

Sergeant Major of the Army Michael A. Grinston

**Defense Writers Group
Project for Media and National Security
George Washington School of Media and Public Affairs**

30 September 2021

Moderator: Good morning, everyone. I'm Thom Shanker, Director of the Project for Media and National Security at George Washington University, and I'm very honored to have as our guest speaker today for this Defense Writers Group session the Sergeant Major of the Army, Michael A. Grinston, whose issues and portfolio and responsibilities could not be more important in the world in which we find ourselves.

As always, I'll open with the first question. I have a couple of emails from two or three of you who want to ask, otherwise, please drop me a note in the direct chat and I'll call on people in the order that you sign up. So SMA Grinston, welcome to our session.

SMA Grinston: Thanks, Thom. Thanks for having me.

Moderator: My opening question I think goes really to the heart of your important responsibilities. We've heard over the last year from the entire Army leadership, including you, that people are your number one priority. We got that loud and clear. But I think if you were to poll Congress, the taxpayers, the general public, they would say at least unofficially that the Army's focus should be on being ready to bring lethal violence to our adversaries to protect national security. So how do you balance this very difficult juxtaposition of priorities - people versus readiness? In particular given all the pressures in our society today?

SMA Grinston: I actually get this question quite a lot from our soldiers and I think the overall narrative for me is pretty simple. We're the Army and we're about people. We normally focus in on our soldiers and then we equip our soldiers. When you talk to the Navy or what any other service does, they say I want these ships. And then I look at the ship. For us in the Army, our foundation and what we do to protect the nation is our people.

When we sent folks to Afghanistan we sent the 82nd Airborne

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

Division as a people. We didn't send a carrier group, we sent that unit of people. So if our people aren't ready, I don't understand how we can be a ready Army.

So my narrative is always it's not people first versus readiness. People first are our readiness. That equals readiness in the Army. If I'm more fit, I'm better at rifle marksmanship. That's about me as a person. If I'm not fit and I can't shoot my weapon, I'm not very lethal. So in my mind I can't even understand, it's not people first versus readiness. People first is readiness. And if I can get the people part right, then especially for me, my perspective as an enlisted soldier, in our doctrine it says I am responsible for individuals, small teams and careers. In other words I give a commander a ready soldier. Then they can focus in on the collective tasks. That's just like basic Army doctrine.

So when we have our people that are ready, then our commanders can focus in on the high-end level combat.

But I do want to be clear, we've missed no deployments in the last year and we're more ready than we have ever been. We didn't miss any of our commitments and that's a testament of us being able to send the 82nd on a no-notice deployment to Afghanistan. We've also had 37 combat readiness training center rotations and we did all that during COVID, so that we did focus in on our readiness, and then we supported everything and every requirement that the Army or the nation has asked us to do in the last year. So I don't see, again, I don't agree that it's people first versus readiness; I think when we look at our people if they're ready, then our Army is ready to do the missions that we've been given, and we've failed at no missions.

Moderator: That's a very clear statement. Thank you for that.

I'd like to just do a small follow-up before I start calling on members of the group. That's a powerful statement, that the Army is as ready as it's ever been. To old guys like me who have covered the Army from 9/11 onward, there were incredible stresses on the force. I'm not asking you to comment on the end of the Afghan mission and here we are in Iraq, but do you think that the Army has now left that post-9/11 period of stress behind you? Really, it's very interesting to me that you say the Army's as ready as it's ever been.

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

SMA Grinston: I don't think that we've got rid of the post-9/11 stress, because we did get in a lot of new missions. When you go back in post-9/11 immediately, and I'll use the height, the 2006-2007-2008 height of the surge, we had you know, 500,000 people just going everywhere. That takes a lot of time to get out of that, so I wouldn't say we've completely just stopped doing that.

What we did, though, we sent a unit that rotates over to EUCOM. We've also sent a unit that rotates over to Korea. So some of our decisions on force posture and then how do we forward deploy and project those units, I think that's added to it. So it's not like we're home-based and doing nothing. And you can just look at everything that we have done. Okay, so all that's still going on. In the last year sending units to EUCOM, sending units to Korea, sending units to Kuwait. And oh by the way, let's go do COVID, and then forest fires and hurricanes.

We had a unit out of the engineer - out of JBLM - just got back from fighting forest fires up in California, in Oregon, that forest fire that was going on there. So there's all these other things that we're still going with. We're not 250,000 soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan like we were in 2006 and 2007, but we are still extremely busy doing the missions that we've been asked to do for our country.

