



(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Timothy Hamlin taken April 27, 2020) U.S. Army Soldiers, assigned to the Cobra Battery, Field Artillery Squadron, 2d Cavalry Regiment, conduct artillery emplacement drills in support of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland in Bemowo Piskie, Poland, April 27, 2020.

Standards and Discipline

An In-Depth Look at Where We Once Were and Where We Are Now

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Published in From One Leader to Another Volume I by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in 2013

As an introduction to this short article, it is important to mention up front that compiling letters from senior leaders in the field who are out doing the Nation's business (leading and taking care of young Soldiers and their Families) is an extremely worthwhile endeavor. In addition to applauding this effort, it is important to note that speaking on many of these topics is extraordinarily necessary based on the strength and health of today's Army.

It is fitting in many respects to discuss *standards and*

discipline in our Army today. The intention here is to discuss this topic briefly from a chronological perspective specifically highlighting how standards and discipline have become a hallmark of our organization as an Army and how they have evolved over the years during the conduct of multiple wars and conflicts resulting in the very foundation that we stand upon both today and into tomorrow.

A little over 237 years ago, our Army was established as a result of a fierce start of the Revolutionary War between our fledging union (the United States as we

know it) and the British Empire. Over the course of the Revolutionary War, led by Gen. George Washington, our Army fought in battles against a much larger and more technically and tactically advanced army. Our Army faced significant shortfalls and suffered many defeats at the hands of a seemingly superior force, at least in the initial stages of the war. As the revolution progressed, the Americans, as they became known, were significantly challenged by the lack of funding, equipment, personnel, formal training, and were literally considered to be “misfits” fighting against trained professionals.

Recognizing this, Gen. Washington with the help of Benjamin Franklin, then minister to France, made contact with Baron Frederick von Steuben, a former Prussian officer who was well renowned for his superior organizational skills. Von Steuben was hired by Washington to serve as the first Inspector General of the Army, with the primary responsibility of structuring, organizing and training the Army. Von Steuben quickly went to work. He would write doctrine in the evening and train small formations of Soldiers by day on drill commands that were at the time closely associated with placing weapon systems into operation and fighting formations.

As he trained more of these Soldiers across the Army on manual-of-arms and drill, Washington began to recognize a significant increase in discipline across the force and it showed in ensuing battles along what we now call the east coast, including the Battle of Valley Forge and many others. Von Steuben continued this effort by training organizational leaders who would then train their small units.

In 1789, Von Steuben formalized this training when he developed what was called the *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, commonly referred to as the “Blue Book.” This document became the mainstay of our Army and was not modified until the Civil War. Even though this manual, which later became the Manual for Drill and Ceremonies, was modified slightly during the Civil War, many of the tenants from the initial book remain to this day as a part of we now refer to as “Drill and Ceremony.”

As the standards and discipline of units improved, so did the success of the American Army eventually leading to victory over the British. As our Army continued to

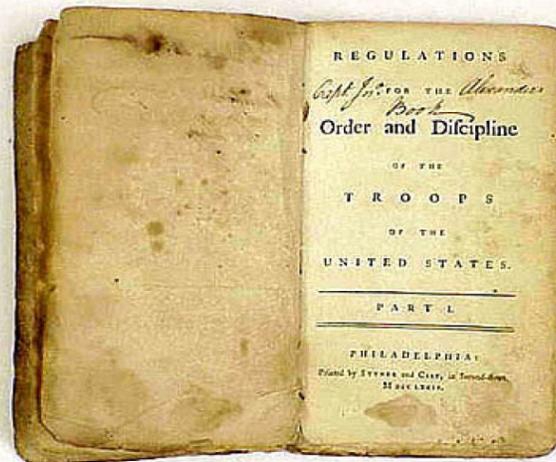
mature and take on a larger role across the globe, standards and discipline would become the very core that would separate our Army from other fighting forces around the world; often viewed by other countries as the “Gold Standard” of an Army with respect to standards and discipline. The other armies often looked at how we marched in formation, how we were consistently in the same uniform, and how strong and tactically savvy our leaders were. All of these spoke to our standards and discipline.

Fast-forward to the late 1960s and early 1970s where the noncommissioned officer became much more formally recognized with the creation of the Sergeant Major of the Army, the Noncommissioned Officer Education System, and an “All Volunteer Army” in 1973. All of these changes and more had a significant impact on the standards and discipline of our Army. No longer did NCOs feel like they were less prepared or educated; in fact, with new schooling they felt even more empowered. This resulted in improved standards and discipline across the force creating better productivity and thus stronger and healthier organizations across the Army.

Standards and discipline are often referenced together because they work in conjunction with one another in order for an organization to be successful, especially a military organization. George Washington once said “Discipline is the soul of an Army, it makes small numbers formidable; procures success of the weak and esteem to all.”

Great organizations are ones that exude and enforce standards and discipline much better than average organizations. The term “standard” is defined by the *American Standard Dictionary* as a written definition, limit, or rule, approved and monitored for compliance by an authoritative agency or professional or recognized body as minimum acceptable benchmark. Standards may be classified as (1) government or statutory agency standards and specifications enforced by law, (2) proprietary standards developed by a firm or organization and placed in public domain to encourage their widespread use, (3) voluntary standards established by consultation and consensus and available for use by any person, organization, or industry.

These terminologies spark some degree of interest as they represent just one perspective, none of which are



The Blue Book remained the official guide to military training and maneuvers until it was replaced in 1812. (U.S. Army photo)



(U.S. Army photo by Patrick A. Albright taken April 21, 2020) U.S. Army trainees with the 198th Infantry Brigade conduct urban operations room-to-room clearing, at Buchanan Range, Fort Benning Georgia, April 21, 2020.

incorrect. Once established, standards (like bureaucracies) can be very difficult to change or dislodge as they become habit. As this document develops, the intent is to draw a parallel to both of these terms and explain how vital they both are to our Army's evolution and to one another. Establishment of standards represents a very good starting point for any organization.

