

# The Army Profession

# Ostrich

# Phoenix?

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**T**HE NOTION of the Army as a profession is as old as the Army itself, but the belief that soldiering is a profession is no longer commonplace for those in uniform. Much discussion in the Army today concerns what it means to be a professional soldier, but the profession itself is losing its status, and no one in the Army is talking about that. In this respect, the Army is like an ostrich with its head in the sand, while it should be like the phoenix continually renewing itself.

Army doctrine explains leadership in terms of a “be-know-do” philosophy, but it does not tell officers and soldiers how to be military professionals. In fact, Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership, Be, Know, Do*, the capstone leadership manual, does not mention the word profession.<sup>1</sup> The Army describes itself as “an institution, not an occupation.”<sup>2</sup> The only mention of professionalism in Army regulations (ARs) is in AR 623-105, *The Officer Evaluation Reporting System*, which says, “Part IV [of the Officer Evaluation Report Form] contains a listing of the Army Values and the dimensions of the Army’s leadership doctrine that define professionalism for the Army officer.”<sup>3</sup> But the list of attributes is not a specific checklist that would help individuals within the profession understand what it means to be professionals. The omission of a useful description of what the Army considers professionalism might be a root cause of the current confusion about professional obligations and responsibilities.

In *The Future of the Army Profession*, Don M. Snider examines results from the Army’s Training and Leadership Development Panel, compares the Army with other professions, discusses the need for the military to advise civilian leaders, and postulates

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that the Army is in a period of growing uncertainty about the nature of military professionalism.<sup>4</sup> That uncertainty threatens to relegate the Army to the level of just another government agency or bureaucracy with no bona fide professional status. Snider’s study is remarkable because, essentially, it is the only contemporary discussion on the subject. Any search for opinions or contrasting viewpoints yields little fruit.

Before 1990, no ongoing Army studies of professionalism had occurred at the institutional level since the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> In the last 10 years, Snider’s work has stood alone in addressing Army professionalism. He has written nearly all the published essays and articles on the subject, and others writing on the subject base their work on his. Still, no new discussion on the subject of professionalism addresses the profession’s future. This is a troubling and potentially dangerous state of affairs.

## Theory of Professionalism

Snider agrees with sociologist Andrew Abbot that a profession possesses three attributes: expertise, jurisdiction, and legitimacy.<sup>6</sup> Samuel Huntington also

identifies expertise, corporateness, and responsibility as characteristics of professionalism. Former Army Lieutenant Colonel Sam Sakesian identifies special knowledge and education; organizational

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structure; self-regulation; and “commitment and calling”—the latter implying a degree of service to society at large.<sup>7</sup>

I refer to Snider’s tenets—expertise, jurisdiction, and legitimacy—to discuss two types of professionalism: theoretical and practical. I see these tenets as being the theoretical components of professionalism because they describe the ideal but do not prescribe the means to attain it. I define the practical components of professionalism as organization and return on investment (or giving back to the institution). These are the practical ways for the profession to ensure its survival and future growth.

**Expertise.** Professional expertise refers to the body of knowledge that the profession’s members have mastered—a body of knowledge that is not common in society at large because those outside of the profession typically do not acquire it. Just as a doctor’s expertise is the study and practice of medicine, the Army professional’s expertise is the study and application of military science.

James Burk, a long-time observer of the military, argues that “at the end of the twentieth century, the Army’s claim to expert knowledge in the management of violence, certified by science, was a foundation for its professional identity.”<sup>8</sup> The Army sees itself as expert in managing or controlling violence, which is inherently difficult to control. This core competency is critical to the Army’s sense of purpose and identity as a profession.

The military profession does not behave as other professions do when it comes to exercising expertise. The legal and medical professions essentially control membership and the application to their professions from within. But, the military’s requirement to relinquish authority over warfare to civilians hampers the Army’s efforts to maintain a professional identity. Because the U.S. Constitution mandates ci-

vilian control of the military, the military profession relinquishes ultimate control over its expertise. In exchange, it assumes the responsibility to advise civilian officials, who might have little or no military experience, in how to best use the expertise.

