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As soldiers leave, show them Army Strong

Readers of Army Times headlines on Army force reduction measures would agree with the assessment by University of Maryland sociologist Mady Segal that the U.S. military is a greedy institution.

It makes “great demands on individuals in terms of commitment, loyalty, time, and energy ... The demands that American armed forces make on members and their families...include the risk of injury or death, geographic mobility, family separations, [and] residence in foreign countries.” We must acknowledge that its members are all volunteers and joined to receive some benefits, including altruistic, from their service. Its members knew what they signed up for when they donned the uniform of our Armed Forces.

However, the most recent accounts of Army soldiers receiving pink slips as they are moving to new duty stations (PCS-ing) or

deployed in still dangerous operational environments are uncomfortable. While we understand the need to draw down the force, especially with our current budget woes, it is perplexing and somewhat distressing to read an Army senior official comment that “we can’t do the right thing” when it comes to policy decisions on how the separations are executed.

I find myself asking, “What did we learn from the drawdowns post-Vietnam and post-Desert Shield/Desert Storm?” In many cases this is the continuing challenge of managing excess inventory of people (in either specialty areas or grades) based on force structure decisions.

Appropriately in this drawdown from nearly 570,000, the Army sought to first identify and target relatively poor performers in the officer and noncommissioned

officer ranks for separation through respective Qualitative Service Programs and Selective Early Retirement Boards for its more senior members. We are at the point where the

Army is now separating good people — officers and enlisted — who have served faithfully and well.

I am reasonably confident that the trappings of farewell, retirement, and award ceremonies are happening in keeping with the traditions of a strong Army culture. With the recent focus on

transitioning veterans back into society, the Army and Department of Defense have emplaced programs to assist with and mitigate challenges of separations.

My concern is how people within operational and functional Army units are treating their separating comrades from the time of notification to release from active duty. Are leaders conveying appreciation for their service? Or is there an unspoken, “it sucks to be you” or an offering of the trite saying, “Well, the needs of the ARMY...”?

I know from personal experience the discomfort of interacting with colleagues who have received notice. What should I say? How should I act?

One can imagine the thoughts of the separating service members as something like, “Well I joined the Army during our War on Terrorism, deployed X times, and my evaluation reports said I was a good soldier/officer...but

the Army doesn’t need me anymore. I did what was asked of me and now am being told to leave.” For each, we hope there is a personal reflection of individual experiences with great training, great teams and esprit, and important missions. The reflections would include what they learned about themselves, about other people and cultures, and about life.

Our unit leaders should engage with empathy and compassion with their soldiers—they are part of our team. We want separating members to be strong advocates for the Army and to recommend service as an option for the other 99 percent of our society. While a full career of 20 or 30 years is not possible for all, the quality of their experience should be high for the tenure of their service, regardless of the length.

The Army is a greedy institution, but it is made up of people who should care for each other. Accordingly, we should live “Mission First, People Always” — this a part of the Army Strong culture. □

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[FORUMS]

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OUTSIDE THE WIRE

THE ‘ACU-CAMO’ OF HELMETS

About “Research raises concerns for new Army helmet design,” Aug. 24:

How are you expected to fire your weapon with that motorcycle helmet on your head?

— Michael Beckham

I don’t think the new army hair policy for female corn-rows will work in the helmet.

— Shawn Robinson

Who thought this was a good idea? The extra weight and cumbersome nature will make it more

dangerous to drive a vehicle ... whiplash ... This is the ACU-camo pattern of helmets.

— Carlos Perez

A visor. So it can get scratched the hell up and we get to get in trouble at lay outs ‘cause we can’t afford to get a new one. Or how about the fact that everything fogs up. Would you rather take off eye pro real quick to wipe down or have to deal with this?

— Nick Wright

Having been to Iraq, that thing looks like it would be hot as hell in 130 degree heat, not to mention how impossible it would be to aim a weapon with 3 inches of plastic on all sides. When you’re in the desert, you want as little material as you can get on and around your body, that’s why most of us never wore the shoulder and armpit pads and all that crap.

— Marcus Dean Adams

So first we have to field the improper design. Next, allow several incidents to occur where it shows the design was poor, third step is to deny there is a problem, fourth step is to wait for Congressional hearing to demand that we fix the



DAVID KAMM/NATICK SOLDIER RESEARCH

Readers question whether they’ll be able to operate their weapons while wearing this helmet design.

problem. Next phase we scrap the entire project. Or kill the thing right from the beginning.

— Kevin Storm

Imagine the technological attachments ... if a NFL quarterback can have his coach in his ear, then why couldn’t a PSG have the same for his platoon.

— Vincent Contreras

VA: TAKE A NUMBER

Regarding “Obama to announce VA initiatives today at American Legion convention,” Aug. 26:

I’ve been in the VA system for 13 years now. Remember the “dent” they put in the backlogs? They accomplished that by denying everybody. Once denied, they wait to see who will appeal the decision. It’s just a political smoke screen to shut civilians up.

— Mark Rexrode

In response to “No proof deaths caused by delay in care, VA says,” Aug. 25:

Takes veterans a year or longer to get claims and disability and even appointments. But illegals get that within weeks?

— Robert VanHoose

I had a friend who needed to see Behavioral Health to renew his medicine and the wait time was four months so he had to go almost three months with no meds and the VA wanted to lower his rating because he didn’t take his meds.

— Mark Peck

We live in Phoenix. My husband

was outright refused care. And I’ve seen unfortunate and embarrassing wait times for those that did get it. Disappointing!

— Katherine Lewis

Treatment delayed is neglect. Where there is negligence in health care there is death.

— Robert W. Sullivan



Cushing

receiving the honor for his actions at Gettysburg:

Cushing died at his cannon. His efforts are the very definition of valor.

— Ryan Quattro

Luckily his VA claims just came through too. His appointment is in six weeks.

— Patrick Nichols