Moderator: Thanks very much.

The first question goes to Haley Britzky of Task & Purpose.

DWG: Hi, Sergeant Major, thanks so much for doing this. It's great to talk with you again.

I had a question about, we've seen a lot on the news and on social media regarding soldiers who are saying with the COVID vaccine mandate, that if I have to get the COVID vaccine I'm just going to leave the Army. What is your message to soldiers who are kind of taking that approach and saying I'm just not going to be a service member anymore?

SMA Grinston: Normally I say please get the vaccine, and I usually frame it in, you know, a story is we've had a lot of soldiers die in the last few months, and when we look at it, probably 99 percent of every soldier that has passed away was unvaccinated. So the question is risk to mission. If we're going to forward deploy and go do any mission that we've been

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

asked to do, you're putting the mission at risk if you're not vaccinated. Some people will go well, I was doing those missions before we had the vaccines. Absolutely. We do go to war with the Army that we have, not the Army that we want. But if I had a brand new body armor that would protect you better and I didn't give it to you and then I sent you on deployment, that would probably be really bad. But before I didn't have the body armor so yeah, you had to go without it. So I kind of look at the vaccine as absolutely, please follow the Army policy from the Secretary of Defense. We've published an order from the Secretary of the Army. We're good soldiers and we follow those orders. This isn't the first vaccine we've ever had in the Army. When I was going through basic training they were sticking needles left and right.

So this is about protecting the force for us in order to protect the nation.

DWG: If I could ask another question just looking forward, I understand the Army is undertaking this Body Composition Program Study in the next month or so to determine if there are any changes that should be made there. What are some of the questions that you're hoping to get answered with that study? And what are you looking for going forward to see what may need to be changed or what should be addressed?

SMA Grinston: I don't think I said it in the beginning, thanks for these questions, and it's good to see you again, too.

Looking forward to the Body Composition, do we have it right? I don't know. I'm not a doctor, I'm not a scientist.

There were a couple of things that it's not, and I'll be clear on this. There's no intention to make the Army less fit. That's like number one. So the whole goal is to see do we have the Army Body Composition Tables right, saying here's my height, is this the appropriate weight in order to be a more ready Army, to do the jobs that all the missions and all the readiness and to deploy. So that's the overall goal, is to make it fit for the missions that we've been given, and do we have the height and the weight tables correct in order to be fit for the mission.

For example, if I'm 5'5'' and I'm 110 pounds, if I'm 115, I'm overweight. Well, if I'm 130 or 130, that person may be more fit and can carry a heavier load on a foot march. So I'm looking at

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

this as a way to look at fitness overall and do we have the height and weight table correct. Again, the long-term goal is to make our soldiers more lethal and more fit and not make us, hey, let's just make us bigger or heavier and less fit. So I'm really looking at seeing the technical part of this, the lean muscle mass. That's what we really want. We want more lean muscle mass as opposed to just more body fat. That's what I'm hoping to get out of the study.

Moderator: Our next question goes to Steve Beynon of Military.com.

DWG: Sergeant Major, thank you for your time this morning.

With the OpTempo probably going down, with most combat deployments kind of wrapping up, can you talk a little bit about what you want units to be doing with that time? Are we looking at potential more NTC rotations? And can you talk a little bit about initiatives to make it to expand opportunities for soldiers to get Expert Infantry and Soldier Badges?

SMA Grinston: Steve, it's good to see you also and thanks for the question.

The OpTempo going down, right now I think it's going to take us a while because we really don't feel like the OpTempo's going down. I actually went out to a unit and I wanted to see - I actually attended a battalion training meeting, I wanted to see what does it look like. I looked at it and I looked at their path to go to the JRT rotation and it looked like 2005. I was like okay, wow. So I think from the soldiers' perspective we're still on this path that leads us to be ready, and that's always a good thing. But is there going to be a year or 15 month deployment after that? Probably not. You may be right. But there are still those requirements that I've said that pull us away from going to deploy, but they're still going to be ready. But what do I get out of that?

I think the road to readiness is still going to be there. So that OpTempo on that nine month deployment may not be on the back side of that, but our path to get a ready Army has been the same and we're going to continue on that path. And we've been on that too. We want to be prepared for large-scale ground combat and that's not going to change because we're going to be ready for whatever mission, and that's the hardest mission.

