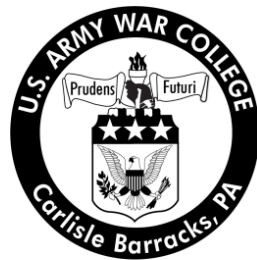


Strategy Research Project

Soldier for Life: Professional Soldier Identity in the U.S. Army

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2014

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Abstract

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In 2012, the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) established the Soldier for Life program and charged it with enabling Army, governmental, and community efforts to improve soldier transition into the civilian world. A subordinate component of this effort is the CSA's vision of a lifelong "Soldier" mindset soldiers will carry with them to assist them in civilian success. This Strategy Research Project posits that a deeper concept of soldier identity is a foundational requirement inextricably linked to the profession of arms and trust inside and outside the Army. This identity must be established first in order to build trust in the institution, narrow military-civilian social gaps, and improve integration of transitioning soldiers into communities. The Soldier for Life program is best postured to champion this endeavor. This project provides a roadmap that logically advances Soldier for Life efforts towards an enduring and valued Army capability that instills soldier identity, builds trust, and compliments both the profession of arms and soldier transition.

Soldier for Life: Professional Soldier Identity in the U.S. Army

As Soldiers we freely answered America's call to serve in the world's premier army. We value your continued service and dedication to the team, and we are committed to sustaining your trust in the U.S. Army now and in the future as "Soldiers for Life."

—General John F. Campbell¹

Our Vice Chief of Staff of the Army published these words on the occasion of the 40-year anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force. The larger message was heavily laden with the concept of trust between soldier and service to our Army as it begins to draw down its end strength to historic lows. This trust is built and sustained through a sense of identity as a "soldier for life," which strengthens our current force and maintains the bonds of honorable service to better posture transitioning soldiers for success in the communities to which they settle. In turn, this success and involvement within a trusting community will help sustain the All-Volunteer Force.² This concept is reinforced in Army doctrine, which characterizes trust as "the bedrock upon which the U.S. Army grounds its relationship with the American people."³ It must exist both between the soldier and the institution; and between the institution and society. This shared trust is "a vital organizing principle that establishes the conditions necessary for effective and ethical mission command and a profession that continues to earn the trust of the American people."⁴ Professional soldier identity--a distinctive self-awareness that all former and current soldiers should hold within themselves--is inextricably linked to the concept of trust and the profession of arms.

In 2012, General Raymond Odierno, the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) directed the creation of a new program to improve soldier identity inside and outside the force. The effort, now known as *Soldier for Life* is both a program and a new sense of

identification as a soldier and what it means to serve in the Army profession. The program would seek to enable the various sources of support inside and outside the Army to improve the sense of purpose and success of soldiers in the transition process. At endstate, transitioning soldiers, veterans, and their families are more career-ready and have access to employment, education, and healthcare resources to facilitate a successful reintegration into civilian society. Implied in the CSA's vision is a sense among transitioning soldiers that they will remain "Army Strong" post-service and recognize the Army's role in their transition.⁵ These veterans will continue to identify themselves as soldiers of purpose who are then more inclined to recommend service to the next generation of military professionals. Successfully motivating the next generation of soldiers to serve ties directly to the CSA's strategic imperative of preserving the all-volunteer force--and *Soldier for Life* is key to this effort.⁶

In practice, this well-intended and absolutely necessary program has experienced a number of challenges in its infancy; challenges that risks the Army's ability to achieve the *Soldier for Life* vision. The program can overcome these challenges if it takes a brief tactical pause, methodically re-crafts its message, and prioritizes its way ahead. Army leadership must also willingly highlight and resource the program to a level necessary to achieve institutionalization of the Army profession and identity. This Strategy Research Project offers a strategic framework that places soldier identity first and logically advances *Soldier for Life* efforts towards an enduring and valued Army capability. Success requires persistent emphasis of identity⁷ from the highest Army echelons, expansion of the support network, and an evolution of the effort into an enduring program.

Why is Professional Identity Important?

Before discussing the *Soldier for Life* concept further, it is important to paint a clear picture of how the Army views the profession, and how professional soldier identity is connected to it. *Army Doctrine Reference Publication Number 1, The Army Profession* (ADRP-1) includes the diagram at Figure 1 which describes who are considered members of the Army profession. The *Profession of Arms* includes all uniformed members of the service regardless of component--from aspiring new recruits to serving leaders. The profession also includes those who have transitioned after honorable service.⁸ It is this population of the profession where a sense of identity as a soldier for life must reside. ADRP-1 describes the Army profession as one whose members are “bonded . . . in a shared identity and culture of sacrifice and service to the Nation.”⁹

