

# Leading Through Tough Times. Treat Every Soldier Like a Tank

## Transcript: U.S. Army Resilience Directorate Outreach Webinar

*January 25, 2023*

### **Presenter:**

Lieutenant General Russel Honoré: Expert. Leader. Fighter.

Lytaria Walker, Host:

Welcome to the Army Resilience Directorate Outreach Webinar for January. At this time, all participants are in a listen only mode – however, you may ask questions at any time by placing them in the Q&A Box. There will be several opportunities for questions throughout the webinar and we should have some time at the end as well.

If you are tuned in for the 1400 session, this is a replay of this morning's 1100 webinar. You may still ask questions in the chat box, but please note that they will not be answered during this session. I will forward them on to LTG Honoré for a later reply. Please note: The views of ARD Outreach Webinar presenters are their own and are not endorsed by the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense. This month, our guest is LTG Russel Honoré.

Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré is a decorated 37-year Army veteran and a global authority on leadership, disaster management and climate preparedness. At the request of the speaker of the House, Honoré led the Task Force 1-6 Capitol Security Review to improve security after the Jan. 6, 2021, attacks on the Capitol. As the commander of Joint Task Force Katrina, he became known as the Category 5 General for his leadership in coordinating military relief efforts in post-hurricane New Orleans.

Honoré knows that the future of our national security depends on protecting our environment, and he's fighting for a brighter tomorrow for us all. A Louisiana native, he founded the Green Army, a coalition of environmental experts and advocates who seek to protect the Earth from pollution and fight climate change and the natural disasters it causes.

During his military career, Honoré held numerous command positions, including vice director for operations for the Joint

Chiefs of Staff and commander of the Standing Joint Force Headquarters-Homeland Security.

LTG Honoré, thank you for joining us. I'm especially excited about this webinar as I am a daughter of New Orleans, born and raised there. I was a casualty of Hurricane Katrina. So many New Orleans natives were positively impacted by your leadership and tenacity during that time. I never thought that I would have the opportunity to thank you in person, but here we are. Sir, Thank You for leading the city of New Orleans through one of the toughest times in history. You are, indeed, a great leader.

We've had a discussion or two prior to today's webinar and you have a very interesting perspective on leadership especially leading through tough times. You've titled your presentation, "Leading through tough times, treat every soldier like a tank." Describe to us exactly what it means to treat a Soldier like a tank.

LTG Russel Hon...: [00:00](#)

We focused on everyone from the platoon Sergeants to the first Sergeants, to the Sergeant Majors and company commanders to give us reports on our Soldiers. We flipped it, and we started having monthly meetings. You have Soldiers in Korea for about 11 months on the ground, and they're leaving, they go back home. So in that 11 months, you have to optimize that time. When they leave, they ought to have the efficiency report in their hand. They ought to have an award if they're going to get one, or a deliberate decision not to give it to them. Have detailed information about those Soldiers. We ought to know 30 days out that the award needs to be into the brigade headquarters if it's a brigade-level award, so the Soldier can receive his award, take it home, and show his Family, and have it with him when he or she updates their promotion packet when they get back to the next duty station.

LTG Russel Hon...: [01:02](#)

As opposed to writing and calling back to Korea and saying, "I don't have my efficiency report. I don't have my award. My counseling package is out of date. My promotion board I attended in Korea was not documented." So we literally want to treat the Soldiers like a tank with the same specific information. We created the dialogue; we created the database. You could not leave Korea if you did not have your OER, your efficiency report as an officer, your enlisted report, or a statement from your first Sergeant that said you were getting the award or you didn't get it. It put the burden on the Soldier to tell the system, "Hey, I have to have my OER or my efficiency report before I can get my ticket to go to the airport to leave." And lordy did that create a stir.

