

## Section 3

# OFFICERSHIP AND THE ARMY PROFESSION

## Key Points

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- 1 The Concept of a Profession
- 2 The Three Characteristics of a Profession
- 3 Professionalism and the Military

Yours is the profession of arms, the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory, that if you lose, the Nation will be destroyed, that the very obsession of your public service must be duty, honor, country.

GEN Douglas MacArthur

## Introduction

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The Army requires that you—as a Cadet and future officer—accept responsibilities not just for doing a job, but also for assuming a way of life. In other words, the Army requires you to become a professional as stated in FM 1, *The Army*:

The purpose of any profession is to serve society by effectively delivering a necessary and useful specialized service. To fulfill those societal needs, professions—such as medicine, law, the clergy, and the military—develop and maintain distinct bodies of specialized knowledge and impart expertise through formal, theoretical, and practical education. Each profession establishes a unique subculture that distinguishes practitioners from the society they serve while supporting and enhancing that society. Professions create their own standards of performance and codes of ethics to maintain their effectiveness. To that end, they develop particular vocabularies, establish journals, and sometimes adopt distinct forms of dress. In exchange for holding their membership to high technical and ethical standards, society grants professionals a great deal of autonomy. However, the profession of arms is different from other professions, both as an institution and with respect to its individual members.

As in so much else, GEN George Washington set the example for the Army professional at a time of crisis in our young republic:

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### GEN Washington at Newburgh

Following its victory at Yorktown in 1781, the Continental Army set up camp at Newburgh, New York, to wait for peace with Great Britain. The central government formed under the Articles of Confederation proved weak and unwilling to supply the Army properly or even pay the Soldiers who had won the war for independence. After months of waiting, many officers, angry and impatient, suggested that the Army march on the seat of government in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and force Congress to meet the Army's demands. One colonel even suggested that GEN Washington become King George I.

Upon hearing this, GEN Washington assembled his officers and publicly and emphatically rejected the suggestion. He believed that seizing power by force would have destroyed everything for which the Revolutionary War had been fought. By this action, GEN Washington firmly established an enduring precedent: America's armed forces are subordinate to civilian authority and serve the democratic principles that are now enshrined in the Constitution. GEN Washington's action demonstrated the loyalty to country that the Army must maintain in order to protect the freedom enjoyed by all Americans.

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## Critical Thinking

What features of Army officership correspond to the characteristics of a profession, as defined by FM 1?

## The Concept of a Profession

When you think about professions, what comes to mind? Credentials, years of study and training, a code of ethics, status in the eyes of the community? Think of the medical caregiver, the legal specialist, the accountant, the architect, the teacher, the law enforcement officer, or the clergy member. What do they have in common with the profession you are training for and are about to enter—the military profession? To truly understand your role as a military professional, you must first understand what people mean when they talk about a *profession*.

A profession is a calling—a vocation. It's a livelihood, yes, but it goes far beyond a simple occupation or "what you do" for a living. A profession is a way of being, a way of thinking, a way of behaving, and a way of growing. In short, it's a *way of life*, not just a job or a lifestyle.

Most professionals would probably tell you that they do what they do because they love their work, that they couldn't do anything else, that they would do it even if they didn't make money at it. The Army is just such a profession. That's why it's important to realize the difference between an occupation—a job—and a profession.

The job of Army officer is the highest embodiment of the profession of arms. When you become a commissioned officer in the US Army, you join an elite body of leaders with a long, proud tradition of service to the country and a commitment to high ideals.

## The Three Characteristics of a Profession

One of the outward distinctions of a uniformed profession is to display distinctive clothing. In previous sections, you've read about the importance of military rank, insignia, and the uniform.

Another characteristic of a profession is dedication to service. You perform your service in the military within a profession.

Three characteristics distinguish a profession as a special type of work: expertise, responsibility, and corporate culture.

## Critical Thinking

What's the difference between a profession and an occupation?

