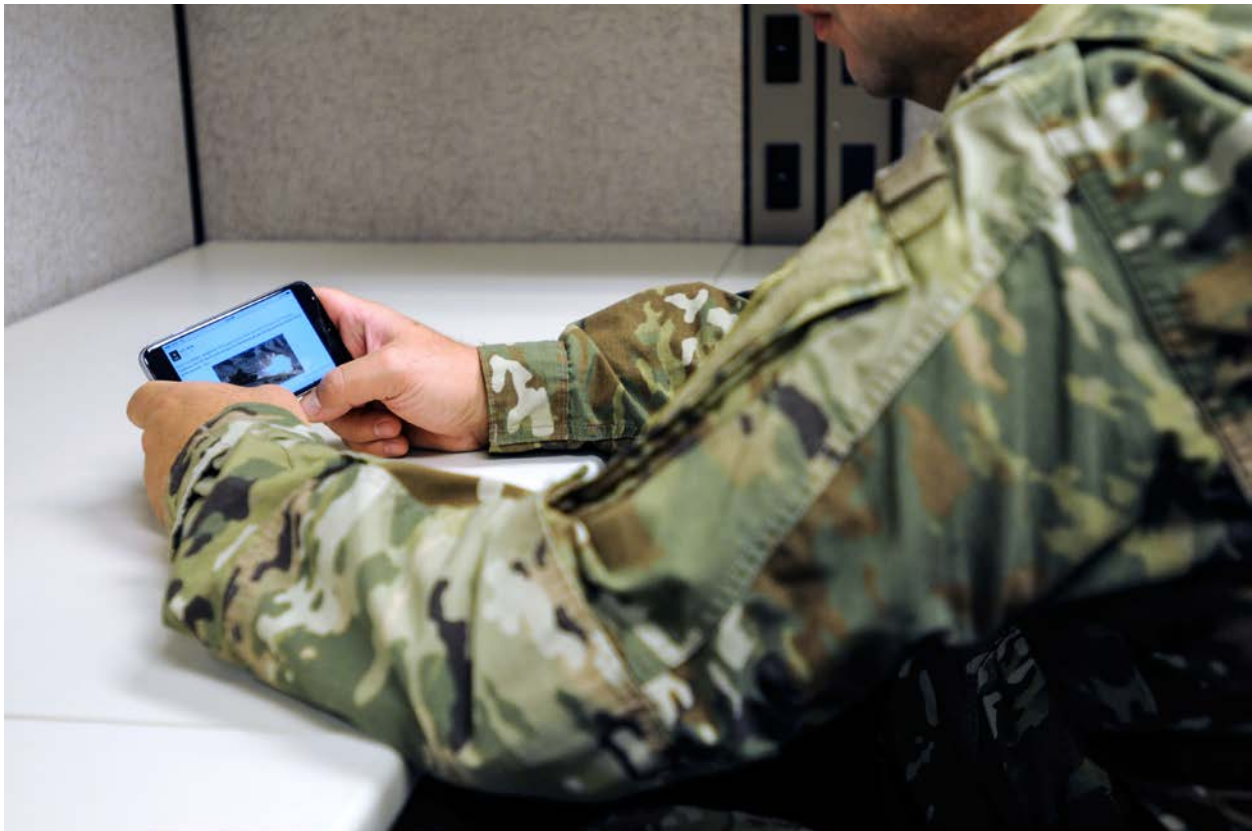


## Social misconduct violates Army values, NCOs at Town Hall 4 say

By MARTHA C. KOESTER

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Harassment, bullying, hazing, stalking, discrimination, retaliation, and any type of misconduct that undermines dignity and respect -- including that done online on social media platforms -- will not be tolerated by the Army, said Maj. Gen. Jason Evans, director of Military Personnel Management, Army G-1, during a March 22, 2017 hearing on Capitol Hill. (Photo Credit: U.S. Army)

When it comes to any question regarding Soldiers' conduct, Sgt. Maj. Boris Bolaños, senior enlisted advisor for the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic and Not in My Squad in

West Point, New York, always refers to the same passage in the NCO Creed — “I know my Soldiers...”<sup>1</sup>

“At the end of the day, it’s about those decisions and actions that our Soldiers make on and off duty when no one is watching,” panelist Bolaños said during TRADOC’s State of NCO Development Town Hall 4 on March 30, as senior enlisted advisors addressed character development among Army leaders. “How well do we know our Soldiers? How well do we know what they’re doing? It goes back to the aspect of leadership, which sets the credibility and foundation for trust.”

During the town hall, senior enlisted leaders addressed a hot-button issue recently thrust into the national spotlight — Soldiers’ online conduct.

Days before the event, on March 28, the Army distributed a letter signed by Acting Secretary of the Army Robert M. Speer, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey. The leaders updated the Army’s social media policy after a nude photo-sharing scandal involving female U.S. Marines was exposed nationally.<sup>2</sup>

Bolaños said unprofessional conduct online falls under the stewardship of the Army profession, which was the main focus of the town hall at Fort Eustis, Virginia.<sup>3</sup>

“As a profession, the Army has a responsibility to maintain standards, standards of discipline at every echelon,” he said. “Every noncommissioned officer, officer and Army civilian corps team member is responsible for enforcing those standards at the direct, organizational and strategic levels. We all have an inherent responsibility to uphold and live by the moral principles of the Army ethic. That’s what guides our decisions and actions. Anything that is contrary to that, it negates our service obligation to the American people.”

