



Soldiers make a beach landing with combat rubber raiding craft during waterborne training off Marine Corps Training Area Bellows on Nov. 27, 2017. The soldiers are assigned to the 25th Infantry Division's 4th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Armando R. Limon)

## A Culture of Trust

*By Master Sgt. Michael Holmberg, Master Sgt. Andres Salazar, Sgt. 1st Class Jonah Herd, Sgt. 1st Class Brandie Lane, and Sgt. 1st Class Natasha Orslene Benavidez Leadership Development Program - United States Military Academy*

**T**hank you for your service is a common phrase that Soldiers hear from the American public. These words acknowledge a social contract between the service member and society with an expectation of professionalism. Soldiers are stewards of their professions through education, training, professional development, and the enforcement of ethical standards. According to Bond (2010), "As irregular warfare becomes more prevalent through persistent, evolving, never-ending conflict, official and unofficial doctrines that define professionalism and provide clear guidelines for it will benefit the U.S. Army" (para. 1).

The Army profession is defined as "a unique vocation of certified experts in the design, generation, support, and ethical application of landpower, serving under civil-

ian authority, entrusted to defend the Constitution and the rights and interests of the American people" (Department of the Army, 2015a, p. 1-2).

All recruits take the oath of enlistment, which includes the underlying agreement to live the Army Values. In addition, it is implied that Soldiers, as professionals, will embody the five characteristics of the Army profession, which includes trust, honorable service, military expertise, stewardship of the profession, and esprit de corps. All of these characteristics reside within the social contract between the American public and their Army. Nevertheless, within the Army profession, and in consideration of the many military scandals that have come to light in the last decade, the efficacy of the Army's culture of trust continues to be a topic of debate.

Currently within the Army, there is an understanding that trust is imperative for unit effectiveness and is a foundational element to mission command. However, when aligning current resources for leader and leadership development, there is a gap in the consistent utilization of available education and professional development resources.

In 2018, the Department of Defense (DoD) released the *Top DOD Management Challenges: FY 2018*, showing that the number of allegations received by the DoD Office of the Inspector General against senior DoD officials has increased over the past several years.

“There was a thirteen percent increase in complaints alleging misconduct by senior officials from Fiscal Year 2015 to Fiscal Year 2017 (710 to 803). The most common allegations involved personal misconduct including improper relationships, improper personnel actions, misuse of government resources, and travel violations. The substantiation rate increased from twenty-six to thirty-seven percent for investigations conducted by the DoD OIG and the IGs for the Military Services, Defense Agencies, and Combatant Commands. (Department of Defense, 2018, p. 66)”

The following sections define current resources and training methods and offer suggestions to improve the current approach for the future.

## Evaluation of the Current State

The Army is supported by its seven values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage (LDRSHIP). Those seven values build trusting relationships. *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1: The Army Profession* states "trust develops from demonstrated character, competence, and commitment" (Department of the Army, 2015a, p. 3-2). But where does the Army stand in its relationship with the American general public?

A 2018 *Gallup* poll provides statistical data on how much confidence the American people have in the U.S. military. It showed that 74% of the people polled have a high degree of confidence in the military. This leaves 26% claiming to have little confidence ("Confidence in Institutions," 2018).

While the American military has recovered some of the population's

trust (3% increase since 2008 according to the *Gallup* poll), there is plenty of room for improvement.

Mutual trust at all levels of the Army results in cohesive units better suited to accomplish their goals. Soldiers trust that leaders at all levels of command will always make decisions based on their welfare and that a healthy balance will be struck between the consideration of their personal needs and the demands placed upon them to ensure mission success. Likewise, leaders at the top echelons of the Army trust that their junior leaders will accomplish the toughest missions and care for their Soldiers (Department of the Army, 2012a).

The Army has multiple avenues through which it is working to create and maintain Soldiers of integrity throughout the force to include setting standards through doctrine. According to John Spencer, "Army doctrine is defined as the fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives" (2016, para. 4).

Doctrine is a qualitative guide for Soldiers at all echelons to direct them through military operations and a variety of career conditions. From doctrine and policies, entire organizations are built to emphasize trust. When doctrine was updated to the new Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) and ADRP in 2012, there was a concerted effort to ensure that trust and ethics were present through numerous methods (Department of the Army, 2015a).

*ADRP 6-22: Army Leadership*, discusses the effectiveness of building trust and how one can build trust as an individual, a team member, and a leader in an organization. *ADRP 6-0: Mission Command*, stresses the importance of mutual trust and shared understanding.



