



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Logan Neely mentors Spc. Jessica Cortina, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 13th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, while performing preventive maintenance checks and services on their tactical vehicle at Fort Hood, Texas, Aug. 17, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kelvin Ringold)

The NCO Creed

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Simply reciting the NCO Creed is not impressive. What is impressive? The ability to live by the NCO Creed 24/7. —Command Sgt. Maj. Bryan A. Pinkney, Fires Center of Excellence Center of Excellence, NCOA Commandant

Well before the inception of the NCO Creed at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the formalization of the NCO Creed into an official Army publication in 1985, noncommissioned officers had long maintained the charge of caring for Soldiers and their equipment in order to accomplish the mission. Baron von Stueben's *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, written in 1778 and 1779, captured historical precedence for what is known today as, "the two basic responsibilities of the noncommissioned officer; accomplishment of the mission and the welfare of Soldiers."

General Raymond T. Odierno, our 38th Chief of Staff of the Army, could not be more correct identifying that, "the strength of our Army is our Soldiers." Regardless of advances in technology or weapon systems, the American Soldier,

more specifically the NCO, will remain a key element to training, leading Soldiers, and winning our Nation's wars.

One could easily make the argument that at no other point or time in the Army's history has an NCO's understanding and application of the NCO Creed been more important. With today's 24-hour news coverage, multimedia outlets, and technological advances, the NCO's duties and responsibilities clearly have strategic implications.

Marine Corps Gen. Charles C. Krulak captured the importance of small unit leaders in his article *The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War*. In it, he refers to, "...the inescapable lessons of Somalia and other more recent humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and traditional operations, where outcomes hinged on decisions made by small-unit leaders." Krulak continues,



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 1297th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion recite the Charge of the Noncommissioned Officer during an NCO induction ceremony at the Havre De Grace Readiness Center, Havre De Grace, Maryland, June 13, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Arcadia Jackson)

“In these situations the individual NCO was the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy and influenced not only the immediate tactical situation but also the operational and strategic levels as well.”

Putting this into perspective, I would offer the unthinkable effects from the actions or inaction of leaders at the Abu-Ghraib Prison in Iraq. Undoubtedly there were NCOs who knew unethical actions were taking place at the prison. By allowing these actions to transpire, these leaders failed to conduct themselves in ways that would bring credit to the Corps, the Army, and our Country.

Through their inability to demonstrate moral courage - by allowing these actions to occur - these NCOs made direct contributions toward extending hostilities in Iraq, furthered the mistrust of the Iraqi people, and eroded the trust of our Army's senior leaders. Most importantly, the second and third order of effects of this grievous failure contributed to the additional loss of American Soldiers.

By virtue of their duties, NCO's have the authority, ability, and moral responsibility to positively affect the mission at every given point, whether those missions are in the hills of Afghanistan, the horn of Africa, or preparing Soldiers for the next Joint Readiness Training Center rotation. NCOs must strive to live by the NCO creed constantly to serve as role models for other Soldiers. Application of the NCO Creed cannot stop at the end of a duty day, nor does it stop on weekends or holidays.

Too often we have examples of NCOs setting the wrong or poor example rather than a positive example. During any given week at any given installation, one only needs to review the blotter report to see examples of indiscipline. Our young and impressionable Soldiers will key into leader's actions, at all levels. We cannot allow NCOs to only maintain a spit shined and lustrous career

on duty, and then dishonor the NCO Corps while presumably “off duty.”

I often discuss with NCOs attending NCO Education System [now known as NCO Professional Development System] courses the importance of Army leader attributes, values, and how NCOs must continuously reinforce them. Simply because a Soldier has completed Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training does not mean he or she is completely inculcated with the Army values. The first line leader must pick up and continue that mantle of training and systematically instill and strengthen the Army values throughout a Soldier's career.

From my perspective, values are best taught by example. From an early age in my family, the response to an elder was always “Yes Sir, No Ma-am” or “Yes Ma-am, No Sir” depending on the context. To translate

that particular value, one could compare the custom of standing at “parade rest” while addressing an NCO, senior to a subordinate or standing at “attention” while addressing a commissioned officer until put “at ease.” These are examples of our customs and courtesies and they reinforce a simple principle - the value of respect. As we earn the respect of the officers appointed over us and the Soldiers within our organizations, NCOs help to systematically strengthen our “Profession of Arms.”

While it is possible an NCO's sphere of influence may have impact at the strategic level, it is crucial NCOs concentrate their maximum efforts on direct leadership; the first-line leader must be able to successfully influence their Soldier's decisions and actions in both the garrison and operational environments. *Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22: Army Leadership* [Now ADP 6-22: *Army Leadership and the Profession*] defines influence as, “the essential element of leadership.”

For Soldiers, at any given point in a career and especially at a time that our Army is engaged in persistent conflict, the balance of strategic outcomes may come to rest on his or her shoulders. The influence imparted through an NCOs leadership will guide the Soldier's actions (or inaction) that they may or may not take on the battlefield. Therefore, the responsibilities inherent in the role of the NCO are paramount.

Although not specifically mentioned in the NCO Creed, dignity and respect resound throughout every paragraph of the NCO Creed. As we move forward to the Army of 2020, it is imperative leaders take full responsibility for their actions. It is essential Soldiers, regardless of their race, gender, religious affiliation, or cultural differences be treated in a manner that fosters a positive professional climate both in garrison and in combat.

The American public has entrusted the lives of their sons and daughters to our NCO Corps. We have an obligation to maintain that trust, to place our Soldier's needs above our own, to communicate to our Soldiers in both words and deeds, and to provide the leadership Soldiers rightly deserve.

The American people are not the only ones who have empowered the NCO with their trust. The commissioned officer's primary role is to command units, establish policy, and manage resources while balancing risks and caring for their people and families. This can only be accomplished with the complete confidence that their NCOs will fulfill their role.

The commissioned officer must be able to maintain a tremendous amount of confidence, trust, and faith in their NCO Corps. Then, and only then will, "Officers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties, they will not have to accomplish mine." Some will suggest our Army is the greatest land combat force in the history of the world. In order to remain that premier, dominate force across the breadth of unified land operations, the NCO Corps must constantly coach, develop, mentor, teach, and train our Soldiers. Only through these full time lines of effort will our Army continue to achieve decisive results.



(U.S. Army photo by Paolo Bovo taken Jan. 22, 2020) A U.S. Army squad leader with the 173rd Airborne Brigade reviews a target with a Soldier to improve accuracy during weapons qualification at Cao Malnisio Range, Pordenone, Italy, Jan. 22, 2020.

Out of every Field Manual, Army Doctrinal Publication, there is one document that serves as the bedrock, the source of inspiration when the rules of engagement become clouded or the proverbial "nugget in the NCO's toolbox;" that source without a doubt is the NCO Creed. "No one is more professional than I." To merely recite these words, is a bold statement, a statement that garners respect, trust, and confidence.

However, to recite this statement or the entire NCO Creed is nowhere nearly enough, we must live the NCO Creed 24/7. Then and only then can NCOs rest assured that regardless of what we may face on the battlefield, our efforts, our Soldier's actions, and the conduct of our unit's performance will be in keeping with the finest traditions of military service.

The following references will give every NCO a comprehensive understanding of how truly important an NCO's actions, character, words, and demeanor impact the mission: *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* by Baron von Steuben, *The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War* by Gen. Charles C. Krulak published in *Marines Magazine* (1999), and *Educating the Strategic Corporal: A Paradigm Shift* by Kevin D. Stringer published in *Military Review* (September - October 2009). ■

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