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

But then what do I want to get out of that time if we didn't do that other rotation. Absolutely, I want experts that are highly trained, disciplined and fit. And specifically the highly trained part and what you alluded to, the Expert Soldier Badge, you can be an expert. That starts your skill. I want to be skilled as a soldier. Can I assemble and disassemble a 240 Bravo under stressful conditions to an Army standard? Can I do that 12 mile foot march under load in under three hours? That's what we want, given that time. We've got to make it a lot easier for units to do and we gave that task to TRADOC. We want to be able to do it more often. That just make us more lethal. The more times we can go out and do these reps - even though I don't get the badge I still practice.

So our ultimate goal is to really work on those individual skills which ends in an Expert Badge. Build on your fitness. Get the foundation of the skills to become expert.

When we were on that constant churn maybe 10-15 years ago I had time to shoot my weapon, get ready for the task and then deploy, and then do the combat, come back, rebuild the unit, get on the road, and then go deploy. Now we want to really get that foundation of those individual tasks where you're expert. Not that you just kind of know the task, you know that task in and out and you can do it under day and night conditions with an uncooperative terrain and an uncooperative enemy anywhere in the world. We can do that but we really want to focus in at that foundational level and that's where we're seeing that we're going in the future. Hopefully that answers your question.

Moderator: One of our correspondents is having mike problems so he texted me the question to ask you. It's from Dmitry Kirsanov. He's our colleague from TASS, the Russian News Agency.

His question is, hazing used to be a significant problem in Russia's armed forces and probably still is an issue to a large extent. Can you talk about how serious this problem is in the U.S. Army and what's being done to address it if it remains a problem?

SMA Grinston: We actually have the Army Command Policy, AR600-20 that addresses hazing and bullying and how it will not be tolerated, but we still have to maintain a level of discipline. When we talk about readiness and we talk about some

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

of these things, it's been two years ago. I don't remember the exact date, but I was a big proponent for, we still have to maintain our level of discipline, and in the 600-20 policy I asked the Secretary and the Chief and they agreed and we put this in there, that an NCO is still allowed to tell soldiers to do corrective training and push-ups is one of those corrective training events. And that is in the Army Command Policy. I was a big proponent of that. It's still about maintaining a level of discipline. It's not about hazing and bullying. This is about an NCO's ability to take an action and make corrections which is what we want from our Army.

But you can't cross that line. We used to do a lot of things that were over the top. You can probably find a video. There were things that we were doing, and I think we addressed that in the Army Command Policy where it says hey, these things aren't tolerated. That's why we have inspector generals, that's why we do these classes on leader development. We do that so that people know I have to maintain discipline, but this over here is hazing and bullying. I would like to say it doesn't happen at all in the United States Army, and that's probably incorrect. But we do have to still maintain discipline and then articulate to our soldiers that these things aren't tolerated and who can make that correction, and then what does that look like?

It's a difficult topic, but most of us know when you cross that line from corrective training and corrective actions to hazing and bullying and at least at the appropriate levels they do that, but we've addressed it in the Army Command Policy and that's what we've done there.

Moderator: I hope you'll allow me as moderator a brief historic footnote. I spent five years as a correspondent in Moscow and views a lot of Soviet Army officers and personnel, and to a man, SMA, they said that one of the strengths of the American military that they so respected was how the enlisted and NCOs were empowered in ways that just really didn't happen in their military. Even during the Cold War across all those miles, they looked at what you and your soldiers do with incredible respect.

SMA Grinston: I appreciate that. I always say we have the greatest Army in the world. We have great leaders, without a doubt. We have phenomenal leaders in the Army and in our military. But our NCO Corps is the best in any Army I've ever seen, and that comes with having the ability to be empowered from

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

our commissioned officers. That's a lot of trust. Without that trust, we can't lose that trust. We can't lose that trust with our soldiers, we can't lost that trust with our officers because we are empowered and we get a lot of leeway, but that's what makes us great so we can focus, like I said, the officers can focus in on those high end collective tasks because they know that our NCO Corps is going to provide those individual tasks that are ready to go and the soldiers are ready and we're empowered to do that. That takes a lot of trust in the NCO Corps. Every day I'm inspired by what our NCOs do around the world.

Moderator: The next question is from Ethan Sterenfeld, Inside Defense.

