TRADOC's Cone vows to keep young soldiers interested

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By KATE BRANNEN — Army Gen. Robert Cone, the new commander of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), knows he has a difficult task ahead of him: keeping young soldiers — who've grown accustomed to the excitement and responsibility of combat — interested and excited in the Army when the deployments are over.

Speaking at the annual convention of the Association of the U.S. Army on Tuesday, Cone said Army leaders are prepared to change service culture in order to accommodate this younger generation.

Gen. Robert W. Cone, incoming commading general of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, assumes command of TRADOC on April 29, 2011, on Fort Monroe, Va. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Angelica Golindano)

"These youngsters are not going to put up with the garrison of old, the pre-2001 Army," Cone told reporters.

They need more autonomy, more responsibility and programs that excite them, he said.

This means changing training, schooling and doctrine in a way that captures young soldiers' imaginations, Cone said.

Last summer, the Army released a report that showed young soldiers returning home from combat are having a difficult time adapting to the boredom and monotony of garrison life. These frustrations, compounded by the enormous emotional stress of combat, are contributing to high-risk behavior, including prescription drug abuse and suicide, the report said.

Cone, who took over TRADOC earlier this year from Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey, said he plans to focus on the transition back to home station, providing this young generation of leaders the right incentives to stay in the Army.

"We're going to see some shifting paradigms," from how the Army delivers doctrine to how it trains, he said.

For example, with doctrine, Cone wants to select a few key manuals and reduce their size from giant tomes to a couple of pages. The remaining background manuals can move to the Web for reference use.

It will also be important to capture tactics, techniques and procedures coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan. Cone is excited by the opportunity to "Wiki-ize" these, capturing them for the long term as well as making them more widely available.

Cone would also like to tie training to real world, regional problems.

Young soldiers are not interested in fighting generic, made-up enemies, he said.

"Once you've done this for real, as most of them have, it doesn't really excite you to chase the Kraznovians or Palonians or whoever we're making up," Cone said.

The role of the commander is going to be essential to making training more exciting and relevant, he said. It will be up to commanders to be creative and deliver training in a novel way.

These changes will be important to cultivate soldiers' careers and keep them in the force, but also to maintain important skills painstakingly developed in Iraq and Afghanistan, Cone said.

"Think about what we've paid for in blood in the last 10 years — it's really the ability to do ops intel fusion, the network analysis and the value of human terrain," Cone said. "We cannot lose that."