

Washington

Army sees leaders of the future leaving today

Service fights to hold on to junior officers

By Andrea Stone
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Alarmed by an exodus of junior officers who say they are fed up with career-obsessed superiors, the Army announced Monday that it is forming two blue-ribbon panels to examine the issue and propose ways to improve officer retention.

Although grumbling in the ranks is as old as the military itself, a burgeoning list of recent studies, surveys and focus groups has documented a spreading culture of discontent among military officers, and those in the Army in particular.

The latest reports from the field have senior leaders especially worried. A strong economy has already made it increasingly difficult to find recruits to fill the "all-volunteer" ranks. Rising dissatisfaction among junior officers, the foundation of the Army leadership structure, threatens to destabilize the service from within.

The Army has seen a 58% in-



By Molly Riley, Reuters

Shinseki: Army chief of staff ordered survey of midlevel officers.

crease in the number of captains who leave the service voluntarily each year, up from 6.7% in 1989 to 10.6% last year.

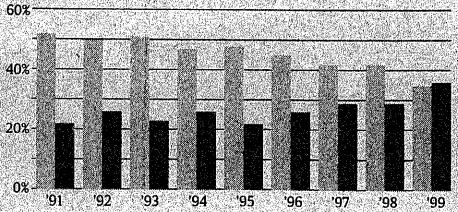
Such statistics are why Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki recently ordered the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., to survey 760 majors attending school there.

What those officers had to say, often in scathing language, has been making the e-mail circuit in

Dissatisfaction among young Army officers

Percentage who intend to stay/leave current active-duty Army careers:

■ Probably/definitely stay until retirement
■ Probably/definitely leave at end of current obligation



Source: Army Research Institute

By Marc E. Mullins, USA TODAY

Army circles for more than a week.

"The chief is very serious about asking the questions in order to identify the problems," says Brig. Gen. Bob Wood, one of two panel directors. "This is a natural process of internal review focused on the process of change."

Officers sounding off in what the Army calls "sensing sessions" were sharply critical about several aspects of military life, from the rapid pace of operations to their uniforms, which they called "ugly." But they saved their deepest cuts for an

Army culture that many said discourages risk-taking and, with the advent of the Internet, allows senior leaders to micromanage subordinates.

In a summary of comments, the officers said that they perceived a "lack of communication between leaders and led" and that young officers "are getting out because they feel out of touch with leadership."

Most general officers "are preoccupied with their careers," the summary of comments said. "Unfortunately, this is the type of offi-

cer the system moves along."

"Trust is the most critical aspect of combat success," says Maj. Don Vandergriff, who has published articles critical of the Army's personnel system. "When that trust is broken, we've got problems."

Some of the most revealing passages in the Leavenworth report also came when officers were asked to respond to particular phrases:

► "Top-down loyalty," the summary said, "does not exist. Senior leaders will throw subordinates under the bus in a heartbeat to protect or advance their career."

► "Zero defects," the shorthand for not tolerating mistakes, is "a symptom of the peacetime Army. Since there is no war to evaluate performance, we have to evaluate everything!"

► "Readiness reporting" was called "absolute lies" by midlevel officers. They accused senior leaders of painting a rosier picture to Congress even as troops in the field struggle with shortages of personnel and spare parts.

The growing distrust between senior and junior officers has been documented before. In a military-wide survey released in January by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank, service members were asked to comment on the

statement. "When my senior service leader says something, you can believe it is true." Only 35% agreed or strongly agreed.

Military analyst Ralph Peters, a former Army officer, says many young officers envy innovation-driven dot-com peers and see no point in sticking around until they are middle-aged to make a difference. "Our military establishment is still stuck in industrial-age thinking, where GM and IBM were in the '70s. They want conformists," he says. "If you're a lieutenant with a good idea, you'll be told to wait 25 years until you're a general to put your ideas into practice."

While the blue-ribbon panels will recommend changes to the Army culture when they report back in late summer, they will have a tougher time addressing broader, generational changes that have contributed to young officer flight. More Army spouses, for example, now have careers of their own and are increasingly less tolerant of the frequent upheavals of military life.

A recent internal survey of captains at Fort Benning, Ga., who planned to leave the Army found that 35% cited family issues as the main reason. Said one captain: "My wife feels more comfortable with me out of the Army. The moving and relocating will get worse."

Clinton takes steps to bridge nation's 'digital divide'

By Richard Benedetto
USA TODAY

SHIPROCK, N.M. — Convinced that Internet access is as essential to success as reading and writing, President Clinton traveled from the heart of California's Silicon Valley to the desert of New Mexico on Monday to press that message and bring word of help.

Today he will be in Chicago meeting with leaders of the nation's high-tech industry to enlist their aid in bridging the "digital divide" — the gap between the haves and the have-nots in the cyberspace age.

The president wants to make sure all of the nation's schools are connected to the Internet, a goal already close to being met.

Additionally, Clinton wants teachers to be trained and communities, government and businesses to help make sure every home has

a computer, especially those of low-income families.

"It can save you and your children 30 years in moving into the economic mainstream," Clinton told residents in East Palo Alto, Calif., on Monday, the first stop on his three-state tour.

East Palo Alto, a low-income community in the shadow of the booming Silicon Valley, is the kind of locale Clinton is targeting in the effort to bring computer skills and Internet access to everyone.

"There are people and places that have not participated in this new economy. I see these places as places of opportunity to create new jobs, new businesses, new employees and keep the American economy going," he said.

Clinton noted that the federal government is giving schools \$450 million for computers, equipment and teacher training.

In his budget, Clinton wants Con-

gress to provide \$100 million for development of community technology centers and \$150 million next year to train new teachers. The president also is asking for \$2 billion over 10 years in tax incentives to companies that donate computer equipment and assistance to schools, libraries and community centers.

Clinton said the computer industry has already responded to his call to help by making \$100 million in contributions aimed at bridging the digital divide in low-income communities. Among those companies: Hewlett-Packard, Gateway, Qualcomm, Novell, America Online, PowerUp, Cisco Systems, PeoplePC and AT&T. AmeriCorps is providing 400 volunteers.

Clinton also announced the start of a series of public service ads created by the Kaiser Family Foundation. The ads, featuring basketball stars Rebecca Lobo and Magic

Johnson, urge young people to take advantage of the opportunities the Internet affords.

Later, at a Navajo Nation reservation here, the president highlighted the problem of getting Native Americans connected to the Internet. He called on Myra Jodie, a 13-year-old member of the Navajo Nation, Jodie recently won a computer, but she can't connect it to the Internet because her home has no telephone service.

Clinton used her story to launch a Federal Communications Commission plan to provide basic telephone service to 300,000 low-income Native Americans for \$1 a month. The service would be subsidized by a 0.4% increase in the federal surcharge on long-distance rates. Only 22% of households on Navajo reservations have telephone service, 45%-50% on all reservations nationwide. Overall, 94% of U.S. households have telephones.



By Stephen Jaffe, Agence France-Presse

Empowerment message: President Clinton discusses Internet-access proposals Monday at a Navajo Nation reservation in Shiprock, N.M.

SEVENTEEN

OF THE BEST REASONS BEHIND OUR CONTINUED SUCCESS