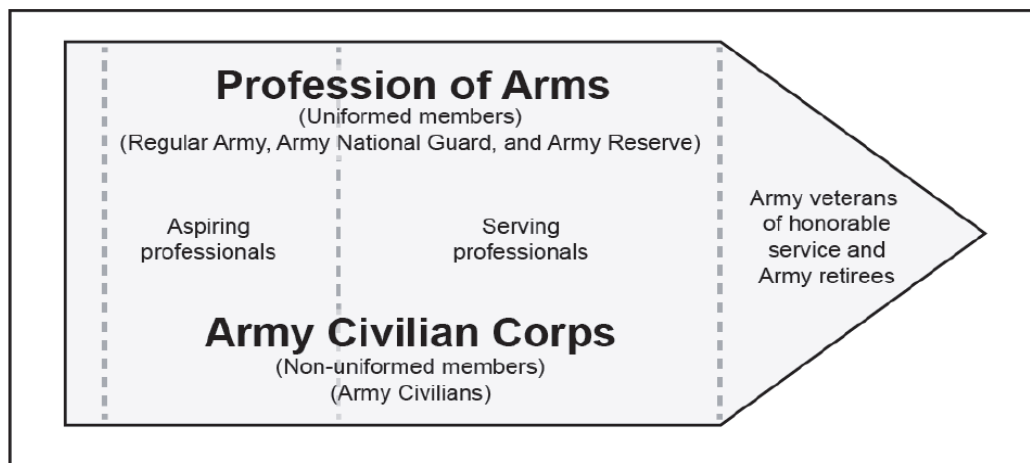


Figure 1. Membership in the Army Profession¹⁰

But what is this shared identity and why should it be important to Army leadership? ADRP-1 goes on to describe professional identity as one dimension of Army culture, but it skirts around a succinct definition of identity while saddling Army leaders with the responsibility to establish and maintain this identity throughout the

force. Other ADRPs and Army products variously describe elements of identity, but nowhere is it described in enough detail for Army leaders to begin the task of inculcating it uniformly across the service.¹¹ Fortunately, these descriptions do complement each other and viewing them together one can begin to construct a practical definition that Army leaders and the *Soldier for Life* program can use to instill it deeper within the Army. All discuss a set of understood and followed ethical standards; some also point to various Army creeds and the Warrior Ethos included therein; and ADRP-1 introduces professional standards of character, competence, and commitment. Taken together, professional soldier identity reveals itself when soldiers internalize and demonstrate these collective concepts.

Promoting and achieving this recommended, universally understood identity within the Army holds two-fold importance. First, it supports and advances the characteristics of the profession. The tenets in the definition above are woven throughout ADRP-1's depiction of these characteristics shown at Figure 2. If trust is the bedrock and values are the foundation, then it is identity that serves as the mortar holding it all together. A soldier who truly identifies with these deeper concepts is more inclined to carry them with him throughout his life. This is identity's second key role and provides soldiers with a sense of worth and appreciation of his/her inherent value to society, even after service. Internalizing the identity of a skilled and trusted professional relates directly to transition, arming the soldier with the confidence needed to succeed in whatever transition they choose after serving. The Army must view professional identity as something initiated at accession, strengthened during service, and sustained

for life and it is important to understand the entity that helps give expression to and champion this identity formation is – the *Soldier for Life* program.

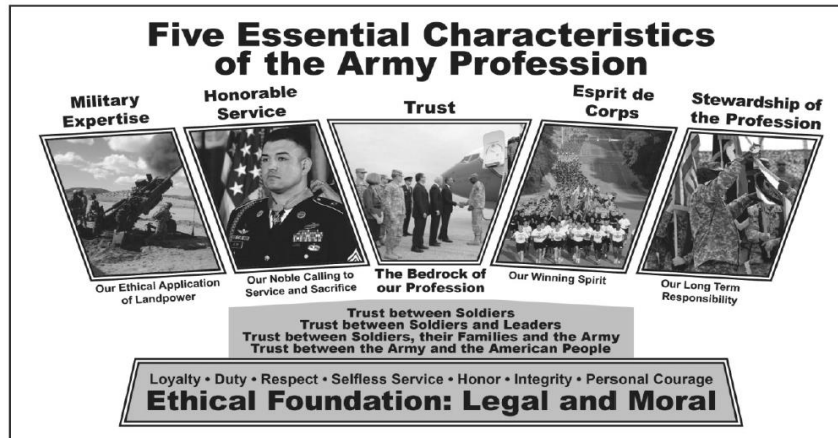


Figure 2. The Five Essential Characteristics of the Army Profession¹²

Soldier for Life Overview

The *Soldier for Life* program was initiated after eleven years of war with societal goodwill at an all-time high. Its mission is to:

Connect Army, governmental, and community efforts to build relationships that facilitate successful reintegration of our Soldiers, Veterans, and their Families in order to keep them Army Strong and instill their values, ethos, and leadership within communities.¹³

The team operates primarily within the stakeholder community, engaging with non-profits, corporations, educators, healthcare experts, and veterans groups. They work to achieve successful reintegration, defining it as transitioning soldiers and families being “embraced” by the community where they choose to settle. There, they have access to employment, education, and healthcare necessary to keep them “Army Strong.” For many, this may seem an idealistic vision of transition. While it is attainable by some, there are significant challenges and opportunities as the soldier hangs up his uniform for

the last time. These issues are readily apparent if one takes a close look at the strategic environment.

Strategic Setting

The graphic below from the *Soldier for Life 2013 Campaign Plan (CAMPLAN)* accurately paints the picture of the environment soldiers will operate in as they transition out of the service.

