



**Be the Leader You  
Want to Be Led By:**  
*An Interview With  
Gen. Stephen Townsend*

■ By Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard





*Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, commander of the Training and Doctrine Command, speaks with Officer Candidate School Soldiers from E Company, 3rd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment, at Fort Benning, Ga., on Aug. 15, 2018 (Photo by Markeith Horace)*

The commander of the Training and Doctrine Command gives his insights on teamwork and the role sustainers play in total Army success.

As the commander of the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Gen. Stephen J. Townsend is leading the charge in building today's Soldiers while changing the Army for the future. Throughout a career spanning more than 36 years, Townsend deployed to combat at every rank from second lieutenant to general officer, and he commanded some of the Army's most historic units.

While responsible for the training of more than 500,000 service members each year in his current assignment, he still makes a point to stay in touch with Soldiers at all levels and build the Army team from the ground up. Here are his insights on teamwork and the role sustainers play in the success of the total Army.

*How important has teamwork been throughout your career, and what role have sustainers played in the teams you've led?*

Teamwork is the cornerstone of any organization, especially the Army. Whether you're talking about a fellow Soldier or an allied nation, teamwork is always essential to mission success and goes hand in hand with leadership.

From my own experiences, I have a long list of war stories of logisticians contributing to the team's success. Broadly speaking, across my four tours in Afghanistan, I saw countless examples of sustainers on the ground and in the air coming through for our Soldiers in the fight. I couldn't tell you how many times I saw pinnacle landings on mountaintop peaks, shoving out resupply, or convoys driving down IED [improvised explosive device]-ridden roads, getting supplies through to the troops.

One specific instance that comes to mind occurred in Baghdad in January of 2007. I was in a Stryker brigade at the time, and my mobile command group was struck by an IED. I noticed the IED as my truck was driving by it, but it didn't go off on us. I shouted a warning over the radio to

the Stryker behind us, but it was too late; it hit them. Some of our Soldiers were wounded, and the Stryker was taken out of action, so we called for help.

We called for medevac and set up a landing zone and a little while later called for recovery. We were prepared to self-recover the vehicle back, but my brigade support battalion had a recovery quick reaction force they had put together.

Pretty soon a medevac aircraft showed up and took our wounded away, and literally about the time the aircraft was departing, up rolled a small convoy of Humvees and some wreckers at high speed. They collected our damaged Stryker and departed, and we were able to continue on our mission. Our maintainers were then able to repair that Stryker and return it to service a few days later.

That's just one example of the kind of experience I've had with Army sustainers over the course of my career, and there are countless others. They always get the job done on time.

*What is the Army doing to develop the leaders we need to be successful on tomorrow's battlefield?*

At the institutional level, which TRADOC is responsible for, leader development is integrated everywhere. Every course a Soldier takes, from their initial entry training and basic combat training until the end of their career, whether that be three years or 30 years, it's all about leader development.

The Army has also created a talent management task force to review policies for leader development and assignments Army-wide. It's allowing us to see if we need to change some of our processes and really update the way we're doing things.

At the operational level, our field units and the experience you get in the field Army are absolutely critical to leader development. There's a lot that goes on out there, and we have a system of after action reviews to cap-



ture lessons learned from all across our Army. That information can be spread Army-wide so that leaders, Soldiers, and units can learn from the experiences of others, not just their own.

The other pillar to that is self-development. It's a way to increase your own repetitions because it's not possible for you to fight enough battles in peacetime. So you have to read those after action reviews from other people's battles, and then you have to read history. I think that's really an important part of leader development.

*As commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps, "America's Contingency Corps," how did you ensure sustainment units were incorporated into the team to maintain readiness for rapid deployment?*

This really wasn't as difficult as you might think. I'm reminded of an old saying sometimes attributed to Gen. Omar Bradley: Amateurs talk about tactics, but professionals study logistics. Every leader I worked with in the XVIII Airborne Corps was intimately familiar with both the requirements of operations and the logistical demands to support them.

*Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of the Training and Doctrine Command, meets with Dr. Mark Esper, the Secretary of the Army, at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va., on May 18, 2018.*



This pattern held true in other units, too. In addition to the XVIII Airborne Corps, in each of my three final operational units (the 101st Airborne Division [Air Assault], the 10th Mountain Division, and Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve), sustainment was absolutely critical to the success of all the operations we conducted. Sustainment leaders were completely integrated into everything we did.

About 14 years ago, we started modularizing our brigades into brigade combat teams. In my opinion, that initiative has better integrated sustainment into our operations at the brigade level and below. And I think brigade combat teams are more effective at sustainment than I was as a battalion commander in an infantry-pure brigade as a result.

