



At the root of warfighting readiness are four things ensuring you can give the best to the nation's best — leading yourself, embracing limit-pushing, studying small-unit leadership, and pursuing peer leadership. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dustin D. Biven)

Warfighting Readiness Starts with You

Four Things to Do Now

By Command Sgt. Maj. Shaun Curry

25th Infantry Division

I didn't graduate from an extraordinary school like West Point. At 19, a lack of dedication cost me the scholarships I'd earned. So, I enlisted in the Army, seeking a challenge and a change of economic status for my wife and daughter. I didn't know what was in store, but I believed the Army would help me succeed.

Less than eight months after graduating from basic training, a little over a week after graduating Ranger Assessment and Selection, and less than five days after

arriving to my first unit, al-Qaida extremists coordinated terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001. Seven months after the event that galvanized our great nation, the Army sent my unit to fight.

Our objective was to hunt down members of the terrorist organization that planned that attack, which killed 2,977. Do you think I was prepared for that physically or emotionally?

Now, in 2025, we're in a turbulent world of

uncertainty: a war in Europe, war on multiple fronts in the Middle East, volatile leaders in the Pacific, and our own country in a season of political change. I've never felt so sure that combat is on the horizon. *If I were the adversary, I would attack now and on multiple fronts, presenting America with multiple dilemmas globally.*

The 25th Infantry Division (ID) and the rest of the Army must be ready for lengthy combat today. Less than 20% of 25th ID Soldiers have deployed to combat, many of them senior leaders. None have seen war like the threatening global conflict.

Senior leaders demand platoon leaders and platoon sergeants train their units rigorously to fight and win our nation's wars. Your leaders ask you to prepare the teams, squads, and platoons for the next fight. Are *you* ready?

How to be ready

At the root of readiness are four things ensuring you're ready to give the best to the nation's best — its sons and daughters preparing for war.

1) Lead yourself

Seek Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) routines that improve your daily output. My routine consists of morning meditation, balanced physical fitness, writing

down moments of gratitude, proper hydration, seven hours of sleep a night, and a monthly behavioral health checkup. This routine may not be achievable for you. It took me more than 20 years to perfect.

To shorten the learning curve, get medical advice from H2F experts: the Armed Forces Wellness Center, performance psychologists, the Ready and Resilient Performance Center, and your unit provider. These experts can share scientific evidence and help you explore an achievable path for your lifestyle.

We live in a time of high depression and anxiety, so what are you doing to stay sharp? As a Soldier in the profession of arms, I implore you to seek out your moment of zen. Find joy in small victories and remain grounded in your approach to self-care. When you suffer a crisis, these routines will bring focus to the fog of war.

2) Embrace limit-pushing

Embrace limit-pushing and increase your ability to be comfortable in uncomfortable or uncertain moments. I do this through tough, combat-focused physical fitness and finding a sport I'm not great at so I can be humbled in the fitness world.

In 2025, I chose jujitsu. In the three previous years, I chose rugby.



Engaging in a cross-section of tough, combat-focused physical activities makes Soldiers both fitter and mentally stronger. While not scientifically proven, combat experience has shown it's hard to kill fit people. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Tyler Selige)

Why take this unusual path? Exposure to variety increases Physical Training (PT) plans for your platoons. Your people may not be ready for a CrossFit Workout of the day or daily Zone 2 runs, and fitness variety serves as mental floss. New workouts clean out the brain plaque from adulting, study stress, and the demands of military service. How do *you* off-gas stress-induced pressures?

Finally, engaging in a cross-section of physical activity makes you a fitter human being. I'm not a doctor and have no supporting scientific evidence, but my combat experience has shown me that *it's hard to kill fit people*.

3) Study small-unit leadership

Study small-unit leadership and team building. I don't mean leading divisions, battalion, or companies through conflicts. I'm talking about the building blocks of military leadership: the team and squad.

How do you create a cohesive small unit? How does it fight? How do you handle crises as a small-unit leader? Have an open aperture to view civilian industries, other armed services, and the pitfalls past leaders have encountered.

You'll need well-rounded knowledge when you lead a unit of any size, but small units in combat require leadership precision. If you majored in political science, you should have minored in small-unit leadership. I guarantee you'll use the minor before the major.

Seek access to historical examples and industry leaders succeeding and failing in small-unit leadership. Bring a strong sense of energy to the unit when you stand before your formation. Be the leader who presents to the future NCO corps a variety of leadership styles and career lessons learned.

4) Pursue peer leadership

There will be a time in your career, if not your life, when your formal or informal education will save a life. Or consider this: I bet someone in your sister platoon or sister company understands how to process a personnel action request (PAR) in the Integrated Personnel Pay System — Army (IPPS-A). This understanding can help you solve a financial hardship for a newly married

Soldier. Individual personnel problems become unit readiness detractors for the platoon.

You're never going to be an expert at everything. Learn from your peers and their experiences. Seek friendships that go beyond utilitarian purposes. Virtuous friendships last a lifetime. My first Army roommate, Joe, is my best friend 23 years later. I can call him if I need mental support or if I want to be *Shaun* with someone instead of *CSM Curry*. His peer leadership keeps me humble and grounded.

2001 feels like a lifetime ago. Was I prepared? Yes. More importantly, the fire teams and platoon squads were experts in combat basics and functioned as cohesive units during the eight months we had to prepare.

The platoon leader and platoon sergeant relentlessly

prepared the platoon for the unknowns of mortal combat. First Lt. Cheney had never seen combat but studied it thoroughly as a cadet in college and as a student at the Infantry Officer Basic Course. Sgt. 1st Class Albertson also didn't have combat experience but was driven to action by TV coverage of the Battle of Mogadishu. He dedicated himself to nearly a decade of training and studying to refine his knowledge of warfighting theory before assuming the platoon sergeant position.

They didn't know firsthand what would or could happen in Afghanistan in 2002, nor did they have the frame of reference to prepare the platoon for extended

combat. We focused on the basics of warfighting, fitness, and team building. That's how we survived those first engagements in 2002 and went over six years of back-to-back deployments — returning from each without a single wounded or killed platoon member.

Your challenge is this: Stay rooted in warcraft basics, continue to improve 1% every day as a leader and in your career field, and be relentless in your pursuit of excellence across the holistic fitness domains.

You may be months away from leading your team, squad, or platoon into combat. You owe it to them to be your best when you get there. That preparation starts now. ■

*THIS WE'LL DEFEND
TROPIC LIGHTNING*



Peer leadership is built through genuine relationships that go beyond utilitarian purposes. Trusted friendships formed in service provide support, humility, and connection throughout a Soldier's career. (U.S. Army photo by First Lt. Katherine Sibilla)

Command Sgt. Maj. Shaun D. Curry serves as the 25th Infantry Division command sergeant major. He has served in a variety of assignments, including 2nd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment Headquarters, 3rd Ranger Battalion, 6th Ranger Training Battalion, 5th SFAB, and 21st Infantry Regiment. Curry deployed 14 times for a total of 61 months to both Afghanistan and Iraq in support of the war on terrorism. He completed all levels of the NCO Professional Military Education up to and including Class 69 in the U.S. Sergeants Major Academy and holds a Master of Science degree in organizational development and leadership from the University of the Incarnate Word.



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

