



Since General Milley, the Army Chief of Staff, was sworn in he has stated on numerous occasions that his number one priority is [readiness](#). While the message is very clear, I honestly think internalizing it is a bit harder. For those like me who cut their teeth on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where deployment dates were known, and every unit had a timeline to prepare against, the word “readiness” might not stir the passion that it should.

If that is the case for you, I would like to offer up something I read a few years ago that helps me give the word “readiness” the emotion and weight it deserves. It is a passage from an [article](#) about the well-known Task Force Smith at the outbreak of the Korean War. While one of the main premises of the article has since been debunked, and we now understand that the failures of that unit extended well beyond the tactical level, I’d like you to focus on a single paragraph. Below is Sergeant Bill Meninger’s account of the night he was notified that he was going to deploy in defense of the 38th Parallel:

“When the invasion came, of course everyone was interested, but it never

occurred to us that we Americans serving in Japan in the Army of Occupation would ever get involved. For me, it was a typical Sunday night in Japan. I was at home with my family. It had rained all day. My wife was giving the kids a bath prior to putting them to bed and I was reading a book and nursing a drink when the call came for me to report to headquarters! The wife wanted to know what the call was about. 'Something must be wrong with the next week's schedule.' I answered. 'I'll be back as soon as I can.' (Which happened to be eleven months later.)"

When there are days that I struggle with keeping my eye on readiness, I place myself in SGT Meninger's shoes. I think about that night and the experience that awaited him and over five million U.S. Service Members and their families.

I then ask myself "What if?"

What if I was the guy in the chair drinking a beer and reading a book?

What if that was my wife giving our son a bath?

Or

What if he was my NCO?

When I do this one-minute exercise in reflection, it makes readiness very real to me. It brings the "Why" behind what I do into clear focus. It makes physical training, maintenance on Mondays, and field exercises even more critical. As soon as I finish a professional development book, I immediately pick up another because I am not sure if I [will have more time](#). I invest more in the family support structure of the organization now, because I am not sure if I will have the opportunity later. Finally, I do my best to make the most out of the time I have now with my family, because I'm not sure I will get the chance next year.

We live in a dangerous world. As leaders we must ensure that our organizations are ready to fight tonight. If you find internalizing the word "readiness" a bit harder when you don't have a deployment date to a combat zone on the calendar, I encourage you take a moment and put yourself in the shoes of SGT Meninger. Any one of us could be a phone call away from war.

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