



Noncommissioned officers prepare to present their ideas to Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey at the NCO Solarium 2015 at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. About 80 NCOs participated in the initiative to address Army concerns. (Photos by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

# NCOs weigh in on Army issues at Solarium 2015

By Martha C. Koester — NCO Journal

**I**t became very clear to the noncommissioned officers assembled during the first Noncommissioned Officer Solarium 2015 Outbrief session at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., which key Army topic of the seven discussed was the most critical to Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey. If physical fitness benchmarks continue on the current path where 40 percent of Soldiers are overweight and body fat standards are too lenient, it will pose a severe detriment to Army readiness, and the Army and nation will suffer for it, Dailey said.

The Sergeant Major of the Army urged about 80 participating noncommissioned officers May 1 during the event at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Combined Arms Center to take accountability for their physical fitness and set the example for their Soldiers.

“You don’t get good physical fitness unless you do physical fitness,” Dailey said. “[I say] good for you if you have the guilt for not doing [physical training]. Let that run on your brain all day long. I hope it eats you apart if you did not do physical fitness this morning. Hopefully that in turn will drive you to do it tomorrow.”

## Call for excellence

Dailey, Command Sgt. Maj. David S. Davenport Sr., TRADOC command sergeant major; Command Sgt. Maj. David O. Turnbull, Combined Arms Center command sergeant major; and Sgt. Maj. Dennis A. Eger, Mission Command Center of Excellence sergeant major, heard from a focus group of NCOs who suggested that the Army needs a better tool to assess physical readiness training (PRT) instead of the “outdated” Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT).



From left, Command Sgt. Maj. David S. Davenport Sr., command sergeant major of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command; Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey; Command Sgt. Maj. David O. Turnbull, command sergeant major of the Combined Arms Center; and Sgt. Maj. Dennis A. Eger, sergeant major of the Mission Command Center of Excellence, take part in discussions May 1 during the Outbrief session of the Noncommissioned Officer Solarium 2015 at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. The Solarium is an initiative of the sergeant major of the Army.

“There are units and posts out there conducting different types of physical training such as CrossFit and P90X. ... They have not bought into what the Army standard is,” said 1st Sgt. Jason M. Lambert, combat engineer 1st sergeant with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 6th Engineer Battalion.

Lambert was the speaker for the physical fitness group. For the Solarium, NCOs were divided into seven work groups. Each group was asked to present their recommendations to the Sergeant Major of the Army on the seven most problematic issues facing today’s Army. The other key topics were talent management, education, culture, training, vision/branding and practicing mission command.

“Our recommendation is to modify the APFT to be more realistic and have it revolve around PRT concepts,” Lambert said.

TRADOC Command Sgt. Maj. David S. Davenport Sr. acknowledged that the APFT does not match the doctrine on physical fitness.

“Why is everybody doing P90X and Cross Fit? Because they’re training to max the PT test; it’s not about their unit mission,” Davenport said. “If you talk to [Soldiers] about Afghanistan, they think stamina is important. It’s not about how many push-ups you can do. We have got to figure out how we’re going to assess overall fitness. ... Fitness is tied to everything we do in our Army.”

### Priorities and the mission

Solarium discussions frequently crossed over into several key topics as the NCOs in focus groups presented their recommendations. First Sgt. Robert V. Craft Jr.,

mechanical maintenance 1st sergeant with 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, discussed consequences for Soldiers who fail the APFT.

“My group came to a consensus that we have begun to accept substandard performance in order to make numbers for mission,” Craft said. “[If Soldiers are being retained] in order to be able to accomplish our missions, it basically leads the average Soldier to believe that PT isn’t important and shape isn’t important. The only thing that matters is the mission.

“At the end of the day, it’s our responsibility as NCOs, bottom line, but the problem arises when we as NCOs do our part [to begin the separation of a Soldier], [and then a commander says] to retain that Soldier and fix it,” Craft said. “I can’t fix a Soldier if the Soldier has quit. I can do more with less if I didn’t have to worry about that bottom 10 percent.”

Noncommissioned officers in the group that focused on talent management noted that the Army needs to improve how select personnel are identified for broadening assignments, such as recruiters and drill sergeants.

“We’ve recently been embarrassed in the media by recruiters having improper relations with recruits; also a sexual assault response coordinator who embarrassed his organization by his actions in Texas,” said Master Sgt. Danny Ibarra, a secretary of general staff for 21st Theater Sustainment Command Operations and Support. “We need to screen [for those positions] a little bit better. There currently isn’t a standardized selection process, and the command sergeant major’s involvement is key.



“Having the command sergeant major vet and interview these personnel could help stop putting these people in the wrong assignments,” Ibarra and his group said.

Dailey said talent management in the Army is under review and that changes to the process are being considered.

“I think that we have to put talent management in the hands of every leader throughout every organization,” the sergeant major of the Army said. “It was once described to me as not about managing the top 10 percent [of Soldiers]. That’s real easy. The challenge is what do you do with the bottom 40 [percent of Soldiers].”

“Everybody’s fighting for that quality individual, and there’s not enough [of them] to go around,” he said.

### **Walking billboards**

NCOs also discussed the successes and failures of Army branding campaigns and whether or not they identified personally with any of them. NCOs in the focus group on branding said the current campaign, “Army Strong,” does not resonate with them.

“We feel that we need something that speaks more as far as who we are, what we are and why we do it,” said Sgt. 1st Class Cornelius Cowart, operations NCO for 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade. “We need something that’s a little more timeless. For instance, a lot of us in here can relate, even 20 years later, to ‘Be All You Can Be.’ It still speaks to our veterans, active-duty Soldiers and even some of our younger Soldiers.”

The sergeant major of the Army agreed with Cowart and his group about the timeless appeal of “Be All You

Can Be”. However, Dailey urged NCOs to consider the message they convey to the public as walking “billboards” for the Army.

“Every Soldier is a billboard; we’re all billboards, and there actually are enough of us to make a difference nationally,” he said. “You can control what your own billboard says. It’s a big old billboard, and it’s going to get more attention than the one that’s on the side of the road.”

Dailey spoke of the new transition assistance program called Soldier For Life, which prepares service members for post-Army life by ensuring that he or she has all of the necessary tools, opportunities and counseling.

“Here is our problem as I see it — the Marine Corps is very good at what they do,” Dailey said. “You can chapter out of the Marine Corps, and you are a Marine for life. A Soldier can retire out of the Army, get paid benefits for the rest of his life and still talk bad about the Army.”

Dailey thanked the NCOs for their work during the Solarium and said the discussions generated will have a profound impact on what he will advise the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Secretary of the Army. Dailey said the Solarium was not just an exercise, but an event that must be done on a regular basis.

“We [in senior leadership] sometimes lose touch; this is our way of getting back in touch with reality,” he said. “You NCOs are the representation of just that. This is a reality of what is going on across our Army ... because you are at the heart of where organizational leadership begins.” ■



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