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A soldier with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, pulls security around a helicopter landing zone at Pohakuloa Training Area, Hawaii. (COURTESY PHOTOS)

Soldier feedback aids retention efforts

The rigors of Army life and the stress it puts on families and relationships rank among the top reasons soldiers decide to leave the service, according to a new survey.

More than 50,000 soldiers responded to the first Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey, also known as DACES, a new tool for senior Army leaders as they work to retain talent across the force.

In the survey, 27% of responding soldiers said their decision to leave was swayed by the effects of deployments on their families or personal relationships.

The impact on a significant other's career, plans for children and their family's well-being were other top reasons cited.

Conversely, more than half of respondents said the opportunity to serve was a top reason to stay in uni-

form, according to the survey.

Retirement pay or benefits, leadership opportunities and a sense of purpose were among the other top reasons soldiers stay.

"Life in the Army is challenging but rewarding," said Brig. Gen. Brett Funck, director of the Army Talent Management Task Force, in a statement. "Demographics in the Army change. DACES helps leaders understand how soldiers, married soldiers and soldiers with families view important career and professional decisions."

The goal of the survey is to capture active-duty soldiers' thoughts about continued service, according to the Army. Previous exit surveys only targeted soldiers who were already leaving the Army, while this seeks feedback from all active-duty soldiers.

Results from the survey are available to Army leaders, who can filter results by rank, career field, gender and race for an accurate assessment of concerns in key demographics.

"DACES provides objective information from thousands of soldiers," Funck said. "The Army can analyze this information to gain a rich understanding of how soldiers feel and what their future potential decisions are based on."

Moving forward, Army leaders are looking for more soldier participation. Soldiers will receive invitations to take the 10-minute survey each year during their birth month and are encouraged to take it every year.

They also will be invited to fill out the survey within 180 days of retiring or separating from the Army.

The first year's survey results are available here.

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Mobile Protected Firepower helps bridge capability gaps

The authors of a new paper published by the Association of the U.S. Army argue that investing in the Mobile Protected Firepower platform will keep soldiers in the fight while returning “shock effect” to infantry brigade combat teams.

In “Mobile Protected Firepower: An Opportunity,” Lt. Col. Ben Ferguson and Capt. Lennard Salcedo suggest that as the Army transitions from counterinsurgency to large-scale combat operations, the time is right “to invest in a capability that will help accomplish the mission, implement a better combined arms team into the [infantry brigade combat teams] and mitigate casualties through fire, maneuver and shock effect in the next armed conflict.”

Development of the Mobile Protected Firepower platform, a concept that was originally referred to as a light tank, will bridge gaps in capabilities that near-peer adversaries could exploit, the authors write.

With scalable armor packages that provide the infantry brigade with a tailorable and flexible response, the platform will enhance an infantry brigade combat team’s ability to “provide strategic reliability” in the face of motorized or mechanized enemies, and the brigades will be able to respond more effectively to increased threats with the platform’s dedicated firepower, the paper says.

Additionally, the infantry brigades’ lethality “will be improved through their gaining an organic combined arms maneuver capability comparable to a” Stryker brigade combat team and an armored brigade combat team, the paper says.

Infantry brigades, the authors explain, now use armored Humvees typically armed with .50-caliber machine guns and other weapons, which have proven to be “invaluable over multiple decades of service.”

However, they assert that this combination of armor, weaponry and mobility “will be increasingly incapable



Staff Sgt. Cesar Campos, left, of the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, receives a thumbs-up from his truck commander during a Stryker drivers training course on Fort Carson, Colorado. (U.S. ARMY/STAFF SGT. NEYSA CANFIELD)

of effectively filling the same role in the next major conflict.”

Even with the common remotely operated weapon station and the improved target acquisition system, the Humvee is “outclassed by near-peer formations that utilize air-droppable fighting vehicles with improved fire control systems for fire-on-the-move. These near-peer fighting vehicles are



A soldier with the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Oregon Army National Guard, provides security for a simulated casualty evacuation during a field training exercise at Camp Roberts and Fort Hunter Liggett, California. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

armored, maneuverable and casualty producing; they can mitigate the IBCT’s strategic maneuver significantly,” the authors write.

While the Army has “continuously made an effort to maintain MPF-like capabilities” since World War II, the various initiatives “dwindled” during the past 20 years of counterinsurgency operations, though the capability “continues to resonate with [infantry brigade combat team] leaders today.”

The development of the Mobile Protected Firepower platform, the authors write, is equal in importance to its acquisition.

The infantry brigade combat team can no doubt continue to fight without a Mobile Protected Firepower platform to support its maneuvers, the paper says, but “this comes with unnecessary risks that the [platform] can mitigate.”

“This platform will enable the IBCT to remain tactically formidable and strategically mobile while reducing casualties that would occur if the troops did not have direct fire support to counter strongpoint threats and armored threats,” the authors write.

Read the full paper here.

Army expands NCO promotions policy



Capt. Marcus Smith, left, and 1st Sgt. James Delaney, center, of the 529th Support Battalion, promote Roger Jackson to staff sergeant at Camp Taji, Iraq. (U.S. ARMY/STAFF SGT. KYLE COOK)

The Army has expanded its temporary promotion policy to all NCOs, allowing those who are otherwise qualified to move up before completing the required professional military education.

