

# RIISING TO THE CHALLENGES OF CREATING A READY ARMY

***AN INTERVIEW WITH LTG GUSTAVE F. PERNA,  
U.S. ARMY DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR LOGISTICS, G-4***

**Editor's Note:** *LTG Gustave (Gus) F. Perna, a 32-year Army veteran who began his career as an Infantry officer before transferring to the Ordnance Branch, has served as the Army's senior logistician for the last two years.*

*He is focused on creating an expeditionary logistics force that can go anywhere with no notice. LTG Perna recently spoke with us about what this means to Infantry Soldiers and the importance of property accountability; he also offered leadership advice for new commanders.*

**Given the Chief of Staff of the Army's (GEN Mark A. Milley's) priority on readiness, how are you focusing your efforts?**

Our job is, first, to focus on readiness today, and we have a lot to keep us busy — with Iraq, Afghanistan, Europe, and Korea. Our job at the Pentagon also is to look ahead — 10, 20, 30 years out. My view is that as hard as the last decade has been, when we were fighting two wars, the next 10 years will be even harder. I say that because Army resources will continue to decline, but enemy threats and uncertainty have not gone away.

No one, logistician or otherwise, knows for sure which theater will require our next major use of ground forces in combat. Secretary (Robert) Gates used to say that when it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, our record is perfect: we have never once gotten it right! That is why we need to be trained, ready, and equipped to set theaters and get us to the next fight, no matter where the mission is. We have to be able to execute all requirements necessary to get us from fort to port, port to port, port to foxhole, and beyond.

**When forces deploy rapidly, it is often at the expense of property accountability. How can leaders mitigate this risk while maintaining a high operations tempo (OPTEMPO)?**

It can be done. If leaders have the right systems and processes in place, if they have established standards, and if they exercise them in garrison and training deployments, they will be able to maintain property accountability. It is those organizations who have not taken these steps that get into combat and become flustered. For those organizations,



LTG Gustave F. Perna delivers opening remarks for the Association of the United States Army's Institute of Land Warfare-sponsored Hot Topics: "Strategic Sustainment for a Globally Responsive and Regionally Engaged Army," in Arlington, Va., on 3 June 2015.  
(Photo by David Vergun)

the first things that go out the door are things like property accountability and equipment maintenance.

I am dumbfounded by this thought process, because those units are betting that the supply chain will be able to save them. Quite frankly, my worst fear is decisive action against an enemy that has an equal capability to ours. Not greater capability — I don't think anybody has greater capability — but comparable air capability and artillery capability. Things will be destroyed. Things will be lost in combat. We need to have accountability of our property; otherwise it won't be there. The supply system won't be able to just beam things to you.

**What are your thoughts on property accountability over the past decade?**

My personal thoughts are that our skills have atrophied — and it is not the fault of the Soldiers or our young leaders. It is a combination of many things. It is a result of our high OPTEMPO with two wars and a process that limited what types of organizations we brought into the wars. We brought in contractors to execute property accountability, taking the responsibility away from our leaders and Soldiers. Now we are trying to regain those skills. It starts with leaders, and it's going to have to permeate through the whole formation, but it will really take a mindset and culture change.

**In terms of property accountability, what can maneuver commanders do to internalize GEN Milley's number one priority of readiness?**

First and foremost, everybody in the formation must understand property accountability is important. Again, it starts with leadership. People do what the commander checks, right? Well, leaders must hold people responsible for their property.

Commanders can do simple things like putting operators' names back on vehicle windshields so Soldiers take ownership. They can visit companies and have Soldiers demonstrate how they execute property accountability. They can have Soldiers back brief them on their hand receipts and demonstrate how they manage their inventories. They can spot check Soldiers and NCOs. Commanders need to visit them in their work areas and ask them, "How do you account for your property?"

When it comes time for FLIPLs (Financial Liability Investigations of Property Loss), people have to clearly understand your standards. If FLIPLs are treated nonchalantly — 'I will just write that off' or 'don't worry about it' — and there's no impact related to performance evaluations or financial responsibility, then property accountability will be taken lightly. But if people understand your standards, that you will enforce them, that you will check them, and that you will hold people accountable, then property accountability will become important to those who work for you.

Here is the correlation to GEN Milley's number one priority on readiness: you are responsible for ensuring your unit is ready to go when you get the call. The Army is not going to be able to fill your shortages because you failed to execute to standard. You must understand what you are short. You must report and hold the system accountable for filling those shortages. But you can't do that in an organization that has poor standards and lacks discipline in supply accountability.

**Can you share some things that worked for you at the company, battalion, and brigade levels for property accountability?**

Leaders must set the standards and the conditions. They must provide vision, time, and resources, and must assess the risk for things that are done or not done. But first and foremost, they must clearly define their vision — in this case, their vision for property accountability. Then they must ensure time is allocated to do what they are telling subordinates to do.

