

## Military OneSource Podcast — Better Nutrition for a Stronger Force

### Episode transcript

#### Intro voice-over:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information, and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit [militaryonesource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil).

#### Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. Our topic today is how one installation is getting fresh, nutritious meals to their troops. That installation is Fort Cavazos. It's a massive Army installation in Texas with tens of thousands of soldiers. So, we have three guests with us today, and they're going to explain how they tap into, really, a number of resources to ensure their folks have easier access to foods. So, welcome everybody to the podcast. I want you to just quickly identify yourself, introduce yourself and let us know what it is that you do, and then we'll get into the conversation. Warrant Officer Schimpf, let's begin with you.

#### Chief Warrant Officer 4 Carl J. Schimpf:

Yes, good afternoon. My name is CW4 Carl Schimpf. I've been in III Armored Corps now since July. I've been stationed all over the world in Hawaii, Korea and Europe, as well as mainland as well. One of my jobs and responsibilities with my chief culinary managing NCO is to oversee a food service operation for III Armored Corps and specifically Fort Cavazos and the soldiers and the tenant units located on the installation. Some of our things that we do to ensure that our soldiers have a proper meal and a proper timeframe, as well as being able to look at the future and try to adjust accordingly based on what soldiers need plus nutrition requirements and moving forward.

#### Bruce Moody:

Thanks. And sergeant major?

**Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy L. McKinney:**

Good afternoon. I am Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy L. McKinney, III Corps Chief Culinary Management sergeant major. I've been in for quite some time now. Food service is one of the passions that I have and the only passion that I've had so far within my military career. What we're here doing at the installation for the Corps and divisions that fall up on the III Armored Corps is providing the oversight of the food program alongside our installation food program manager and also identify inventive ways to improve our food program strategy for the local installation and also across the III Armored Corps.

**Bruce Moody:**

Thanks, Welcome. Chontrelle?

**Chontrelle Sturdivant:**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Chontrelle Sturdivant. I currently serve as the installation food program manager for Fort Cavazos. I am responsible for the food service contracts, prime vendor contracts, any food sources that go into our military dining facilities and any other systems that will support meal card holders and soldiers consuming meals in our military dining facilities.

**Bruce Moody:**

So, one of the reasons that we wanted to have you on the podcast is not merely because of what you do, but also because of just the scope and scale of what you do. So, for people who do not know somebody, give us an idea of just how big your installation is and how many folks you have to feed.

**Chontrelle Sturdivant:**

I'll take that one. This is Ms. Sturdivant. So, due to the geographical size of Fort Cavazos, we have three places that we refer to. We have the main cantonment area; we have West Fort Cavazos and we have North Fort Cavazos. So, of all of those we feed over 3,500 soldiers a day. That is for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Again, our main customers are the meal card holders, which are the soldiers that live in the barracks. They do not have access to other food service resources through government payment, but we do support them through the dining facilities.

**Bruce Moody:**

How many folks are you feeding every day?

**Chontrelle Sturdivant:**

Over 3,500 soldiers a day.

**Bruce Moody:**

And just so we get a sense of the environment in which you guys are working, what are some of the challenges? And you mentioned that the base is huge. What are the other challenges either that you have in getting food to them or the soldiers have with access to food. What really made some of your efforts necessary?

**Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy L. McKinney:**

Some of the efforts that we've been able to establish here on installation is really geared towards the, one, the geographical layout and also our food desert areas, which is out 6988, which there is no feeding facility or capacity in that area. So, we were able to establish one of our third kiosks, outpost kiosks in that area to provide a feeding source to those soldiers of course that are ESM, which is our essential station messing soldiers that receive that entitlement to ensure that they have something geared towards within their immediate footprint outside of going to the AAFES marketplaces and things of that nature here on installation. To include expanding our initiatives, with three times kiosks now to kind of put in those footprints in a close proximity of the work areas and some of the living quarters that is alongside of our traditional dining facilities here on main cantonment and also West Fort Cavazos.

**Bruce Moody:**

Let's talk about the kiosks. For those of us who have no idea what they look like, what do they look like and what sort of food options are they providing?