This decision allows the Army to bridge the gap between training and promotion requirements, said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston.

“We want to make sure our best NCOs are being promoted while getting them to school as quickly as possible,” Grinston said on Twitter. “This allows us to better manage talent while we bridge the gap between training and promotion requirements.”

Similar policies “tailored to their component” will be in place for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve, Grinston said as the Army struggles with a backlog at the various NCO schools.

“This is about talent management and promoting the best soldiers available,” Grinston reporters, according to Military.com. He added that the top reason enlisted troops are passed over for promotion is that they haven’t attended the required schools, Military.com reported.

The change, which was effective Jan. 1 and runs through the 2022 calendar year, is an extension of a previ-

ous announcement waiving the PME requirement for senior NCOs who had not yet graduated from the Master Leader Course, which is required for promotion to master sergeant.

That policy began Nov. 1, and it gives qualified soldiers up to a year to complete the required schooling.

The same timeline will apply to other NCOs as well, and those who do not complete the required school before the one-year deadline will revert to their original rank. They will not be required to pay back any pay or allowances earned during that time, according to the Army.

The Army has had similar policies in the past as it tries to manage its enlisted population, including conditional promotions and temporary promotion for deployed troops.

The temporary promotion policy works to ensure that no top performing soldiers will miss out on promotions for reasons beyond their control, Grinston said. It will be reexamined in September to determine if it should continue.

“Our goal is to develop every leader for promotion. The select-train-educate-promote system is the right way to do that,” Grinston said. “As we create an environment based on merit, we are going to make sure we get this right.”

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PERK OF THE WEEK



Paying for college can be stressful. AUSA has partnered with College Ave Student Loans to provide financing options without the stress. Members get a .25% interest rate discount on all in-school loans and .50% on the loan amount paid back to the borrower on all refinance loans. To learn more, visit www.ausa.org/studentloans.



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Vital defense bill passes, but 2022 budget delays persist

By Mark Haaland

We begin the new year with a bit of good news. Congress passed and the president signed the National Defense Authorization Act. As you may recall, the bill hit numerous procedural snags along the way, but it ultimately got over the finish line.

This vital legislation includes important investments for the Army and national security. In particular, the final bill includes increased funding authorization supported by the Senate and House Armed Services Committees.

The inclusion of additional authorization of funding has been one of the Association of the U.S. Army's primary recommendations in meetings with congressional staff.

Additionally, the NDAA authorizes a 2.7% pay raise for service members,

Government Affairs

funds necessary military construction projects and includes support for Army modernization and readiness initiatives—all of which are also AUSA recommendations to Capitol Hill.

While enactment of defense legislation was welcome news, Congress has not yet passed any of the 12 appropriations bills to fund the federal government this fiscal year, which began Oct. 1. These bills are essential for national security, as they provide funding for the Army to improve its People First and family readiness programs and enhance readiness and modernization.

Uncertainty remains as to whether these bills will be passed and the final amount that will be included if they are enacted. The current continuing resolution runs through Feb. 18.

In December, AUSA sent a letter to the leaders of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees highlighting the importance of passing these funding bills.

It is possible that the government



The NDAA authorizes a 2.7% pay raise for service members, funds necessary military construction projects and includes support for Army modernization and readiness initiatives. (U.S. ARMY/STAFF SGT. CHRISTOPHER DENNIS)

will be placed under a full year continuing resolution, which would unfortunately preclude new or expanded investments in the Army's readiness, quality-of-life and modernization accounts.

We expect to know more as the February deadline approaches.

Contact elected officials

AUSA encourages members to contact your elected members of the House of Representatives and Senate to express your views about defense funds and policy, and especially about the need for the stability that comes with on-time funding.

Funding for our defense programs is critical as our Army and nation face many threats.

Our veterans have also earned the best care the nation can provide. All of these critical priorities and more are hampered by funding uncertainty.

Here are links to reach your representatives and senators in Congress.

The congressional schedule for the beginning of January remains in flux. It is expected that there will be further efforts to pass legislation

related to voting rights and other priorities.

Similarly, lawmakers' concern about the Russian military buildup and possible further invasion of Ukraine is rising. A vote on additional sanctions on Russia is expected in the next few weeks, as are votes on executive branch nominations.

Lastly, although the administration is expected to provide the president's fiscal year 2023 budget request to Congress the first week in February, we will not be surprised if this important document is delayed.

If or when this occurs, once again, the entire process for authorizations and appropriations will face challenging time constraints for Congress to complete its annual work.

These delays have unfortunately become a matter of routine, but AUSA and other military service organizations and our defense industry partners will advocate ardently for on-time defense funding and appropriations.

Mark Haaland is AUSA's Government Affairs Director.

Get AUSA member discounts with TaxAct, Covert Threads

By Susan Rubel

The Association of the U.S. Army has partnered with TaxAct to provide members 25% savings on their federal and state tax filings. Individual members and their families are eligible, as well as small businesses.

Why choose TaxAct?