## Expertise

Professionals are who and what they are because they acquire **expertise**—a special kind of knowledge and a context for that knowledge. Expertise can be of at least three types: *technical*—based on training and study; *theoretical/intellectual*—based on education and study; and *liberal*—based on broad reading, interactions with colleagues, and a focus on lifelong learning.

### Technical Expertise

Professionals know how to operate the hardware of their professions. They are technically expert. For the doctor, it is an in-depth knowledge of medicines and drugs, laboratory testing, imaging equipment, and surgical procedures. For the architect, it is a well-defined knowledge of loads, stresses, materials tolerances, and coefficients. For the military professional, it is an intimate knowledge of the technology of field weapons, aircraft, tank, artillery, computers, telecommunications, or other specialized equipment.

### Theoretical (or Intellectual) Expertise

This is the “how” and “why” of the technical component. In our example of medicine, technicians can perform the tests, but may not know the how and why behind the intricate functions of the human body. A construction worker knows how to pour cement for a reinforced foundation, but may not understand how or why the foundation will hold up the building. The same is true of the Soldier who knows the basic functions of the Army’s equipment. It’s not necessary for him or her to understand the theoretical concepts behind the tactical or strategic use of the equipment. This component of the professional officer’s job is what enables him or her to comprehend and apply new techniques.

Life or death decisions come from an officer’s ability to understand the greater mission and apply tactical skills to fulfilling the mission. The only information an officer may receive is the commander’s intent. He or she must move forward and deduce the how and why, especially during combat and in today’s Contemporary Operating Environment.

### Broad Liberal Expertise

This is probably the most complex and the most important component of expertise. Liberal knowledge is a professional officer’s ability to understand the role of his or her profession and its unique expertise within society. It includes the knowledge of behavior, human relationships, standards of conduct, and the structures of human organizations. A professional needs to know when and how to offer his or her services to achieve the most desirable and effective results. You could call this the *philosophy* of arms or the doctrinal grounding of military science.

### Military Expertise

What expertise does the Army expect you, as an officer in training, to master? The Army expects you to learn how to organize, equip, and train the force—your Soldiers. The Army also expects you to plan the activities of the force with clarity of mission. You also must know how to execute the mission, a task critical to the military’s success. Finally, the Army expects you to be expert in directing operations—engaging in the many kinds of Army activities during both war and peace. Directing operations is a core responsibility of a professional military officer.

#### expertise

*what you know (theoretical), what you know how to do (technical), and what the value of that knowledge is to the greater society (broad liberal application)*

## responsibility

*the obligation to employ available information, resources, and personnel to manage work and complete missions, which for an Army professional ultimately means upholding the Constitution and ensuring the security of the nation*

## Responsibility

### Professional Responsibility

As you've seen, professionals require intensive education in a particular service or skill that most members of society do not have. Along with all of this expertise are some distinct **responsibilities**. As an Army professional, you must be aware of them.

By definition, a professional offers a service that is vital to society. This service is performed for a person or group of people commonly referred to as clients.

By definition, professional expertise is so complex that laymen are usually not capable of understanding what the professional does or how he or she does it. Therefore, the professional has exclusive possession of a certain skill set, and the client agrees to accept the professional's application of those skills. This relationship creates certain expectations. Just as the professional expects the client to place affairs completely within his or her hands, the client expects the professional to observe certain ethical standards of behavior. Society expects the Army professional to fulfill three key obligations:

- Not exceed professional competence (no “Custer’s Last Stands”)
- Act only in the nation’s best interest
- Maintain integrity with the American people.

Clearly the professional has most of the leverage in this relationship, at least until proven otherwise, and he or she is accepted as the unquestioned authority.

