

The Canadian Armed Forces Ethos

Trusted to Serve

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Preface

The *Canadian Armed Forces Ethos: Trusted to Serve* is the most essential doctrine in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). It must guide our conduct and performance at all times, both on- and off-duty.

This Canadian Armed Forces Ethos (CAF Ethos) comes at a particular turning point in Canadian Armed Forces' history. Mainly in response to strategic transformation at the turn of the century, the previous publication *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* emphasized the profession, organizational aspects and future challenges related to the evolution of our Profession of Arms rather than our ethos. Instead, *Trusted to Serve* is focused on expanding and refining our shared understanding of our military ethos.

The CAF Ethos reflects Canadian values. These values allow our profession to operate with the trust of those within the organization and those we proudly serve; the Government of Canada and Canadians. Therefore, we entrust this renewed military ethos to all serving CAF members; to commit to and live by its principles. Every single one of us must embody the CAF Ethos and employ its values in our decisions and actions both while in the service of others and in our personal lives.

This renewal represents a necessary shift in approach to our ethos. With this publication, we have focused on accurately describing our ethos and putting it to best use in our daily service within the Profession of Arms. As military professionals, we must internalize all the elements of the CAF Ethos because it needs to underpin our character. Close to two millennia ago, Marcus Aurelius wrote that a person's worth is measured by the worth of what they value. Our worth will be judged by how we best exemplify the ethos espoused here. Our conduct and performance reflect directly on all of us. Therefore, we need to apply the highest standards of ethics and professionalism in all that we do. Our military effectiveness and credibility depend on it.

The Profession of Arms can only maintain its credibility and trust with the Government and Canadians by respecting the dignity of all persons. The employees of the Department of National Defence and CAF personnel share this foundational ethical principle within our combined Code of Values and Ethics. This foundational principle as well as other Defence Team values and ethics are now incorporated into the CAF Ethos in a way that more fully articulates what is expected from our military personnel. The CAF Ethos also serves as the basis for building the CAF Code of Professional Military Conduct.

As we progress in rank, this doctrine is formally taught and discussed on all common career-related professional military education programs; however, this is not enough. Leaders have the most significant impact on CAF culture and cohesion. Therefore, as leaders, we must demonstrate the highest standards of conduct and professionally socialize this ethos in our daily military service, ensuring that we live up to its ideals.

All military personnel must frequently return to our ethos for guidance and regularly discuss it with other members of the Profession of Arms. This is especially true when faced with challenging situations and decisions. All CAF personnel regardless of rank must play an active role in reshaping military culture by embodying the CAF Ethos and helping others to do the same.


Finally, we remind all leaders of their responsibility to consistently reinforce these values and principles through action, especially when it may seem challenging to do so. Our actions or inactions influence others whether we realize it or not. The example we make is the standard that we set. Remember, if we commit to and live our ethos, we will have earned the trust and respect of our team, the Government, and our fellow Canadians.

A blue ink signature of W.D. Eyre, written in a cursive style.

W.D. Eyre
General
Chief of the Defence Staff

A blue ink signature of G.A. Grégoire, written in a cursive style.

G.A. Grégoire
Chief Petty Officer First Class
Canadian Armed Forces Chief Warrant Officer

A close-up, profile view of a woman in a Canadian naval officer's uniform. She is wearing a white-topped officer's cap with a dark band and gold braiding. Her hair is pulled back into a bun. She is looking out towards the sea. In the background, another person in a similar uniform is visible, and the ship's deck and equipment are partially seen. The word "CANADA" is embroidered on the sleeve of her uniform jacket.

Even more so now
than ever, character
is just as important,
and indeed often
more impactful, than
competence.

CANADA

Introduction

Since Confederation, the Canadian military profession has worked to stay in step with Canadian society. More recently, the focus has been on expanding its membership to best represent Canada's demographics; the people we serve. It is therefore equally important to recognize past inequities and exclusions in CAF history and traditions, and work to change them. In doing so we realize our ideal Profession of Arms; a highly competent national institution that embodies our ethos – the CAF Ethos.