*How critical is effective training for building capable sustainment units?*

Absolutely critical. German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel once said, "The best form of welfare for the troops is first-class training." So what does first-class training do? First-class training makes sure you apply combat service support and sustain-

ment to training just as you would combat arms.

First-class training is relevant, it's realistic, and it's tough. It improves and hones not only individual Soldier skills but also collective skills from smaller units all the way up to the BCT [brigade combat team] and beyond. And it strengthens resilience in both individual Soldiers and units, making those Soldiers and units tougher in facing the demands of the battlefield. When it comes to training, sustainers have to be just as involved as combat arms leaders for units to be successful.

I think the proof of training and the integration of sustainment is in the pudding. The last time I failed due to a lack of logistics or sustainment was in 1987; to this day, I can recall it instantly. My unit was on a training exercise, and we had expended our ammunition in an engagement with the opposing force. We were displaced on the battlefield and called for resupply, but it was hours and hours late in coming and arrived only after we had another engagement with the enemy while I was out of ammo.

Beyond that training experience, which is seared into my memory, I haven't had another failure due to a lack of sustainment throughout the course of the rest of my career. So I think we've done a pretty good job of integrating sustainment into our training and our operations.

*Can you discuss the importance of team building with our joint and coalition partners, especially as we prepare for complex, multi-domain operations?*

I don't think building a team with our joint and multinational partners is really any more difficult than doing so with Army partners. From the very beginning, you first have to explain to them what we have to do; that's the mission. Then you have to tell them what you want to accomplish; that's commander's intent.

Finally, you need to tell them that

we're all going to operate as one team; I don't care what service or branch is above your pocket, what color your uniform is, or what the flag is on your shoulder. In the end, you just have to lead them from the front. And I've found Soldiers and leaders universally respond to this kind of leadership.

*Looking toward the future, how are we redeveloping the way the Army builds the greatest team in the world?*

The Army is evolving at a number of different levels. At the organizational level, we just stood up the Army Futures Command, the first new major command since 1973, when TRADOC was created. Futures Command will be responsible for all things future, with a particular emphasis on materiel and how we're going about equipping. We've activated six cross-functional teams that

are looking at a range of the Army's highest priority materiel acquisition programs.

In the area of training, we're improving initial entry training for Soldiers. We're making basic combat training tougher, and we're making one station unit training longer, starting with the infantry course and moving on to other courses after that. In our units, we're increasing the demands of home-station training because home station is where we actually train and certify units for war. And at combat training centers, we've introduced a full-spectrum, hybrid, near-peer threat that is really stressing our units in their full-up collective training.

Lastly, we're also introducing the new Army combat fitness test. The new test will improve individual fitness and readiness for deployment, and it's also going to change the culture of the Army.

*Do you foresee innovation and emerging technologies impacting mission command?*

I think innovation will play out in a lot of areas, but particularly when it comes to mission command. Innovation will improve not only our situational awareness at both the individual and team levels but also our common understanding between commanders and the whole team. It will also increase the speed and quality of our decision-making.

Now, all of that sounds really good; it sounds like we should have perfect information and make great decisions all the time. But the problem goes back to this near-peer, hybrid threat we train for and might have to operate against. That threat has the ability to deny our communications and degrade our understanding and situational awareness.

If our mission command system





fails or is denied to us, we have to operate off of our philosophy of mission command: commanders issuing mission orders with clear commander's intent, and subordinate leaders using their disciplined initiative to accomplish that intent. All of it is enabled by trust.

***You have commanded at every echelon. What advice would you give a Soldier entering the Army today to be a successful teammate?***

First, keep your honor clean. Every decision you make and every action you take needs to be based on a foundation of our Army values, your service values, or your national values.

Second, live on amber; be ready. Ready for what? Ready for anything. You should be physically ready and mentally ready. Be ready as an individual Soldier and ready as a member of your Army unit. Be comfortable

with uncertainty, and expect the unexpected.

Third, act with disciplined initiative. Our Army has a philosophy of mission command. Leaders give mission orders with a clear commander's intent, which empowers subordinates to act with their disciplined initiative. Subordinates and subordinate leaders have to be smart enough to recognize when their plan is failing; they need to be smart enough to come up with a plan that will work, and then they need to have the guts to do it. And they need to have the trust and backing up and down the chain of command to empower that disciplined initiative.

