



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III speaks to Command Sgt. Maj. James L. Manning Jr., right, and 1st Sgt. Christopher Cunningham, center, both with 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, Aug. 5 during his visit to Fort Drum, N.Y., to discuss the Army's Ready and Resilient Campaign. (Photo by Capt. Peter Smedberg, 10th Mountain Division)

SMA: Engaged Leadership Key To Resilient Force

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As the Army begins moving toward reduced troop numbers, a glaring reality faces units across the board — commanders must be prepared to sustain a rigorous operational tempo with fewer Soldiers standing in formation.

To help shed some light on the future of the U.S. Army, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III and his wife, Jeanne, visited Fort Drum, N.Y., this week to meet with Soldiers and family members and to talk about the Army's Ready and Resilient Campaign.

Building the force during 13-plus years of combat in Iraq, Afghanistan and other more obscure theaters around the globe, helped shape the Army into a force of more than 570,000 — a number that could shrink to 450,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017, and if sequestration continues, could result in an even lower number of troops as overseas contingency operations wind down.

With a smaller Army, an added demand is placed on the need for a ready and resilient force capable of stand-

ing up to operational requirements at home station, at national training centers and while deployed.

“We’ve got to have as many Soldiers ready as we possibly can,” Chandler said. “We have a very small Army that will get smaller, but we will still have to do the things we’ve done over the last 13 years.

“We’re not going to be able to be successful as an Army if we have Soldiers who don’t have the ability to bounce back, whether that’s from an emotional injury or physical injury, so we’ve got to have as many Soldiers ready as we possibly can,” he continued. “Resiliency helps us in our ability to bounce back, and to be that person who is able to deploy, and fight and win our nation’s wars.”

To help mitigate the stressors placed on Soldiers and families as a result of a leaner force, the Army has placed high-level command emphasis on its Ready and Resilient Campaign, known as R2C.

R2C is designed to integrate and synchronize multiple efforts and initiatives already under way to improve the readiness and resilience of its force.

R2C ties assets including Sexual Harassment/Assault Response Program, Army Substance Abuse Program, Behavioral Health, Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness, Army Suicide Prevention Program, Soldier for Life: Transition Assistance Program, Total Army Sponsorship Program, Strong Bonds and the Integrated Disability Evaluation System, into a streamlined environment that is easily accessible and abundantly staffed at the lowest unit levels Armywide.

Despite the wide array of resources available to today’s Soldiers and families, the key to resiliency is engaged leadership at the first-line supervisor level, according to Chandler. Engaged leaders will be able to identify issues with their Soldiers’ physical and mental well-being — many times before the Soldiers themselves — and help guide them to the appropriate resource to address their needs.

“There’s a lot of things that engaged leadership means, but to me it means being present in your Soldiers’ lives, whether they live in the barracks or off post,” Chandler said. “It’s about being empathetic, extending yourself to Soldiers and trying to understand where they’re coming from — being aware of the issues that may be present in their lives.”

Individual resilience can be built, maintained and strengthened when viewed as an enduring concept and acquired through regular training, but without engaged leadership — leaders who really know their Soldiers — the Army cannot become the resilient force officials envision.

“I think just the term ‘engaged’ means action; you can’t just spout the NCO Creed or Warrior Ethos and thump your chest and say, ‘Look at me, I’m an NCO,’” Chandler said. “It means actually taking steps to be engaged in your Soldiers’ lives and the lives of their families.”

Chandler explained that being engaged does not mean interfering; rather, it means NCOs should be empathetic and knowledgeable about how to help and what services are available to Soldiers and their families.

“It’s about extending yourself to Soldiers and trying to understand where they’re coming from; being aware of the issues that may be present in their lives,” he said. “It could be financial issues, it could be physical issues that a Soldier or family member has, and it’s your responsibility as a leader to do something about it.

“That takes a level of commitment, character and competence,” Chandler continued. “There’s a lot of things that engaged leadership means, but to me, it means being present in your Soldiers’ lives. I challenge any NCO, if you don’t know where your Soldiers live off post and have not physically gone out to see how they live and where they live, you are not an engaged leader.”

While addressing 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) Soldiers during a town hall meeting, Chandler said engaged leadership extends past the supervisor level down to the “battle buddy.”

“I go back to the Army profession where it’s about character, commitment and confidence,” he said. “You should be looking out for the welfare of your battle buddy both on and off duty. You should be committed to them, willing to do what is necessary to ensure their well-being.

“You should know what to do if you sense that something’s wrong and be able to talk to your leadership about it,” Chandler added. “If you do that, I think you’re supporting our Ready and Resilient Campaign.” ■

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