The Profession of Arms is subordinate to the elected civil authority (i.e. the Government of Canada) and serves only the state. The defence of Canada and its interests is the Canadian Armed Forces' primary role. Threats to Canadian interests have changed over time, but the fundamental purpose of the Canadian Armed Forces remains the lawful application of military force as requested and authorized by the Government of Canada.

Achieving government objectives requires a considerable level of reciprocal trust between the Government of Canada, the CAF as an institution, the people of Canada and the military personnel who have accepted the inherent risks to health and life in military service. Canadians and the Government expect the CAF to be operationally ready to assist civil authorities during domestic crises such as floods, forest fires, search and rescue operations, and to defend Canadian sovereignty, or even to help advance Canadian interests abroad. Given the CAF monopoly on the lawful application of military force, Canadians trust that CAF personnel will conduct themselves ethically and professionally in all of these activities, as well as off-duty. At the same time, CAF personnel volunteer to serve knowing that the CAF leadership and the Canadian government assume responsibility for their well-being and the well-being of their families.



However, military performance can quickly be overshadowed by inappropriate conduct, which in turn can cause significant damage to the trust that the CAF maintains with Canadians, the Government, and our own serving members.

Individually and collectively, as members of the Profession of Arms, CAF personnel have a duty to uphold the highest standards of conduct both on- and off-duty by being the best example of the CAF Ethos. It follows that this duty requires a commitment from our people to be of strong character.

Even more so now than ever, character is just as important, and indeed often more impactful, than competence.

It is our individual
level of commitment
to a set of principled
behaviours that
determines our
strength of character.



The background image shows a trench lined with sandbags, with soldiers in camouflage uniforms. A semi-transparent box with a dark blue gradient is overlaid on the upper part of the image, containing the title and table of contents.

PART 1

The Importance of Trust

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The Importance of Trust

Military service is a privilege and is founded upon the trusted relationship that the CAF builds with Canadians, the Government, and those within the Defence Team. Those who trust the CAF have confidence in our professional military advice and service because they recognize our purpose, character and commitment to deliver successful results.

Trust is built through a commitment to character and competence. Character requires the ability to consistently live by a set of defining values and principles that shape one's conduct and judgement. Competence leads to the professional excellence needed to provide military advice and service that result in success, time and again.

The benefits of trust are wide-ranging. Trust enables those in uniform to work together within a common purpose and intent, rather than prescriptive orders, and this fosters professional creativity while maximizing efficiency and success. Also, mutual trust between military members creates the cohesion necessary for teams to succeed in the face of adversity. Lastly, the institution's trustworthiness allows the CAF greater flexibility in managing its affairs.

Trust takes time and energy to build through principled character and excellence in professional competence. However, trust is fragile and can quickly erode through weakness of character or an inability to deliver results. We must therefore prioritize strength of character and professional excellence in who we are and what we do as a Profession of Arms.

Character

High-character organizations tend towards success and do so consistently over time. As volunteers, each of us comes to the military with our own character based on the values and principles which, to that point, have defined us. An evidenced-based understanding of character reveals that strength of character can and must be intentionally developed through an essential set of behaviours that are underpinned by our ethical principles and values. Intentionally developed character determines how we make choices and conduct ourselves. It is our individual level of commitment to a set of principled behaviours that determines our strength of character. However, one's character is not static. Our character is always evolving while we are working; for example, becoming more courageous or less courageous, or developing more humility or less humility. The ethical principles and military values described in Part 2 of the CAF Ethos require that all military members commit to and develop strength of character within themselves.



Competence

As professionals, military members are expected to continuously develop their level of professional competence as they progress in rank and experience. Excellence in our individual occupations is required to excel as military teams to ensure mission success. Professional competence demands a lifelong commitment to learning and both the drive and humility to pursue continuous improvement in ourselves. The professional expectations described in Part 2 of the CAF Ethos frame the professional competence that all military members must strive to achieve.

The Purpose and Function of the Canadian Armed Forces' Ethos

CAF personnel who embody and live our military ethos allow our profession to operate with the trust of those within the organization, with the trust of the Government of Canada, and of Canadians.