- LTG Russel Hon...: [02:01](#) But you know what? It took about 30 days to get it implemented, and it worked like clockwork. We no longer were getting reports from PERSCOM telling us (as was the case the first month I arrived in Korea) that we had about 15 lieutenants that had rotated back to the United States and not gotten their efficiency report, and the same thing with some non-commissioned officers. So we treated the Soldier like a tank. If a tank loses a fire control system at 10 o'clock in the morning, by three o'clock that afternoon I knew. Yet we had Soldiers who were about to leave the country with no record they had ever been in Korea: no award, no efficiency report. Some of them didn't even have their shots up to date. We did all that, and we flipped the script and started treating our Soldiers with respect because the Army is about Soldiers. We use equipment, but we elevated information to and about our Soldiers at the same level we were doing it for our tanks. So treat a Soldier like a tank. That is the concept.
- Lytaria Walker: [03:19](#) Absolutely. Thank you. So in more of our prior conversations, you've mentioned the importance of having a battle buddy. Talk to us a little bit more about that.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [03:32](#) It's a lesson I learned from my first tour in career as a lieutenant. Our division commander at the time, General Emerson, emphasized that. We were overseas. From that moment on, every assignment I went to, regardless of the size of the formation, I wanted every Soldier to have a battle buddy. Your battle buddy knows where you are. Your battle buddy knows issues going on in your life. Your battle buddy is there for you, and you could talk to them about anything. If you are not in formation, your battle buddy better know where you are. Because it's your battle buddy's responsibility to look out for you. We are a team in the Army, and that team would be like a football team lining up on the field. Somebody ought to know where the center is or where the halfback is if they're not on the field.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [04:38](#) We are professionals. We're a volunteer Army. It's imperative to have a battle buddy. Those people are assigned or they work together inside the squads and platoons and companies. Your battle buddies, your emotional support, is the person you vent with, is the person that knows maybe even what you're thinking. Your battle buddy can recognize subliminal communications that something is wrong because they know you. We emphasize that a lot in the second infantry division that your battle buddy knows you and knows where you are or who you went out with or where you were going. Because that may be the link to find you if you are not present at formation.

Your battle buddy must know the last location you went to. I know today, troops have cell phones in garrison. That's gone a long way to stay in touch.

- LTG Russel Hon...: [05:44](#) It's easier to say, "Hey, I missed my train back from Seoul. Tell the first Sergeant I'll be on the next train." That kind of information is critical. It's not the fact that the Soldier may not be there, but we know where that Soldier is. Because if we miss a Soldier, it's just like we are missing a weapon. We will stop that formation until we find that Soldier. That becomes the mission of the day. If that Soldier is not present in formation, everybody stops. Same as we do it if we lost an M16 or an M9 or a vehicle, everything stops to find that Soldier because that Soldier is a part of the team. If his battle buddy or her battle buddy doesn't know where they are, that's a problem. But we will stop the formation to find that Soldier. That's the idea behind the battle buddy.
- Lytaria Walker: [06:41](#) Yes, thank you. Absolutely. Leading through tough times. Talk to us about what it means to be an Army Strong resilient leader when circumstances aren't ideal. I saw you in action with this for Hurricane Katrina. So talk to us a bit more about Army Strong.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [07:04](#) When the Army shows up for a mission, people expect us to solve the problem. Not create the problem, but solve the problem, accomplish the mission. Many times, teams or leaders get apprehensive in doing that. But when the American Army show up, people ought to have in the back of their mind, "The problem will be solved now; the Army is here." They look for us to have solutions for them. If people need food, you give them food. If they need a ride, you give them a ride. If they need medication, you give them medication, as was the case in Katrina. We gained a lot of favor with people. The other thing we wouldn't do, we wouldn't point our guns at them; these were Americans. So when you go in to do a mission and people see the American Army, throughout our history, that's been our tradition.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [08:11](#) Solve the problem, accomplish the mission, and take care of the people and treat them with respect. Because in this case in Katrina, these were our citizens. I took great exceptions in some cases where I saw Soldiers and/or police pointing weapons at our own citizens. People expect you to solve the problem. When the Army show up, they're looking for solutions now, not later. So that comes with a lot of tradition. It comes with a lot of regulations on what you can't and can't do. Sometimes you have to break a rule to do the right thing. Our leaders should

have, and they do have, the initiative to do the right thing. There would be some that says, you shouldn't use the Army helicopter to go feed cows. Well, we've done that ever since we've had the helicopters. There are people that tell me, "Well, the lawyers have to approve this."

LTG Russel Hon...: [09:17](#)

I said, "Tell the lawyers we'll talk to them next week. Go feed the cows." Get it done to save the animals. Catch the pets on the streets in New Orleans. That's nowhere in the Army mission, to capture pets, but it was a part of the mission. The first law that was changed after Katrina was the pet law, that cities and states must have a plan to take care of pets, because people saw dogs in particular on rooftops that needed food, that were straggling around. One of the most popular email hits I had was when I announced that our Soldiers would start picking up pets. My headquarters in Atlanta received over 500 calls and hundreds of emails complimenting the First Army Joint Task Force Katrina for taking the pets in and getting them evacuated. So the way we look at it, you go in to solve a problem and not create issues, but it's a part of our Army ethos to accomplish the mission.