**Chief Warrant Officer 4 Carl J. Schimpf:**

Hey, so this is that CW4 Schimpf again. So, our Army kiosks are a little bit different than a standard, like an express or an AAFES Express facility that you would see on an installation. We try to provide as fresh ingredients possible to our soldiers, but also we understand that there's some constraints with that based on how long you can keep the products and so on and so forth. So, we do offer fresh salads, fresh sandwiches, pre-made sandwiches. We do have meals that are pre-prepared as well and are frozen or they're refrigerated. And sometimes, some of the facilities we do have heated meals as well, the soldiers can take and grab and go. One of the big, I think, positives about this is really our flexibility to allow the soldiers to have different options within the kiosk, but also the hours of operation gives them flexibility.

So, when a soldier goes to PT formation at 6 a.m. in the morning, they get done around 7:30 a.m., they do their hygiene and sanitation and get ready for a 9 a.m. work call, it gives them an opportunity to grab a meal to go or they can use one of our traditional facilities that we have. We have currently have about three operational, and a fourth will come back online in May. And we're looking at some other flexible feeding options as well. But that kiosk allows the soldiers, the ESM, the soldiers that are not receiving additional funding through the Army that receive a meal entitlement, gives them that option to grab a meal and take it to work or eat it on the go, even grab a meal for lunch or even another option for dinner if need be as well.

But it just gives the soldiers an opportunity to use their entitlements, which is what we call flexible feeding options instead of using their cash out of pocket that they already receive an entitlement, but it gives them an opportunity to use that entitlement of the location. So, that kiosk is that opportunity for them to grab and go, and that gives them the items required as set aside as well as the dietitian and nutrition requirements to feed the soldier adequately.

**Bruce Moody:**

And I want to get into some of the options. One of the reasons that we felt this would be a very interesting conversation, yes, we're talking to one installation that belongs to the Army, but it's sort of a universal problem. You've got a lot of people, and you've got to feed them. And so, maybe other installations will take some notes here and incorporate some of the things that you're doing. You do the kiosk because there's a lot more going on, and that's sort of the secret sauce for you guys is that you have a lot of different options all working for this population. Let's get into one of them. And it involves transportation. I think it says Cavazos Connector. So, just sort of give us the quick summary of what the Cavazos Connector is.

**Chief Warrant Officer 4 Carl J. Schimpf:**

Yes, the Cavazos Connector is a point-to-point bus system that allows soldiers to use an app that allows them to choose a location for pickup and a location for drop off. Then it can be on post, and there's also off-post capability as well. So, if they need to go to Target or back to their home, their area where they live in off-post, there are some virtual routes that are set up for that as well. One of the convenient things on this is really the soldier has a better ability to get around the installation where, so if they're located on the east side of post and the closest facility they have is about two and a half miles away, they have the option of using other facilities instead of the closest facility located to where they work or live.

The Cavazos Connector has been a very, a positive asset for Cavazos and for the soldiers and their ability to move around the installation and outside the installation. But it really gives them the ability to have those options available at different facilities. Our grab and

go. We do offer the meal prep, which gives them the opportunity to come down to facility and take the meal prep option as well. But again, it goes back into the overall installation support structure that has been a very positive for the installation for the soldiers.

**Bruce Moody:**

So, I know that a lot of people have taken advantage of this connector. You've given out lots and lots of rides. What are you seeing as a result of that? What are people doing differently when they have access to this connector that can take them directly to food options?

**Chief Warrant Officer 4 Carl J. Schimpf:**

Well, this has been, we've seen an uptick in basically our quality of service or provided service to the soldier. Our head counts at the facilities have increased where our utilization rates were hovering around 70% to 65%, and now we're seeing on average between 85% and 95% utilization at our installation facilities. We have seen increased usage of those facilities based on the Cavazos Connector. We attribute it to the Cavazos Connector. Some of the data points that they're pulling for is really, the area of where they're dropped off at is near the facilities and that's been the increased location of drop-offs on the installation.

**Bruce Moody:**

And to move on to some of the other items, because again, we're going to get into this in another episode, but you've got other programs and discounts that are out there to help military families and service members save on groceries. Talk about those and what you offer, and maybe what some of the military families may not be aware of.

**Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy L. McKinney:**

Sgt. Maj. McKinney here. One thing I can say is, I have been one, for example, that hasn't utilized the commissary much by me, using a lot of the off-post establishments to do some of my grocery shopping. However, we sent a gift certificate to kind of get those patrons back into the commissary to understand the savings, the cost savings that they can experience by using the installation program, which is your decker, your commissary establishments if you will, which is a \$25 gift card. It is easily something that can give the soldiers and/or families back to that establishment just by providing them that gift card and understanding the price cuts that they can be introduced to and doing that price comparison versus of utilizing the Walmarts and HEBs and things of that nature. So, I do think that is a great thing that they did because it got me back in there and to actually

look at the price cuts and the savings that I can experience by just shopping back at the commissary.

**Bruce Moody:**

So, when it comes to food, food and community really go together. It obviously ties people together. Would like to hear you guys talk about some of the maybe most unexpected or innovative food programs that you've had and the ways that they've strengthened the military community in your area.

**Chontrelle Sturdivant:**

So, when we look at our food ecosystem, we have a variety of options for our military service members. One of those options is our military dining facilities. A second one is a culinary outpost food trucks. A third one is our culinary outpost kiosks. And then we have our fourth one, which actually is unique to Fort Cavazos, which is our phantom centralized hub, and that's where we have centralized initiatives to support our military service members. So, what I'd like to highlight here is our military dining facilities. In 2024, we piloted a new initiative that is still ongoing right now from the Department of Army Action Stations and Menus. And basically, we transformed our military dining facilities into a food court-like concept. So, instead of giving them one or two menu options, we actually have about seven stations in there. The service members are able to go to and dine at with unique cuisine options.

In conjunction with those meal options, we actually funded choice architecture that would help guide the customer to those unique areas and also invested in some colorful artwork as well as lighting because we wanted to make sure that we provided a different ambiance to soldiers. And we see the amount of soldiers that were going off installation to consume some of their meals. So, this was unique to us to ensure that we kept those service members on installations and they were able to perform their duties and get back to their duties in time by dining at the dining facilities. And still to date, that initiative has excelled greatly widely for us here. And again, as chief were saying, it contributes to our utilization rate being from 65% to about 85% to over 100% right now just by those action stations in there.

**Bruce Moody:**

It makes a huge difference, and I really want to spend a little bit more time on this, especially if we have folks from other installations going, "You guys have a utilization rate that we can only dream about." It really makes a big difference how places are laid out; how they're lit. You go into one grocery store versus another and the way they're lit tells you a lot about that place. So, talk to me about these touches, which are not frivolous because they're obviously making an impact. People are going to make choices

about where to spend their money and where to take their meals, and they're making the choice to go to your hub, to go to your food sources. So, if you were to have a conversation with another installation, what do you want them to know as they're listening to this conversation?

**Chontrelle Sturdivant:**

Well, for us, I think the initiative started out with how we could bring customers back into the dining facilities, and then we had to broaden our reach and see what our commercial establishments were doing. One of the things that we needed to work on was our marketing and advertising strategy. So, getting with the team members, we had to ensure that we invested in our marketing and advertising strategy just as our commercial establishments do as well. When we initiated the marketing and advertising concept, that really brought a visual aspect to what we were trying to bring in the dining facilities. Historically, people eat with their eyes, and it's not lost in 2025. So, if the food doesn't look good or the environment doesn't look good and you don't feel comfortable by the ambiance in there, then you're not willing to dine in there. So, investing in the food was equally an investment in the choice architecture as well as the decor to make sure that it was modernized, and it was a place that soldiers wanted to dine in.

**Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy L. McKinney:**

Also, may I add that we were able to tap into the service member themselves, the ones that go out and dine. We were able to do a survey a year ago to kind of solicit some of those highly visited establishments that's outside. That way, we can bring that on the installation that provides a flexible accessibility for them to have food choices, to include some of the things that they would prefer based, referencing our traditional dining facility experiences. So, I think tapping into the innovative side of the food service team and program, being able to bring them something different than what they were normally looking at when you come into a facility, which is your traditional unit seniors on the wall or pictures or thing of that nature that still made you feel like you were, one, in a military structured building. So, being able to bring in the acrylic signage and the colors and the lighting provides a different ambiance for them to feel like, I can go to lunch, breakfast or dinner and step away from the organization and be in a restaurant-like establishment.

