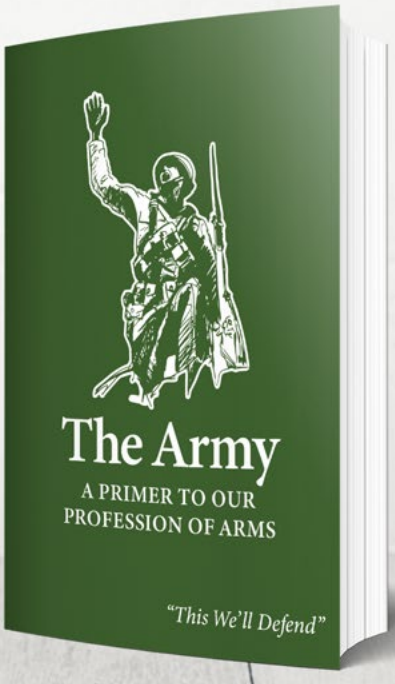
# Field Manual 1

## *The Army: A Primer to Our Profession of Arms*

U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2025, 104 pages

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Teaching an institutional history of the U.S. Army to first semester West Point cadets has been cathartic—it has helped me to make sense of my decade of service within the organization's broader history. The latest field manual (FM)—FM 1, *The Army: A Primer to Our Profession of Arms*—offers that sense-making to young Army leaders in an accessible manner that can be digested in less than two hours of reading. It is something I wish I had as a newly commissioned lieutenant.

Published in May 2025 and intended "for every leader and potential leader who aims to serve well and honorably," FM 1 is a responsible work of inculcation that clearly defines what it means to be a soldier, how the Army is organized, and how it fits into a network of teams from the joint level and beyond.[1] Organized into three sections—"An American Soldier," "What Our Army Does," and "Obligations of Our Army"—FM 1 is eminently readable and filled with anecdotes that convey conventional and less conventional conceptions of what it means to be a warrior, professional, and leader. Its strengths are the stirring vignettes, an emphasis on being a good teammate at all echelons, and a clear introduction to the Army's organization, doctrine, and missions. Ultimately, this is a worthwhile and meaningful primer. Even so, the manual could be improved in three key ways: by tempering its expression of U.S. Army exceptionalism, expanding its consideration of the Army's missions, and emphasizing critical thinking in its leaders. In offering these critiques, my intent is to strengthen future versions of the manual based on my experience as an officer in the operating force and as an instructor teaching the Army's history to cadets.

The chapters on what it means to be "An American Soldier" strongly convey an aspirational model of professional warrior leaders but also espouse a problematic exceptionalism (i.e., a claim that we are somehow different from all other nations' armed forces). Chapter 2 asserts that "American Soldiers are unique" because we "do not ascribe to principles of terror and ruthlessness," and that because we are charged with fighting "aggressively but discerningly," it ensures that our soldiers are "always 'the good guys.'"[2] This claim to uniqueness

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is inaccurate—our NATO allies, among others, also aspire to this ideal. Further, if uncritically read, the idea that American soldiers are always the good guys (if they try to be discerning) risks justifying or rationalizing unethical actions in support of a mission and can lead to overconfidence that undermines mission success. Merely intending to defend American values does not inherently uphold them. FM 1 does acknowledge that American soldiers have fallen short of the standard for ethical action, but I encourage future versions to highlight the actions of soldiers who have acted to uphold those values even when others have not.[3] The actions of Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, a helicopter pilot who intervened at My Lai to prevent American soldiers from killing more Vietnamese civilians, could illustrate both the shortcomings and the type of bravery we want soldiers to exemplify.[4]

The section titled "What Our Army Does" concisely explains the Army's mission and structure—but misses a critical component. Congress, in Title 10, section 7062, lays out a much broader remit for the Army than warfighting. I recommend including it in full in the appendix:

> It is the intent of Congress to provide an Army that is capable, in conjunction with other armed forces of—(1) preserving the peace and security, and providing for the defense, of the United States, the Commonwealths and possessions, and any areas occupied by the United States; (2) supporting the national policies; (3) implementing the national objectives; and (4) overcoming any nations responsible for aggressive acts that imperil the peace and security of the United States.[5]

