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**Army is taking limited steps to counter racial divisiveness**

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The Army will take a few limited steps to counter racial divisiveness among its force, but is delaying a number of more contentious decisions, including recommendations on banning Confederate symbols and changing the names of bases.

Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy announced Thursday that beginning in August the service will no longer include soldiers’ photos when soldiers are being considered for promotion. McCarthy and Gen. James McConville, the Army’s chief of staff, said that they are still reviewing whether to redact the box on the form that identifies a person’s race. Some bits of personal information, such as religion and marital status, are currently redacted.

They said the Army will wait for broader guidance from Defense Secretary Mark Esper on whether to ban the Confederate flag and other symbols. They declined to detail their own recommendations on whether bases named after Confederate leaders should be renamed. McCarthy noted that President Donald Trump has made known his objection to renaming, and the issue is now in Congress’ hands.

Trump two weeks ago said his administration “will not even consider” changing the name of any of the 10 Army bases that are names for Confederate Army officers. Members of Congress, however, are pushing for change. The Senate’s top Republican, Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, has said he would be OK with renaming bases.

Confederate monuments and military base names have become a national flashpoint in the weeks since the death of George Floyd. Protesters decrying racism have targeted Confederate monuments in multiple cities, and some state officials are considering taking them down. Such moves are facing vehement opposition in some areas.

The Marine Corps has banned display of the Confederate flag and other similar symbols, saying they can inflame division and weaken unit cohesion.

Trump’s opposition to the renaming of bases appears to have stalled other military movement on several of the issues. McCarthy and Esper both had indicated this month that they were open to discussions about renaming bases, but are now relying on Congress.

Instead, the services are shifting to studies and task forces to come up with recommendations.

McCarthy said he has ordered a study into how military justice is meted out, and whether there are disparities based on race. McCarthy said he want a report back in 60 days.

The Navy, which had begun steps to direct the removal of Confederate symbols, has not finalized or put in place the plan. But on Thursday, Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, announced the creation of a task force to examine service policies and “identify and remove racial barriers and improve inclusion within the Navy.”

“A lot has to be done to address the symbolic challenges that we face that could create divisiveness in our ranks, as well as the substantive, to assure that every man and woman has the opportunity to reach their maximum potential,” McCarthy told Pentagon reporters.

Army Col. Carl Wojtaszek, who is in the office of manpower analysis, said a study last year showed that promotion boards, which can include between nine and 17 members, show differing results when photos of candidates are available. He said that when the photo is not included, the board members’ scores are more closely aligned, it took them less time to vote on each soldier and “the outcomes for minorities and women improved.”

McCarthy said Army leaders are also going to be meeting with soldiers to have what he called uncomfortable discussions about eliminating “unconscious bias.” McConville said he was meeting with Army generals on Thursday to discuss inclusion, saying the issue isn’t about percentages but about making sure all soldiers know they are valued members of an Army team.

“We need to take a hard look at ourselves and make sure that we’re doing all that we can,” to promote racial diversity and inclusion, he said. “We know we have to do more.”

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