DWG: Thank you so much for doing this today.

My question is about coming out of Afghanistan, what lessons has the Army learned about the equipment that soldiers need? Will there be any change between the split between the money spent, do you think, on like the major programs like a Black Hawk or an Abrams and a Bradley and what soldiers can put in their rucksack?

SMA Grinston: Ethan, thank you for your question.

When we look at our modernization priorities, the good news is we've had those modernization priorities for a while. Look at long range precision fires, that was number one; the network. Then at the bottom of that, most people don't look at the six modernization priorities from the Chief of Staff, soldier lethality and the Solder Performance Model. There's a lot of functional themes in there, but that's still a line of effort whether we're working on the next generation combat assault rifles and if we look at the assault rifles, you look at the automatic rifle, you look at the integrated virtual augmentation system, the IVAS. Those portfolios are still there. We've gotten some things out to the field like the enhanced night vision goggles binoculars, phenomenal set of [inaudible] that are out in the field right now. So the soldier lethality portfolio is still there. There's still a lot of cross [inaudible] that look at how we make soldiers more lethal and you know, as the budget gets tight we have to prioritize within the portfolios on can we afford everything. That's not a decision for me. That's a decision for the Secretary of the Army with the advice of myself and mainly the Chief of Staff of the Army because here's

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

the money, as the money goes down within each portfolio can we afford to do everything? So that's a delicate balance. The good news is we're still on track or ahead with most of those lethality long-range precision fires, future vertical lift, next generation combat vehicle. So it's not about the old stuff, the Bradley and the tank, it's the new stuff in the modernization portfolio.

But we're not giving up. We're not going to say okay, we're tight on money, we're just going to buy all new helicopters. We're still looking at those things that are on-line and that we can get to our soldiers. If it's more mature and it's ready, again, as money gets tight, does the Secretary want to go here or this thing? And those things for soldiers usually are low cost. I didn't say no cost. To get a rifle versus buying a whole bunch of helicopters.

So we can't just say here's our priorities and let's just go with the things that are the cheapest, but we're not giving up on the soldier lethality. Those are the few things that I think - now specifically, what we had in Afghanistan was the best, we sent the 82nd in, they did a phenomenal job. But some of that modernization and equipment that they have now we're trying to make better for the future. I just talked about a couple of those, the rifle, the automatic rifle and the night vision goggles. Those are the things for the future that I'd really like to see the technology catch up to what we want.

DWG: Did the withdrawal from Afghanistan at the Kabul Airport change the thinking there at all?

SMA Grinston: No. I think what we saw is - again I can't tell you how proud I am of the 82nd. Imagine, we do things that most people just, everybody just goes yeah, that was pretty routine, to send the division headquarters over. The first unit wheels up in 18 hours heading over to I don't know, another country, and ready to go to war. That's how you have to think. And we do that. And people go oh, that's just what the Army does. Yeah. But nobody else really does it like that.

The equipment they have and the lessons just kind of codify the cross-functional theme and the lethality and the things that we're working on, the Soldier Protective System is in the Soldier Lethality Portfolio, getting better body armor, making that lighter so you can get on the plane and make it a little bit more

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

flexible, a shooter's [cut] on your body armor plate.

So all these things we're working on. I think the deployment to Afghanistan just kind of proved that our modernization priorities are on track, and at least in that one it showed that we're heading in the right direction.

Moderator: Next question is to Jeff Seldin of Voice of America.

DWG: Thanks very much for doing this.

Two related questions. I was wondering to what extent is disinformation driving or helping to drive problems within the ranks, whether it's COVID or extremism? And also to what extent are you battling or having to teach soldiers to battle disinformation campaigns and influence operations whether it's from outside groups or nation states like Russia and China?

SMA Grinston: Thank you for your question.

I really, really struggle with disinformation. And sometimes I wouldn't even say disinformation. I would just say you know, no information or I'll kind of explain this.

I had a question in my office. We were talking about the Military Justice Improvement Act. I'm not going to talk about that, but the question I asked my soldiers, I said do you think we should do this? Somebody said yeah. Absolutely. We should change it. I said okay, why do you think that? What do we do right now? And that's where I go back to that no information was the soldiers don't know sometimes like Army policies, Army regulations. That's my job. So I take that on, we're changing the board questions so that they, we're going to change on how we do these things so that we make sure that the soldiers know the doctrine and what the Army regulations, what the Army has actually told you to do.