LTG Russel Hon...: [10:31](#)

Sometimes your mission isn't described to you in writing, it's about doing the right thing that makes people feel better, feel safer, and have what they need to live. We switch that around if we're in a combat operation, still with respect for the people that are non-combatants, to take care of them. That's been our ethos in the Army. That's the way we were trained. We sacrifice to do that. That goes back to the Revolutionary War, where our Army made tremendous sacrifices to defeat the British and win our freedom. The sacrifices they had, not all of them had proper clothing, didn't have proper ammunition. They were carpenters and farmers and bricklayers, but they committed to a mission as Soldiers, and they sacrificed for us. They were the plank-bearers for what we do in the Army today. If you're going to accomplish something, you have to be prepared to sacrifice. The mission comes first and taking care of your troops. I apologize for that long answer, but that's one I'm very passionate about.

Lytaria Walker: [11:49](#)

Absolutely, I love it. I can hear your passion. Sir, when you landed on the ground for Hurricane Katrina, what was your first order of business as a leader? What was the first thing that you said, "We have to do this"? What was the "this"?

LTG Russel Hon...: [12:07](#)

The Army. We bring communications; we bring logistics; we bring medicine; we bring food. Now let's do it. Talk to the mayor. Talk to the governor. Find out their priorities. Every Soldier is taught how to adapt and overcome. Every Soldier is

taught to accomplish the mission. The mission in New Orleans was to save lives. So talk to the mayor. The big challenge was that the city was flooded, so the priority was to evacuate the people. At the same time, there was a lot of talk about security in the city. But in my mind I knew the priority was to save lives, evacuate the city, give people food and medicine as they need it, evacuate the people as best we can, get them medical care, evacuate the hospitals, evacuate the nursing homes, help evacuate the jails, whatever it took to get people out of there.

LTG Russel Hon...: [13:18](#)

That became the priority. Then when the opportunity came, report to the American people through the press on what we were doing. It was imperative that we engaged the public and told them what we were doing. It was important to me, in Korea and when I commanded First Army, that we told the communities we operated in, "This is what we are doing," so they know what we were doing behind those fences and in those woodlines, that would be our training. That became a part of standard operating procedures when we got to New Orleans--to tell the American people what we were doing. My rule on that is figure out the three most important things you want the press to know. Regardless of what question they asked up front, you tell them the number one thing you want the press to know.

LTG Russel Hon...: [14:14](#)

When they ask the second question, regardless of what it is, you tell them the second most important thing you want the press to know because the press is your loud speaker to the American people. The third question, repeat the answer to number one. Repeat that message so they know you are making progress. That we are not going to be victimized here. We're going to get the mission done, and we're going to take care of the people. So that's in the context of what was happening in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. That also included Mississippi, Alabama, and parts of Florida. It was an overwhelming mission, but we had good people working for us. The Soldiers understood the mission, and they excelled. We had Sailors, Marines, and Air Force also working with us on that mission, so it was a team effort. People gave me a lot of the credit, but it's 20,000 troops. We brought 20 ships and 250 helicopters, and most of the United States Transportation Command was in support of that mission. So we had a lot of logistics, and we had good communications.

Lyteria Walker: [15:31](#)

Absolutely. Actually, my aunt, who's deaf and mute, had to be rescued from her rooftop by one of those helicopters. So as I said, I have firsthand experience. I understand all about what happened during Hurricane Katrina. I watched you incessantly

on CNN and everywhere else just getting the news. I was well evacuated by the time the hurricane made landfall. But again, thank you for your leadership during that time. It was invaluable. Thank you sir.