While chapter 4 details some Army tasks under Defense Support of Civil Authority, it does not address many missions the Army has regularly been called upon to do. Specifically, it does not address training and advising missions (which the U.S. Army has been engaged in since the Philippine-American War of 1899–1902) and occupation, peacekeeping, and constabulary duties (which the U.S. Army has been involved in since the American Revolution). Including these missions is not meant to detract from warfighting or from preparing for it; it ensures that leaders engaging in such missions do not see them as a distraction from the real mission—but as *the* mission, which is whatever they might be called upon to do by our elected leaders.

The concluding chapter, "This We'll Defend," notes that the Army is "charged with addressing some of the most challenging tasks our nation endeavors to accomplish" and exhorts its leaders to "get to work and do what we need to win"—but could do more to emphasize the need to be critical and reflective, especially of military advice and decisions that have not worked.[6] FM 1 asserts that to win requires tough, relentless soldiers who are professional and ethical and who lead efficiently and effectively.[7] Those qualities are not enough to win. FM 1 also needs to charge leaders with learning from where we have fallen short—especially from the missions we regularly do, not just from certain aspects of large-scale combat operations. Providing more anecdotes of army leaders as critical and reflective thinkers can help to address this gap. A good example would be Capt. Travis Patriquin's role in ensuring his brigade's support to Sunni tribes in Anbar Province as they developed police forces to target al-Qaida in Iraq in 2006.[8]

Ultimately, I was inspired by what the primer calls upon me to do as a leader in this storied—and learning—institution. Despite its shortcomings, FM 1 succeeds in providing foundational ideals for an army serving a free society, which, akin to what Abraham Lincoln said of the Declaration of Independence, should be "constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated."[9] ■

*The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not reflect the position of the United States Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.*

## Notes

1. Field Manual (FM) 1, *The Army: A Primer to Our Profession of Arms* (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2025), vii.

2. FM 1, *The Army*, 8–9.

3. FM 1, *The Army*, 8–9. FM 1 acknowledges instances where "the horrors of war" poisoned the judgment of soldiers, noting this happened at My Lai, Vietnam; Mahmudiyah, Iraq (actually Yusufiyah); and Maywand District, Afghanistan.

4. The actions of Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson and his crew are described in detail in Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Viking, 1992), 137–40. Another example to consider is Capt. Ian Fishback's repeated requests for clarification on orders regarding the detention policies in Iraq between 2003 and 2004, which eventually resulted in Sen. John McCain sponsoring the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005. See Eric Schmitt, "3 in 82nd Airborne Say Beating Iraqi Prisoners Was Routine," *New York Times*, 24 September 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/24/politics/3-in-82nd-airborne-say-beating-iraqi-prisoners-was-routine.html. A third is Pvt. Justin Watts's decision to report a war crime that members of his platoon had committed in March 2006 in Yusufiyah, Iraq; while the perpetrators were held accountable, Watts was alienated from his unit and faced death threats for years. See Saythala Lay Phonexayphova, "Lessons from Yusufiyah: From Black Hearts to Moral Education," *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (January-February 2016): 103–7, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art017.pdf. For more details on the incident and the response from the unit, see Jim Frederick, *Black Hearts: One Platoon's Descent into Madness in Iraq's Triangle of Death* (Random House, 2010).

5. Army Policy; Composition; Organized Peace Establishment, 10 U.S.C. § 7062 (2018), accessed 18 May 2025, https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title10-section7062&num=0&edition=prelim.

6. FM 1, *The Army*, 72.

7. FM 1, *The Army*, 72.

8. For more on Capt. Travis Patriquin, see William Doyle, *A Soldier's Dream: Captain Travis Patriquin and the Awakening of Iraq* (New American Library, 2011). For a more sober account of the lasting impacts of the Awakening, see Carter Malkasian, *Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

9. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, eds., *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 2 (Lincoln Memorial University, 1894), 331. This speech by Abraham Lincoln on 26 June 1857 was in response to the Dred Scott Supreme Court case in Springfield, Illinois.

US ISSN 0026-4148