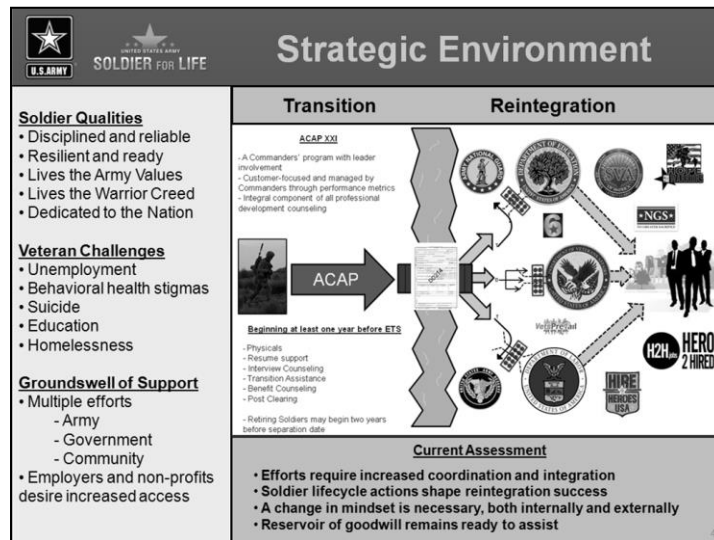


Figure 3. Soldier Transition Strategic Environment¹⁴

After a transitioning, the soldier completes the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) process, collects his Military Service Record (DD Form 214), and crosses the bridge into civilian life. There he finds vast amounts of assistance from an array of Army and other government resources; non-profit aid; employer veteran hiring initiatives; colleges and university veteran programs; and healthcare ventures--all willing and ready to receive the newly minted veteran. However, there remains a clear lack of coherency and organization to the resource pool. These well-intentioned organizations, inside the Army and outside in the rest of the government or community, often work at cross-purposes. This leaves the soldier confused and hampers successful transition for many.

The soldier, while often highly qualified, is also challenged socially with stigmas both real and imagined.¹⁵ These efforts require coordination and integration for success, especially in light of the on-going Army drawdown that transitions soldiers in droves over the next five to ten years.

Accelerated Army Drawdown

The war in Iraq has ended, as will our part in the fighting in Afghanistan later this year. The Army has accelerated its drawdown efforts with a plan to reduce the active component from roughly 530,000 to 490,000 by the end of fiscal year 2015; and between 440,000 and 450,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017.¹⁶ This effort coupled with normal attrition equates to about 100,000 transitioning soldiers per year over the next ten years--or about 1,000,000 soldiers in total.¹⁷ Some of these attritions will be involuntary, requiring soldiers to adjust to a civilian future sooner than planned. The practice of reducing forces after major American conflicts is not uncommon.¹⁸ The current reduction is smaller in scale than all others since World War II, however, coming on the heels of America's longest two wars, the strain on the force is palpable. While today's soldiers possess perhaps the highest levels of experience, discipline, and competence ever seen in the Army's long history, they are experiencing disproportionate difficulty in succeeding in civilian life. The statistics are sobering.

Evidence of the Reintegration Challenge

The American reality facing these new veterans is a challenging one. Those who returned to communities before them continue to struggle in key indicator areas such as unemployment, divorce, suicide, incarceration, and homelessness. There are approximately 23 million veterans living in the U.S. and almost 12 percent of these, or 2.6 million, are veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq era. The distinction between pre

and post-9/11 veterans is an important one.¹⁹ Certain key statistics show a clear difference in how well these two veteran demographics are performing within society. And it is the post-9/11 veteran who represents the transition bow wave to come.

Veteran unemployment offers an important example of the challenge. In 2013 unemployment statistics reveal that veterans of all eras are unemployed at a slightly lower rate than the national average--6.6 percent against 6.7 percent. However, post-9/11 veterans stood a much higher chance of being unemployed in 2013 with figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showing a 9.0 percent average.²⁰ Disabled veterans fare even worse in finding and maintaining employment because their job options are often reduced. Compounding the problem, an alarming 81 percent of transitioning military personnel do not feel fully prepared for their transition to a civilian career. From the other side of the interview desk, 64 percent of hiring managers believe service members need additional assistance to successfully transition to civilian employment.²¹

In reality, veteran unemployment is a dual problem for the Department of Defense (DoD). Foremost, it is a negative indicator of the military's ability to enable successful transition in their veterans, post-service. It also presents a fiscal concern in the form of unemployment compensation that the Pentagon must pay to these unemployed veterans. In 2012 alone, this bill was \$944 million.²²

Another key indicator is the potential impact of service on a soldier's marital status. According to the DoD, the military divorce rate fell in 2013 to 3.5 divorces for every 100 military marriages. Female military members were 7.2 per 100.²³ These averages far exceed the national average of 3.6 divorces for every 1,000 marriages.²⁴ A recent study found some key contributors to the military divorce rate. They found a

correlation between divorce frequency and cumulative time deployed. Further, there was a statistically significant increase of divorce in marriages that began before 9/11. The study therefore suggests that high operational tempo, and partner expectation of the same, impacts a couple's ability to remain together.²⁵

Another recent study by The Center for Public Integrity summarized cumulative statistics for post-traumatic stress (PTS), traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, and suicide in veterans. The study estimates that 20 percent of Afghanistan and Iraq combat veterans have PTS (three times the rate of pre-9/11 vets), and half of these never seek treatment. Another 19 percent have TBI and seven percent have both. The study posits that these are contributors to veteran suicide, which was double that of the civilian rate (30 against 14 per 100,000 people) in 2012.²⁶ PTS can also contribute to trouble with the authorities, homelessness, or both. Today, roughly 200,000 veterans are behind bars in America, which disproportionately represents 14 percent of the prison population.²⁷ While veteran homelessness has declined over the last three years, it is still alarmingly disproportionate to the civilian demographic. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates that 57,849 veterans (representing approximately 12 percent of the adult homeless population) were homeless on any given night in 2013.²⁸