To best employ the military, the Nation needs the advice of experts who know how to use the instruments of military power. This must be a part of the national decisionmaking process. To this end, it is absolutely critical that the military develop leaders who are savvy in the workings of the Federal Government—leaders with knowledge of not only the Army’s realm of expertise but the political realm as well. Professional education and knowledge of the political workings of the Government are vital to the ability to provide comprehensive advice on the use of military force. Exposing officers to this facet of the profession’s expertise throughout their careers is essential to developing officers who can serve the profession well when they reach positions requiring familiarity with the political realities of the Government.

Unfortunately, the Army tends to reward officers for muddy boots time in tactical assignments, as opposed to service that develops the intellectual ability to accomplish missions at the highest levels of government.<sup>9</sup> The Army must change this if it hopes to develop the best leaders for the future, because the skills that make leaders successful in muddy boots jobs are not necessarily those required of senior leaders.

**Jurisdiction.** Jurisdiction refers to the area in which the professional applies his expertise.<sup>10</sup> Medical professionals apply their expertise in doctors’ offices, examining rooms, or hospital operating rooms. Army professionals apply their expertise on the battlefield.

The jurisdiction of a profession can be encroached upon. If the Army is not vigilant, other professions might chip away at the Army’s historic jurisdiction. Contracting-out, privatization, and other cost-saving initiatives might unintentionally produce a loss of jurisdiction when civilians perform functions that soldiers have traditionally performed. Although this is not necessarily a negative consequence, given the downsizing of the Army and the last decade’s increased operational tempo, the Army’s increasing reliance on a civilian work force will only be a positive experience if the Army deliberately and carefully decides where it wishes to yield its jurisdiction when it re-defines its professional boundaries.

In defining the jurisdiction of its expertise, the Army must not restrict itself to the battlefield and



(Left to right) Future Secretary of State General Colin Powell with Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, General Norman Schwarzkopf, and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz at CENTCOM headquarters during The Persian Gulf war.

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warfighting. The Army must also identify professional competencies that make soldiers different from other professionals or society at large.

The soldiers of today’s Army are different from their forefathers. Advances in education and technology and exposure to the “global village” have produced soldiers who can easily adapt to the complexities of today’s contemporary operating environment and who often possess expertise in important areas ancillary to the use of military power, such as leadership and training.

Corporate America spends millions of dollars each year to recruit military officers to its ranks. What skills do these soldiers possess that U.S. corporations feel would so benefit their organizations? The Army must identify the valuable skills that corporate America finds so attractive, fully understand its own professional jurisdiction, extend its boundaries, and enhance its legitimacy.

**Legitimacy.** Legitimacy is the acceptance of a profession’s expertise by those outside of it. For example, society at large commonly understands that doctors are medical professionals and that lawyers belong to the legal profession. But true membership in a profession requires more than simply the possession of expertise. Legitimacy requires that the profession establish means of controlling its mem-

bers to ensure that they adhere to a specific set of values and a common ethical system. The American Bar Association exercises such control for the legal profession, but the Army does not have an organization that prescribes standards of conduct for its members. The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) prescribes the legal limits of conduct for the profession’s membership, and Army Values describe the characteristics expected of members in good standing, but neither is a definitive standard of ethical behavior.<sup>11</sup>

The UCMJ defines what is criminally accountable behavior, and Army Values describe virtuous attributes, but neither helps solve the ethical dilemma of having to choose between two rights, not between right and wrong. Ostensibly, the UCMJ and Army Values keep members of the profession out of jail and describe attributes the Army considers to be good. In reality, the Army relies largely on tradition and personal intuition to develop in its members the ability to exercise self-control when faced with ethical dilemmas. This kind of self-governance, if it remains rigid and too heavily steeped in tradition, can alienate the profession from the civilian society that controls it and grants it legitimacy. When the civilian society cannot understand its military, the military loses legitimacy. The Army ends up losing

status as a profession and becomes just another government bureaucracy.

That soldiers belong to the military profession is not as commonplace a notion as one would think. Since the 1950s, skepticism about the Army's expertise concerning national defense has risen. Pundits and social engineers now have increasing influence over the military. Many outside the military

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believe the military is not a profession but an instrument of government and that public opinion should determine the design and use of that instrument. The debate over homosexuals in the military is an example of this kind of civilian encroachment on what had been traditionally a professional concern.