What I found is, in the past before in order to get a baseline of what we're doing you read the manual. You had a manual. It wasn't on-line. You had this thing and you had to read it. The doctrine or something. But now all this information is out there and it feeds this mantra, and they get that but they never go back and actually go look up what's the Army current policy. That's what I'm fighting with. And if you still have that opinion I say absolutely, let's have an adult conversation on

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

your opinion based off of fact and doctrine and the information that you heard. But right now they're going off of solely the information that they've heard and not the doctrine or the ExOrd or something that's put out that we have done.

So this is a big struggle. How do I combat that? [Inaudible] is changing just on that topic. I just went back and said okay, I want an up-front test. When you do your training on sexual assault and sexual harassment, I want you to test and say okay, here's what you do in this case. Here's what you do. And before you get any PowerPoint, because the Army loves PowerPoint slides. Before you do any of that let's do your knowledge right up front on current Army doctrine or current Army procedures on certain things, and that's where I'm going to kind of fight the disinformation or the lack of information. Test those on what the Army's put out. I try to put out information myself in social media, in talking points, doing things like this. But that other information's still there and it's alive and well so it's a constant fight and it's a constant struggle. But they'll go, Sergeant Major this is what was said. Okay, but what's the facts that you know that's in the Army? I'm trying to get that better, and that's just a couple of those things that I'm doing specifically on this point because it's a big issues.

DWG: How much of a problem is it with having, when recruits are coming into the Army, that when they're coming out of school they don't understand how to really search out trusted information? They're just relying on what they hear from friends and social media. And the problem is if they don't know this coming in, is this something that needs to be addressed just beyond the Army? Because other branches and even society at large, you're seeing a gap there in terms of how to understand what's real, what's not, what should be trusted, what shouldn't be trusted.

SMA Grinston: I think you're right. We've got to combat this as a nation. The interesting piece is, I think schools are starting to - I've got a teenage daughter and we were having this discussion about what are you reading, what's on the internet? She said well, dad, I've already saw that. There was a documentary that she saw about the dilemma. She saw that. Then at the dinner table we had a discussion about how to get the proper information. Now I'm not sure if everybody gets that.

But I think the Training and Doctrine Command, we put the absolute best into, we've got the best [inaudible] officers

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

there, and then how do we bring you into the Army culture? That's really what you're talking about. This culture of learning and organization and getting into doctrine is alive and well. We've got to make sure we maintain that culture on standards and discipline and Army regulations. We do that right off the bat with basic training and advanced individual training. We've got to just keep focusing on that as we pass them off to the operational force so that we reinforce what the Training and Doctrine Command kind of tells them. We've got to reinforce that in our operational force. Again, we're working on that and society could help us, like everything. But I think we have our own responsibilities to worry about inside the Army and we're focusing in on that.

Moderator: The next question goes to Nate Hochman of National Review.

DWG: Thanks so much for being here, I appreciate your time.

One of the debates I'm sure you're going to be aware of in recent months in the military is the role of diversity, equity and inclusion in relation to the military's traditional mission. This is something, as I'm sure you're aware, that you were the subject of quite recently in late August when you had a tweet about, it was celebrating Women's Equality Day and it was about diversity inclusion and it happened to coincide with the day that the military sustained the worst casualties in more than a decade in Afghanistan. And you were criticized for being sort of out of step with what the role of a sergeant major is sort of appropriately intended to do. And I think it was an interesting microcosm for this larger debate over diversity and equity in the military. So I'm curious, just broadly your perspective on that debate, and then specifically on the controversy over your tweet and what specifically your perspective is on that.

SMA Grinston: Thank you for your question.

Diversity, equity, inclusion. I'll spin it one way. Diversity is a number, equity is as in equal opportunity, and inclusion. Everybody here on this screen probably wants to have a diverse, equitable and inclusive job or place to work. I mean I couldn't imagine where you go you know what, I want to be a reporter and I don't want it to be equal. I don't want equal opportunity in my job. I just don't want it.

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

So I struggle when people go well, I can't believe that we want to have diversity, equity and inclusion in the military because I think, I would be surprised that in any job that you wouldn't want that in your organization. I think we would want the same thing in our Army. I know I want that in my Army. We're stronger when we have a more diverse portfolio. If we go somewhere, we probably have someone in the Army from that location almost anywhere in the world. So if we had to go to Africa to fight a mission on a [inaudible], we probably could go find somebody that's in our military from that region, right now, on active duty, that speaks that language. We could find that in the system, it may take us a while, we've got to work on our system. Get them in the unit and then help us go and deploy.