**Bruce Moody:**

How did it feel for you guys to see those numbers spike up like that?

**Chontrelle Sturdivant:**

It was exciting. So, for all of us, for commanders, any leader and definitely your food service stakeholders, we were very excited. It really let us know that our hard work and efforts were noticed, and we were getting what we wanted, which was to bring our service members back into the dining facilities. And I would like to provide you an example of one of the initiatives, if I may?

**Bruce Moody:**

Yeah, of course.

**Chontrelle Sturdivant:**

So, we featured a coffee bar in 2024, which we call the 254 Blend. Now, what's unique about the 254 Blend is not the coffee beans or even how they grind the coffee. What's unique about it is the 254 is the area code for our installation. So, it was a catchy phrase, and we were able to partner with branded coffee products like Dunkin Donuts, Nestle and Nescafe, Coffee Mate branded products that everyone is that they're known for. It's easy to market it and it's us having it accessible, and the dining facilities was exciting as well. So, we took that 254 coffee brand and logo, and we placarded it on every wall in the facility. Every warming cup that you have has the logo on there. So, it was a whole part of our marketing and branding strategy for our military dining facilities that when you walk into your place of business, you're walking in with a cup of the 254 Blend. And so, that visual aspect of marketing, and seeing it in every soldier's hand made it easier to bring them back into the dining facilities.

**Bruce Moody:**

Nice. When you have folks coming to use your shopping facilities, your meal facilities, do you have tips for them for shopping smart or eating smart, eating well without spending a fortune?

**Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy L. McKinney:**

For us, for the dining facilities, we do try to educate them or increase the knowledge on what that, the meal card entitlement which we have the different meal prices for your breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Using lunch for example, the meal rate is \$7.10. Looking at all of the options that are available for soldiers to choose from is a power move in itself. When you look at the items that you can select within the facility and the different choices for just \$7.10, to me, that's already a catch-all on being able to spend less and still receive more, versus being on the outside establishment, using your out-of-pocket expenses to go to some of the other establishments and spending \$15 for a meal.



And you may get a drink, a sandwich and some fries, and I can go into one of the dining facilities with the new innovation that's been implemented in there with the action station style feeding and maybe select something from a station or two, and then also have your unlimited salad bars, refill on my drinks. I get desserts. I can get the lickies and chewies that come along with it for just \$7.10. And I don't think you go anywhere right now and receive something at that level and the quality that you're receiving outside of your installation dining facilities right now.

**Bruce Moody:**

Now, I'm pretty sure you're absolutely not. That's the only place you're going to get it. It's just so awesome. So, just last question for you guys, what is next? What are you looking for as far as setting your next goals?

**Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy L. McKinney:**

What we're looking for right now is, one, continuing to market our Phantom Fresh, the meal prep program, some of the other things that we have going on here on installation. So, that way we can kind of do a catch-all for the ESM soldiers, the meal card holders at our installation to allow them to understand what can be offered to them. And then, soon coming here in the summertime, we'll be standing up a bistro kiosk-like concept. So, one of our facilities that is currently under renovation, that we'll be able to offer, I would say a combination of your kiosk and also ready to make meals where you can select from some of the different offered meals that will be inside that facility that will be made to order.

So, it's fresh, it's being made in front of you, you'll have the opportunity to dine in. It will be a small-scale dining option that's available for the soldiers or they can also get it to go. And we want to be able to share that across the platform, and that way hopefully, across III Corps, some of our other installations, we'll be able to tailor something in the same for their installation as well based off of their geographical layout.

**Bruce Moody:**

Yeah. Well, this has been a very interesting conversation. I really appreciate you all coming together and talking about some of the amazing things that you're doing to take care of the war fighters of your installation. I wish you all the best and thanks for joining us today.

**Sgt. Maj. Kresassidy L. McKinney:**

Thank you.

**Chontrelle Sturdivant:**

Thank you.

**Chief Warrant Officer 4 Carl J. Schimpf:**

Thank you.

**Bruce Moody:**

I want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always like to hear from you. If you have a question or a comment about what you've heard today, there's a link in the program notes. You can reach out to us, and be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts, to include YouTube, and please do because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody, thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.