At times, managing the Army's jurisdiction seems to have less to do with maintaining professional legitimacy than portraying an image that is consistent with the current ideals of the civilian society. Portraying such an image leads to public trust—the key to sustaining legitimacy—and this enables the profession to exercise its expertise on the application of military power.

## Practical Professionalism

The military needs to analyze its current practices and doctrine to determine if they contribute to the growth of the profession. Without such an analysis, the profession might become stagnant or dormant and fail to see threats to its existence.

Education is the foundation of the profession. Professional military education consists of initial education and developmental education. Both are critical to the growth of the profession, but significantly, no prioritization of initial and developmental training has occurred.

**Initial education.** Initial education teaches the profession's expertise to new and prospective members. It is a formal process of learning the profession, just as medical and law schools teach members of the medical and legal professions. Initial education must inculcate a sense of what it means to be a member of the profession.

The sense of identity that accompanies professionalism begins during initial education. The Army

is not doing this as well as it could at present. In a recent study, researchers Gayle Watkins and Randi Cohen asked Army officers if they considered the Army a profession. Although most officers interviewed spoke positively about their profession, a sizeable minority had serious concerns: "Some company-grade officers were surprised by the question . . . since thinking about the Army as a profession was not something that they had previously considered."<sup>12</sup>

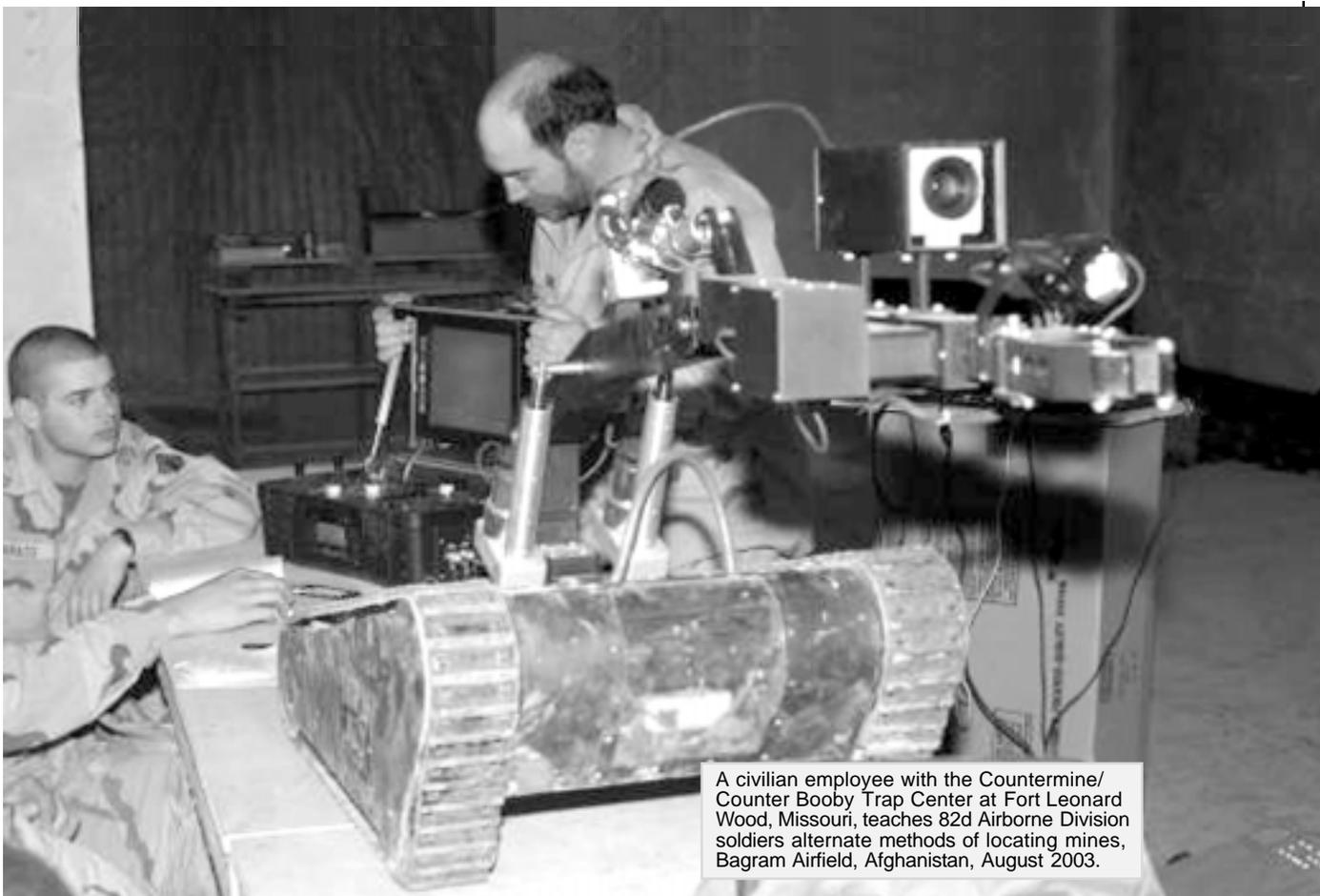
The finding is significant, and there are only two possible reasons for this: either soldiers were not listening during their initial education, or the education did not instill the notion that to be an Army officer or soldier is to be a professional. The latter conclusion, if true, indicates the Army admits members without making sure that they understand the profession's expertise, jurisdiction, and source of legitimacy. This is not a sign of a growing, developing profession, and highlights a possible cause of the current attrition in the junior ranks.