Let's just talk about [Onon Lemons] who is a linguist that speaks Pashtu and Dari. As we need those linguists we had Pashtu and Dari speakers in the Army. That made us more lethal because I actually know what's being said or not being said from people around me. If I don't know you just told me I hate you and I want to kill you, if I don't have a Pashtu or Dari speaker and you just said that to me and I don't know what you've said, that could put me at risk. So I think diversity and equity and inclusion actually makes our Army a more lethal Army, and that's our foundation of what we are.

I still remember as a small kid, I think the nation was built off of immigration. We brought in, we even said the melting pot. So I think that's what our society is all about.

Now regardless of where you come from you want to have an equal opportunity to excel. That's where I would go. And I stand by that, that we're more lethal when we are inclusive of that.

Now specifically to the tweet, I'll give my own story. I tweeted that. I didn't know what was going to happen two hours later. If I'd known what was going to happen two hours later, I would have prevented it, it wouldn't have happened. That's just like step number one.

But the attacks on the Army is, it's quite interesting to me personally. I've got two tours in Afghanistan, so I'm not somebody that hasn't been there and lost soldiers in Afghanistan. And outside of probably the one minute it took to type that tweet, the seven days a week that I was, the whole Department of the Army was in meetings all day on Afghanistan and making sure

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

our troops had the equipment, were they trained, did we have the aircraft to get the 82nd there, did they have everything they need in order to get them out when they're ready, did we have every lethal thing that we could give them on the ground and was the Department of the Army and everybody completely focused on this one thing? Yes. Absolutely. We were all in.

But I would say did we stop everything we're doing in the world for that? And would you want us to? Can your Army do more than one thing? Absolutely. I mean I hope so. Because at the same time we also had forest fires. At the same time we still had COVID. At the same time we still had flooding, at the exact same time a hurricane toes and hits Louisiana.

So your Army can deal with a whole bunch of multiple, serious, complex problems that are global, all at the same time, and you think we're not focused. I would argue that in that three week time span I would ask you where was your Army at that moment and can we handle more than one thing? I would say absolutely. Are we focused on that? Absolutely. Did we get 120,000 people out of Afghanistan? Absolutely. When have we ever done that in the history - since I've been in the military 33 years, we've never been able to do that. We did that because the entire Department of the Army was completely focused on this task at hand. But it wasn't the only task that we have. And your Army can do that. And we do it routinely, that nobody even questions it.

So I still stand by my tweet and will always stand by tweets. Happy Women's Equality Day and there were other days that I always say Happy on those days and what those things are. But I would say that the whole Department of the Army was completely focused on the tasks that we needed to be focusing on.

DWG: One quick follow-up to that. I think the line of critique isn't that the military can't do multiple things at a time. It's that the introduction of certain ways of thinking could actually be harmful to the central mission of the military which is to protect the homeland.

I think to your first point about the value of diversity in the military in terms of having translators, for example, who can understand the native language. That I think is something I assume the military has always been in favor of. The military as an institution has been one of the most diverse institutions in American life for a very long time. It is the introduction of

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

the language of diversity, equity and inclusion and I think what some would argue are the ideological tenets of that that I think is new and that concerns a lot of folks.

SMA Grinston: Nate, I appreciate it, but this isn't new. Didn't we have like separated Women's Army Corps at some point in the Army? We had separate black units in the Army. This concept of diversity, this is absolutely not a new concept. The nation has been struggling with this, this topic of diversity and inclusion and equity since I've been alive. That's just my own personal perception of this. I don't think this is a new topic that's been hey, let's go introduce this new idea. We've have equal opportunity offices in the Army since I've been in the Army.

Moderator: The last questioner in the queue right now is Gina Cavallaro of Army Magazine.

DWG: Thanks for joining us today.

I want to take you to talent management and then also ask you about the significance of the change in the E3B training and testing that we talked about with TRADOC yesterday.

The talent management, I just wanted to kind of get a sit rep on that and see what's happening with the assessment. The sergeant major and first sergeant talent alignment assessments and what's next with those, how much of it has happened, when is it happening next? Is it out of the testing phase? And then about the badges if you could, please.

