



(Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense)

Ed Campbell, a Task Force Cyclone human terrain team analyst, along with his fellow team members, meets with the chief of police of Kohe Safi in late July 2009 during a luncheon engagement in Parwan Province, Afghanistan. The Afghan police hosted the luncheon in honor of a departing American police mentoring team commander.

Army Civilians and the Army Profession

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One notable difference between the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and previous conflicts was the omnipresence of U.S. government civilians. More than in any conflict past, civilians

were everywhere. No, I am not talking about the locals. I refer to the sizable presence of government civilians on nearly every U.S. installation in the war zone. Since the start of combat operations in 2003, civilians from

various government agencies were instrumental to achieving U.S. objectives. One team, one fight, right?

Fast forward to 2011. The Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE) showcased the results of its comprehensive assessment of the state of the Army Profession. Pitching the campaign at military installations worldwide, the center sought to promote and reaffirm the Army Profession following the decade-long conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. What was most unprecedented was the center's revised definition of the Army Profession which, for the first time, included Department of the Army (DA) civilians as a component.¹ Civilian membership in the profession was a *fait accompli*. After all, if the Army declares it so, it must therefore be. Correct? Not exactly.

Given the close civilian-military interaction during the recent conflicts, it is hardly surprising that the Army would feel the need to establish civilians within the profession.² Senior military leaders may have welcomed the measure as a form of team building, which is a noble enough endeavor. But, does the honorary reception of civilians by Army leaders actually constitute *de facto* membership in the military profession?

Since civil-military relations emerged as a branch of political science, no mainstream scholar has ever claimed civilians to be members of the military profession. Although the CAPE did, in fact, include established scholars in its committee, the assertion came undeniably from the military establishment itself rather than from an objective academic source. The Army prefaced the study with the foregone conclusion to include civilians as members of the profession. Recognizing the problem with this reasoning, the CAPE sought to modify the definition of the Army Profession in order to accommodate civilians. It stated—

The solution within the campaign was to revise, to broaden, the description of the Army's expert knowledge/expertise By expanding the realm of the Army's expert knowledge and in-practice expertise to "the design, generation, support, and application" of land combat power, the civilian members of the Army can now rightly see where their expert service fits within the profession.³

The expanded definition, although describing where civilians may "serve" the profession, does not

adequately confer professional status on the civilian workforce. The problem with the CAPE's reasoning is simple: Desire to be part of a profession is insufficient grounds to become part of it. The truth is that DA civilians cannot be members of the Army Profession because the service they provide does not classify them as a profession—even with the broadened language used in the CAPE study.

Neither seeking to discredit the CAPE nor to marginalize the critical role filled by civilians in our nation's armed conflicts, this article critically examines the qualities that define a profession specifically as they relate to civil-military relations. This article concludes that DA civilians fall short of the definition of a profession. Moreover, there is a substantial difference between serving as a member of a profession and, in the course of colloquial English, merely being a professional or working in a professional manner.

The Army Profession

The notion of the military as a profession grew to prominence in the twentieth century as warfare took on an increasingly technical nature, one that required years of study and practice in order to master. Compounding this technical complexity was that the devastation of war required strict discipline in its application and obedience of the military to U.S. elected leaders. The military gained a high level of trust with the American public that the application of force would be used in a manner consistent with the will of the state. Acknowledging this trust and the unique relationship that the military held with the citizenry, the military acquired conscious awareness of its professional and moral responsibilities. It was the combination of these three components—the technical expertise of warfare, the relationship of trust between itself and the American public, and awareness of the professional responsibilities pursuant to that trust—that collectively established the Army as a profession. Thus, professionalism, as an element of the practice of warfare, also became associated with the core values and core competencies of the Army.⁴

It is critical here to explain and distinguish between various notions of a profession. The vernacular view, for instance, would suggest that a professional is anyone who derives remuneration from an occupation—any occupation, such as a manager, worker, or clerk; or that

the term professional distinguishes an athlete, actor, or musician who performs an art full-time—from one who practices a hobby. It is likewise possible for anyone to *act* professionally or to conduct himself or herself in a professional manner by producing quality work. Although all these definitions are found in commonplace usage, they fall short of the concept of a *professional* as a member of a profession. In this sense, the CAPE study may have intended that DA civilians should be part of the Army Profession by the fact that they produce quality work. However, professional performance is not sufficient grounds to make one a member of a profession, since anyone of experience and competence is capable of producing *professional* quality work.

Correctly speaking, the Army is not a profession merely because it claims to be.⁵ Rather, the Army is a profession because it possesses the qualities that distinguish a profession in the modern sense—qualities that are also found in other established professions, such as medicine, law, and engineering. The prerequisite qualities that as a minimum define a profession include a core competency and ethic, professional certification, and self-regulation. The fact that all three qualities are absent from the Army Civilian Corps indicates that its members cannot qualify as members of the Army Profession.