**Developmental education.** Developmental education develops the members in the profession and essentially consists of officer professional development and the Noncommissioned Officer Development Program. These have become synonymous with an hour on the training schedule that usually consists of a series of briefings on a topic related to the specific mission of a given unit. The time is rarely devoted to teaching what it means to be a professional, and educating—as opposed to training—members for the good of the profession.

In recent years the importance junior officers place on professionalism has changed. After completing their career courses, captains arrive at new duty stations wearing Bermuda shorts, Birkenstocks, and 3-day growths of beards. (Because they are on leave, they see no problem with this.) Others might be wearing shoulder patches from previous units. Officers often scramble to find uniform accessories when a need for the Class A uniform arises. They might even show up in uniforms that do not fit them. These officers are aware of the Army's standards; they just don't think these "little" things are important to their warfighting mission. Through their actions, they reveal they do not understand professionalism as the Army has traditionally defined it.

The Army is in the midst of an identity crisis. We know when someone is not a professional, but it is much harder to define what a professional is. The construct is abstract and open to interpretation. It appears that the Army sees professionalism as the property of individuals rather than that of the institution.<sup>13</sup>

The dramatic shift during the 1990s from the single-focused Cold War environment to the multi-



A civilian employee with the Countermine/Counter Booby Trap Center at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, teaches 82d Airborne Division soldiers alternate methods of locating mines, Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, August 2003.

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faceted contemporary operating environment might have something to do with this, but regardless of the cause, the Army must come to grips with defining professionalism and ensuring that its definition is known Armywide. To initiate the process, Snider developed a set of principles for officership to serve as a foundation for educating new members of the profession.<sup>14</sup>

**Membership in professional organizations.** Being a member of a professional organization is one indicator of professionalism. These organizations help broaden the profession's expertise and foster awareness of opportunities or threats to professional jurisdiction. They are forums for discussion about the profession and ways to impart a common identity.

In the past, Army officers and soldiers joined certain professional organizations and did not question their purpose. This is no longer the case. Membership in such organizations is often the result of psychological arm-twisting, geared more toward increasing membership rolls than recruiting active, involved members. This has gone on for so long now that the Army has considerable inertia to overcome. Fortunately, many senior leaders recognize this

and emphasize the benefits of membership instead of counting membership cards. Developing members of professional organizations who are active and involved is much more important to the profession than having officers and soldiers who just write checks to pay their membership fees because they are afraid their commanders will ask to see their membership cards.

**Giving back to the institution.** One aspect of practical professionalism often overlooked is the responsibility of members to give back to the institution by contributing to the profession's body of knowledge, which helps keep the profession a growing, progressive organization. One way to expand professional knowledge is through writing. Publication of letters, essays, articles, and other thoughts in professional journals or other media (including electronic and web-based technology) sparks thinking and discussion within the professional community.