- LTG Russel Hon...: [16:07](#) And I might mention we also had the Coast Guard. I forgot our buddies in the Coast Guard. It was a total DOD and Coast Guard, as well as FEMA. Everybody was there; it was an all-teams effort.
- Lytaria Walker: [16:18](#) Absolutely. Absolutely. So you've shared in the past that your personal motto is "See first, understand first, act first." Why this motto, and how can Soldiers and leaders integrate those same principles into their daily lives and their daily careers?
- LTG Russel Hon...: [16:43](#) Yeah, that's a good one. I got so excited when I saw it. It was actually written by the warrior Sun Tzu in The Art of War. When I saw it, looking back at my career, I guess I might have been a field-grade officer then at Fort Leavenworth studying Sun Tzu. When I saw it, it opened up a spear knowledge. "See first, understand first, and act first." I mean, we could apply that, not only at work in the Army, but at home. Sometimes we see, but we fail to act. The government says, "See something, say something."
- LTG Russel Hon...: [17:39](#) See first, understand first, and act first. We engraved that on all the coins we used to give to troops in our model of excellence because there's significance, that if everyone has situational awareness of what's happening around them, we will not be surprised. Because we should choose the time and place we're going to act. But if you fail to see what's happening around you or what's about to happen to you... It could be the weather. Weather has a big part of what goes on in the Army. You look at the weather today, and you look at what's coming tomorrow. We couldn't allow the weather to surprise us in Korea because you could have projection of 10 to 15 inches of rain. See first, understand the impact. You live in a country with 60% mountains, that when it rains, that water is going to the valleys.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [18:51](#) So any training we're doing, we have to move back from the rivers. To go out on any of the bridges that went through our camps, we had to go through and clean the debris out. So "see first, understand first, and act first" could solve you a lot of problems tomorrow, from destruction to your roads and bridges, to Soldiers being trapped in valleys where they can't get out. Even to the case of losing Soldiers, because we did not see first, we did not look at the prediction of 10 inches of rain and what impact that was going to have on that weather

system. So weather is one that we deal with every day. Last night, right here in our home at Baton Rouge, we had a tornado warning, then a tornado watch, and the phone went to beeping, and they thought there was a tornado about four miles from our home.

- LTG Russel Hon...: [19:52](#) It was moving at 60 miles an hour. So we got in the closet. See first, understand first, act first. The good news. We do have these machines now, these smartphones that can give us pretty interesting information. But with that kind of information, you should not be out on the road driving. You should be in a secure place. So that would be the simplest example I would give. Or when it was predicted to snow in Korea, with 20,000 troops or thereabout, north of Seoul. When it snowed, we had a rule in the division that the snow would be picked up by sunrise because if the Soldiers walked on the sidewalk, hundreds of them going to the chow hall or going to work, it would be compacted. We were getting Soldiers slipping and falling and injuring themselves on the sidewalks. So every first Sergeant and Sergeant Major in the division knew, come sunlight that snow better be picked up, because we didn't want Soldiers falling while walking on the sidewalk. It's just those types of things. Once we arm people, see first, understand first, act first.
- Lytaria Walker: [21:22](#) Sir, as Soldiers matriculate through their Army career, what are some important leadership lessons you can share that they should consider?
- LTG Russel Hon...: [21:37](#) Well, I would say one of them is to do the routine things well. Too many times people fail to understand that, from your first assignment in the Army, when the drill Sergeant teaches you how to make your bed, it is done that way for a reason. When they teach you how to clean your weapon, it's done that way for a reason. When they teach you the parts of personal hygiene and taking care of your feet, adapting to how you live in the field, it's done for a reason. Do the routine things well. The other thing I learned in the Army is don't be afraid to take on the impossible.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [22:29](#) Mandela said it in a little different way. I said, "The future is dependent on us doing the impossible." With the advances in technologies and abilities we get, there are some big issues that face us as leaders we have to solve. And some of them are systemic; some of them are multi-generational in the Army. But just because it's a big problem doesn't mean we shouldn't try to solve it. Embrace the impossible. When I go out and speak to CEOs and companies, which I do a lot these days, I tell them they all ought to have an impossible list. When I was at Fort



Stewart in Georgia, we had an issue with our barracks; they didn't look well on the inside.

LTG Russel Hon...: [23:28](#)

So we found Soldiers that had skills before they came in the Army. We couldn't wait on the engineers. We went out and bought paint. We bought equipment to clean up mold. We cleaned out the air ducts, repainted the barracks, we put tile down, and we did self-improvement. We saw that Soldiers lived in a decent space because we couldn't wait. We're Army. We adapt and overcome, and we have skill sets from all types of skills in the military. How do we use them to take care of our Soldiers? Embrace the impossible. That's where the opportunities are. The third lesson I would say about leadership that's stuck with me is, if you are going to lead, you have to sacrifice. And one of the things you sacrifice is your own personal capital because you have to create change.

LTG Russel Hon...: [24:43](#)

To create change you have to get people to change. When you start that process, people are going to criticize you. You have to be prepared to be criticized. If you're not receiving any criticism, you're probably not doing much. You might be doing some form of management, but you're not leading. Because people don't like to change. At the same time, people don't want to be surprised by change. It's called socializing the idea. If I knew I wanted to change something in the division or in the brigade I was commanding, I would mention it in a meeting. This is what I'm thinking about doing. I'm thinking about this.