So, statistically speaking, veterans of all eras are more likely to divorce, twice as likely to have PTS, three times as likely to have TBI, and twice as likely to be homeless than the non-service U.S. population. Post-9/11 veterans fared worse still in all these categories, and are also disproportionately unemployed. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2011 44 percent of post-9/11 veterans describe their readjustment to civilian

life as “difficult” compared to only 25 percent of older veterans saying the same. Roughly 48 percent of post-9/11 veterans experienced strain in family affairs since transitioning, and 32 percent say there were times they felt apathetic about life in general.²⁹ The study also shows a military-civilian gap in service to the nation and significance of the military’s contribution to American prosperity. Only about one half of one percent of Americans have served on active duty since 2001. Post-9/11 veterans do not believe the public understands the challenges to military families inherent in military service, and the general public largely agrees--84 percent and 71 percent, respectively.³⁰

While half of the American public does not believe the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have made any significant difference in their daily life, there is some good news in the Pew study. Confidence in the nation’s military remains very high and more than 90 percent of Americans express pride in our armed forces. About 75 percent indicate they have expressed gratitude in tangible ways.³¹ It is this gratitude that has manifested itself so positively and presents clear opportunities to assist our soldiers in transition. Fostering a collective sense of identity within the force and increasing an understanding of what that identity can contribute to the community can also sustain this goodwill.

Community Goodwill

By some estimates, there are over 40,000 non-profits nationwide supporting veterans in some form or fashion.³² Whether a veteran needs a home that supports a disability, job placement assistance, recreational opportunities, family counseling, or even free chiropractic sessions, it is all out there in the vast sea of goodwill.

Corporations and trade associations also are on board. Major companies such as Wal-

Mart, Home Depot, and JP Morgan Chase all have significant veteran hiring initiatives. Trade associations as varied as the National Association of Realtors and National Beer Wholesalers Association have also committed to facilitate entry into their fields by veterans. The Army and several government agencies have also postured themselves in recent years to address increased support requirements. The Army has at least 26 programs that at least touch some element of soldier transition or veteran support and there are countless others among the services and elsewhere in government. This rush to help has created institutional competition and a resulting “support quagmire” that is difficult to navigate through, serving as one of the many barriers *Soldier for Life* must overcome for success.

Barriers to *Soldier for Life* Success

The *Soldier for Life* program has not been without its challenges since its inception. While the program has been moderately successful in achieving many of its short term goals within the community; funding, manpower, institutional competition, senior leader emphasis, and an evolving mission have all hampered efforts to implant *Soldier for Life* themes across the Army institution to make any appreciable strides towards the establishing a soldier identity in its ranks. The program’s initial operating budget was sufficient to pay for the nationwide travel and promotional material required to begin communicating the *Soldier for Life* message. However, three separate spending freezes within the program’s first 18 months interrupted travel necessary to expand the network and spread the word. The DoD moratorium on conference attendance works against *Soldier for Life* efforts as well. Conferences provide an excellent opportunity to maximize spending power because target organizations come together in one location and only require one trip instead of several to interact with

important stakeholders. In *Soldier for Life's* first year, they missed golden opportunities at annual conferences for influential organizations such as the Society for Human Resource Management, the National League of Cities, and Student Veterans of America.³³

The *Soldier for Life* Program Office has operated under three separate directed military over-strength (DMO) authorizations providing the office with 18 military personnel organized both regionally and functionally.³⁴ These positions were meant to be nominative positions, ensuring that only high-performing officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were considered for them. In practice, however, Human Resource Command (HRC) did not, and still does not, view these DMO billets as nominative. This creates significant friction between *Soldier for Life* leadership and HRC in finding the best personnel fits. Getting quality candidates also creates another problem--the likelihood these officers and NCOs will turn-over more frequently due to school and/or command selection. To address this continuity problem, *Soldier for Life* created a civilian deputy position. However, fiscal constraints and the ongoing Department of the Army hiring freeze have precluded filling this position.³⁵

Within all components of the Army, there are no less than 26 other programs of record that are related to, or contribute in some fashion to the *Soldier for Life* aspects of transition (employment, education, or healthcare).³⁶ Major efforts include ACAP, Army Community Service, Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness, Credentialing Opportunities Online, Community Covenant, Warrior Transition Liaison Program, and Partnership for Youth Success. *Soldier for Life's* experience with the success of these programs in its first year was mixed. Most of these programs were welcoming with

information sharing and offered integrating and synergizing efforts. Some programs, however, viewed *Soldier for Life* as an unnecessary and duplicative effort making it difficult to partner with them. These latter programs failed to appreciate the opportunity *Soldier for Life* presented by virtue of its proximity to the CSA and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army (VCSA).³⁷

The CSA, VCSA, and Sergeant Major of the Army have all included *Soldier for Life* themes within their speeches to external audiences. However, as one moves from these top echelons to other senior leadership within major subordinate commands and the operational army, the message diminishes quickly and it is almost non-existent at the division level and below. Even at the venerable U.S. Army War College (USAWC), the Army has missed multiple opportunities to plant the seed and begin a *Soldier for Life* dialogue among future Army senior leaders heading back to the force. In numerous sessions between Army senior leaders and this year's USAWC resident class, the *Soldier for Life* program was not mentioned even once.³⁸

A final and more fundamental challenge to the *Soldier for Life* effort rests with their evolving mission. In December 2013, the office's mission changed by only a few words, but these words significantly changed the direction of the office away from the original intent of the program. No longer are they to "enable" efforts, but rather "connect" efforts and "build relationships."³⁹ Even though "enabling" efforts provided a loose linkage at best to generating a *Soldier for Life* conviction in the force and stakeholder community; the "connecting" of efforts and "building relationships" stray very far away from actively building soldier identity.