Ironically, before the "information age," Army officers were prolific writers, putting their thoughts and deeds down on paper for later reflection or for the historical record. Officers contributed essays to professional journals setting forth their thoughts about

tactics, operational art, strategy, force modernization, and many other topics relevant to the profession of arms. Many of these articles are still required reading in Army schools. Today, an officer who has been published is a rarity. The information age, which was supposed to leverage technology to make work more efficient and to create more time for other pursuits, such as writing, has instead had the opposite effect; it has increased the military professional's workload and left him little time for reflection.

An important aspect of professional self-development and keeping current in the profession is through reading what others publish in professional journals and reflecting on those ideas. Without doing so, professionals cannot stay abreast of all the important things going on in an institution as large and complex as the Army. Sharing ideas and thoughts through publication is an efficient, interesting way to improve the profession's knowledge base. The Army should encourage a culture in which members share ideas through habitual professional reading and writing.

**Encouraging discussion and debate.** Discussion and debate within the profession is also important, but in the last decade, such debate has dwindled. Speaking out has negative connotations; it is often looked on as whining, and new ideas are scoffed at and tossed aside—practices that can be harmful to any organization. The free exchange of viewpoints and ideas, even if the ideas are counter to the “party line,” makes the profession a thinking organization that can react to new opportunities and threats to its jurisdiction.

Of course, the Army should not become a teahouse where people sit around and wax philosophical about the woes of the world, nor do I suggest that discussion become dissention. Once leaders make decisions, the professional supports them. But, having the freedom to enter intelligent, professional dialogue on the issues that affect the future of the profession should lead to more commitment to implement decisions.

Healthy dialogue sparks professional reflection on approaches to problems, makes us consider other options, and develops critical thinking skills that are absolutely necessary for leaders in the contemporary operating environment. The healthy exchange of ideas through publication and discussion is one of the

processes that enabled World War II's military leaders to solve immense problems that the world had not even been able to comprehend before the war.

## Leadership Doctrine

Army leadership doctrine focuses on the human dimension of leadership and identifies core competencies Army leaders must possess. One of those is conceptual thinking, but training this abstract concept under the paradigm of task-conditions-standards is difficult. A better way to develop a conceptual thinking competency in Army leaders is through professional discussion, debate, and writing. Assignments must balance muddy boots time with jobs that expose officers to situations that develop the intellectual capabilities required at higher levels of responsibility.<sup>15</sup> This is the way to prepare the profession to master the environment it might face in the future.

Senior Army leaders understand that the Army must place more emphasis on professionalism and have begun a series of professionalism and officership conferences to identify salient issues and to build an action plan to safeguard the profession's expertise, broaden its jurisdiction, and increase its legitimacy. This is a good start, but senior leader conferences only go so far.

Junior leaders do not interact with the Army's senior leaders on a daily basis, but at the brigade and battalion level, junior leaders interface with leaders who can directly change their understanding of the Army as a profession and as a place to develop professionalism. The characteristics of the professional leader should be built from echelons below the brigade level. Senior leaders can guide the Army in defining such characteristics, but they cannot force members of the profession to comprehend them. The active, enthusiastic support of leaders at lower levels working hard to instill professionalism in everything they do is the way to accomplish this.

The way forward is clear. The Army must revitalize its profession by redefining its expertise, expanding its desired jurisdiction, and striving anew to maintain its legitimacy. The Army must educate its members to be professionals, inculcate professional standards, and emphasize the healthy discussion of issues to develop involved, contributing leaders committed to the institution's ideals. **MR**

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## NOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, 3-1.
3. Army Regulation 623-105, *The Officer Evaluation Reporting System* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1998), 17, para. 3-19.
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5. *Ibid.*
6. Snider and Watkins, *The Future of the Army Profession* (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Primis Custom Publishing, 8 April 2002), 28.
7. William M. Dollar, “Prescriptions for Professionalism,” *Air University Review* (July-August 1978). See also on-line at <[www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aireview/1978/jul-aug/dollar.html](http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aireview/1978/jul-aug/dollar.html)>.

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9. Lloyd J. Matthews, “The Uniformed Intellectual and His Place in American Arms: Part II,” *Army* (August 2002).
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11. Uniform Code of Military Justice. See on-line at <[www.military-network.com/main-ucmj.htm](http://www.military-network.com/main-ucmj.htm)>, accessed on 8 January 2004.
12. Snider and Watkins, 2002, 82.
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15. Matthews.