SMA Grinston: I'll try to keep this as short as I can. On the first sergeant talent alignment assessment, we're past the pilot and into making it a binding, but it's not full implementation yet. So we really truly believe we want to be able to pick a more lethal, competent first sergeant of character. How do we do this? We've run several pilots on this now, but now we are doing one that's binding, meaning that in the past we did an assessment, did we have it right, and it just gives us information. But now it's like okay, if you don't make it through the assessment you're not going to be a first sergeant. But that isn't Army-wide, meaning in order to be a first sergeant in the United States Army regardless of compo, you don't have to do the assessment. But we're at a new phase now at Fort Carson, where you run the first sergeant assessment program and if you're not ready for the first sergeant position, you don't go in that

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

position, so it is binding. That's what I mean by that binding.

Specifically for the way ahead, my goal is to have that fully implemented by 1 October next year. So this is how we do it, we do an assessment, and then, but we're working on this because we have a lot of [inaudible] troops around the Army. And when we do an assessment at Fort Campbell is that still good when you move to JBLM? So that's why we need a little bit more time, but where we're doing it now, it is going to be binding for the E8, first sergeant positions.

The next one is the sergeant major assessment program. I believe we are far along enough that, we've already told everybody, it's going to be binding meaning if you don't do well on the assessment you're not going to be a brigade CSM. That's going to happen in November.

The one unique thing is this. We also said what you've done in the past, meaning the variable for you not to compete to be a brigade sergeant major was time in service. So maybe that's not correct. Maybe you had more time that you could do, I mean you're fit, you're disciplined, highly trained, and you can do more. So we said okay, we're not going to limit you by time in service to be a brigade CSM. So if you've got 27, 28 years and you go through the board process, we look at your records, then you have to compete at sergeant major assessment in November, if you pass that assessment and you made the list and we need you, then you get to be a brigade CSM. If you don't pass that assessment, you will not be fully qualified for a brigade CSM position. So that's going to be in effect, so that will be binding.

And then the last, to connect the dots on the full binding assessment, I don't think we'll go too much lower, is from E8 to the brigade. So I talked about what we're doing with first sergeants in the brigade and then we have this other piece in the middle is the battalion CSM. We're going to do an assessment around January or February and see if we can do the battalion CSM assessment at the Sergeant Majors Academy because most E9s flow through the economy. Do that assessment there because they're already there That saves us a little TDY money and if we've got you all there let's just do the assessment. But how long will that last? Because not everybody comes out of the Sergeant Majors Academy and immediately goes to be a battalion CSM. Does that last for two years? When do we need to go back? How do we

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

do that?

DWG: Is that a pilot in January?

SMA Grinston: Yes. So please don't hold me on the exact dates. I gave them until that class gets out they're going to run some kind of pilot to give me some information on how we do this. So from the time the class starts, they just got in there now, from September until when they leave around June-ish, June/July. They have to go in and do this pilot and I think, my perception is they'll get it done sometime between now and January and that will give me the information I need to run this. So we're going to do it with this class, because we only do one class a year for sergeant majors, and that will inform us.

My goal is to have all three of those at either IOC or FOC before FY23. I think we're good, I think we're almost complete with the first sergeant assessment. I think the brigade CSM assessment is much further along. That sweet spot, the one I think's going to take us all the way to FY23 is going to be the battalion CSM.

Do you have any follow-ups on talent?

DWG: No, I don't. I know we're running out of time.

I'd like to get your big picture view of the significance of the E3B training and testing down to two weeks now.

SMA Grinston: I'd like to even get it down, if we're really good, maybe we can get it down to a week. TRADOC freaked out when I told them that, but I am super excited about what we've got going on with the expert badges. I want to be clear. It's not so much about the badge. Again, this is making it a highly trained soldier and the more opportunities we can have to go do those type events, the better trained the individual soldier will be. That's how much I believe in the expert soldier badges. And the reason why we want to get it a shorter time, because everybody knows, you even said it. We're running out of time in this moment. Time is not unlimited. We all want more of it. And the longer we're alive we definitely want more of it. And it's no different in every unit. So the units that I've got a short amount of time, if it takes me two weeks to set up the Expert Infantry Badge and then I have to shut down the entire brigade for 45 days, that's a lot of time to do that one individual test. That's only one MOS. Only one MOS - 11 Bravos.

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

That's it. The Expert Infantry Badge.

