



The Joy of Officership

“Since you get more joy out of giving joy to others, you should put a good deal of thought into the happiness that you are able to give.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

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RECENTLY, SEVERAL ARTICLES about “toxic leadership” within the officer corps appeared in *Military Review*, *Army*, and the *Military Times*. Toxic leadership is certainly real. I am not dismissing it as an important issue, but we need some additional dialogue to balance the previous rhetoric about the topic. The subtle, yet significant dimension of military officership is as important today as it has ever been in our nation’s history and desperately needs some highlighting.

Being an Officer

Being an officer can be fun, and I strongly argue that it should be. Not fun in the way golfing or swimming are, but fun in the more profound sense of accomplishing something wholesome and good. Being in a joyous profession is important for several reasons. First, people do not like jobs that make them unhappy. Second, job performance correlates positively with job satisfaction. Happy workers are effective, productive workers. Third, jobs viewed as fun and rewarding entice the best and brightest to the profession. There should be no doubt that our nation’s military officer corps has always tried to recruit America’s finest young men and women to join it, and highlighting the joy of officership is essential to keeping this trend alive.

As a recent military officer retiree, I have come to believe that my profession does not do a good enough job of promoting the joy of officership to those whom we serve and those willing to serve. I want everyone to know I loved being an armed forces officer. Yes, there was separation; yes, there was hardship; and yes, there were disappointments. However, each morning when I woke up and put on the uniform, I was proud to be an officer. The profession I proudly served brought me years and years of pure joy!

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PHOTO: SSG Michael Hawf takes a moment to give a child a toy in a village southwest of Baghdad during a humanitarian mission, 3 January 2010. (U.S. Army)

Distinguished Army combat commander and Desert Storm hero General Fredrick Franks shared the joy he experienced being an officer in the following words:

I make no apologies about my pride in our nation, our Army, and our Soldiers. From that day in July 1955, when I proudly put on the fatigue shirt with “U.S. Army” over the pocket and took my place in the line with my West Point classmates, I was excited every day to be an American Soldier. I loved the Army. I loved soldiering. I loved the cause we served.¹

Being an officer *should* be joyous. Officers should celebrate having the daily privilege to serve the people, the platoon, the ship, the wing, the regiment, and the nation they love. This should not be negotiable. To be an exceptional officer, one must not only be competent, brave, loyal, and trustworthy, but also the exemplar of spirit and optimism. In a recent teleconference with the Class of 2012 at West Point, 1st Cavalry Division’s commander, Major General Daniel B. Allyn, emphasized the importance of an officer’s responsibility to motivate and inspire his soldiers. Speaking from Afghanistan, General Allyn said, “You must be the one to lift them up when they are down.” He suggested the cadets he was speaking to must embody the spirit of hope and optimism and bluntly stated, “Everyday for the past 30 years I have loved being an Army officer.”

The very next day, General Raymond T. Odierno, the new Chief of Staff of the Army, told over 1,000 seniors that he thought he would be a “five and dive” guy, but he loved being an officer and that was an important reason why he stayed.

Joy in the Profession

So where does the joy of officership come from?

The story of officer happiness starts with the oath. Officers in the profession of arms swear allegiance to serve the noblest of causes. Both ethical and legal codes require them to be exceptional moral agents in the conduct of their duty. The United States Constitution sets forth the enduring values that frame the professional military ethic, and Title 10 of the *United States Code* (Army, section 3583) requires “all commanding officers and others in authority in the Army to show in themselves a

good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination; and to guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Army, all persons who are guilty of them.”

These demanding obligations of officership do not require us to be happy. Nor does being an effective officer require one to be happy. I have served with and for many officers who were rarely if ever joyful (as best I could tell) and yet got the job done. What I will argue is that, because of this moral mandate, armed forces officers have unlimited opportunities to experience overwhelming joy and satisfaction. For every officer to experience the same joy that Generals Franks and Odierno and Major General Allyn described is possible!

What is the relationship between reward and being a member of a profession with such an extremely rigorous moral mandate? George Washington, arguably this nation’s most important



MAJ Karla Porch, left, the operations officer for Regional Support Command North, performs a reenlistment ceremony for Air Force SSgt Sasha Navarro at the Mike Spann Memorial at Qala-i-Jangi, near Mazar-e-Sharif, Northern Afghanistan, 30 May 2011.

and respected military officers, tells us the answer: “Happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected.”²

We train, fight, and die for a purpose so decent and good that it is essential officers lead with a full and unambiguous eye on “happiness.” In addition to one’s personal happiness, officers have the additional responsibility of mining the challenges of their often onerous and dangerous daily routines for some seemingly inconceivable ardor and then leading in a way that allows their charges to do the same. I readily acknowledge that this is easier said than done, but even so, it seems worthwhile to explore the fundamental tenets of officership in order to promote joy.

