I’ve served as the Sergeant Major of the Army for more than 18 months now, and the best part of my job continues to be meeting soldiers and their families. Last year, I traveled more than 200,000 miles and visited camps, posts and stations around the world, and I am continually amazed by the stories of sacrifice and resilience I hear at each stop.

For example, just a few months ago, my wife, Jeanne, and I visited wounded warriors and their families at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Many had lost limbs and were trying to come to terms with their future. One soldier, as he was getting into his new wheelchair, said that the first place he wanted to go was just a few doors down to visit his buddy who was wounded in the same IED blast. He is just one example of the type of soldiers in our Army today.
Right now, approximately 185,000 soldiers are forward deployed or stationed in nearly 160 countries around the world, and each is doing amazing work. Some are in places you might never even think about—the Philippines, for example, or the Horn of Africa. Of course, we still have about 60,000 soldiers deployed in Afghanistan; many are now on their third, fourth or even fifth deployment. Even as we continue fighting and winning our nation’s wars, we are an Army in transition, well on the way to meeting our fiscal year 2017 goal of 490,000 in the active component. As we do this, it is imperative that we provide the proper care and services to departing soldiers and their families. Through the Army Career and Alumni Program, we will ensure a successful transition out of the service and into the civilian sector. The Army, in coordination with the Department of Labor and Department of Veterans Affairs, will conduct assistance training and transition counseling for Army personnel beginning at least 12 months from their transition date to enable soldiers to successfully make the transition into civilian society. This deliberate and dignified approach is in keeping with recognizing the extraordinary sacrifice of the American soldier over the last 11 years.

Our NCOs and mid-grade officers are the key to ensuring we are keeping the best soldiers in our ranks. Unlike other services, the centerpiece of our Army is the soldier, so it’s imperative that we keep only those who deserve to wear the uniform of a United States soldier. Our soldiers are values-based and ethical professionals who continue to play a critical role in ensuring our Army is the best and most respected force in the world. Our soldiers and Army civilians continue to adapt to unpredictable challenges and have performed magnificently in every assigned task and mission. To ensure that we build upon this success and set the conditions for success in the future, the Army initiated the Army Profession Campaign last year. Part of this campaign includes five essential characteristics that define us as professionals.

Trust is earned through our ability to maintain the other four characteristics in everything we do and everywhere we serve. Our soldiers’ Military Expertise ensures that we are able to fight and win our nation’s wars. Esprit de Corps

SMA Raymond F. Chandler III was sworn in as the 14th Sergeant Major of the Army in March 2011. Previously, he served as the 19th commandant of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA), the first enlisted commandant in USASMA history. As Sergeant Major of the Army, he serves as the Army Chief of Staff’s personal advisor on all enlisted-related matters, particularly in areas affecting soldier training and quality of life. He devotes the majority of his time to traveling throughout the Army observing training and talking to soldiers and their families. SMA Chandler sits on a variety of councils and boards that make decisions affecting enlisted soldiers and their families and is routinely invited to testify before Congress. He has held a variety of leadership positions throughout his career, ranging from tank crewman to command sergeant major. He has served in all tank crewman positions and has had multiple tours as a troop, squadron and regiment master gunner. He has served in the 1st Infantry Division (FWD), 2nd Infantry Division, 4th Infantry Division, 1st Cavalry Division, 3rd Armor Division, 2nd and 3rd Armoried Cavalry Regiments, U.S. Army Garrison—Fort Leavenworth, Kan.—and the U.S. Army Armor School. SMA Chandler holds a bachelor’s degree in public administration from Upper Iowa University.
helps foster fortitude, pride and cohesion among soldiers. Soldiers with Honorable Service embody the Army Ethic and our values. Finally, our continued Stewardship of the Army Profession ensures that resources are well managed while our soldiers and civilians continue being the professionals our nation expects them to be. Our Army is doing a great job, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Suicide, hazing, post-traumatic stress, and sexual assaults and harassment are just a few of the major concerns our Army faces today.

We know there isn’t one cure-all to fix these issues. We do know that engaged leadership is a great first step. That means our small-unit leaders are communicating consistently with their soldiers. A long time ago a retired command sergeant major told me something that has always stuck with me: “Every soldier should have an NCO checking on him or her every day.” That’s engaged leadership, and that’s the leadership we’ll need to fix these problems.

Despite these issues, however, our soldiers continue to do a tremendous job. They have done all we have asked of them and more. The professionalism, dedication and sacrifice they display every day are the reasons our Army is the envy of every other in the world.

Here’s one example of that professionalism. Earlier this year, I traveled to a small combat outpost in Afghanistan called Bari Alai. This remote, platoon-sized camp sits high atop a mountain, and the only way to get on or off this outpost is by helicopter.

On top of this mountain, I met the 3rd Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. During the visit, I had the privilege of awarding them the brigade’s first Combat Infantry and Combat Action Badges.

These eight young men—five infantry soldiers, two generator mechanics and one cook—had never deployed before. Most were under 21, yet they decisively engaged the enemy less than 24 hours after arriving at the outpost. The enemy knew that the platoons were rotating and decided to test their defenses, but 3rd Platoon was ready. They re-
pulsed the attack and, just as important, sustained no injuries during the firefight.

It’s a testament to that young platoon leader, who had been with the platoon less than a month before deploying and ensured his soldiers were ready for combat. It’s a testament to that platoon sergeant, who ensured his soldiers, regardless of military occupational specialty, were trained in their Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills. And of course, it’s a testament to the young men who comprise 3rd Platoon. Each had given the same oath: to support and defend the Constitution. Each lives the Army Values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage. Each lives the Warrior Ethos: I will always place the mission first, I will never quit, I will never accept defeat and I will never leave a fallen comrade. This platoon is just one example of the type of professionals who make up your Army.

But our soldier does not stand alone. Only a select few can be at the pointy end of the spear. Our Army would not be successful without the 278,000 Army civilians who are committed to serving them and our nation. Our civilians equip our soldiers, feed them and transport them. They are a vital cog in the Army machine, and we would not be successful without them. Not only do they serve at home when soldiers deploy, but they are also on the front lines, ensuring our soldiers have what they need to accomplish every mission.

And of course, no soldier would be successful without his or her family. Millions of husbands and wives, sons and daughters, and moms and dads have watched their loved ones go off to war … some have even lost their greatest treasure in support of this country. These families endure the same hardships as the deployed soldier; they move across the country when it’s time for a soldier to permanently change station, and they give up jobs, homes and schools. You cannot say enough about our Army families. They have done everything we’ve asked of them and more. Our families have proven time and time again to be the most resilient group in the country.

And this group—our soldiers, Department of the Army civilians and family members—who make up the Army Family. They are the pride, soul and heart of our Army, and I could not be prouder to serve with them.

The strength of our nation is our Army … the strength of our Army is our soldiers … and the strength of our soldiers is our families. This is what makes us Army Strong.