

## Explorer Sends: CGSC embraces Comprehensive Soldier Fitness

By Brig. Gen. Ed Cardon | Deputy Commandant, Command and General Staff College

Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's well-known remark that "War is Hell" is true even today and directly speaks to the current fight. Our experience over the past eight years at war tells us that we must better prepare our Soldiers and their families to persevere with the challenges inherent in military service.

The Army is taking positive steps to build resilience in our Soldiers, families and Army civilians - all of whom have answered the call to serve and have been affected by the cumulative effects of eight years at war. An initiative known as Comprehensive Soldier Fitness is one approach to create that resiliency across the force.

The Army is discovering that most Soldiers endure the stress of combat and emerge from those experiences stronger and more resilient. CSF is a means to inculcate this idea of positive growth across the force. This approach is a marked shift from previous initiatives, with past efforts focusing on treatment rather than prevention. CSF will focus on prevention by assessing mental fitness early on and teaching skills for coping with stress and trauma. Through CSF, the Army will energize existing resiliency programs, standardize them across the Army, and renew its commitment to reduce the stigma associated with seeking behavioral health assistance.

The Command and General Staff College, as part of a larger Combined Arms Center effort, is expanding upon this Army initiative to implement a more holistic Comprehensive Soldier Fitness effort to build strength and resiliency. This initiative at CGSC builds upon five dimensions of strength - physical, emotional, social, family and spiritual - to increase resilience and maximize potential in our students, faculty, staff and families. We seek to build mentally tough, more resilient leaders who are equally ready to lead change across our Army by inculcating resiliency in their units. This initiative also seeks to provide a foundation for our Army team to overcome hardships and adverse events, bounce back and grow stronger in the process.

The key to increased resiliency is placing the same level of enthusiasm toward conditioning our minds and souls as we place toward conditioning our bodies. No one dimension of strength stands alone. The true potential of CSF lies in its applicability across each dimension to create a synergetic quality for each person. For example, while physical fitness activities clearly relate to the physical dimension, they also impact the emotional aspect through mental discipline, and have a social aspect when conducted with partners or groups. Spouse programs are integral to the family dimension, and also relate to the social and, in some cases, spiritual dimension. Bottom line: many of these will fit across some or all of the dimensions of strength and each person can decide for themselves which to focus on at any given time.

### CGSC education and training opportunities

We have a unique opportunity here at CGSC to inculcate a Comprehensive Soldier Fitness mindset in every officer who attends this institution. The educational environment provides an opportunity to educate mid-grade leaders on resilience - and demonstrate the importance of this initiative, starting with their own welfare - but more importantly, to the organizations they will eventually lead. To this end, we are implementing several changes to the Command and General Staff School curriculum to leverage these initiatives and build resilient leaders.

During the foundations block, every CGSS student receives resiliency instruction that teaches skills to apply optimistic thinking to life's problems. The CSF foundations block also leverages relevant guest speakers and in-depth staff group discussions to reinforce CSF and resiliency tenets. Select students participate in a course elective that includes attending the University of Pennsylvania 10-day Resilience Trainer Course. These students receive Master Resiliency Trainer certification and learn skills that enable them to "train the trainer" and assist their commanders in overseeing the unit's resilience program when they return to the operational force. We are also reinforcing this with spouse programs, including the Personal Awareness and Leadership Seminar and Spouses Night Out sponsored by CGSC.

I'd also like to highlight the CGSC CSF Web site at [www.cgsc.edu/csf](http://www.cgsc.edu/csf), a gateway to all things related to Comprehensive Soldier Fitness. The Web site includes a single source of information from a master calendar of events to the latest news information, blog discussions and links to all resources here at Fort Leavenworth. Our efforts also include faculty

---

development. We have one faculty member currently enrolled in the UPenn's Master's of Applied Positive Psychology program, and offer faculty members the opportunity to attend the resiliency training at UPenn. We have also stood up a CSF Coordination Office that will synchronize CGSC efforts with the Fort Leavenworth installation.

There are many installation programs available at Fort Leavenworth that can promote resiliency across the five dimensions of strength. In many cases, it is taking already existing programs and bringing them together for a common purpose. I will highlight a few, but encourage everyone to view the CGSC CSF Web site for additional resources aligned with those five dimensions.

The Army Physical Fitness Research Institute provides a full wellness program with health screening and education on diet, exercise, stress and other lifestyle issues. Additionally, Fort Leavenworth Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation offers a variety of activities to help Soldiers and their families balance their lives through recreational, social and educational events.

#### Installation resources

Another resource includes chaplain programs, such as Strong Bonds and marriage enrichment seminars. These seminars empower Soldiers and their spouses with relationship building skills and are committed to restoring and preserving Army families. The Strong Bonds program at Fort Leavenworth allows couples and families to gain practical, useful information based on curriculum designed especially for military families. Through small group and one-on-one activities, couples and family members learn how to maintain and strengthen their relationships in today's high operational tempo environment. Army families are increasingly participating in the Strong Bonds program, which in turn, makes the Strong Bonds program an investment in Army families and in the Future Force.

The functional fitness program is another opportunity to strengthen your physical, emotional, and social fitness. The program is scalable and adaptable so all family members can participate, and it helps the individual reach his or her maximum potential through a holistic exercise and diet regimen. Additionally, students have the opportunity to complete CrossFit certification through the functional fitness program in conjunction with FMWR.

The combination of education and training opportunities at CGSC and installation resources provides our students, faculty, staff and families with the ability to balance their lifestyles. The key to individual success is to focus on strengthening resiliency and learning positive thinking skills.

I strongly believe the CSF initiative can increase our ability to prevent problems and build increased resiliency in ourselves, our families and the Soldiers we lead.

You know better than most that we are in an era of persistent conflict. Comprehensive Soldier Fitness will strengthen and enable us to thrive in this environment and maintain healthy and well-balanced lives.