Canada as a country is made stronger because of its diversity and commitment to equity and inclusion, and so is the CAF. Diversity, equity and inclusion are so critical to CAF effectiveness that they are set as professional virtues and a key part of our military ethos. The DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics emphasizes a supporting hierarchy of ethical principles that underpin our ethos: first, respect the dignity of all persons, then serve Canada before self, and finally obey and support lawful authority. We take these principles into the heart of our ethos.

The CAF Ethos also serves other essential functions. Military leaders must have a thorough understanding of the CAF Ethos to guide their decisions as they apply the full spectrum of military

force. Over two millennia ago, Thucydides wrote that war is a violent teacher. When faced with the most vicious and barbaric of circumstances, the CAF Ethos gives our members a touchstone upon which to consider their decisions and actions.

Military decisions are often made in complex circumstances, with incomplete knowledge, under significant time constraints and considerable moral pressure. While competence is a requirement for decision-making, competence alone is insufficient. Strength of character needs to inform the moral component of decision-making. Canadians rightfully expect military personnel to lead by demonstrating professionalism in all decisions and actions.



The CAF Ethos also enhances professional conduct and performance because its principles, values and expectations reinforce selflessness, duty and the team. It unifies our personnel under one value system focused on achieving the military objectives chosen by the Government of Canada. Because it is a value system, the CAF Ethos creates and shapes a desired professional culture that then builds trust. The goal is to live the CAF Ethos to such a degree that we view all behaviours, decisions and actions through its lens.





Strength of character needs to inform the moral component of decision-making.

PART 2

What is the Canadian Armed Forces Ethos, and How Do I Use It?

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What is the Canadian Armed Forces Ethos, and How Do I Use It?

The CAF Ethos describes who we are as a profession. Ethos is defined as the characteristic spirit of a culture, community or organization as manifested in its beliefs and aspirations. Therefore, the ethos of a military force is the ideal culture of that profession, expressed by clear principles, values and expectations. Ethos should not be confused with ethics. Ethics are moral principles that govern people's behaviour (i.e. what is right and wrong). They form the foundation upon which the CAF Ethos is built.

The CAF Ethos comprises seventeen elements categorized as three *ethical principles*, six *military values*, and eight *professional expectations*. Since these elements are either unique or crucial to the Profession of Arms, they are not only described and taught but must also be embodied by all military professionals, at all times. The CAF Ethos defines our professional conduct, shapes our professional judgement, and frames our performance expectations.

Most of our principles, values and expectations can also be found in other government codes such as the DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics, and also the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector. However, the CAF Ethos further defines how these seventeen elements relate specifically to Canadian Armed Forces personnel as members of the Profession of Arms. Although these elements clearly apply to operations, the principles, values and expectations of the CAF Ethos must be applied **at all times**.

The CAF does not expect recruits to fully understand and comprehensively apply the CAF Ethos right away. However, socialization, or more simply, an ongoing discussion between leaders, subordinates and peers, helps to deepen our understanding of its application to military service and our daily lives. The CAF Ethos must guide all our actions and decisions,

ranging from how we respect each other every day, up to and including the lawful use of force on operations.

Leaders have a special responsibility to exemplify the highest standards of our ethos in their military service because, as CAF leadership doctrine emphasizes, we lead by example. Leaders must also constantly socialize the ethos with their subordinates. It is through practicing the ethos that we learn, internalize, and live it.

The CAF Ethos does not define standards of behaviour in minute detail. The CAF is a values-based organization that depends on self-discipline and sound judgement to uphold its high standards of conduct and performance. The ethos is a living value system that needs to be broad enough to apply to any number of situations. The ethos is only as effective as how our people interpret and apply it in their daily lives and military service. We all play an active role as members of the Profession of Arms in holding each other to account to the highest standards of conduct and performance.


ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The CAF Ethos has three ethical principles founded on *The Constitution Acts 1867 to 1982* which in turn describes the basic principles of the Canadian democratic government and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. These principles are the foundation of our CAF Ethos and underpin strength of character. The ethical principles are presented here in order of their importance to the CAF Ethos.

1. Respect the Dignity of All Persons

Everyone must be treated with respect and humanity at all times and in all places. Everyone deserves to serve in a safe, inclusive environment. As military professionals, we must respect the dignity of all persons at all times.