Core Competency and Ethic

First and foremost, the *sine qua non* of any profession is a core competency—that is, the unique expertise that defines the profession. The core competency must involve a body of knowledge essential to the practice of the profession. For example, the core competency of the medical profession is medicine or healthcare; for the legal profession, it is law; and for the engineering profession, it is engineering. In the general sense of the Army Profession, its core competency is land warfare or, to use specific the language of the CAPE study, “the design, generation, support, and application of land combat power.”⁶ Just as every doctor’s core competency is medicine, and every lawyer’s core competency is law, so too the core competency of every military officer is land warfare.

A core competency requires years of very specific experience and education to master. Notwithstanding any differences in military occupation, branch, or

career field, every professional soldier and officer learns a universal set of combat skills and basic tactics. In the same way that a doctor enters a residency for further practice after the completion of medical school, Army officers and noncommissioned officers undergo years of key assignments and follow-on schools in order to develop this professional expertise.

Complementing the Army’s core competency is the code of ethics, which reaffirms the bond of trust between the members of the profession and the client. Although one might argue that a code of ethics is separate from and independent of a core competency, I argue that in the professional sense neither a core competency nor a code of ethics can exist without the other.⁷ Whereas, the core competency describes what expertise the profession will dispense to the client, the codes of ethics describe the manner in which the profession will dispense this expertise. The code of ethics represents the base value system that all members of the profession must meet.

The Army code of ethics is embodied in oaths of enlistment and commissioning, academy honor codes, the Code of Conduct for service members, creeds for non-commissioned officers and officers, and in the Army Values and Warrior Ethos. Although these creeds and others appeared in writing at various periods in history, their appearance merely codified those values that already existed in the Army’s professional ethic.

In addressing the question of civilians in the Army Profession, the problem is this: The DA Civilian Corps possesses no core competency and associated code of ethics. Unlike the legal, medical, or military professions, there is not a sole area of expertise that the DA Civilian Corps dispenses. Apart from a number of military retirees who now occupy its ranks, the DA Civilian Corps neither possesses nor pursues the expertise necessary to prosecute land warfare. For those who advocate Army civilians as members of the profession, this is a troubling prospect. What role then do the DA civilians play?

All professions contain a number of associates, people who serve the profession or work in the profession but who are not members of the profession *per se*. Legal secretaries, clerks, and administrative assistants, for example, may provide specific services to their supported professions, but these services are by no means unique. While lawyers are trained and possess the core

competencies to perform these same services, legal secretaries are not competent to practice law. Once again, this status does not marginalize the contributions any of these occupations may make to the professions they serve. It simply indicates that as associates of a particular profession, they are not members of that profession.

Army civilians are not competent to perform the duties of their uniformed counterparts. Instead, they provide a service to the Army that is neither unique nor defined by any particular core competency.⁸ While many DA civilians—such as doctors, engineers, and other specialists—are distinct members of other professions, their technical expertise is only tangentially related to the prosecution of land warfare and is insufficient to qualify them in the Army Profession itself. Therefore, without a core competency, the DA Civilian Corps cannot claim to be part of any profession.

In bolstering the point with regard to DA civilians, the CAPE study directed attention to the governing code of ethics embodied in Title 10 standards of conduct as well as the civilian oath of office and Army Civilian Corps Creed. Pointing out their similarities with military oaths and creeds, the study claimed that these vignettes were sufficient to justify a professional ethic for the Army Civilian Corps.⁹ Even if one accepts the CAPE's claim as valid, a professional ethic also requires a degree of enforcement throughout the self-regulation of the profession, which will be explained further.

Professional Certification

Complementing the definition of a profession is the requirement for certification. Licensure confers the legal authority to practice most professions and certifies the expert knowledge to meet regulatory guidelines. An academic degree is often not sufficient in itself to meet this qualification. The government or licensing agency may require a further assessment to ensure that the aspiring members have achieved sufficient mastery of the skills required to serve in the profession safely and responsibly. Engineers hold in high esteem a professional license that requires years of application and study before one is allowed to take a licensing exam. Lawyers pass a grueling bar exam for the authority to practice law. Such is the case with most other professions.

In the Army, both officers and enlisted soldiers undergo certification multiple times in their careers through specialized schools that simultaneously teach

and assess mastery of required knowledge, combat skills, leadership, and fitness—all of which certify the members' sustained permission to engage in land warfare. The Army's periodic reassessment of its members parallels that of other professions that require continued education in order to maintain certification.

