

Military Bearing - Projecting Confidence and a Command Presence

By Command Sgt. Maj. Naamon Grimmatt

1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division

Published in From One Leader to Another by the Combat Studies Institute in 2013

Jan. 8, 2018



Sgt. 1st Class Tolo Gbassage, a career counselor assigned to 16th Sustainment Brigade, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, demonstrates military bearing while being recognized as the top U.S. Army Europe career counselor during a ceremony held in Wiesbaden, Germany, Dec. 15, 2017. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Daniel Cole)

An Army's ability to fight and win its nations wars is not solely dependent on weapons and training alone. It also rest on the attitude or climate of units, leaders and Soldiers. Find a winning Army and you will find a positive climate; the opposite is true about a losing army. While an Army's climate is comprised of many factors, the most predominate is its military bearing, the way it conducts business from the top officers and noncommissioned officers down to the most junior Soldier. If an army possesses a positive climate at its heart, you will find a strong military bearing. Soldiers and leaders, who conduct themselves as professionals and do what is right regardless of the situation in which they find themselves, go the extra mile even when it would be easier not to in both peace and war.

Military bearing is conducting oneself in a professional manner to bring credit upon oneself and the Army at all times. It is the ability to project a commanding presence and confidence, uphold standards, and doing the hard right over the easy wrong in both good and bad situations both on and off duty. Simply acting the way Soldiers and leaders are expected to act, presenting a professional persona. Military bearing comes from pride in oneself, pride of being a Soldier, a leader and in service to the nation. The way a leader carries them self with the knowledge and understanding that military bearing is continuous and that his or her actions and military bearing will lead to criticism, both positive and negative. Understanding that their military bearing will define the way in which other leaders, Soldiers and the world views them. Accepting that military bearing does not end at the end of the duty day when the uniform is removed. Often the only contact the civilian population has with a Soldier is during off duty hours. This is when they will make their judgments and opinions about Soldiers and the Army in general.

Many times the first impression formed by a person or organization about a Soldier or the Army is from how Soldiers conduct themselves or by their military bearing, and first impressions do count! This is especially true when working with other branches of the Armed Forces or other

nations, just as your first impression of another branch or Army is the military bearing its leaders and Soldiers demonstrate. A bad first impression may affect how much you trust and respect you show that Soldier or organization and your attitude towards working with them. The same is true when conducting operations in foreign countries. The way your unit and its Soldiers conduct themselves while executing a mission will shape the way the indigenous population will receive and accept you and your unit's actions. Always keep in mind that your success in shaping this first impression is just as important as winning any of the battles which might follow.

A leader can get a sense of a unit's military bearing almost immediately when they take a look around. It does not matter if you're a team leader or command sergeant major, if the little discipline tarts are not being followed such as standing at "parade rest" when addressing an NCO, calling "at ease" when a senior NCO enters a room or the way NCOs and Soldiers conduct themselves when they think no one is watching. It is our job as NCOs to show a strong military bearing at all times and to instill it into our Soldiers by our example. It can be as simple as "do as I do, not as I say."

Why is having a strong military bearing important? Soldiers will always choose a leader to follow and that leader will either be good or bad. A leader's ability to maintain a strong sense of military bearing, though not always an easy task will have an immeasurable impact on Soldiers. A strong military bearing in a leader will instill pride in Soldiers. A strong military bearing among leaders will create a sense in the Soldiers that their leader is technically and tactically proficient and a true professional leader, a leader whom they can trust, respect and place their confidence in, a leader who will take care of them. They will want to follow and be like that leader.

As NCOs we must always encompass a strong military bearing and instill it into our Soldiers. In my first few days after taking position, I was walking around the battalion area and noticed three Soldiers standing in front of the headquarters chatting. Two had their backs to me and the third was either looking past the others or did not recognize me. As I approached them with the intent to get to know some of my Soldiers and ask about their experiences in the command I noticed that one had a hand in their pocket, another had both hands tucked into his trousers. As an NCO my blood pressure began to rise, I wanted nothing more than to go over and start yelling while at the same time directing a lot of push-ups and correct the problem like my NCOs would have done 20 years ago. However, as I got closer I noticed that the Soldier facing me was a sergeant, at first this really sent my blood pressure soaring and I moved faster towards them. As I was approaching, I began to think, if a sergeant is conducting himself like this and allowing this to happen there must be a problem with his military bearing. This is when I realized that if I carried out the plan I was forming in my head I would be the one who had lost military bearing. I decided to treat this as an opportunity to educate a junior NCO and these other Soldiers. Once I was standing within a few feet of the Soldiers I was noticed and all jumped to correct themselves. Needless to say all three received a one-way, first class lecture on military bearing. I would like to say that this was the only incident of poor military bearing I witnessed over the next few days but it was not. A few days later, I conducted my first NCO Professional Development with all of our sergeants and the topic was significance of strong military bearing and its impact on a unit.

Much the same way that a strong military bearing can motivate and create positive effects, a loss of military bearing can have a negative effect! Take for example the two Soldiers standing with the NCO. The Soldiers were just following this NCO's example. If he did not care about his military bearing or standards then why should they? The leader that lacks a strong military bearing also risks losing the trust, confidence and most important, the respect of their Soldiers and superiors as well. The loss of military bearing has led to leaders being relieved of their duties. Once respect and confidence in a leader's ability is lost, it is a hard, long struggle to gain it back if ever fully regained. A leader's poor military bearing influences, already negative in nature, will have a plague-like infection on future leaders because the current generation of Soldiers, the leadership of tomorrow's Army, will only be following the example set by their past leaders.

Military bearing is not a task that Soldiers learn in training. There are many references to assist in the study of military bearing. The NCO creed is an excellent guide to follow. The first sentence says it all, "No one is more professional than I." Other references include ADRP 6-22 (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/adrp6_22.pdf), Army Leadership. However, studying is not enough. Military bearing is something learned over time by accepting and living by the Army values and perhaps most importantly observing leaders who demonstrate and act with a strong sense of military bearing while also being part of a unit with a climate that boosts a strong overall military bearing. We must set the example now, starting with leaders. These traits will then transfer into the essentials of a good Army, its ability to train, fight and win for generations to come, as Soldiers who had leaders with strong military bearing to emulate become leaders themselves and inspire their Soldiers.