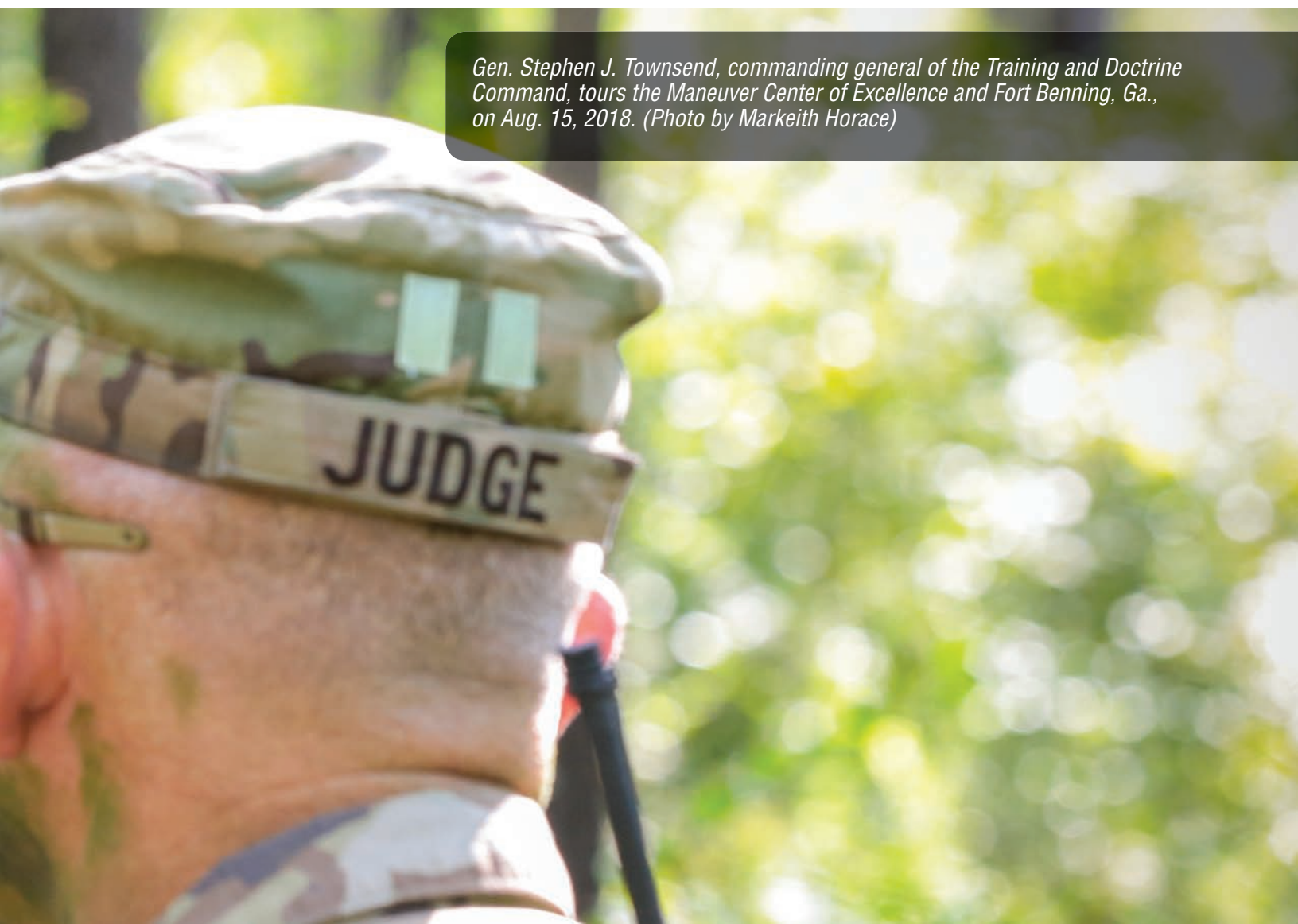
Last, lead by example. That applies to leaders, but also to Soldiers as well. Sometimes I'll say that, and privates will ask, "Sir, what do you mean by that? I'm not a leader." I believe every Soldier in the United States Army is a role model for somebody. Clearly,

officers and noncommissioned officers are role models for their units, but even privates are a role model for somebody. It may be a teammate in their squad or section, or it may be a family member back home, but they are a role model nonetheless. So to every Soldier: lead by example and model what you think a Soldier ought to be. In the end, be the leader you want to be led by.

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*Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, commanding general of the Training and Doctrine Command, tours the Maneuver Center of Excellence and Fort Benning, Ga., on Aug. 15, 2018. (Photo by Markeith Horace)*