Future Soldiers from the Phoenix Recruiting Battalion, recite the oath of enlistment during a mass enlistment ceremony, Nov. 18, 2018 at State Farm Stadium, Glendale, Ariz. The ceremony took place shortly before a National Football League game between the Arizona Cardinals and Oakland Raiders. (Photo by Alun Thomas, U.S. Army Recruiting Command Public Affairs)



Soldiers lift a log during a battalion endurance event at Torii Station, Okinawa, Nov. 30, 2017. The event tested a variety of skills, including leadership and radio communications. The soldiers are assigned to 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group Airborne. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kwadwo Frimpong)

As doctrine is updated and released, the critical element of trust in the Army culture is being brought to the forefront, with specific wording to align everyone to this shared vision (Department of the Army, 2012a).

The *Center for Army Profession and Ethic* (CAPE) was created in 2008 to reinforce the Army profession and its ethics education, resulting in new doctrine and a multitude of training and information resources. CAPE (\*as of 2019, it is now known as the *Center for the Army Profession and Leadership*—CAPL) is currently the strongest proponent for the promotion of trust within the Army and provides resources for building and maintaining a culture of trust at the individual, unit, and institutional level.

*ADRP-1: The Army Profession* was developed by CAPE (now CAPL), who devoted an entire chapter of the publication to stressing the importance of trust. This publication also introduced multiple facets of trust within the Army, including trust between Soldiers, trust between Soldiers and leaders, trust between Soldiers and their families, and trust between the Army and the American people (Department of the Army, 2015a).

CAPL works with Army organizations to provide programs of instruction (POI), as well as vignettes and scenarios, which are readily available through their website and personnel (Center for the Army Profession and Leadership, 2019).

## Adaptations

The following suggestions were conceptualized with the understanding that resources for building trust are readily available through CAPL. However, these resources do not currently align with leader and leadership development practices, including Soldier counselings and evaluations, risk assessments, 350-1 training, and Professional Military Education (PME). These adaptations are meant to

strengthen the link between Soldier development, team dynamics, and the culture of trust within the Army profession.

## Reflection and Soldier Assessment

The primary function of the current evaluation reporting system is to provide key information to U.S. Department of the Army Headquarters for use in making critical personnel management decisions (Department of the Army, 2015b). Counselings and reviews serve as a tool for growth. They provide reflection and assessment opportunities that ultimately help Soldiers improve their skills, performance, and character. Examples of how a leader builds trust are included in the Leads

block of the Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report (NCOER). Leaders are expected to build trust with their subordinates in order to mediate relationships and encourage commitment among followers (Department of the Army, 2015b). In addition, a relationship of trust begins with respect and grows from shared experiences and understanding.

One adaptation to the current policy could be integrating more character assessments on the NCOER. A relevant example of how this could work would be the West Point Cadet Periodic Development Review (PDR). This form takes the attributes from the Army Leader Requirement Model and adds additional components of character, including moral, civic, social, performance, and leadership.

## Ethical Risk Management

There have been numerous examples throughout the Army where a lapse in ethical risk management has led to an incident of broken trust both internally and externally (Ingersoll, 2013). An ethical violation negatively impacts trust throughout the Army, yet these violations can be mitigated before they occur with a more in-depth consideration of all possible outcomes of a situation from an ethical standpoint.

Before a training or operational event, leaders complete a *Deliberate Risk Assessment Worksheet* (DD Form 2977), where the physical risks associated with the assigned tasks are assessed. This form guides an individual through identifying associated risks, but it lacks consideration for the ethical risks of an event (Department of the Army, 2014). The *Deliberate Risk Assessment Worksheet* could include a section that encourages leaders to consider the ethical risks associated with an event, either by a section specifically designed to address ethical



From front, Sgt. Jackson Haskell, Pvt. Harold Hall and Sgt. Micah Salas, assigned to Company A, 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, participate in a village-clearing exercise at the Malakhand Training Village, Orogrande Range Complex, N.M., June 24, 2018.

considerations, or an additional section along with each risk that involves the consideration of an ethical risk that could be associated with that task.

#### Utilization of CAPL Resources

The CAPL website features a multitude of resources including simulations and vignettes for ethical training. Not In My Squad (NIMS) is a CAPL-developed program that instills a sense of ownership and empowerment into the squad leader for the actions of their subordinates due to the importance of the squad level in building a strong formation ("Not in My Squad," 2019). The NIMS section of the CAPL website features an assessment tool to evaluate the mutual trust within a squad, and multiple simulations that an individual or team can work through together to gain better awareness and understanding of the program and how a trusting relationship is built. Also, an installation's Ready and Resilient Center can conduct NIMS workshops, which assist leaders with the challenging tasks of building trust, cohesion, and ownership.

Army divisions can also utilize CAPL to conduct an Army Professional Seminar, which is a facilitated discussion focused on professionals, trust, and certification. This could be leveraged as an installation leader development program, where leaders can open a dialogue about the profession and potential changes that could benefit

the organization ("Not in My Squad," 2019).