Whatever the mission, the current *Soldier for Life* CAMPLAN has provided little utility to the team's important work. The need to codify the campaign was necessary and laudable; however, the product is voluminous and contains multiple, confusing variations of a campaign strategy and framework. It is also hampered by a general lack of direction in time and space. It also does not adequately address the most important component of the *Soldier for Life* vision--specifically, professional soldier identity. So, as *Soldier for Life* scrutinizes their mission further, so too should they consider revising their CAMPLAN, which is the roadmap they must use to achieve the collective vision.

Soldier for Life Campaign Plan

The *Soldier for Life* campaign framework identifies four lines of operation emanating from soldier lifecycle to the desired end-state of a career ready transitioned soldier fully connected to necessary employment, education, and healthcare resources. These lines of operation (Army, Government, Information, and Community) "describe each sector of society and are required to provide a holistic approach to achieve [*Soldier for Life*] objectives."⁴⁰ The CAMPLAN also identifies four "main objectives"--Mindset, Access, Relationships, and Trust--that serve to focus efforts to those components that influence preparation of soldiers and families for transition. These objectives are not mutually exclusive--each influences the other and none will succeed if another does not.

The current *Soldier for Life* objectives all describe subordinate activities that support the objective and guide the campaign towards a desired end-state specifically, "Soldiers, Veterans, and Families leave military service career ready and find an established network of enablers connecting them with the employment, education, and healthcare required to successfully reintegrate into civilian society."⁴¹ *Mindset* describes

those activities that will inculcate the soldier lifecycle and the all-volunteer Army strategic imperative within the minds of soldiers and the greater stakeholder community. *Access* connects soldiers, veterans, and their families with employment, education, and healthcare support. *Relationships* build enduring connections within the community that sustain awareness of veteran issues and inspire action. As previously described, *trust* is the bedrock of the relationship between the Army and the American people and it is vital to the success of the profession.⁴²

There are some valuable aspects to the CAMPLAN in its current form, including these objectives. Once these pieces are stitched together in line with a guiding mission and end-state, the *Soldier for Life* CAMPLAN will provide a stronger way ahead for the program as it moves into its third year. An improved strategic approach that addresses the collective shortfalls of the program and prioritizes activities in time and space is central to the success of this revised CAMPLAN.

Proposed Strategic Approach

It is not uncommon to adjust the dials on a fledgling Army program. But this should be done within the parameters of a sound mission statement that supports a desired end-state. Previous iterations of the mission statement did not address at all the notion of evolved thinking among soldiers and veterans, even though the concept is clear in the program's name. A proposed way to integrate this into the *Soldier for Life* is to restate the mission as:

Soldier for Life establishes "Soldier Identity" within the force and builds relationships within the Army, government and community that maintain this identity and facilitate success of and leadership by our Soldiers, veterans, and their families within communities.⁴³

This mission encapsulates what the program seeks to do across all lines of effort, while not straying too far from the Army’s important connection to the civilian community. The desired end-state should also embrace soldier identity and could read as follows:

Soldiers, veterans, and families closely identify with the Army profession, succeed in transition, and are viewed as assets and leaders within communities and civilian society.⁴⁴

Any change in direction to the *Soldier for Life* program strategy must start with a mission and end-state review. These guiding principles “bookend” the strategic approach from the beginning to end. The proposed framework described below maintains current objectives, but classifies them as the true lines of effort (LOEs), and overlays them over phases. These phases describe major objectives that the Army must achieve before moving to the next phase. Each also has a center of gravity that focuses work during the phase. The original CAMPLAN LOEs of Army, Government, and Community are retained, but they now represent the resource pool from which the program will source activities throughout the campaign.

