



# What NCOs Need To Know About The New Tattoo Policy

By Clifford Kyle Jones — *NCO Journal*

**T**he Army has revised its tattoo policy again — the third time in just more than a year. On April 10, Army Regulation 670-1 was updated to remove restrictions on the number and size of tattoos on the forearm and the leg below the knee. Soldiers and recruits are now allowed appropriate tattoos of any size anywhere on their body except their head, neck and most of their hands (AR 670-1 allows one “ring” tattoo per hand.)

The release of AR 670-1 came less than two weeks after Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno announced that change was imminent during a news conference April 1 at the Association of the United States Army Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Ala.

“As part of the regular process that we go through in reviewing regulations covering the wear and appearance of the Army uniform and the appearance of our Soldiers, we will be releasing in the coming weeks an update to that policy,” Odierno said. “And the most notable change is going to be the change in the tattoo policy in the Army.”

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey seemed to have telegraphed the potential for the changes in the weeks preceding the announcement. Dailey took over

as sergeant major of the Army in January. Even during his first troop visit in early March to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., it was clear that many Soldiers were unhappy with the policy, which was revised in March last year to limit the number of new tattoos below the elbows and knees and scale back some allowances made in 2006, during the height of the surge in Iraq and Afghanistan.


















About a week after his visit to JBLM, Dailey was at Fort Bragg, N.C., where he opened his talk with Soldiers and their families by saying that he had some idea about the concerns they would raise.

“I’d bet my next paycheck that someone in here wants to talk about tattoos,” he said.

The new AR 670-1 includes a few other changes, as well. It authorizes Soldiers traveling commercially on official business to wear their Army Combat Uniforms. Previously, Soldiers had been required to wear their dress uniforms. The new regulation also clarifies the wear of Army uniforms at off-post establishments that sell alcohol — Soldiers may be in uniform when buying liquor at a liquor store, for instance, but not while drinking at a bar.

However, it was the new tattoo policy, first announced in March 2014 and then revised in September 2014, that had drawn the most attention — and ire.

## HOW TATTOO RESTRICTIONS HAVE CHANGED

RESTRICTIONS	PRE-SURGE	JAN-2006	MAR-2014	SEP-2014	NOW
Extremist or indecent					
Hands and back of neck					
Face and front of neck					
Below elbows and knees					
Seeking commission					

**Extremist or Indecent** — Tattoos determined to be extremist, indecent, sexist or racist have been consistently banned as contrary to the good order and discipline of the Army.

**Hands and back of neck** — Tattoos visible in the Class A uniform have been barred with the Jan-2006 exceptions allowed by a surge-era ALARACT. AR 670-1 now allows a ring tattoo on each hand.

**Face and front of neck** — Certain types of permanent makeup are the only types of tattoos that have ever been allowed on these areas of a Soldier's body.

**Below elbows and knees** — In March 2014, the number of new tattoos allowed below each elbow and knee were limited to four, and those could not exceed the size of a Soldier's palm.

**Seeking commission** — Until a Sep-2014 update to AR 670-1, enlisted personnel with tattoos outside the bounds of the new rules had to seek a waiver to apply for a commission.

After Odierno announced the latest changes, Dailey said, "You can't go anywhere without hearing about the Army's tattoo policy. It came up when I was at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (at Fort Bliss, Texas), too. So it's not just Soldiers, but leaders as well."

Dailey also said that "overwhelmingly," Soldiers have told him the tattoo policy would play a role in whether they stayed in the Army.

"So then we struggle with: Do the standards of discipline we've established override the needs of what we need to maintain the all-volunteer force, and the quality of the all-volunteer force?" he said. "When we move this

standard too far to the right, can we actually maintain the all-volunteer force in the future?"

When Dailey was at Fort Bragg, one Soldier told him that he would like the Army to return to the "pre-surge" standards, when tattoos were allowed as long they weren't visible while a Soldier wore his or her Class A uniform.

"Does that sound fair?" Dailey asked the room. He was met with a resounding "Hooah!" from the Soldiers in the room. And he and the secretary of the Army listened. ■

— The Army News Service contributed to this report.

**NCO JOURNAL**

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