Mandatory training requirements have decreased across the Army which gives commanders more flexibility to focus on training that is more impactful to their units and missions (Mattis, 2017). According to *Army Regulation (AR) 350-1: Army Training and Leader Development*, "periodic ethics training will be provided to Army personnel as determined by their commanders or supervisors, consistent with the unit or organization training plan" (Department of the Army, 2017a, p. 184). This means that the commander has the freedom on the frequency of the periodic training. While this is important and necessary for the future of the force, it could be more thoroughly defined.

We recommend an addition to the regulation. It should be an annual requirement and the content of the training should come from *ADRP-1*. In addition, the instructor should be hand-selected by the unit command team and senior leaders should require that all training assess the ethical constructs of a given task.

The training on the CAPL website encourages Soldiers to think about the consequences of their decisions, however, most will not intentionally spend time on the CAPL website if it's not a requirement. To counter this problem, especially at the unit level, incorporating ethical dilemmas into unit training will yield meaningful discussions and help Soldiers develop their critical thinking skills.

## Professional Military Education

Every Army leader attends PME, which is precisely where information can be effectively delivered. In turn, leaders are empowered to properly disseminate this information through education and training at the smallest unit levels. Yet, ethical training is not a requirement outlined within *AR 350-1, Table F-1* (mandatory training requirements for all personnel) for Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development System (NCOPDS).

We recommend that Army ethics should be developed into a POI and taught at all levels of leadership development, including NCOPDS and Basic Officer Leader Course. The POI for ethics training should be broad and cover a wide range of topics to encourage discussions. It should also include a few case studies to observe real world scenarios and their outcomes. The ethics training should be tailored to the grade of the participants as outlined in technical and leadership proficiency requirements for Army professionals (Department of the Army, 2017c). This instruction should be based on the understanding that although trust and ethics are accepted concepts, leaders need to have the knowledge and experience to deal with these issues as they surface. These programs should be as passionately enforced as the Army's Sexual Harassment Assault Response Prevention and Equal Opportunity programs.

If this new POI is instituted, it has the potential to cut down on the amount of unethical decisions that take place in the military, especially during combat (Murphy, 2014; Dallek, 2018; Phillips, 2018). This would ensure that American military forces uphold their reputation as peace keepers and uphold the positive reputation and standards that the American public has come to expect.

## Specialized Ethics and Trust Program

The West Point Leader Development System is a tool that the United States Military Academy uses to instill Army ethics to the Corps of Cadets. The cadets are not the only ones who benefit from this model, the faculty and staff also benefit by becoming better leaders themselves through teaching it.

According to *Army.mil*, "By demonstrating strong character, leaders will earn and maintain the trust of the American people and the Soldiers they lead as they serve as stewards of the Army Profession" ("West Point Leader Development System," 2018). If the Army can reproduce this development system at an Army-wide level it has the potential to positively affect all Soldiers, not just cadets.

## Research Gaps

The Army currently has more programs dedicated to ethics and trust-building than ever before, but further

research is required to determine the specifics of trust that lead to a breakdown in the trust-based relationship across all levels. Along with more research, the Army should continue to press forward in promoting their development of "strategy, doctrine, policy and training designed to reinforce a values-based organization of trusted Army professionals" ("Army Culture of Trust," 2016, para. 5).

The following are several strategies that could be used to study the Army's trust-based relationships through multiple echelons:

- The DEOMI Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) is a tool that can be used to measure levels of trust in a unit or command
- *Gallup* polls could be designed and offered to the public to determine where the trust breaks down between the Army and the nation
- A research study could be designed to examine trust across the Army, how easily available resources are accessed and implemented, and where the most likely sources of ethics violations often occur

## Conclusion

According to Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel A. Dailey, "Arguably, the highest performing squads in our formation are those that are built upon trust: trust in their leaders, and trust in one another" (Dailey, 2015, para. 11). A culture of trust is a priority for the Army and essential to mission command. According to Covey (2016), trust is a learnable skill. Therefore, proper implementation of any of these adaptations will enhance team building and empower adaptive leadership development. The Army's long-term goal is to consistently set conditions for enabling personal and unit readiness. The reinforcement of Army professionalism and a culture of trust directly correlates to the strength of our force. CAPL has developed its most recent campaign around the principles of mission command, including building cohesive teams through mutual trust, accepting risk, and creating a shared understanding. This campaign will assist in navigating future large-scale operations, which relies on small groups to operate autonomously. These groups rely on the professionalism of its Soldiers and the trust between them. Army professionals are expected to demonstrate character, competence and commitment, and treat themselves, each other, and the American people with dignity and respect. This ensures the U.S. Army continues to uphold the highest standards in its trusted profession. ■

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