LTG Russel Hon...: [25:38](#)

So it would give opportunity for people to come to me. People don't like to be surprised. But if you're going to lead, you're going to be criticized. To lead, you have to sacrifice, and that's one of the things you sacrifice. But leadership is about performance, not popularity. It's about getting the job done. And again, those three points: do the routine things well. As an Army commander, a division commander, a brigade commander, a battalion commander, and a platoon leader, some of the worst calls I got were a wreck, people injured, vehicle mechanical failure with troops in the back, driving too fast, driving beyond the conditions. Most of those centered around some routine thing that didn't happen the way it's supposed to.

LTG Russel Hon...: [26:50](#)

Some of the greatest success I've seen in the military is when we go in and do something that somebody said was impossible. "You can't do that." We'll see. We adapt and we overcome. And again, the third was painful sometimes. When we're talking to Soldiers, we have to make sure we are not answering our own question. I grew up with that kind of Army. The Colonel would

walk in the dining facility and say, "The food's good, isn't it?" Well, he just answered his own question. He or she. "Your barracks are good, aren't they?" Well that Soldier's not going to tell. "Okay, yes sir." He's trying to move on. As opposed to asking open-end question. Sometimes you're going to get critical information back.

LTG Russel Hon...: [27:54](#)

"No sir, the food is not good." You have to be prepared to listen to that. We get the same thing every day. I started a theme in Korea in our dining facilities that we would have barbecue every Saturday because it's an American tradition. If the troops were home, they'd be barbecuing. On Sundays we would have brunch in the dining facilities. What a big hit that was with the troops.

Lytaria Walker: [28:24](#)

Wow.

LTG Russel Hon...: [28:26](#)

The cooks came around. They enjoy it because when the troops are happy, the cooks are happy. I said, "No more Army chicken." I actually said Fort Lee chicken, with all due respect to my friends at Fort Lee, and the General from Fort Lee called me and said, "Russ, what the hell you doing?" I said, "Look y'all, it must be Fort Lee chicken, because all these cooks show up, and they're serving this hospital-looking pale chicken. It's somewhat baked and has no seasoning on it. It's just sitting there." I said, "Y'all must be teaching that at Fort Lee." I said, "We've outlawed it in the second division." I said, "You can have chicken cacciatore, you can have stew chicken, you can have barbecue chicken, you can have Greek chicken, you can have Korean chicken. But we are not having any more damn Fort Lee chicken." That ended up starting the strike. That got me in some trouble with some of my friends, but everybody got the message.

Lytaria Walker: [29:29](#)

The other thing was, doing the routine things well. I would go to the dining facility and ask the mess Sergeant, "How does the liver taste?" If he told me, "Well, I didn't taste it." "Well, why in the hell is it on the line if you haven't tasted it? At what good restaurant has the chef not tasted the food before it's put on the line?" It's that kind of stuff that, in the part of the Army I was in, because the people who trained me to adapt and overcome and to be prepared to receive criticism if you're going to create change. My Soldiers didn't like it when I told them we were going to have takeout breakfast in our dining facility because it was extra work for the cooks, so we had to give them some extra help. But that was a great service. I don't mean to talk so much about food.

- LTG Russel Hon...: [30:34](#) It's key to the morale of the troops. Our Army does move on its stomach, and the Army is about to make some great changes in its food service for that reason. But it is endemic. As some would say, "Let me walk through your motor pool and go to your dining facility," and that can tell you a lot about the unit.
- Lytaria Walker: [30:57](#) Wow. Sir, you mentioned something, and I want to revisit it. It really resonated with me. You said, "There's a difference between managing and leading." I like that. Would you mind expounding a bit more on that?
- LTG Russel Hon...: [31:14](#) A manager is a safe place; you can rely on the charts. It's about time, resources, space, and it's all about making the numbers. Leading: I use a little different definition of leadership than what was in the Army book. The Army book is, what it was when I retired in 2008, general definition was the art and science of influencing others to accomplish your mission.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [31:56](#) In the Honoré book of knowledge, leadership is the art and science of influencing others to willingly accomplish a mission. Willingly. I think that's the major difference. The difference as I see it between management and leadership is management is more focused on executing what's been told to be done. Leaders are the ones that figure out what the most important things that need to be done are, and leaders set the priority at work. That's how I differentiate between management and leaders. Leaders know when to break the rules.
- Lytaria Walker: [32:46](#) You also mentioned a lot about sacrificing in leadership. Tell me a bit more about that.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [32:55](#) Yeah. The leader has to be prepared to sacrifice. You only have so many hours a day. The leader will tell people many times to do what they don't want to do. Cleaning those sidewalks, I didn't have to really say that, but I knew what the impact it was from being there as a second lieutenant, and nobody cleaned the sidewalks. Troops would be falling, then having to go to the hospital. Leaders figure that out, "Hey, we're going to do this." That's not in the Army book that you have to clean the sidewalk.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [33:47](#) Leaders figure stuff like that out. I got criticized at Fort Benning one time when I sent a note to the brigade commanders and said, "Trim the trees on the sidewalk in your brigade area." So the word went out, "Boy, that General is micromanaging, and he's telling us to cut the trees." I said, "Yes, because the troops are walking, and they're going in the street because the trees are hanging over the sidewalk. That's why I want you to cut the limbs hanging over the sidewalks around Building 4. Because