This first principle must anchor everyone's conduct across the profession. We always need to perform our duty with humanity, treating people with respect, whether they are in the military or not.



The equal dignity of
all human beings is
the logic of military
ethics, diversity,
equity and inclusion.

Respect for others is developed by appreciating the other person's unique identity, skillset, perspective, history and experiences. Respect, in turn, is the foundation for inclusion and trust built within and across our diverse military teams. Creating an inclusive and positive atmosphere enhances our ability to perform more effectively in military service. Respect is a necessary condition of mission success.

Respect is also expressed in humility, empathy, compassion, and an understanding that we are all of equal value despite the different lived experiences that have shaped us. Respect is most important when dealing with vulnerable populations while on operations. Humility, empathy and compassion are values Canadians aspire to and ones that we must commit to developing throughout our military careers.

Respect for the dignity of all persons goes beyond openness and consideration for all those within our working environment. As the foundation of military ethics, it also means an aspiration that all humans can live their lives in peace and be protected against unprovoked aggression, because we are all fundamentally equal and deserving of this ideal. When an extreme aggressor denies such a principle, it is the responsibility of those who embrace this principle to lawfully defend it. The equal dignity of all human beings is the logic of military ethics, diversity, equity and inclusion.

Those who respect the dignity of all persons demonstrate humility, empathy and compassion and give credit where it is due. They advocate for others' interests and welfare, demonstrate respectable behaviour, create a safe space to live and work, and are a positive and compassionate influence.





2. Serve Canada Before Self

CAF personnel prioritize service to the country, the military and their teammates ahead of themselves as a personal commitment to mission success. As military professionals, we place service before self to maximize team effectiveness.

This commitment to a higher purpose rests at the core of our value system. It is closely related to loyalty, selflessness and humility. We answer a calling to serve Canada and come to understand that we are an integral part of an essential national institution that defends our people and our way of life. We fulfill this function with our critical commitments to domestic operations that safeguard Canadians in crisis and abroad in

supporting and advancing Canadian interests. We serve with a strong sense of duty, without a sense of entitlement or needing special recognition.

Fulfilling this function is demanding. Leaders have a role to play in ensuring a healthy work-life balance for their subordinates. Leaders who allow the service demands to become too extreme for the team may achieve short-term mission success but risk longer-term unintended and potentially adverse consequences. Military personnel need to stay true to their personal identities and attend to roles and responsibilities in their personal lives. After all, military members have full lives outside of the military, and contributing to our family and community life is how we stay in touch with Canadian values and personal values.



The CAF Ethos creates and shapes a desired professional culture that then builds trust.

CAF personnel must operate with a strong sense of duty and are responsible to keep their leaders informed of their personal needs. It is a leader's responsibility to understand each individual's diverse and personal circumstances within their team to achieve a fair balance between service to Canada and care for self and family. Maintaining this balance is a positive force for the long-term health of our military personnel and supports mission success.

Those who serve Canada represent their team's interests first, they help their team improve their professional standards, do the right things for unselfish reasons with no thought for reward, and support one another through adversity.

3. Obey and Support Lawful Authority

CAF personnel act decisively in following lawful commands and orders to achieve mission success. As military professionals, we always obey and support lawful orders and the authority that issues them.

The strict obligation to obey lawful commands is a binding regulation that enables the chain of command's duty to achieve the mission. In turn, the military chain of command relies on a disciplined, cohesive team to immediately obey and carry out lawful commands and achieve decisive results towards mission success. Failure to follow a lawful command can result in reduced operational effectiveness at best, or at worst, complete mission failure. Obeying and supporting lawful authority reinforces our professional expectations of discipline, teamwork and duty. Everyone also bears the responsibility not to follow manifestly unlawful commands and to report them to a higher and appropriate authority.

Leaders must recognize that their decisions and orders impact the level of trust they earn from their subordinates. The consistency of their lawful and ethical decisions and related orders can build trust across the team, enhance cohesion and ultimately strengthen the chain of command, despite the potential for those lawful and ethical decisions to be unpopular.

Those who follow this principle support lawful authority, demonstrate initiative to support their commander's intent, make the team more effective through disciplined obedience, lead their subordinates through adversity and persevere to mission success.