In a true profession, certification is earned and maintained only upon meeting regulatory requirements, mastering required knowledge, and adhering to standards of conduct, all of which are prescribed in the profession's core competency and ethic. It is the profession's self-regulation that oversees the issuance and maintenance of this certification. Although the CAPE study alluded several times to "certification" of civilian employees, it offered little in terms of specific examples. What then exactly certifies a DA civilian? And what happens if the civilian does not adhere to those certification requirements? The CAPE study was a bit vague on this issue.¹⁰ In fact, there exists no certification that distinguishes a DA civilian from any other type of federal employee. Additionally, if a DA civilian fails to meet the regulatory or ethical standards, there exists no process to decertify that person. This point brings me to the last section, that of regulation of the profession, because certification is such an important process through which the Army Profession regulates itself.

Regulation of the Profession

The previously discussed qualities of core competency, ethic, and certification require one final quality to bind them together. This quality is the ability of the profession to regulate itself—to enforce the core competency and ethic and to issue certification on their basis. For example, a state bar association uses certification to enforce legal ethics and determines baseline educational requirements in the legal profession. In the case of engineering, each state's board of professional regulation manages testing standards and issues engineering licenses. State regulatory authorities draw on the expertise of senior members of each profession to determine certification requirements. It is through the control of standards and licensure in the enforcement of the core competency and ethic that these regulatory bodies provide one more vital service: control of entrance to and exit from the profession.¹¹

Entrances to and exits from the profession are crucial to its regulation. The gates of the profession do not



(Army photo by Dave Palmer, U.S. Garrison Red Cloud)

Col. Jack Haefner, commander, U.S. Army Garrison Red Cloud and Area I, honors three garrison employees for their professionalism in the public works field 30 September 2014. The three honorees are Roland Langford, the Directorate of Public Works Garrison Support Executive of the Year; Marshall Downs, the DPW Operations and Maintenance Executive of the Year; and, Yun Heo, the William C. Gribble DPW Executive of the Year in the 2013 Army-level DPW Award Program.

refer to the simple matter of changing jobs but to that of changing professions. When a doctor changes jobs within the field of medicine, does he or she cease being a doctor? Regardless of the specific form of employment, the doctor maintains a certified level of competency and trust with the patient. In cases of malpractice or ethical violations, the doctor may become decertified and thereby removed from the profession. That removal is performed by the governing body of the profession, so it is in this manner that the profession regulates itself.

The Army controls entrance to the profession through its academies and commissioning systems, basic training, and developmental assignments. The control of entrances is crucial to the Army Profession because the Army cannot simply hire an officer or noncommissioned officer off the street—no more than a hospital can hire a doctor who has not graduated from medical school. The core competencies involved in war fighting are so technical that they require a significant level of schooling before one can even begin work at the basic level. This is not the case with the DA Civilian Corps. The federal system is arranged such that an employee

can start at virtually any grade if the employee possesses a commensurate level of experience. The requirement for significant technical experience refers only to those civilians who produce technical services such as doctors, engineers, and scientists, and who are by default members of a technical nonmilitary profession.

Exits from the Army Profession are formal procedures involving a discharge, which in extreme cases may be accompanied by a criminal penalty or loss of commission. But otherwise, changing jobs within the Army does nothing to diminish the professional status of the soldier. Departure from the military also occurs at set career intervals during which officers and noncommissioned officers are assessed, and a failure in the assessment may result in exit from the Army Profession. The Army's "up or out" promotion system requires that its members achieve a specified level of technical and ethical competency within a finite time frame. Those individuals who fail to do so are then removed from the profession.

Once a soldier has been discharged, he or she is no longer a soldier and acquires a very different status in



(Photo by Jacqueline Van Pool, 401st Field Support Brigade)

Brig. Gen. Les J. Carroll, commanding general of Joint Sustainment Command–Afghanistan, presents the Defense of Freedom Medal to Aaron Ardon, a Department of the Army civilian from Red River Army Depot, at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. Ardon was presented the award after being wounded in a rocket attack on his compound. The medal is the civilian equivalent to a Purple Heart and is awarded to honor civilian employees of the Department of Defense injured or killed in the line of duty.

the legitimate application of warfare. This brings us back to the issue of the DA civilian. The Geneva Convention categorizes DA civilians as noncombatants. They may not employ weapons except in self-defense and, for all practical purposes, may not engage in land warfare. The CAPE study was careful to address this legal distinction by separating the Army Profession into two components: the Army Profession of Arms and the DA Civilian Corps. But by making this distinction, the CAPE study is forced to admit that the DA Civilian Corps is removed from the core competency of land warfare.¹²

With regard to control of entrances and exits, the DA Civilian Corps has no more controls than any other part of the federal service. The requirements for employment are identical to those of other federal agencies, and DA civilians who transfer into or out of the Department of the Army acquire or relinquish no special status except in title.

