



The Profession of Arms and the Professional Noncommissioned Officer

Sergeant Major of the Army Raymond F. Chandler, III

None is more professional than I.” This first phrase from the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Creed has been the motto of our corps ever since a group of senior NCOs struggled to put into words the desired core values of an NCO back in 1973.

Now, almost half a century later, we struggle to understand how 10 years of war has changed our Army and our NCO Corps. There is no question we are a more versatile, adaptable and resilient force. Our soldiers have changed after years of facing unique stressors. We must take a hard look at ourselves to truly understand what it means to be a part of the Army profession.

According to the 2011 Army Posture Statement, the American professional soldier is an expert and a volunteer, certified in the Profession of Arms and bonded with comrades in a shared identity and culture of sacrifice and service to the Nation and the Constitution. A soldier adheres to the highest ethical standards and is a steward of the future of the profession.

There is no question that our soldiers are professionals. The very definition of professional is found in our Warrior Ethos, the NCO Creed, and the Army Values. To me, a professional performs all tasks to a high standard of skill, competence, and character. However, some still question whether a soldier is a professional or belongs to a profession.

First, to be a professional, you must have specialized knowledge. Our soldiers receive this knowledge throughout their Army career in the form of professional military education. Secondly, professionals live by a code of ethics, which soldiers have in our ethos and Army Values. Finally, a professional puts his or her service before their income. I am sure each of you can attest that our service in the Army has nothing to do with a paycheck. Therefore, there is no question that our soldiers belong to the Army profession, just as doctors, lawyers, and accountants belong to theirs.

Sergeant Major of the Army Raymond F. Chandler, III, was sworn in as the 14th Sergeant Major of the Army on 1 March 2011.

PHOTO: U.S. Army SFC Aaron Beckman, assigned to the 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command (JMTC) NCO Academy, and SGT Robert Murray, assigned to JMTC, walk toward the next task, Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, 12 August 2009. (U.S. Army, Gertrud Zach)

Nevertheless, our profession is unlike any other in the world. Our soldiers are asked to uphold and defend the ideals and values of the United States. They are the standard-bearers for the Nation and the tip of the spear in combat. Our professionalism is based on a relationship of trust between our Army and the American people. You don't have to look too far back in history to see what happens when we lose our professionalism and, with it, the trust of the American people.

This professionalism and trust is part of our Army culture. This culture is a system of shared attitudes and values and is the spirit and soul of our institution and part of our Army ethic. The Army Blue Book best sums up our ethic:

“Being a Soldier means conducting yourself at all times so as to bring credit upon you and the Nation—this is the core of our Army culture. Our Army is a unique society. We have military customs and time-honored traditions and values that represent years of Army history. Our leaders conduct operations in accordance with laws and principles set by the U.S. Government and those laws together with Army traditions and values require honorable behavior and the highest level of individual moral character . . .”

Our NCOs play a vital role in our Army ethic. NCOs are the best soldiers in the formation and always lead from the front. A unit without a strong NCO loses the ability to fight and win our Nation's wars. Today's professional NCOs are more important than ever, as they are routinely asked to accomplish more now than any time in the past.

The NCO Corps continues to be the envy of all other armies in the world. Personal courage, integrity, loyalty, and devotion to duty have long been the hallmark of our corps. Our NCOs have done an exceptional job as members of the Profession of Arms, being adaptive, agile, and creative on the battlefield.

A great example of our professional NCOs is Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, a Military Police (MP) soldier from the Kentucky National Guard. Hester became the first female soldier awarded the Silver Star since World War II for her actions in Iraq in 2005. During a firefight, Sergeant Hester and a few of her fellow soldiers from the 617th MP Company fought off more than 30 insurgents armed with assault rifles, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades, killing 27 and capturing 7 more.



(U.S. Navy, MC2 Matthew D. Leistkow)

U.S. Army SPC Dylan Clarke stands guard outside the Taza council building during the Iraqi Adopt an NCO Program, Taza, Iraq, 23 March 2010.

After 10 years of combat, we are well versed in combat operations, but we have allowed our garrison skills to suffer. I am sure everyone has read Chapter 3 of the *Army Health Promotion, Risk Reduction, and Suicide Prevention Report*. This chapter discusses “The Lost Art of Leadership in Garrison” and talks about our lack of accountability and discipline. This is NCO business.

I know that our Army has been strained and stressed by 10-plus years of war. With 12- and 15-month deployments and little time between to reintegrate with family, it was inevitable that some skills would degenerate. In addition, many of our platoon sergeants joined the Army after 9/11, and they only know an Army at war, which makes for a dangerous recipe. However, now, as we begin to spend more time in garrison, our NCOs must again become the standard-bearer in the unit. We must instill a sense of pride, discipline, and accountability in our soldiers. This will not come during the normal duty hours. Our NCOs must remember that being a leader is a 24-hour job.

Being an NCO also means a total embodiment of the Warrior Ethos and the Army Ethic. Our soldiers need uncompromising and unwavering leaders. We cannot expect our soldiers to live by an ethic when their leaders and mentors are not upholding the standard. These values form the framework of our profession and are nonnegotiable. Values, plus the Warrior Ethos, guides the way we conduct ourselves as professionals. We must be the uncompromising standard-bearer for our soldiers.

As we continue through this year, I want each of you to think about what it means to be a professional NCO and how we fit into the Profession of Arms. What lessons have we learned in the last 10 years?

How has the Army and the NCO Corps changed since 9/11? What do we, as NCOs, need to do to fix our skills while in the garrison environment. Your answers will form the foundation of our corps as we move into the future.

“I am proud of the Corps of noncommissioned officers.” We owe it to our soldiers to continue setting high standards and instilling discipline in our units. We do this so our Army professionals stay strong and our legacy is never tarnished. We have learned from the mistakes of the past and have now set our sights on the future. Our soldiers, our Army, and our Nation rely on us to protect our profession and with it, our way of life. **MR**



U.S. Army SFC Aaron Beckman from Charlie Company, 7th Army NCO Academy, assembles a weapon during the 7th U.S. Army Joint Multinational Training Command 2009 Soldier of the Year and Noncommissioned Officer of the Year Competitions, 15-19 June, Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany.