

*I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat.
I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade.*

INCULCATING THE WARRIOR ETHOS

By First Lieutenant Nicholas Vujnich

The Army is currently fighting a war against terror that has led to conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq. This contemporary operational environment (COE) is far different than any ever seen before. Although in recent years the Army has operated in desert terrain and fought urban battles in hostile cities, doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures (DTTP) have not fully prepared the Army to face the current enemy. This enemy attacks with nontraditional methods that are constantly evolving due to the need to overcome varied US countermeasures. This continuous evolution renders the enemy exceedingly unpredictable. Additionally, the enemy is highly motivated and fully prepared to sacrifice lives to accomplish missions. Enemies live and hide among the general populace, nearly undetectable, and are able to move freely throughout the theater of operations until they are prepared to strike. They are determined, they are dedicated, and they are dangerous.

While US forces are preparing to move into theaters to face these new enemies, leaders must harden the troops against such opposition. While discipline, dedication, and determination are necessary for success and survival in any military environment, these attributes are particularly vital for Soldiers sent to combat in the COE. Soldiers must go to war inculcated with a Warrior Ethos that not only protects them from danger but also equips them with the attitude and mental preparation necessary to overcome the enemy.

The Warrior Ethos may be described in many ways; however, a single Army creed captures the essence of the Warrior Ethos. The creed simply contains four clear, concise statements: "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade." This creed sums up what the Army expects regarding the actions of a Soldier, and it provides a solid foundation for discussions about how to instill Soldiers with the Warrior Ethos.

There are many great Soldiers in the Army. Unfortunately, there are also Soldiers who do not demonstrate the Warrior Ethos. Some make excuses for why assigned tasks are not completed, when the fact is

that they just do not place the mission first. Some say that they do not know how to complete a particular task—perhaps believing that accepting defeat is easier than searching for the answers needed to do the job correctly. Every morning at physical training, there are Soldiers who fail to meet the daily standards set by the instructor. Responsibility for these failures is sometimes avoided by using justification related to unrecorded injuries, excessive difficulty of exercises, or overworked muscles resulting from time spent at the gym the night before. The real truth is that some Soldiers just do not want to work any harder, so they choose to quit rather than put forth more effort.

Soldiers who do not live by the creed when facing the day-to-day stresses of a garrison environment are unlikely to do so when faced with the dangers presented by combat. Therefore, leaders must take every opportunity to properly prepare Soldiers for various situations they may face. The foundation for this preparation is the creation of an attitude that places the mission first, never accepts defeat, never quits, and doesn't leave fallen comrades behind. Behaviors and attitudes that fail to demonstrate the Warrior Ethos cannot be condoned.

The first step in inculcating Soldiers with the Warrior Ethos is to hold them responsible for their actions. Leaders must not allow Soldiers to accept defeat or give up the mission. Soldiers must be forced to adopt a hardened attitude at all times. Only with this attitude, will they be prepared to take the next step.

Once a hardened attitude is adopted, Soldiers must begin learning the technical and tactical skills which will prepare them to defeat the enemy. The ability to shoot, move, and communicate is essential to a Soldier's effectiveness in combat. Marksmanship is widely accepted as the most vital of these tasks, yet not all Soldiers are able to qualify on assigned weapons systems. One of the most fundamental duties of any unit should be to ensure that Soldiers are able to accurately engage the enemy. According to Field Manual (FM) 3-22.9, "The procedures and techniques for implementing the Army rifle

marksmanship training program are based on all Soldiers understanding common firing principles, being proficient marksmen, and being confident in applying their firing skills in combat.”

After the fundamentals of marksmanship have been mastered, a Soldier’s skills must be advanced beyond the basics necessary for the qualification range. FM 3-22.9 details programs that focus on skills such as advanced firing positions; combat firing techniques; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) firing; unassisted night fire; moving target engagement; short-range marksmanship (SRM) training; and squad-designated marksman (SDM) training. Mastery in these areas establishes a skill set that reinforces the concept of Warrior Ethos among Soldiers. Soldiers who master these skills will be adequately prepared and will have the confidence necessary to seamlessly act against the opposing force during combat.

The ability to maneuver in the combat environment is another of the most important aspects of war. Maneuverability affects all levels from divisions of combat forces all the way down to the individual on the ground. After the enemy has been engaged, Soldiers must apply the basic fundamentals of maneuver operations to overcome the opposition. They must also be taught to properly seek cover and concealment to effectively protect themselves while preparing to return fire. Every individual on the battlefield should be familiar with troop-leading procedures and have a working knowledge of the battle drills necessary to respond to enemy attacks with deadly force.

To successfully engage the enemy and maneuver to overcome them, individuals and their elements must be able to effectively communicate on the battlefield. Soldiers must be trained and fully capable of conducting various communication tasks required of them while under attack. Every Soldier entering the COE should fully understand his unit standing operating procedures (SOPs) for communicating air combat element (ACE) reports; size, activity, location, unit, time, and equipment (SALUTE) reports; and situation reports (SITREPs). Each Soldier must also be able to competently communicate nine-line medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) requests and improvised explosive device (IED) reports. A Soldier’s ability to relay timely and accurate information plays a significant role in the provision of lifesaving medical treatment and the support of quick-reaction forces (QRFs) to aid with an offensive reaction to the attack. Solid communication skills help to build the confidence that Soldiers need to react to any situation, including chaotic situations that will surely occur. This confidence is a large part of the Warrior Ethos.

In the COEs of Afghanistan and Iraq, forces generally operate in a tactical defense that supports the strategic offense. Strategically, this is a war of resource attrition in which the ability to conduct tactical defense and survive in combat wears on enemy resources. Although some forces in theater actively seek out and destroy the enemy and its resources, the majority conduct support operations with emphasis on tasks that protect the force. Survivability in theater helps maintain national support on the home front, which is a factor that cannot be ignored in the effort to achieve victory.

Because Soldiers primarily operate in tactical defense, much of their current training is focused on the skills necessary for protection in a combat environment. The training does not emphasize the fact that the tactical defense is only an operational pause used to set the conditions for transition to the offense. Leaders must ensure that training instills in Soldiers the Warrior Ethos that, upon becoming a target, drives them to immediately transition from defense to offense. In short, Soldiers must be taught to conduct the simplest of warrior tasks—to defeat the enemy.

While survivability is key to success, triumph can be realized only by presenting a hardened presence in the face of the enemy. The opposition actively seeks soft targets that do not appear to be prepared to defend and, more importantly, are not ready to strike back after an attack. Empowering Soldiers with the skill set and mental fortitude necessary to defeat the enemy is the way to change the tide of a war.

The Warrior Ethos is more than just a creed or a set of values that can be spoken of in plain terms. The Warrior Ethos is a mentality, an attitude, and a way of reacting to chaos and confusion. In order for Soldiers to habitually think and react in an admirable manner, they must be taught the fundamental skill sets that allow them to fight with the Warrior Ethos. Therefore, leaders must ensure that training includes the components necessary to accomplish this goal. For their part, Soldiers must live by the creed and hold themselves to those standards; they must do all that is necessary to ensure that they never leave a fallen comrade. 🇺🇸

Reference

FM 3-22.9, *Rifle Marksmanship M16A1, M16A2/3, M16A4, and M4 Carbine*, 24 April 2003.

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