people are having to go around in the grass or walk in the street.” “Oh, okay.” We had another incident at Fort Benning, a quick one. We were having heat injuries out in the basic training unit, and I said, “Are the air conditioners working?” All the colonels and Sergeant Majors look at it. “Well, we assume they are.”

LTG Russel Hon...: [34:52](#)

I said, “I’ll tell you what, for the next five days, I want to report at six o’clock, 1800, 2200, and 0300 in the morning. I want to know what the temperature is in the rooms where the basic training troops are sleeping,” because we were just having too many heat injuries. Boy, that ran around. “That General is telling us to turn in reports on the temperature in the room. We don’t even know if our thermostats are working.” “Well, go buy some thermostats, Colonel, I want to know the room temperatures.” So, we looked at this after about three days. The engineer came in. I said, “What does this tell you?” I show him the chart, the spreadsheet. They made up a spreadsheet. “These rooms are not cooling down at night, General.” Well, duh.

LTG Russel Hon...: [35:57](#)

“What do you want to do to fix it?” “Well, we just had that worked on about two years ago.” “Well, call the contractor.” “Well, I don’t know if we have the authority to call him.” I said, “Give me his damn number. I’ll call him.” In Atlanta, the contractor came down, went out, and inspected. They had local engineers, DPW, that went out and did the repair, and they switched the pipe.

LTG Russel Hon...: [36:28](#)

Because they did that, the rooms were not cooling. So, the young troops living in there, many of them getting indoctrinated to the Army, were not cooling down. They were not rehydrating. When I went in to talk to the troops, I said, “How much sleep you get last night?” “Well, I got four hours because only two of our six washing machines work. So somebody has to stay up all night to wash our clothes.” “Well, what the hell’s wrong with the washing machines?” “Well, they’re broke, and we are waiting on work orders.” So I called and said, “Send them all brand new washing machines.” See first, understand first, act first. That’s what leaders do. Managers put that on a piece of paper and turn it in. Leaders are expected to act. And you have to have management. You have to have the bean counters, you have to have the people that say that you overspent your budget, which I did a few times.

Lytaria Walker: [37:31](#)

I’m sure. Wow. Very good information. Thank you. So in conclusion, you shared with me your geese analogy, which I thought was just a true example of leadership at its best. Would you please share that analogy with our listeners today?

- LTG Russel Hon...: [37:56](#) The story goes—and it's anonymous—leading by studying geese. If you've ever been around a formation of geese flying, you may occasionally look in there and see them, but more than likely you heard them; they were making noise. If they were moving from one place to another, they were in formation. Now people who study these things said the reason they fly in the formation is they can go further faster because of the wind dynamics with a lead bird and one scattered in a certain position. And they're making noise. The metaphor is this, they're making noise because they're telling the leader to go faster.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [38:59](#) The other thing, by studying these geese, you've noticed that the lead goose will move back when they get tired, and another goose will take charge and will move up. Sometimes in your organization, the leader needs to step back and say, "Hey y'all keep going. I'm going to observe this. I need to recoup mentally, physically. Somebody else lead." The other thing you'll notice is, if these geese were to fly over South Louisiana, and there were hunters out there, they'd shoot one. They'll only shoot one, kind of in the middle of the pack, because if they shoot that one, they know one or two geese are going to come check on them. "Why did that goose go down?"
- LTG Russel Hon...: [39:53](#) If you shoot one, there will be one or two that will follow. That's the battle buddy. They're coming to check and see what's going on, and they in turn get shot. But hunters know this, so they'll shoot one, and another one will quickly follow to figure out what's going on. They're looking out for their buddy. Are you in an organization where you're telling the boss, let's go faster, let's get it done, let's get more done? Are you in an organization where the boss feels fatigue or needs some quiet time, and says, "Y'all, you continue to continue the mission. I'm going to observe"? Are you in an organization that if your desk-mate in your office doesn't show up, that somebody's calling and saying, "Where is John? Where is Andy today? Where is Buddy? They're not here."
- LTG Russel Hon...: [41:01](#) How many times do we see in life experience or watch it on the news that somebody didn't show up to work, but it was a coworker that called and said, "They're not here. Where are they?" Leadership from studying geese is an anonymous story, but it's stuck with me, and I've shared it with people around the world. You can actually look it up and read the story. I've added a few metaphors to it, but I want to be in that organization where they're telling the boss to go quicker, and the boss don't mind stepping back and letting somebody else lead in a natural way. And that if somebody, a battle buddy, comes up missing,