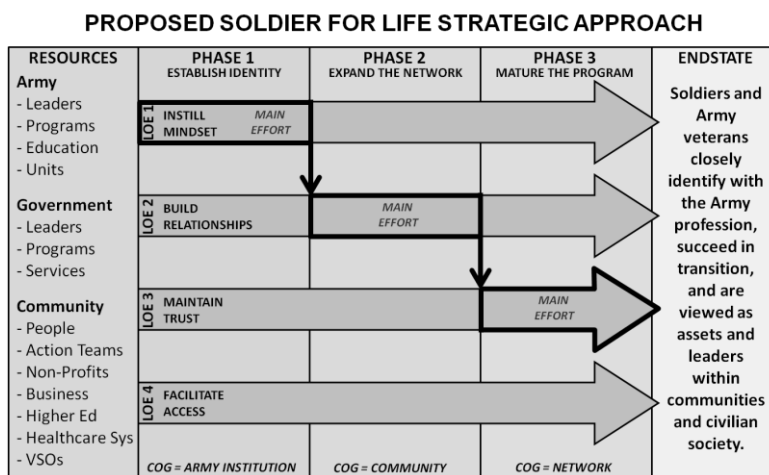


Figure 4. Proposed Soldier for Life Strategic Approach

Phase One: Establish Soldier Identity

The *Instilling Mindset* LOE is the main effort in this phase with all others in support. Subordinate tasks within the phase all focus on developing and instituting soldier identity. It is a huge, service-wide effort; therefore all other activities short of maintaining current relationships should be secondary. First, *Soldier for Life* must weave identity into its current messaging. The program effectively advances the importance of educating the force and stakeholder community so that they may better understand the significant role our soldiers play in defending freedom. Mindset alone, however, is not a deep enough concept to achieve the level of service culture change the CSA desires. A “mindset” is simply an attitude or a way of thinking about something. An “identity,” on the other hand, represents who a person is. It defines one’s character and willingness to join into a collective identity of service to our nation. In the first phase of the campaign, the program should strive to provide meaning and purpose to soldiers so that they better identify who they are and what they value; and from that, strength, honor, and service within a profession of arms prevails.

Some of this work has already been done, just not by the *Soldier for Life* team. The Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE), an organization within the Combined Arms Center, and proponent for ADRP-1, have a mission today to serve as the proponent for the Army profession, the Army ethic, and character development of Army professionals to reinforce trust in the profession and with the American people. CAPE’s endstate of “an Army culture that reinforces trust within the Army Profession and with the American people”⁴⁵ nests well with *Soldier for Life* identity efforts. In fact, the companion to ADRP-1, Army Doctrine Publication 1 contains one of the first doctrinal references to the *Soldier for Life* initiative.⁴⁶ The *Soldier for Life* and CAPE

teams should work together to develop complementary messaging for the next step in this phase--immersion within the force.

In order to successfully plant the first seed of a new identity, immersion should occur at every level throughout the Army in a memorable manner. The Army has done this well on several occasions in its recent history. A good example occurred on June 14, 2001 when soldiers throughout the Army first donned the black beret, the vast majority of them standing in a ceremonial formation to do so. As controversial as this headgear change would become, soldiers do recall where they were that day and the significance of it.

The Army should consider a similar approach to premiere the soldier identity concept. Perhaps a *Soldier for Life* "Stand Up" on a day of significance, such as the Army's birthday as was done with the black beret. Much like the common safety stand down, this would serve as a day of instruction on the concept, the Army profession, and offer reflection on how each soldier personally identifies with their nation, Army, and unit. Key related topics would include the Army Values, the various professional creeds, Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness, and ethics as they all speak to the profession and what makes soldiers unique. Commanders across all components would be accountable for completion of the stand-up and NCOs responsible for execution with embedding events adjusted locally to allow for family member and veteran participation.

Intensive organizational maintenance activities, in the form of inclusion of identity themes within professional military education at all levels, would need to follow. The Army would adapt unit and installation activities to reinforce identity concepts and facilitate transition. One example is to consider designating career counselors as the

unit *Soldier for Life* representative and expanding their mission to include soldier identity master trainers and transition counseling. They would become the commander's personal representative in developing identity within the unit and ensuring soldiers transition better. On behalf of the commander, career counselors would monitor soldiers' progress in ACAP. This vernacular would need modified to further institutionalize the *Soldier for Life* concept. By renaming ACAP centers *Army Soldier for Life Centers*, they will continue their transition mission, and provide a "mother ship" that will support and resource career counselor efforts.

Phase Two: Expand the Network

Once the Army has systematically and programmatically set the conditions for sustained reinforcement of soldier identity within the force, it must then turn its attention to stakeholders outside the gate. *Building Relationships* becomes the main effort in this phase and *Soldier for Life* will resume aggressive engagement within the government and stakeholder community. They should also leverage the Army's vast resources already within the community to accelerate expansion of the network. Aside from the reserve component units nationwide, there are also 948 recruiting stations⁴⁷ and 273 Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) units across the country.⁴⁸ These entities are the tip of the Army's spear in often insulated communities and provide a turnkey capability to expand the *Soldier for Life* network.

The Army's *Soldier for Life* branding effort gains momentum within this LOE. Reserve component units would have *Soldier for Life* representatives just like their active component counterparts. Army recruiting stations would be rebranded *U.S. Army Start Strong Centers* and their grass root initiative mission expanded to not only participate in local networking efforts, but also provide support to local veterans

requiring access to the network. ROTC battalions will continue their community and university outreach efforts and include *Soldier for Life* themes in their training.⁴⁹ In coordination with their universities, ROTC battalions would also provide access to the network for student veterans on campus.

Efforts to develop and advance community action in hometown America will increase during this phase. Army and other service entities can assist in developing local networks. These include the Army retiree councils resident at each Army installation and the influential network of Civilian Aides to the Secretary of the Army. *Soldier for Life* should also take advantage of similar community action efforts led by other services. Partnering with other services in and around Air Force, Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard installations will put an Army face in those communities where some Army veterans land. All this will require close coordination and extensive travel by the *Soldier for Life* team, but as the network matures, much of the personal touch can be done by members of the network itself--Army recruiters assisting Army veterans living in a Navy town, for example.

