

The Army Ethic: The Heart of the Army

SLC Class 004-17

Saturday, August 5, 2017

I pondered what the Army Ethic means to me, simply because I could not find a precise standard to apply. I made it my mission to seek out a better answer. I began with the website for the Center of Army Professionalism and Ethic (CAPE). I was immersed in a lengthy paragraph about how the Army Ethic shares the same general underlying principle of any ethic: "The standard and expectation for all of us to make right decisions and to take right actions at all times." (Living the Army Ethic, n.d.). CAPE goes on to explain that the Army Ethic "is the heart of our shared professional identity -- trusted Army Professional -- our sense of who we are, our purpose in life, and Why and How We Serve the American people." (Living the Army Ethic, n.d.). Through all of this, however, Army Ethic is nowhere defined.

How do I put into words a sense of who I am, my purpose in life, and why and how I serve the American people? There is no simple answer. CAPE attempts to remedy this dilemma by providing presentations, info papers, guides, posters, videos, and lesson plans to help mentor and guide us in how to live the Army Ethic. But, how do I know if I am living the Army Ethic if the Army struggles to explain it?

Next, I looked for the building blocks behind the Army Ethic campaign, and stumbled upon The Army Ethic White Paper, written by CAPE in 2014. In that paper, CAPE acknowledged that the Army Ethic lacked a definition that is "accessible, commonly understood, and universally applicable." (CAPE, 2014, p. 2). In its conclusion, CAPE sought to define the Army Ethic in three words: Character, Competence, and Commitment. (CAPE, 2014, p. 12). But, this is not what stuck out to me.

CAPE's 2014 proposal for describing the Army Ethic introduced it as "Army Ethic: The Heart of the Army." (CAPE, 2014, p. 11). This, I thought, was the most concise and meaningful way to explain Army Ethic. When we put our heart into a concept, we put everything on the line—our morals, traits, and family values. Having heart is more than a thought process or physical demand; it is believing in, and standing behind a concept larger than ourselves. This is what the Army expects of each of us.

When I think about the Heart of the Army, I think about the service and sacrifice that all of us shoulder. This call to service and sacrifice cannot be learned, but must be voluntarily accepted. I see this every day. The Heart of the Army is reflected in the less-than-one-percent of the population that serve in our Army. (Department of Defense, 2017). The Heart of the Army (and military) is built upon the memories of those Servicemembers who made the ultimate sacrifice. It is built upon the stories of those men and women who earned this nation's highest recognition for selflessly placing their lives in grave danger to complete the mission and save the lives of others. (MoH Archive Stats, n.d.). The world, today and tomorrow, respects our Army and this Nation's military because of this Heart; this is the Army Ethic.

When I put on my uniform, I do it proudly because of what it represents. I do it because I welcome the burden of building upon the reputation bestowed from the warriors before me and those serving beside me. And I gladly accept my duty to the Army and commitment to this nation to pass the torch to tomorrow's leaders.

Understanding the Army Ethic in this way made me understand why our leaders struggle to define it in doctrine. Army Ethic is a significant underlying element of our service and virtue that cannot be confined to words—we find a similar predicament

when defining “love” (or for the lawyer, “reasonableness”). While the Army has words that support the Army Ethic—such as character, competence, and commitment—we must look deeper. We bring with us different morals, come from unique backgrounds, and have varying degrees of perspective. Ethic cannot be taught by a simple Army standard, but only acknowledged. We must look to each other, and more importantly within ourselves to identify if we are living the coveted Army Ethic, which CAPE described as an “extraordinary moral obligation inherent in the identity to which we aspire: Trustworthy Army Professionals.” (CAPE, 2014, p. 11).

In conclusion, the Army Ethic is not meant to be a definition, but an acknowledgment of what and who we are. We are standard-bearers; doing what is inherently and morally right by our leaders, peers and subordinates—as well as society—because the reputation (and future success) of our Army depends on it; it depends on me. Because I—as well as all of us wearing this uniform—are the Heart of the Army, we are the Army Ethic.

References

- Counts of Active Duty and Reserve Service Members and APF Civilians [XLSX]. (2017, March 31). Department of Defense. Retrieved from https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/rest/download?fileName=DMDC_Website_Location_Report_1703.xlsx&groupName=milRegionCountry.
- Living the Army Ethic (n.d.). In *Center for the Army Profession and Ethic*. Retrieved August 05, 2017, from <http://cape.army.mil/aaop/living-the-army-ethic/>.
- Medal of Honor Archive Statistics. (n.d.). In *Congressional Medal of Honor Society*. Retrieved August 05, 2017, from <http://www.cmohs.org/medal-statistics.php>.
- The Army Ethic White Paper [PDF]. (2014, July 11). Center for the Army Profession and Ethic. Retrieved from <https://www.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/356486.pdf>.
- U.S. Casualty Status [PDF]. (2017, August 4). Department of Defense. Retrieved from <https://www.defense.gov/casualty.pdf>.