somebody goes and checks on him. That's the kind of outfit I want to be in. I think that's pretty Army Strong.

- Lytaria Walker: [41:52](#) Absolutely. What a fantastic closing, General. Thank you so much for that. We will now take a few questions from the audience. If you would like to ask a question, please type your question in the Q&A box, and we will read them aloud. There will be a short delay before the first question is announced. Remember if you are tuned in for the 1400 session, this is a replay of this morning's 1100 webinar. You may still ask questions in the chat box, but please note that they will not be answered during this session. I will forward them on to the General for a later reply. Okay. General, let's go to the questions here. Please ask your questions in the Q&A box. Okay. Someone is asking, "Does the saddle behind you have military history associated with it?"
- LTG Russel Hon...: [42:49](#) Oh, absolutely. That is a McClellan saddle from the Civil War period. General McClellan, as you remember, was a Union officer. He had that saddle designed for the comfort of the horse, not the Soldier.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [43:08](#) It looks a lot better than it is comfortable to ride on. When it is a general officer saddle, you see the blanket, and it has three stars on it. But that is a McClellan saddle. I had it made from an artisan up in Arkansas that does replica work. But that is from the Civil War Union Army general officer saddle.
- Lytaria Walker: [43:32](#) Okay, let's see. Next question here. Someone says, "Yes, leaders figure out what needs to be done and make it happen. If you say something, you are not liked. Sir, how did you manage the negative reactions to your leadership?"
- LTG Russel Hon...: [43:51](#) Telling people to do what they want to do is easy. Telling them what they don't want to do, that's the problem. "Hey, we're going to take off early Friday." That's easy! You have to do one of them every now and then. But you also have to be prepared to tell troops the new things that you know they don't want to do. They didn't want to clean the snow, but they also didn't want to see their buddies going to the hospital and having forever back pains from falling in the snow. Those cooks didn't want to figure takeout meals, but when you did the math, there's no way we could have fed 1400 troops in an hour and a half in the dining facility. So we had to have a solution. So again, leadership is about performance, not popularity.
- Lytaria Walker: [44:45](#) Wow. Great answer. Someone says, "When change is slow, how do you continue to motivate?" That's a good one.

- LTG Russel Hon...: [44:55](#) We have to continue to challenge ourselves. You can be in an organization that's not apt to change. The good news is our leaders change. Sometimes you have to wait for that leader to change, or you have to accept that next assignment and go somewhere else. Because you can be in an organization that's not apt to change, and it can be very frustrating.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [45:23](#) It can be operating in accordance with the regulation. The regulation said you could serve that Fort Lee chicken just like that all the time, because that's what's on the meal card. But you have to challenge the system, and our troops expect us to do that, to do the right thing. We were having an issue at Fort Hood with our Soldiers ending up in wrecks, and I think data is a monster. So I asked our safety guy, I said "Give me the demographics of when and who's getting in the wreck. Who's getting injured?" We came to find out it was between Thursday evening and Monday morning before first formation is when we were having most of our accidents. I said "Okay, gimme the age group and the demographics." The majority were young males between 18 and 23. I said, "Well, now we have a target. Let's focus on them then. What were they driving?" Motorcycles and souped-up cars. Okay, let's go to the parking lot, and bring in all the souped-up cars and the motorcycles. We're going to do a little extra training.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [47:13](#) Then we went to common sense stuff. When the Soldier came in for a pass, a four-day pass or a three day pass. "When are you coming back?" "Well, I'm going to leave Kansas City at midnight, and I'll be back at six in the morning." "Oh really? Let's talk about that. Why don't we give you a four-day pass? You'll leave at six in the morning and get back here by five in the afternoon. Let's negotiate that." But Soldiers wouldn't ask. Because if he's going home to an ill mom or to a brother or sister's wedding, many times they wouldn't ask. They would say, "I need a three day pass because I can ride back in six hours." Well, let's talk about that because we want you back safe.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [48:20](#) A lot of them were taking risks. The other thing we found is the impact of alcohol. The rule I used in my formation was, I would ask the platoon Sergeant, "Who is the Soldier that's going to have the next accident in your platoon?" Nine times out of ten, they can tell you who that was going to be. They know. They don't do the routine things well. They're not concentrating on what they're doing, and they think nobody's watching them. There's no accountability for them. The Sergeants know who's going to create the next accident. Trust me. They know. And we can do something about these things. When I took brigade