So how do you do that? You make sure that systems and routines are established on the calendar. You make sure that key standards-related events are highlighted on training calendars. You make sure that leaders are looking for output or metrics in their meetings.

Supply accountability can be done at motor stables; at company, battalion, and brigade maintenance meetings; at division maintenance meetings. It can be done at battalion, brigade, and division training briefs. There are many times that you can assess metrics for supply accountability, and you need to make sure that you take advantage of all of those.

An additional key is mission command. How are you tracking as a commander to ensure it is being done? What

processes have you put in place to allow you to validate it?

For example, when I was a brigade commander, I spent an entire day with each company commander. I did this both in garrison and in combat zones. We would do several things. One, we would eat breakfast together so we would just have a casual conversation. It lessened some of the younger officers' anxiety.

Then, we would go check Soldier living areas together. The first sergeant would meet us — the company commander and me. I could assess several things. Did the commander understand where the Soldiers were living? Did he or she know what was going on with hygiene? With laundry? But more importantly, did he or she truly have an appreciation for the property they were responsible for in the barracks?

Now some will push back and tell me that we don't have to account for that property anymore. And I say they are wrong. It is government property. Your Soldiers are living there. And it is your responsibility.

Next, I would take them into their orderly room. We would go over training calendars and assess the way he or she was executing from an administrative perspective. I would check the way they were accounting for their ability to execute missions. What records were being kept? How were they maintaining proficiency in administrative ways?

I would check the way they were doing training — how were the training calendars? How were they determining training? Were they annotating the right things on training calendars?

The next step was to check their standards for maintenance. I would have him or her go over the O26 report. And if they didn't understand how to read that important report, that was an indicator. I would have them go over their supply hand receipts with me. We would check dates. We would check leaders. I would make them validate that the leaders were still in the unit. So we would go through the fundamentals. And that allowed me to understand their capabilities from an administrative perspective, which I consider one of the five focus areas of unit leadership. The other four are: mission, maintenance, training, and supply.

Finally, we would go to the motor pool. We would walk around with the motor sergeant, and at the time, the SAMS [Standard Army Maintenance System] clerk. We would walk the line and look at the equipment. Then we would have a discussion about processes. What is the standard for ordering parts? What is the standard for maintaining accountability of equipment? What is the standard for tracking and inventorying tools?

Basically, it was a mission command event. I did this in both battalion and brigade command. I think it was absolutely essential for coaching, teaching, mentoring, training, and holding people accountable. They knew I thought it was



important. I didn't stand in front of a formation and say maintenance is important, or supply accountability is important. I demonstrated the importance.

**What would happen if you found property was missing?**

First, when we found out that property was missing, the company commander had to personally come tell me. That information couldn't be sent to me by email, although in combat I made an exception and allowed phone call reports. But in garrison, they had to personally come tell me that they had identified a loss and they had to tell me what they were doing to account for the loss. First reports were always acceptable, and I never got excited about it, but they were going to tell me directly.

Second, I made the company commander responsible for the narrative on the FLIPL. They weren't allowed to just say property was lost, here is how much it cost, sign their name, and expect some investigating officer to figure it out. The company commander was responsible for doing the research and putting it on paper. And they had to come brief me on their research.

Then the FLIPL officer had to take the facts as presented and make an assessment based on Army regulations. He or she would have it checked by the lawyers and then presented to me. I would make the final determination. So it's important to understand the process and execute it and work your way through it.

I only gave people 14 days to execute a FLIPL — because, like units today, we got busy, we were in the field, we were doing a lot of things, and I did not want them to think the FLIPL was not important. If the FLIPL officer got to 14 days and had not outbriefed me yet, then he or she would immediately have to start wearing the Army Service Uniform (ASU). So on Day 15, he or she would show up in my office in the ASUs to present the information to me. The officer had no choice. Everybody knew what was going on. They were not allowed to come out of the ASUs until the FLIPL was done.

**Did that help expedite things?**

Absolutely. Again, you want to demonstrate to everybody that this is important to you. You want the whole brigade or battalion to understand. It wasn't out of ridiculing people, it was just things I did to make my point that property accountability is important.

**Maneuver units are currently being fielded Global Combat Support System-Army (GCSS-Army). How can they leverage GCSS-Army to improve property accountability?**

GCSS-Army is a game changer that will help not only logisticians but the entire Army. It will provide more visibility for commanders. They will be able to clearly understand where all of their property is, where it has been assigned, when it is due in, and what are the statuses of their requisitions.

**Any final thoughts on property accountability?**

Yes, it is commander's business. Period. End of discussion. Make it your business. Set the systems and routines in place. Hold people accountable to a high standard and it will serve you well.