The tri-signed letter touches aspects of what CAPE is targeting with the Army framework for character development, which is all about the Army ethic, Bolaños said. CAPE is working on character development through use of the Army ethic. Not in My Squad also applies, because it was designed to help Soldiers appraise the trust and cohesion within their squads.<sup>4</sup>

The letter deals with understanding the Army's values, which is the fabric that makes Soldiers professionals, TRADOC Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport said.<sup>5</sup>

"I don't think we're saying not to go to [certain websites], but we're asking people to remember that they're professional Soldiers, 24 hours a day, seven days a week," Davenport said. "You can't just turn your values on and off just because you're on one of these social media sites."

Soldiers may always refer to the Army's official social media handbook, offered by The U.S. Army Office of Public Affairs, said Sgt. Maj. Jose Velazquez, senior enlisted advisor for the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs.<sup>6</sup>

"Recently, there have been some people online who forget that they're Soldiers, and Soldiering doesn't stop at 5 o'clock," he said. "Soldiering is more than just a job, and you can't take your Soldier hat off ever. If you're going to be a part of the team, then you have got to be all in. And if you don't want to be all in, then you should get out. That's the truth. Now, listen — if there is a critique that is deserving of anybody, then that's absolutely fair. If it's an honest, constructive criticism of anyone, I have no issue with that. ... But there are ways to do it, and surely one of the ways to do it is not to say hurtful things, negative things about people online and just really taking it too far. We are in the business of treating each other with dignity and respect, and that's got to be the golden rule online, just like it is in life. You treat Soldiers and you treat your civilians with dignity and respect, and if you do that you are always right."

During the town hall, Bolaños referred to a recent comment made by Command Sgt. Maj. Alberto Delgado, senior enlisted leader of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command in Kaiserslautern, Germany: "We need to stop this leadership by social media." Bolaños had recently returned from Germany, leading training workshops for the TSC on Not in My Squad. Instead of contacting soldiers through social media, NCOs should be attempting to lead Soldiers face-to-face.

"[Leadership by social media] is not how we lead Soldiers," Bolaños said. "It is a way to facilitate communication, but the most effective way to communicate with Soldiers is face-to-face. We communicate the standard. We communicate what we believe as Soldiers and noncommissioned officers, and we hold everybody accountable. It's part of our DNA as Soldiers and leaders. We need to use a different approach to leadership, which may be more of a transformational/inspirational leadership with our Soldiers that inspires them to want to live by the Army code. I think that is our solemn call to abide by those principles."

Social media can be a useful tool to communicate with Soldiers in the Army, Velazquez said.<sup>7</sup>

"I am an advocate for Soldiers using social media to communicate and engage," Velazquez said. "Because unlike in the past where you read a newspaper or watched the 6 o'clock news, for this generation of Soldiers that's not how they communicate. That's not how they entertain themselves. We leaders have to recognize that if we are going to communicate with Soldiers, other than face-to-face and direct leadership, [we must] use those platforms, go where they are having that conversation and be able to engage with them there."

Town hall moderator Master Sgt. Michael Lavigne asked if more time could be allotted at the Center for Initial Military Training to address the Army policy on online conduct for Soldiers.

“We are in constant revision of the basic combat training program of instruction, and that is something that we’ve looked at and addressed,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Gragg, command sergeant major at the Center for Initial Military Training at Fort Eustis. “But our biggest challenge right now is we have to understand that the average age of our Soldier who comes in is 18 years of age. They’ve had 18 years of programming in whatever value sets they had before coming in. So what we have to do is look at them and say, ‘Let’s try to deprogram and reprogram the values of the Army into that individual.’ Now if they are congruent, that transition is easier for the individual. But if those value sets are totally opposite to the Army, then we begin a building process in basic training and in IMT, which has to be reinforced and taken forward into the first unit of assignment.”<sup>8</sup>

It’s not just the millennials or the privates coming into the Army who are guilty of improper online conduct, Davenport said.<sup>9</sup>

“It is our Army as a whole,” Davenport said. “Values apply just as much to me as the TRADOC sergeant major as to the youngest private entering TRADOC today. Our conduct, our bearing should reflect credibly on our Army and our nation.”

Soldiers who use social media are expected to abide by the terms outlined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Velazquez said.<sup>10</sup>

“UCMJ will be used when a Soldier is found to say something derogatory about a leader and a fellow Soldier, especially if it’s something completely inappropriate,” he said. “Now that’s a leadership issue, and leaders really have to attack that. There is no task force at the Pentagon, searching the Internet to find people to attack with UCMJ action. That’s a leadership issue at the local level. ... UCMJ applies to a Soldier 24 hours a day, and it doesn’t just apply in the physical world.”

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