Being a Warrior

Army officership is the professional practice of being an Army leader. Understanding what it means to *be* an officer, that is, having an explicit self-concept of one’s identity, is critical. To be an Army officer is to be a warrior, a servant of our nation, a member of a profession, and a leader of character. These interrelated identities shape officer behavior and form the bedrock of all Army officer development, training, and education. Once commissioned, officers are obligated to always act in a manner consistent with these identities. As was the case with the officer’s moral mandate, little in an officer’s professional identity requires him to be happy in order to fulfill his professional obligations. Perhaps one might argue that happiness is not a method or quality of officership, but rather the entire activity of being an officer. In the 4th century BCE, the Greek philosopher Aristotle claimed that happiness was something complete and self-sufficient, the end of things pursued in action.³ If you accept this notion, then officership becomes one method or means for a person to become satisfied in the military profession. Many great officers validate this. Matthew F. Holland suggests in his book *Eisenhower Between the Wars: The Making of a General and Statesman*, that Eisenhower subscribed to such a philosophy:

While some of these attributes could be granted by what Aristotle called fortune or luck, in the end, one’s happiness was a virtuous activity of the soul. Dwight D. Eisenhower was not only a lucky man, but

also one who took such a charge as the guide to his life.⁴

It is naive to suggest that the entire military officer corps should be happy all the time. Our profession is a demanding one and often fraught with great disappointment and loss. What I offer here is a more philosophical view regarding the profession of arms, a view that we rarely discuss because the tactical challenges of our daily tasks often overwhelm us and we forget or neglect to see officership this way. Reminding ourselves often how special and joyous it is being an armed forces officer is important.

With regard to the first component of an officer’s identity, I ask, “To what happy end could being a professional warrior bring us?” To be a warrior is to follow a code. Prospective officers learn this code from the very beginning of their formation. This code allows them to stand apart morally from others who kill such as murderers, terrorists, sociopaths, and tyrants. In her essay “The Warriors Code,” Shannon French explains the justification for such a code—

By setting high standards for themselves, warriors can create a lifeline that will allow them to pull themselves out of the hell of war and reintegrate themselves into their society. A warrior’s code may cover everything from the treatment of prisoners of war to oath keeping to table etiquette, but its primary purpose is to grant nobility to the warriors’ profession. This allows warriors to retain both their self-respect and the respect of those they guard.⁵

In practicing their profession, warriors use judgment, compassion, discrimination, and proportionality. To do anything else would be to disgrace the code. To fight as a warrior is to do so honorably, and being honorable is joyous. All one has to do is observe a deployed unit’s return from war to see the joy experienced by the service members and their loved ones. These events are a celebration for many reasons, but one is the happiness that comes with honorable service and sacrifice. Returning warriors feel joy, joy because they are home safely, joy to be reunited with those they love, joy to see friends and family, and joy to have fought with honor. Fighting as a moral warrior can have a joyous end.

Throughout my career, I have seen such happy endings during promotion, award, and retirement ceremonies, and even military funerals. Our nation, our comrades, and our families celebrate our warriors. Those who are a part of the celebrations bask in the glory of having fought with honor. Serving your country with honor is personally and professionally satisfying.