Discipline or *military discipline* as it is often referred, is defined as the state of order and obedience among personnel in a military organization and is characterized by the Soldiers' prompt and willing responsiveness to orders and understanding compliance to regulation. Often, non-military members view all uniformed military services as organizations that have a very strict set of rules where it takes an enormous amount of discipline to thrive. Much of the perception that the Army is a very disciplined organization is true; from the time a civilian makes the choice to become a Soldier until that new Soldier walks across the parade field as they graduate from Basic training, discipline is a focal point in their training.

Over the course of our 237 year history, it has been proven time and again that discipline is the difference between winning and losing, between average and exceptional. Once standards are established in an organization, it takes discipline to follow and enforce those standards both individually and collectively. Although this might seem straight forward and relatively easy to accomplish, it can be much more difficult to achieve in practice. Using a brigade combat team (BCT) as an example, it is easy to see how difficult this can be.

The Army Force Generation Cycle has a considerable impact on the life of a BCT as it comes out of the Reintegration/Reset Phase and transitions to the Train/Ready Phase. In the Train/Ready Phase, the unit begins individual training and eventually works up to collective training culminating with some type of battalion level training

and most often than not, on to one of the three Combat Training Center rotations (JRTC, NTC, or JMRC). All of this training occurs over a period of time, some in a shorter time period than others. Over the course of this "train up", units that establish clear standards and have leaders that enforce those standards are normally the units that ultimately perform well at these CTC. The standards and discipline if established early in this cycle and enforced correctly result in units that are successful in their rotation and are extremely successful during combat operations. Units that fail to focus on standards and discipline often find themselves reacting to situations rather than preparing for their future mission. Wearing eye protection at all times during combat operations, carrying your rifle at the "Ready" vice slung over your back, a unit that is physically fit, a unit that has superior marksmanship skills, and a unit that conducts innovative, realistic and challenging training are all examples of disciplined units. Albeit these examples seem small and minute, they are undoubtedly the difference between an average organization and one that breeds strong disciplined leaders with high standards. In the book *About Face*, by Col. David Hackworth, he writes "The Army got rid of offending traditions, it did not replace these traditions with anything that fulfilled their basic and essential functions... to instill standards and discipline... if the Army expected its men to be effective on the battlefield, even to stay alive on the battlefield, discipline had to be the number one priority". An organization that has strong practices of standards and discipline are very successful.

Over the past 10 years, our Army has been involved in fighting and winning two wars against a very determined enemy and during the course of that time period, we as an institution have seen significant innovation across many fronts; recruitment and retention, centralized and semi-centralized promotions, functional training, professional military education, barracks/housing policies, physical readiness training, countless pieces of new equipment/technology and much more that have to a large degree, unintentionally degraded the overall standards and discipline of our Army while increasing the need for leadership that is focused on training. So what is it that we must do to re-acquaint ourselves with what made us so successful prior to our current fight? First, we cannot solely attribute the degradation in our level of standards and discipline to our fight abroad, something which we have done extremely well. The mid-level leaders we currently have in our formations are much stronger at training, preparing and performing in combat, but lack many of the garrison type skills that were present in our formations in the 1990s. One might pose the question, "well which attribute is more important to have?" The short answer is both, and the next question could be, "how can we show this generation of mid-level leaders that the 'garrison-type functions' are important?" The short answer would be to show them with hands-on application.

Make them conduct frequent inspections of their Soldier's barracks/housing. Make them lay out their OCIE along with their Soldiers. Make them conduct an in-ranks inspection of their Soldier's appearance and uniform, both utility and dress. Make them march their Soldiers from one point to another on a regular basis and not just whenever there is some type of ceremony. Make them counsel their Soldiers monthly/quarterly. Make and show them how to prepare for a Command Inspection. Make and show them how to keep common areas cleaned without the help of contractors or others. Make and show them that competing for Soldier/NCO of the Month/Quarter/Year is a "good thing."

Show them that their personal and professional conduct and behavior represents more than just themselves and is representative of the U.S. Army. Lastly, help them develop the intestinal fortitude to make on-the-spot corrections when necessary as this is essential to the standards and discipline of an organization. All of these and many more need to happen while allowing subordinate leaders the maximum latitude to operate. This is accomplished by assigning them responsibility and holding them accountable without overly managing their work.

Establishing and enforcing standards and discipline is the key to an organization's overall success and should be treated in such a way that every member of the organization understands those standards and that they are committed individually and collectively to those standards. If you can find an organization which is highly successful in combat, chances are they are one that has high standards and have strong enforcement of discipline at every level.

Aristotle once wrote "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit...so then if we repeatedly practice high standards and discipline, and it is



(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James Geelen taken Aug. 8, 2019) U.S. Army Spc. Zyandriana Doss, a petroleum supply specialist, 68th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 4th Sustainment Brigade guards the perimeter from his fighting position during training at Camp Red Devil, Fort Carson, Colorado, Aug. 8, 2019.

the creation of those habits that enable us to defeat a determined and audacious enemy."

Leaders at every level should take time to train and mentor young Soldiers and leaders on a united front to continue to emphasize that standards and discipline are the hallmark of our Army. Even though this initiative is directed in order to address the rising concerns of our senior leaders, we should all remain confident that our Nation possesses the most lethal and professional force that this world has ever known and that we have more than enough seasoned leaders within our ranks to coach, teach and mentor our aspiring professionals on the very ideals that have made us such a successful organization for over 237 years. ■



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