For enforcing the core competency and ethic of the DA Civilian Corps, assuming that either exist in the first place, the federal system has no such provisions. This is not to say that federal workers are incompetent or

unethical. Rather, the civilian employment system does not manage these qualities nor fire employees for failing in either area. Missed promotions or loss of employment due to poor performance are specific to a job and are neither treated as exits from a profession nor related to the Army Profession's core competency and ethic.

The conclusion, therefore, is that the DA Civilian Corps is indistinguishable from the remainder of the federal workforce. It contains no core competency itself and is unqualified to manage the Army's core competency of land warfare. Even if one accepts the premise that a core competency and ethic for the DA Civilian Corps truly exist, there is no provision in the employment system to enforce either one. In other words, the DA Civilian Corps does not meet the definition of a profession.

The DA Civilian Corps

The CAPE's argument that Army civilians now rate as members of the Army Profession simply does not hold up. A desire to be all-inclusive with regard to military and civilian personnel is not a sufficient provision

to become so, and the CAPE's revised definition fails to remedy the problem.

Essentially, what the DA Civilian Corps lacks are the prerequisite qualities of a profession—first and foremost, a core competency and ethic. This core competency represents the specific technical knowledge of the field for which all of its members must achieve proficiency. The ethic provides a framework in which to apply that knowledge. In this case, the services provided by government civilians are neither sufficiently unique that the Army cannot provide them for itself nor do they require any specialized knowledge inherent to the Army Profession. With no core competency from which to draw upon, there

exists no standard to professionally certify members of the DA Civilian Corps. And even if a standard were to exist, neither the Army nor the federal system controls entrance and exit in such a way as to regulate civilians as members of the profession.¹³

This is not to say that the DA civilians provide no value to the force. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown, they most certainly do. But what is key to understanding the relationship between the civilians and military members is that the value civilians provide is routine and not unique. It is more accurate to say that while not strictly members of the Army Profession, DA civilians support the Army Profession through the services they provide. ■

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Notes

1. Sean Hannah, "Profession of Arms Campaign Information Paper #1," Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE), 8 Dec 2010, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcape.army.mil%2Frepository%2Fproarms%2Fprofessioncampaign_infopaper.pdf&ei=tv7IVM63L8ijgwSemlOQAg&usg=AFQjCNEHnYFP7eb-FekY0CzhVvlBRdY3C-w&bvm=bv.84607526,d.eXY (accessed 28 January 2015); CAPE, *The Army Profession: 2012 After More than a Decade of Conflict* (Schatz Publishing Group, Oct 2011), 30, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16040coll2/id/4> (accessed 28 January 2015); CAPE, "White Paper: The Army Civilian Corps—A Vital Component of the Army Profession," 1 Feb 2012, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcape.army.mil%2Frepository%2Fwhite-papers%2FArmy-Civilian-Corps-A-Vital-Component-of-the-AP.pdf&ei=vQHJVLyAA4nFggTSj4H4Ag&usg=AFQjCNG2jR-mIVfjTLVd4lLz8B1_BSI02Q&bvm=bv.84607526,d.eXY (accessed 28 January 2015).

2. Richard A. Lacquement Jr., "Integrating Civilian and Military Activities," *Parameters* (Spring 2010): 20-33. The author discusses military and civilian interaction in counterinsurgency operations.

3. "White Paper," 5.

4. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 19-20, 119; Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), 9 and 11; John Winthrop Hackett, *The Profession of Arms: The 1962 Lees Knowles lectures given at Trinity College, Cambridge*

(Cambridge UK: Trinity College, 1962); Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews, *The Future of the Army Profession, 2nd Ed.* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005); Suzanne C. Nielson and Don M. Snider, ed., *American Civil Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

5. Don M. Snider, "Once Again, the Challenge to the U.S. Army During a Defense Reduction: To Remain a Military Profession," (Strategic Studies Institute Professional Military Ethics Monograph, February 2012), 4, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1097.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2015).

6. *White Paper*, 5.

7. Richard A. Gabriel, *To Serve with Honor: A Treatise on Military Ethics and the Way of the Soldier* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 19-49, 105.

8. Snider, 18. The author makes this distinction between a profession, which works with expert knowledge to complete unique non-repetitive tasks, and that of a simple government organization, which works with nonexpert knowledge to efficiently complete repetitive tasks, such as the management of the Army bureaucracy.

9. *The Army Profession*, 46; "White Paper," Francis J. Harvey, Department of the Army Memorandum, *The Army Civilian Corps*, 19 June 2006, <http://cpol.army.mil/library/general/acc-memo.html> (accessed 28 January 2015).

10. *The Army Profession*, 24-25.

11. Snider, 23. The author provides a discussion on self-regulation.

12. *The Army Profession*, 9.

13. *Ibid.*, 15.