Two major motivating factors prevent abuse of this power. The *first* is the vocation or “calling” aspect of the profession discussed earlier. Most people enter a profession because of an abiding desire to serve society and their fellow man. Many endure great personal hardship to meet the standards of their “calling.” Consider the medical student who graduates with hefty student loans after spending many years as a full-time student—or your own sacrifices to attend college and become a military professional.

The *second* motivator is autonomy. Most professionals desire to maintain their ability to control their profession. They realize that only as long as the profession as a whole abides by ethical standards will society allow it to keep functioning autonomously.

### Responsibility of Officership

The military officer is responsible for the military security of the United States.

Most Americans accept the idea of allowing Army professionals to safeguard and carry out the business of protecting the nation. Most would not know how to fight a war and, when placed in a situation of grave danger, would quickly defer to the military officer for that expertise.

Today, the Army spends billions of dollars and huge amounts of time building competence in the military profession. The structure of the Army rests on ensuring that military professionals do not assume command positions until they are capable of doing so.

The US Constitution, the Soldier’s Creed, and the Army Leadership Framework are all sources of the ethical authority and moral obligation to which military professionals adhere in maintaining the trust of the American people and our allies. You will study the Soldier’s Creed, Army Values, and Army Leadership Framework in other sections of this textbook.

## Corporate Culture

In the Army, the **corporate culture** for military professionals is found, in part, in its customs and courtesies you have already studied, and in the “Warrior Ethos” introduced earlier in this textbook.

## corporate culture

*an organization’s internal, unique way of doing things—the fingerprint of the organization, differing from every other organization’s culture, binding the organization together from the inside*

What does corporate culture mean? It refers to a group of people experiencing a sense of belonging or a common bond. Among Army professionals, corporate culture tends to result from the following factors:

- A common bond of mission, shared customs and courtesies, and comradeship
- A desire to remain autonomous
- A unique professional knowledge and expertise.

These factors tend to lead to standard professional practices. Among them are:

1. *A desire to police the profession.* The military has specific doctrine to follow; it also has codes and its own military justice system.
2. *Control of entry.* You must pass the numerous tests used to place military professionals into positions, and you must also go through extensive training and education to receive your commission. A commission is to the officer what a license or certification is to a doctor, attorney, or accountant.
3. *The need to promote professional knowledge.* The key focus is to develop leaders who can fulfill the mission. This requires continuous, extensive training and education.
4. *A desire to represent the profession.* Every action taken by a military professional is representative of the military, down to the uniform he or she wears or the language he or she uses.

## Professionalism and the Military

You exhibit professionalism as an Army officer and leader when you respect the Constitution and the military's civilian leadership; when you live the Soldier's Creed and Army Values; and when you can apply the elements of the Army Leadership Framework—Be, Know, Do—in all of your daily activities, no matter what your rank, your current job, or where you are assigned.

While most professionals serve an individual client, the Army officer's client is the nation—whether helping in disaster recovery, protecting national security, or defeating an enemy. As GEN MacArthur notes in the quotation at the beginning of this section, the military's professional failure would be catastrophic. Army officers—like their counterparts in the other armed services—study, work, and train throughout their professional careers to ensure that the military profession will not fail when duty calls.



# CONCLUSION

The Army officer is the cornerstone of the nation's military. As George Washington, Douglas MacArthur, and other leaders have asserted, without a strong officer corps, the Army lacks the basis of professionalism critical for national security. Being an Army officer is not just another job. It's a proud profession with a rich history of serving the nation. Army training and leader development are unrivaled in the world. Your ROTC program aims to help you become the kind of Army officer—to reach a degree of professionalism—of which you, your family, and your country can be proud.

## Learning Assessment

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1. Define the concept of a profession.
2. List and define the three characteristics of a profession.
3. Discuss how a doctor, lawyer, and military officer each approach their vocations with the same mindset.

## Key Words

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**expertise**

**responsibility**

**corporate culture**

## References

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Field Manual 1, *The Army*. 14 June 2005.

Field Manual 6-22, *Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile*. 12 October 2006.