commander at Ford Stewart, we had on average 28 DUIs a month. That's almost one a day.

- LTG Russel Hon...: [49:24](#) So after my second month, I said "Okay, here's what we're going to do. The next company that has a DUI is going to go on some immediate training for two days in the field." We had a van, I called it the Blue Goose, and I said, "On the weekend and at nights, the company that had the last DUI will man the Blue Goose." The first people to man the Blue Goose will be the first Sergeant in the company, the command of that company. When Soldiers drank too much, we gave them all a card to have in their hand, and if they drank too much and they didn't want to get in their car and drive or they didn't have a ride, they called the Blue Goose, and we'd go pick them up. In three months, we went from 28 DUIs a month down to two or three.
- Lytaria Walker: [50:21](#) Wow. Outstanding.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [50:23](#) Because what the Sergeants did was, "If you get drunk, you better call me. Because we don't want to be driving that Blue Goose." Or "you better call your squad leader. Or "you better stay the hell out of that car." That's how we reduced the number of DUIs in the company. That's very draconian. But we think we saved a lot of lives.
- Lytaria Walker: [50:49](#) Sure. Someone is asking if cooking is still one of your favorite things to do.
- LTG Russel Hon...: [50:56](#) Absolutely. I cooked a pork belly about two weeks ago. That was pretty good. Kids didn't care for it too much. I think the sound of it—pork belly—kind of turned them off. But it came out pretty good. Over the holidays, we cooked a prime rib at Christmas. So yeah, I still fiddle around on the grill.
- Lytaria Walker: [51:21](#) Nice. One last question here. With all the mandatory training required of Soldiers, what is your suggestion for leaders to prioritize the People First mission and better manage the time they do have?
- LTG Russel Hon...: [51:36](#) Absolutely. This is why we need good management skills. When you look at training at the company and the platoon level, I found using military stakes is a lot more efficient way of getting the mandatory training done. As opposed to each platoon or each company doing skills training independently, what we did when I was a brigade and division commander is we create military stakes. So you could have an expert on the NBC in first platoon, and then they taught everybody else until people went



through and got their mandatory training done. I found it's best to set it out in a term of blocks in a couple days within a month. Then we get the subject matter experts in and knock it out, as opposed to each platoon or company trying to figure out how they're going to get all the mandatory training.

LTG Russel Hon...:

[52:57](#)

Every week we had a company who would run the range to qualify, and when I was a brigade commander, that was one company out of the division. So anybody that just came to the unit, that company didn't have to go set up a separate range. You'd show up that eight o'clock in the morning, you have your weapon. You have your Sergeant with you. You go through your PMI; you go through your POP training, and you shoot. As opposed to trying to have each company set up a qualification range, that's how we managed it. It wasn't perfect, but it was better than what we were doing when everybody had to figure it out on their own. That can help a lot with a lot of the mandatory training. Of course, now we have the benefit of virtual training that can be done. But in the Army, we can learn virtually, but we can only do our work in person.

Lytaria Walker:

[54:04](#)

Well it looks like we're just about out of time. I want to extend a very gracious thank you to you, General, for taking your time today to provide this great presentation for us. Thank you, participants, for joining today's webinar as well. Once the webinar concludes, you will be prompted to complete a survey. We appreciate your feedback as this survey will help us to improve upon future webinars. If you'd like to receive invitations for ARD webinars and receive the latest news and information from the Army Resilience Directorate, please go to ARD's website at [armyresilience.army.mil](http://armyresilience.army.mil) and sign up for notifications there. Please also follow us on ARD's newly launched LinkedIn and Instagram platforms. Again, I am Lytaria Walker, your webinar host. Thank you for joining us this morning and have a wonderful rest of your day. Take care now.