So as a former brigade sergeant major, I absolutely shut down the entire brigade and it was about two months and I told everybody they had to go through. I said this is good individual training. Every battalion will run through the Expert Infantry Badge. They went through the training and then we stopped, and then we gave the Infantry soldiers about another week or so to do just their training. Then they would go through. Then they'd pass.

So from the time I was a brigade sergeant major all the way to now, the Sergeant Major of the Army, I said we've got to fix that so that we can at least allow a soldier that has the opportunity, they did the training, and then at the end get a test and see if they can be an expert.

So we've been working on this for a long time. But to shorten the time means that I don't have to shut everything down. I can just to, I'm going to go, I'm going to certify that I know this task and it really gives the squad leader the opportunity to verify that that soldier did that task, they put it in the job book so that you can see that I'm getting this training. And then the NCO is learning how to be a great NCO and a great leader. They test them on the task, not just the lane where it may be a different NCO, so I'm learning leadership skills, I'm learning how to do that task, I want to make sure my soldiers do well, and then I don't have to shut everything down and it's on a unit that's prepared for those tasks. And then at the end there's a test.

Instead [inaudible], we train, train, train for the test and then we take the test and we don't get it, it's like okay, in two years we'll go back to do that again. If we can do it three times a year. Remember all those good things I just talked about, the NCO gets to be a leader, they have to prepare and teach a test, it's about building leaders and then at the end there's a test. And on the other side the commanders don't feel obligated that we have to block off this huge chunk of time that we don't have extra time of and it gives them the opportunity to get the test. And then it opens it up so that when I do it, I'm not just focusing on one MOS. I can really encompass the entire organization that they can be an expert soldier, and then after that short period of time, then they can go back to that being Artillery, being a Medic, being a Cyber Warrior, being any MOS. So it really, that time is really crucial and I'm really proud of

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

what TRADOC and everybody's done to get this over the line to make it come to fruition.

Moderator: I want to save the last few minutes for your final comments, but Scott Maucione of Federal News Network said he had a final concise question.

DWG: Thanks so much for doing this.

My question is just that you've made a lot of changes that are fairly easy for the Army but have taken a lot of thought in terms of inclusion and personnel. What do you have coming down the pipeline and what are you thinking about right now in terms of those things? You know what I'm talking about, changing hairstyles, the nameplates, those sorts of things.

SMA Grinston: Thank you for your questions - Gina and Scott.

At some point I said I'm done with changes for the Army. Maybe I came in hard and strong the first year. I think there's going to be a few minor tweaks here and there that we may make like always, but right now I don't see us making any more bold moves in the future. We clearly have some [missions] on some of the things. We're looking at are we going to put nameplates on the Army green service uniform. That's been hey, we don't know who you are, we don't know who you are. So there are minor adjustments and we make those minor adjustments all the time. There's not a day goes by that normally somebody doesn't, Sergeant Major, what about this? But right now I don't see more bold moves in the next year. We put a lot of time and effort, I brought a panel in for the big uniform change that we rolled out. I brought in a corps sergeant major, a division sergeant major. I don't see that right now, bringing in that kind of level of panel from across the globe to look at that. We're constantly going to have some of those minor tweaks on the uniform things in the next year. Hopefully that answers your question.

DWG: Thank you.

Moderator: Sergeant Major, we're just minutes from the end of our hour and I try to be a punctual guy, but I did want to save these last moments for you. Any wrap-up comments before we thank you for your time and sharing your experience with us today?

SMA Grinston: I really appreciate all the questions and as I

SMA Grinston - 9/30/21

close this out, I mean I want to tell you how proud I am of your Army and the missions that we have done seamlessly. And I'm really proud of our leadership, too. The leadership also in the Joint Staff and General Milley and all the leaders of the Army. They're phenomenal and they have guided us through an incredible time of the country. Going through COVID, going through floods, going through forest fires, you know, we had three no-notice deployments for the Army all the while simultaneously taking care of the homeland. Then any mission we've been asked to do. I couldn't be more proud of our soldiers and to anybody else listening, I can tell you that the Army has never been more ready. It's because of our great soldiers and we're going to continue to be ready for whatever the nation and our country needs.

Moderator: Sergeant Major, thank you again for your time and your experience, and our appreciation to your staff for all of their support.

So on behalf of the Defense Writers Group and GW's Project for Media and National Security, thank you all for attending and have a great day.

#