- The ProTips feature provides quick, easy-to-digest bits of information that help you improve your tax outcome and financial wellness.

- It offers a maximum refund guarantee.

- The program also offers a \$100,000 accuracy guarantee.

- You can easily switch to TaxAct from your previous online tax provider by simply uploading a PDF of your previous year's return.

- The Deduction Maximizer is TaxAct's proprietary tool that works in your favor to uncover certain qualifying deductions and credits many filers don't realize are available.

Member Benefits

- The program offers a customized tax plan with potential refund-boosting opportunities and easy-to-follow instructions.

- You get seven years of access to your return.

- The company provides a satisfaction guarantee.

Since 2000, TaxAct has helped e-file more than 80 million federal returns, and it is ready to help you.

Visit www.taxact.com/ausa for consumers and www.ausa.org/taxbus for small businesses to learn more and take advantage of your 25% discount.

Covert Threads discount increase

Covert Threads was added as an AUSA affinity partner when I received a pair of their desert socks as a gift from a military publication representative.

I gave them to a friend who is constantly on his feet, and after wearing them, he asked how to get more—and



Since 2000, TaxAct has helped e-file more than 80 million federal returns, and it is ready to help Association of the U.S. Army members. (COURTESY PHOTO)

ordered 10 pairs. He reported that his feet were always in pain by late morning, but he could go all day with these socks.

AUSA members now get 35% off with code AUSA35. Previously, the discount was 10%. Be sure to use the code and choose "AUSA" when asked about where you heard about Covert Threads, as they donate back to AUSA's scholarship program.

The socks were inspired by Marine Sgt. Russ Meade when he was deployed to Fallujah, Iraq, in support of

Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Before his 2005 deployment, Meade received eight pairs of socks from Peter Menzies, a friend who had been in the sock business for more than 60 years.

"Although the socks felt great, the extreme heat and other elements resulted in foot problems such as blisters and hot spots," Meade said on the company's website. "I emailed Peter with these problems and asked him if it was possible to develop a better sock for a specific climate."

Soon after, Menzies shipped a new type of sock, the "Sand" boot sock, to Meade. It was such a success that other Marines began ordering them.

After his deployment, Meade and Menzies created Covert Threads to develop socks and other garments for Marines and others seeking "comfortable yet rugged socks that stand up to the rigors of harsh climates and conditions," according to the company's website.

If you stand on your feet for a long time, have foot issues or work or play in harsh conditions, give Covert Threads a try.



Covert Threads socks were created for those who stand for long periods of time, have foot issues or work or play in harsh conditions. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Susan Rubel is AUSA's Insurance and Affinity Programs Director.

Longtime AUSA volunteer takes on new role at university

Kris McBride, a former president of the Association of the U.S. Army’s Redstone-Huntsville chapter and the association’s Third Region, was recently selected to be a senior adviser for the University of Alabama in Huntsville’s Procurement Technical Assistance Center.

During her term as chapter president from 2013–2015, the chapter added several significant new programs to its agenda in support of the Army. These include increasing the involvement of young professionals in AUSA activities, presenting an hourlong Memorial Day special that aired during prime time on a local television station, and conducting a new Benefit Briefing program for National Guard and Reserve units, where volunteers from across the community briefed soldiers on important topics.

Redstone-Huntsville



Kris McBride. (AUSA PHOTO)

supporting AUSA’s moving of its annual winter symposium, now known as the Global Force Symposium and Exposition, from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to Huntsville.

In her role as Third Region president, McBride led 19 AUSA chapters with over 40,000 members in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi,

North Carolina, South Carolina, Panama and Puerto Rico.

In addition to her work with AUSA, McBride has more than 30 years of experience in development and engineering support for the Army as a defense contractor writing software for missile and support systems, and later as a manager leading other engineers in systems development and maintenance.

She retired from SAIC in 2019 and currently leads the Army’s 2nd Recruiting Brigade Regional Partnership Council, a group of volunteers across the southeast that strives to connect America to the Army.

Also named as a senior adviser for the Procurement Technical Assistance Center was Marc Jacobson, a retired lieutenant colonel with 25 years of service in the Army and Army Reserve.

“McBride and Jacobson look forward to working with the PTAC team and its clients,” the university said in a statement.

Chapter recognizes outstanding 101st Airborne soldiers

Members of the Association of the U.S. Army’s Fort Campbell chapter recently recognized the 101st Airborne Division’s NCO and Soldier of the Year during a ceremony at McAuliffe Hall on Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Charlie Koon, chapter president, and Don Hunt, a chapter board member, presented pistols to Spc. Daniel Olmeda, the Soldier of the Year, and Staff Sgt. Nathan Cullison, the NCO of the Year. Olmeda serves with the 101st Airborne Division Band, while Cullison is assigned to the 101st Division Artillery.

Fort Campbell



Charlie Koon, left, AUSA’s Fort Campbell chapter president, and chapter board member Don Hunt, right, present pistols to Staff Sgt. Nathan Cullison, second from left, 101st Airborne Division NCO of the Year, and Spc. Daniel Olmeda, the division’s Soldier of the Year. (AUSA PHOTO)



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