

**The Army Ethic vs. Our Enemies**

**Ian D. Birk**

**Staff Sergeant**

**SLC 003-16**

**SFC Robert Charvat**

*“As stewards of the Army Profession, senior leaders have the responsibility for embracing the Army Ethic and taking it to their organizations as an ongoing conversation within the profession to support and preserve the greatest land force ever fielded.”*

— The Honorable John M. McHugh, Secretary of the Army

As I was preparing to write on this topic, it struck me that the title of the assignment is “living the Army Ethic,” not “describing the Army Ethic,” not “demonstrating the Army Ethic,” not “modeling the Army ethic;” but actually *living* the Army ethic. It seems to me that there is a big difference between understanding something, demonstrating something, or even believing in something, verses *living* it. There have always been, and always will be, Soldiers who can demonstrate and model the Army ethic during their duty hours. They show up at the right place, at the right time, in the right uniform, and say the right things because it is in their own best self-interest to do so; their income and their careers may depend on it. It is a different thing entirely to embrace the Army ethic as part of your life—to take it home with you—to make a conscious effort to incorporate it into all aspects of your life.

So what is the Army ethic? What does that even mean? Well, All Army Activity message 189/2014 gives six different examples of what the Army ethic looks like. I will not be addressing all of those here, but I wanted to focus on two in particular. First: “We defend the values that frame the nation, preserve the peace, and fulfill our moral obligation to execute the legal and ethical orders of civilian authority.”

Second: “We live our shared professional identity as trustworthy army professionals, honorable servants in defense of the nation, military experts in the ethical design, generation, support, and application of land power, and stewards of the army profession.”

These quotes should serve as a reminder to all of us that service in the United States Army is more than a job—more than a career—it is a way of life. Or at least it can be, depending on how we choose to embrace it. There are only so many vocations in our society where the willingness to lay down your life is a prerequisite for employment. There are only so many vocations that require you to raise your right hand and take an oath, just to get hired. That kind of commitment cannot be achieved through false dedication or empty devotion. It can only be achieved through genuine loyalty and allegiance. One might even argue that no reasonable person would risk *death* in service to their nation if they had not first embraced their nation’s values in *life*.

So why do it? Why take it home? Why not just model the Army ethic while in uniform instead of devoting ourselves to *living* it? There are many possible answers to those questions; not the least of which is to remember: our enemies have their own set of values. They have their own “ethic,” and they are fiercely dedicated to fulfilling it, even to the death. We need look no further than New York, Paris, San Bernardino, and Orlando to understand that. Our enemies are ferociously committed to radicalized concepts of fundamentalist ideals; and they are willing to go to terrifying lengths to see those ideals fulfilled.

If we hope to overcome in the end, if we expect our values of equality and tolerance and liberty to win the day, then we must be every bit as devoted to our ethic

as they are to theirs. Our commitment must be as strong—if not stronger—than our enemies.’ How else can we endure their seemingly endless attacks on unarmed civilians? Our loyalty to the Army ethic must remain unwavering if we hope to someday see an end to these conflicts.

When speaking about achieving victory in battle, Napoleon once said, “the moral is to the physical as three is to one.” We have won, and will continue to win, the better part of our physical battles with the enemy. But we must not lose sight of the moral struggle we are engaged in with that same enemy. They have made it painfully clear that they will not be relenting any time soon. Therefore, we must embrace the Army Values, and live the Army Ethic. In doing so, we will not only improve ourselves as people and professionals, but arm ourselves with the moral courage to outlast our enemies in this battle of values.