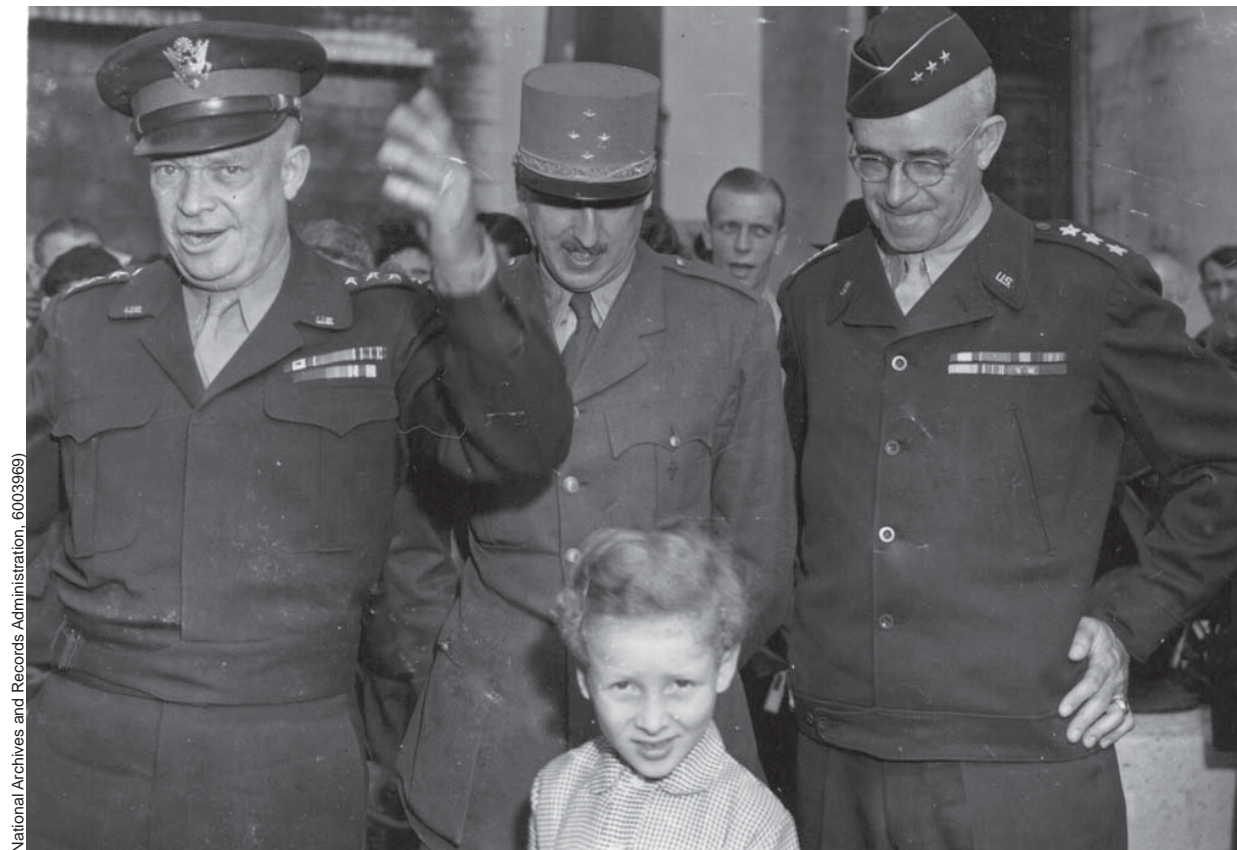
Servants of the Nation

Armed forces officers are servants of the nation. Like many other men and women in dangerous professions, they often risk their lives for the safety and freedom of others. War is ugly, and to fight is often costly and unforgiving. Today's battle space is not only unforgiving but unpredictable as well.

So where is the joy in war? Thucydides wrote, "To be happy means to be free and to be free means to be brave."⁶ These simple words remind us of one of the core principles upon which our nation

stands. To pursue happiness we must be free, and the preservation of this freedom rests squarely on the shoulders of the brave men and women who have answered our nation's call to serve. As officers, we must constantly make this core principle of service come alive for those we lead. Service can be difficult, service can be lonely, service is sometimes brutal and gruesome, and the memories of war can haunt all of us long after we have fought a battle, but purposeful leaders find ways to tether sacrifice to the core principle of service in ways that are meaningful and relevant to the soldiers they lead. Resiliency requires spirit and optimism even under harsh conditions. Officers must lead their troops in a way that shows they care more about them than they do about themselves.

To serve your nation, know your troops, for as General Omar Bradley said, "The greatest leader in the world could never win a campaign unless he understood the men he had to lead."⁷



National Archives and Records Administration, 6003969

Standing in front of the famous Arc de Triomphe in Paris, GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower, left, Supreme Allied Expeditionary Force commander, addresses cheering Frenchmen. To his left are GEN Joseph Koenig, military commander of Paris, and LTG Omar N. Bradley, command of the 12th Army Group, 27 August 1944.

Officers must know their troops like they know their own children. Colin Powell remarked,

The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.⁸

To serve your nation, to preserve her freedom, to selflessly sacrifice for those you lead *should* be unmistakably joyful. Lead with this affirmative attitude, and it will rub off on your troops. They will work harder and be more resilient. As you see your men and women rise to the challenge you can be satisfied knowing you fulfilled your role as a servant to the nation. If they sense your joy in officership, they will unconditionally follow you, fight for you, and be willing to die for you and our nation.

When you become an officer, you join a profession steeped in history and tradition and whose illustrious members included the likes of Washington, Grant, Bradley, Marshall, King, Nimitz, Arnold, Hoar, Krulak, and others. Should you feel joy wearing the same uniform as did many of these great American heroes? Absolutely!

