unforeseen area of need within their own allocated budget. More flexibility in the military decision packages (MDEPs) and to move money within sub-activity groups (SAGs) empowers installations to meet their operational mission.

The most important aspect of an innovation culture is frequent feedback mechanisms from multiple sources across the installation. Feedback should go directly back to multiple levels of the workforce with empowerment for employees to act on feedback. This fosters immediate implementation of changes to improve services, change policies, mitigate risk, and make positive changes. At Fort Drum, the installation receives feedback from the commanding general's staff duty after action reports, Interactive Customer Evaluation comments, command engagements, social media comments, Army-directed surveys, and direct engagement with soldiers and families. It is important

to get feedback both internally and externally to the installation.

It is important to note that an installation must balance innovation with efficient standardization and centralization across all installations. Installation Management Command maximizes the use of resources through centralization. Innovation must not turn initiative into decisions that degrade capability or impose cumulative risk across Army installations.

An important closing point for installations in the future is the importance of partnership with surrounding communities. This principle spans all four focus areas, as surrounding communities are greatly populated by soldiers and families. Installations must manage emergencies side by side with the surrounding communities and not isolate themselves from the surrounding areas. A crisis off base affects the readiness of soldiers on base. Energy resiliency plans should include efforts to support surrounding cities and towns. Degraded services off base affect the family readiness of units. Continual collaboration with the Association of Defense Communities and surrounding communities is vital to this effort.

Conclusion

Combining the content of the most recent guiding documents and the CSA's focus areas implemented at the garrison level shapes a path of continuous transformation for installations. If we lack focus, tackling this problem can be overwhelming and aimless, but application of the CSA focus areas of warfighting, delivering combat-ready formations, continuous transformation, and strengthening the Army profession to the installation determines what we must do. A few conclusions contribute to the ongoing correspondence on how to transform our installations continually.

First, we must keep readiness of warfighting capability as the main priority, enabled by modernization and quality of life initiatives. Soldiers need purpose as warfighters; all other efforts will fall in line to support that purpose, including the link between readiness and quality of life. Second, communication of information is a key component to build ready families and enable soldiers and families to proactively participate in shaping their quality of life. Access to reliable information and responsive services to soldiers in transition builds resilient and ready families. Third, talent management of the civilian



Fort Drum, New York's housing partner Mountain Community Homes manages 3,793 homes to support soldiers and families of the 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

workforce, to include recruiting talent from military families, must include stability and predictability of their jobs. A stable workforce builds adequate and reliable services for installations, and military families contribute to that effort. Fourth, we cannot let policies and processes stifle innovation. Empowerment of installation workforces to make changes and modify policies is essential to transform installations. We must encourage and reward innovation.¹⁴

Finally, the resiliency of installations must consider the integration with surrounding communities that support our soldiers and families. A power outage off the installation will affect the people who work on the installation. Independent and protected services on an installation are a security and readiness requirement, but neglecting surrounding communities will affect the readiness of soldiers and families. ■

Notes

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13. Grinston, McConville, and McCarthy, *Army Installations Strategy*, 6, 13.

14. Ibid.