Throughout this phase, the Army should consider how it is resourcing the *Soldier for Life* program in terms of money and personnel. Funding should match the effort required to aggressively build the network. Assuming some financial risk to invest in the program now will maintain momentum and reap great profits for both our soldiers and our communities. The Army should also continue manning the office with the very best personnel and build in mechanisms to ensure they have both the rank and longevity to be effective in the greater community. By this phase, the civilian deputy position should be filled.

Also at the top, the Army should consider making the director position a one-star general officer billet and the senior enlisted advisor a command sergeant major. These ranks wield significant influence within communities and open doors that are otherwise hard to get through. The program should also staff the regions with former battalion commanders and sergeants major to reflect the normal officer and NCO partnership at this level. Finally, an assignment to *Soldier for Life* should carry with it a two-year minimum commitment, as is done in other key assignments throughout the Army. Once conditions are set for these organizational changes, the right people will be in place to mature the program in the next phase.

Phase Three: Mature the Program

When the Army began considering what a program such as *Soldier for Life* might look like and what it might do, then VCSA General Lloyd Austin posited that the effort would likely have a 40-plus year lifespan.⁵⁰ He envisioned a capability that would support the average soldier departing service today throughout his life. This phase works to achieve this envisaged outcome to build a mature and lasting capability with organizational endurance to operate in the veteran space for years to come. *Maintaining Trust* becomes the main effort in this phase as the program becomes a venerable entity that soldiers and citizens alike trust.

In order to achieve this vision, *Soldier for Life* must mature itself into a bona-fide Army program with approved manning documents and budgets that support a long-term mission. Part of this effort requires a bottom-up review of all Army programs that support soldier transition and veterans and consideration of where efficiencies can be gained. *Soldier for Life* recently subsumed two other related programs--the Human Resource Command's (G-1) Transition Strategic Outreach and the Army's Retiree

Services from the Army G-1.⁵¹ There are other consolidation candidates within the Army that may make sense to bring them under the *Soldier for Life* umbrella. ACAP and Community Covenant are two of these that come to mind--the former being the final touch-point before soldiers remove the uniform for good, and the latter actively building community networks every day.

The future structure of the *Soldier for Life* team should also include U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard components. Representatives from each these organizations within the program's task organization provides both the perspective and institutional expertise necessary to coordinate efforts between Army components. In practice, this could involve liaison officers from each for the entire program; or preferably, U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard members within each region and among each functional area. This demonstrates a "one Army" approach and furthers the impression of the importance of a single identity for soldiers for the entire force.

Conclusion

The U.S. has asked so much from our Army's Soldiers and families over the last twelve-plus years of conflict. The soldier of 2014 has emerged vastly different than the one who entered the war in 2001. He is ready, resilient, competent, and trusted. But he is also challenged--challenged by a tough economy, challenged by cultural demographics, challenged by behavioral health stigmas, and challenged ironically by the very goodwill that seeks to assist him. He often does not know who he is or what value he can offer the community to which he will return. Moving into its third year, the *Soldier for Life* program is postured to remedy these challenges and capitalize on the intrinsic value of today's soldier to his community. It begins with the soldier and his ability to identify closely with his individual experience in the service of our nation. This

identification will provide him higher levels of confidence as he navigates the road of life. It will also inspire conviction in the community that will receive him as society recognizes the value and leadership soldiers provide.

The *Soldier for Life* program is best postured to effect this improvement. But it must consider the logical steps to get there. Working in and among community goodwill is crucial, but doing this before the soldier views himself as a “soldier for life” is the wrong recipe for success. Despite fiscal austerity, senior Army leaders must commit the necessary resources to this endeavor. They must commit now to making *Soldier for Life* (the concept) a palpable foundation of the Army of the 21st Century; and *Soldier for Life* (the program) the central enabler of the effort. The program must have both the CSA’s voice and his fingerprints in order to weave its work into the fabric of the Army profession and institution. When the program finds success, soldiers and veterans will have achieved and recognize their new and profound professional identity – one of a soldier, a *Soldier for Life*.

Endnotes

¹ John F. Campbell, “VCSA Sends: Soldier for Life,” July 23, 2013, linked from *The Official Homepage of the United States Army* at “News Archives,” http://www.army.mil/article/107876/July_23_2013_VCSA_sends_Soldier_for_Life/ (accessed January 15, 2014).

² Ibid.

³ U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, June 2013), 2-1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Michael A. Coss, “Soldier for Life Overview,” briefing slides with scripted commentary, Arlington, VA, U.S. Army Soldier for Life Program, September 2012.

⁶ Raymond T. Odierno, *Marching Orders, 38th Chief of Staff of the Army: America’s Force of Decisive Action* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army, January 2012), 2.

⁷ One should consider *soldier* identity and *professional* identity synonymously. In ADRP-1, the U.S. Army has established itself as a profession of arms and it is depth of the underlying professional identity within soldiers this project hopes to influence.

⁸ Per ADRP-1, membership in the Army profession also includes non-uniformed civilians or the Army Civilian Corps. While their role is extremely significant, they are not included in the discussion of inculcating a professional soldier identity in the Army.

⁹ U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1, 1-1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-8.

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Profession, Army Leadership, and An Army White Paper: The Profession of Arms*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, December 8, 2010).

¹² U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1, 1-6.