However, this is not always the case. Retired Colonel Don Snider suggests that being a member of the Army profession requires a shared self-concept. This shared identity has been criticized for being misaligned with the true meaning of officership:

Army officers are shorting themselves of an immense potential of inspiration and satisfaction because of their poorly conceived self-concept, which contributes directly to the dissatisfaction of junior officers and to the shortage of captains and misutilization of lieutenants.⁹

Having a common self-concept implies members of the profession share the same values, beliefs, and norms and act in ways consistent with them. But this *is*, in fact, the professional military ethic, and it is essential for officers to embrace it in order to lead, fight, and win successfully. Equally important, as Snider suggests, the professional military ethic presents unlimited potential to improve officer inspiration and satisfaction (joy). Benjamin Franklin believed in such an ethic:

Be studious in your profession, and you will be learned. Be industrious and frugal,

and you will be rich. Be sober and temperate, and you will be healthy. Be in general virtuous, and you will be *happy*. At least you will, by such conduct, stand the best chance for such consequences.¹⁰

Franklin's words are consistent with today's professional military ethic, which aligns spirit with behavior, intent with action, learning with doing, and uncompromising consistency between thought and deed. Remember the commissioning oath. You swore allegiance to support and defend the enduring principles of freedom, liberty, respect, and honor in the Constitution. Through this honorable service as a member of the profession of arms, you *can* and *will* find incredible joy and happiness.

The final component of an officer's identity is being a leader of character. In my view, character is the fuel that drives the engine of belief; belief in oneself, belief in the mission, and belief in those we lead. Soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines will not die for their country unless they believe in their cause. You must represent this cause in all your thoughts, words, and deeds. The great American statesman Henry Clay said, "Of all the properties which belong to honorable men, not one is so highly prized as that of character."¹¹

Leaders of Character

Character in an officer is admired and contagious. Character must be genuine and one must develop it constantly throughout the course of one's lifetime. While it remains a lofty and ill-defined term that has different meanings for different people, character is simply the sum total of one's virtues—honesty, compassion, prudence, and courage. The key to developing character is identifying those virtues we need to work on and then practice bringing them into balance. One can be overly or excessively prudent and lack courage or have a deficiency of it, which means those virtues have become vices. To develop character, an officer must be constantly mindful of his vices and work diligently to correct them.

Officers are also responsible for the character development of their troops. Virtuous personal habits and a steadfast focus on character development enable officership's joy to emerge. Character is the wellspring of achievement, the result of believing in yourself and believing in your people. Little is more

joyous to an officer than seeing one of his soldiers demonstrate bravery in battle, compassion in loss, honesty when confronted, morality in killing, humility when recognized, or perseverance when weary. Character enables an officer to enjoy seeing his troops thrive in peace, win in war, and flourish in life without ever needing a thank you.

Who serves, how we serve, and who we fight change, yet many aspects of officership are timeless. The profession of arms is a proud and honorable one that requires dedication, selflessness, and sacrifice by its members and their families. For a moment, just a moment, reflect on and then share how much joy you have experienced being an officer. Doing so will be healthy for you, inspirational for others, and good for the profession.

I recently began teaching at West Point and ran across a former student of mine. A Naval Academy exchange midshipman who was spending the fall semester at the U.S. Military Academy, she seemed excited when I saw her and after a brief hello, told me she finally understood what I had meant when I

mentioned in class two years before that the reason I stayed in the Navy for 30 years was because being an officer brought me so much happiness and it never stopped being fun. I had taught the plebes (freshman) that the true joy of officership was seeing the transformation of those you lead. I mentioned that officers feel true satisfaction when they see their subordinates grow as people, fight as a team, complete the mission, and thrive in their lives.

My former student had just completed her summer as a member of a team training new plebes at the Naval Academy. Her smile beamed as she described the joy she experienced watching these patriotic young men and women grow before her eyes as she helped them take their first bold steps on their long march to commissioning. I told her her career as an officer would continue to bring her great reward and happiness. As she started to walk away, she stopped, turned around, and said, "Thank you, sir!" Nothing could have made me happier. **MR**

NOTES

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3. Tom Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 220.
4. Matthew Holland, *Eisenhower Between the Wars: The Making of a General and Statesman* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001) 50.
5. Shannon French, "The Warrior's Code," *Air University*, 2001, 13 September 2011, <<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/jscope/french.htm>>.
6. *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service*, Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989;

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9. Don M. Snider, "Officership: The Professional Practice," *Military Review* (January-February 2003): 3.
10. "Benjamin Franklin," Gledhill Enterprises, from 1-Famous-Quotes.com, <<http://www.1-famous-quotes.com/quote/42555>> (16 September 2011).
11. Henry Clay (n.d.), from FinestQuotes.com Web site: <http://www.finestquotes.com/author_quotes-author-Henry-Clay-page-0.htm> (16 September 2011).