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NewsLines

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Turmoil at the top

Walter Reed scandal claims Army secretary, leaves force reeling in time of abrupt change

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The more than 1 million soldiers of the Army, deeply involved on two war fronts, suddenly find themselves serving under leadership tainted by scandal and in critical transition.

Army Secretary Francis Harvey is serving out the final days of command cut short, pushed out the door by his boss, Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Gates was unhappy with the Army's response to revelations, reported by Army Times and The Washington Post, that wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington were consigned to squalid quarters and mired in administrative red tape while awaiting care and evaluation for benefits.

"I am disappointed that some in the Army have not adequately appreciated the seriousness of the situation pertaining to outpatient care at Walter Reed," Gates said in the Pentagon briefing room.

"Some have shown too much defensiveness and have not shown enough focus on digging into and addressing the problems," Gates said.

"Also, I am concerned that some do not properly understand the

need to communicate to the wounded and their families that we have no higher priority than their care, and that addressing their concerns about the quality of their outpatient experience is critically important.

"Our wounded soldiers and their families have sacrificed much and they deserve the best we can offer."

He took no questions from reporters.

Harvey was at Fort Benning, Ga., the morning of March 2, when he cut short his visit to return to Washington to meet with Gates. Sources told Army Times that Gates asked for Harvey's resignation. However, in an interview in his office shortly after the announcement, Harvey said he offered Gates his resignation because he believed the Army let down the wounded soldiers. He said the furor has depressed the staff at Walter Reed, and he wanted to prevent any others from leaving or being fired.

"We can't have them leave,"

said Harvey, a former corporate leader appointed to the top Army civilian post in November, 2004. "We can't have them be so demoralized that they leave. So I figured what the heck, if I offer my resignation, that may stop all this bleeding, and it was accepted."

Army Undersecretary Pete Geren will serve as acting secretary until a new secretary is nominated and confirmed. The transi-



ROB CURTIS/STAFF

FRANCIS J. HARVEY

Title: 19th secretary of the Army, since November 2004.

Duties: Statutory responsibility for all matters relating to Army manpower, personnel, Reserve affairs, installations, environmental issues, weapons systems and equipment acquisition, communications, and financial management. Also responsible for the Army's annual budget.

Efforts while secretary:

- Improving housing, child care and other quality-of-life issues.
- Increasing warfighting capabilities.
- Increasing the size of the operational Army.
- Updating the leader development program to reflect the security environment.

■ Linking the Future Combat Systems Program with the Army Modular Force and Army Business Transformation.

Other positions:

- Much of his career was with corporations, providing products and services to the federal government.
 - Professional, management and executive roles at Westinghouse Corp., 1969-1997
 - Involved in more than 20 major defense programs, including tanks, missiles, submarines, surface ships, aircraft and satellites.
 - Director and vice chairman, Duratek, a company specializing in treating wastes.
 - Member of the Army Science Board in the late 1990s. Serves on boards of several corporations.
- Education:** Bachelor of science, University of Notre Dame; doctorate in metallurgy and material sciences, University of Pennsylvania.

tion has already begun, an Army official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Army also announced the same day Harvey resigned that Maj. Gen. Eric R. Schoomaker will become the new commanding general of Walter Reed. Schoomaker, now the commanding general of the Army Medical Research and Materiel Command at Fort Detrick, Md., is a doctor and the brother of Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker, who is retiring in April.

Eric Schoomaker replaces Army Maj. Gen. George W. Weightman, whom Harvey fired March 1. According to a statement released by the Army, service leaders had "lost trust and confidence" in Weightman's ability "to address needed solutions for soldier outpatient care."

Another Army official, who also asked not to be named, said Harvey's abrupt dismissal came as a surprise, even within the Army staff, which learned of the resig-

nation shortly before 4 p.m. March 2, when the announcement was made.

Harvey had left Washington late March 1 to visit Fort Benning, Ga., and had spent the night at the post, according to sources there. The next day, he had breakfast with students attending the Maneuver Captains Career Course and met with other junior leaders. He observed urban training and received an update on housing construction and Fort Benning's base realignment and closure progress.

The Army official said "he cut short his visit" and returned to the Pentagon during the lunch hour. Officials couldn't confirm whether Harvey was summoned back to Washington, but sources received word at 9 a.m. to cancel a media brief scheduled for 1 p.m.

Harvey met with Gates sometime the afternoon of March 2 after returning to the Pentagon, the Army official said.

It remains to be seen what sort

of impact Harvey's resignation will have on the Army during a time of war, during the annual budget process and during the Walter Reed debacle. Asked to comment, Army spokesman Paul Boyce said: "The Army is a strong team. The team is made up of more than one individual, all forming links that, as a team, are there for the nation's defense."

Nevertheless, the Army and the Pentagon have undergone an unsettling whirlwind of change in recent months, beginning when President Bush fired then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Nov. 9. Gates was quickly confirmed as his replacement, and shortly thereafter, Gen. George Casey was replaced as top commander in Iraq by Gen. David Petraeus. Casey is set to replace Gen. Peter Schoomaker next month as chief of staff. That will leave the Army with new leadership at the top civilian and military posts.

Harvey was the second consecutive Army secretary forced out. In April 2003, Rumsfeld sacked former secretary Tommy White.

Retired Brig. Gen. David Grange said it will be up to Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Richard Cody to provide steady leadership for the service while Harvey's replacement and incoming Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey settle into their jobs.

"As the vice chief, he is going to be the steadfast leader in this period," Grange said. "You really have to have Cody kind of holding things together."

Grange said he was surprised to hear that conditions at Walter Reed had deteriorated so badly and said that in the end, Harvey is responsible.

"If you are in charge, you are accountable," Grange said. "I'm sure they were not resourced the way they should have been."

Grange said being wounded twice in the Vietnam War showed him first-hand that medical care for wounded soldiers is always neglected.

"When you are going to go to war, what never is financed is the second- and third-order effects like veterans benefits and patient care," he said. "That's always frustrated me. Having been wounded a couple of times and sent to [military] hospitals, ... you see a lot of things."

Good, but good enough?

In Congress, Harvey's sudden resignation didn't end concerns that the military leadership had forgotten the basic mission of taking care of the troops.



Gates



Weightman