¹³ *The Soldier for Life Homepage*, <http://www.army.mil/soldierforlife/> (accessed March 15, 2014).

¹⁴ U.S. Soldier for Life Program, "Soldier for Life Campaign Plan 2013," Arlington, VA: U.S. Army Soldier for Life Program, June 2013, 3.

¹⁵ These stigmas include post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, depression, and alcoholism. While some soldiers do suffer from these afflictions, so do many others among the civilian population in a wide array of professions.

¹⁶ Andrew Feickart, *Army Drawdown and Restructuring: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, February 28, 2014), 7-10.

¹⁷ Coss, "Soldier for Life Overview."

¹⁸ Feickart, *Army Drawdown and Restructuring*, 26.

¹⁹ Many governmental organizations, most chiefly the Bureau of Labor Statistics, use the term "Gulf War II Era Veterans" to describe veterans who served after the events of September 11, 2001. In the interests of brevity and simplicity, this work uses the "post-9/11" vernacular instead. There are likely many reasons behind the differences in civilian success between various veteran demographics, but these are not the focus of this project and are therefore not addressed.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Situation of Veterans 2013* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, March 20, 2014).

²¹ Eric Gioia, "What New York Owes Vets," *NY Sun*, September 29, 2008, <http://www.nysun.com/opinion/what-new-york-owes-vets/86789> (accessed March 7, 2014).

²² Pauline Jelinek, "DoD Spends Nearly \$1B a Year on Unemployment," *Army Times Online*, March 15, 2013, <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20130315/NEWS05/303150001/DoD-spends-nearly-1B-year-unemployment> (accessed March 7, 2014).

²³ Andrew Tilghman, "Military Divorce Rate Ticks Downward," *Army Times Online*, December 19, 2013, <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20131219/NEWS/312190026/Military-divorce-rate-ticks-downward> (accessed January 3, 2014).

²⁴ Centers for Disease Control, "National Marriage and Divorce Rate Trends," http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.htm (accessed March 19, 2014).

²⁵ Sebastian Negrusa, Brighita Negrusa, and James Hosek, *Gone to War: Have Deployments Increased Divorces?* (Berlin, Germany: Springer-Verlag, July 9, 2013), 8-14.

²⁶ Jeff Hargarten, Forrest Burnson, Bonnie Campo, and Chase Cook, "Suicide Rate for Veterans Far Exceeds that of Civilian Population," linked from *The Center for Public Integrity* at "National Security," <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2013/08/30/13292/suicide-rate-veterans-fat-exceeds-civilian-population> (accessed February 17, 2014).

²⁷ Mark Thompson, "A Troubled Marine's Final Fight," *Time*, February 10, 2014, 38.

²⁸ The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, "Frequently Asked Questions About Homeless Veterans," http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/ (accessed March 5, 2014).

²⁹ Pew Research Center, "War and Sacrifice in the Post 911 Era," October 5, 2011, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/war-and-sacrifice-in-the-post-911-era/> (accessed January 3, 2014).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Easter Seals Dixon Center, "Our Work: Model of Excellence," http://dixon.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=dixon_our_work&s_section= (accessed March 15, 2014).

³³ Personal observation.

³⁴ Coss, "Soldier for Life Overview."

³⁵ COL Kevin Hicks, U.S. Army Soldier for Life Deputy Director, telephone interview by author, January 17, 2014.

³⁶ Coss, "Soldier for Life Overview."

³⁷ The *Soldier for Life* office and its personnel were previously task-organized under the VCSA's office with the *Soldier for Life* director serving as a Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Army. While the director remains a Special Assistant, effective February 1, 2014, the

rest of the office was realigned under the Director, Military Personnel Management (DMPM)/Army G-1.

³⁸ This includes the Army G-1 who now owns the program as mentioned in the previous endnote.

³⁹ U.S. Army Soldier for Life Program, “Connect’ Way Ahead Decision Brief,” briefing slides to GEN John F. Campbell, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, Arlington, VA, U.S. Army Soldier for Life Program, December 22, 2013.

⁴⁰ U.S. Soldier for Life Program, “Soldier for Life Campaign Plan 2013,” 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴² U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1, 1-5.

⁴³ Adapted from U.S. Soldier for Life Program, “Soldier for Life Campaign Plan 2013,” mission statement, 6.

⁴⁴ Adapted from *Ibid.*, end-state, 7.

⁴⁵ *Center for the Army Profession Homepage*, <http://cape.army.mil> (accessed March 1, 2014).

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army*, Army Doctrine Publication 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, September 2012), 4-8.

⁴⁷ *U.S. Army Recruiting Command Homepage*, <http://www.usarec.army.mil/support/faqs.htm#stations> (accessed January 13, 2014).

⁴⁸ John D. Hansen, Ohio University ROTC Recruiting Operations Officer, telephone interview by author, February 21, 2013.

⁴⁹ *Soldier for Life* wording is not used in this part of the branding effort because some potential recruits and their families may misinterpret the intended meaning. “Start Strong” is the first step in the soldier lifecycle and is therefore nested with the *Soldier for Life* thematic.

⁵⁰ Coss, “Soldier for Life Overview.”

⁵¹ Director of the Army Staff, “Realignment of Soldier for Life Program Office, Army Retirement Services Office, and Army Transition Strategic Outreach Office,” Memorandum for Army Staff, Washington DC, December 23, 2013.