



The Ethics of the Introduction of New Skill badges

SGM Andrew J. Nichols

To me the awarding of badges for doing your job or graduating an advanced individual or basic training is contrary to the Army of One and the Warrior Ethos. We, the army stress we're all the same regardless of your military occupational skill (MOS). The Army has now come out with the close combat badge, the message is quoted as, in response to requests from field commanders and after careful analysis, the U.S. Army announced a new badge for selected combat arms Soldiers in combat arms brigades who engage in active ground combat.

The Close Combat Badge will provide special recognition to ground combat arms Soldiers who are trained and employed in direct combat missions similar to Infantry and Special Forces who will continue to be recognized for their ground-combat role with the Combat Infantryman Badge.

The Army will award the CCB to Armor, Cavalry, Combat Engineer, and Field Artillery Soldiers in Military Occupational Specialties or corresponding officer branch/specialties recognized as having a high probability to routinely engage in direct combat, and they must be assigned or attached to an Army unit of brigade or below that is purposefully organized to routinely conduct close combat operations and engage in direct combat in accordance with existing rules and policy.

The CCB will be presented only to eligible Soldiers who are personally present and under fire while engaged in active ground combat, to close with and destroy the enemy with direct fires.

This sounds fine and dandy this badge like so many other "good Ideas" that the army has tried to introduce has been abused to the point that people who had a rocket fly over their head are now seeking the CCB to impress their peers or promotion board members. This is not a new stigma the Aircrew Member Badge (AMB) was originally designated for those individuals who

were on flight status or routinely had to fly in a army rotary or fixed wing aircraft. In the mid 80's they relaxed the criteria and made it a by product of most aviation MOS's if you graduated from either Blackhawk helicopter repairer school or aircraft avionics repairer course you were given the same badge even though your likely hood of flying routinely was nil.

Then in the late 90's the branch CSM who was a aircraft electrician and had no way to know the personal pride Army Crewchief's had in their craft took the short sided approach to army retention and with a stroke of a pen made everyone in the aviation field eligible for the ACM, to include army air traffic controllers and aviation operations personnel (flight ops and S3). This was a devastating approach to the lowest common denominator and retention needs.

The ACM became officially the army aviation badge AAB. Over night you had Operations Sergeants wearing master AAB's. Crewchief's who had flown thousands of flight hours and been shot at more times then they'll ever know now wear the same badge as that of someone who has never touched an army aircraft. Surely there were other ways of making everyone feel part of the corps.

I wonder what Paul Smith would think of all this? SFC Smith an engineer platoon Sergeant in Company B, 11th Engineer Battalion 3rd Infantry Division had just finished a 12 hour drive up from the Euphrates river in APC's and Bradley's, arriving at Bagdad Airport on April 4, 2003 when his platoon was attacked by at least 100 Iraqis, supported by mortars and RPG's. No one know for certain what Smith was focused on when, after helping evacuate three wounded, he climbed into the gunners hatch of a damaged M113 and perched himself behind it's .50 cal machine gun. Maybe the boys in his platoon, maybe the mission, maybe wrath, but definitely not saving himself or what badge he could sport if he could just pull this off. Paul is credited with killing at least 50 enemy and saving the lives of most of his Platoon. SFC Paul R. Smith

posthumously became the first recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic actions on that April morning.

The U.S. Air Force has taken this condition to the next level with skill or MOS badges for just about every job in their branch. The Navy however has got it right; embedded in their rank you will find their military specialty. The only way to receive special skill badges such as the enlisted aircrew badge is to attend the navy's aircrew member school in Pensacola Fla. And the submariner's and surface warfare badge can only be earned by completing certain skill qualifiers and certifications. I firmly believe that people do not join the service to see how many badges they can fit on their uniform it to serve and support the people to their left and right and to preserve the way of life that we hold so dear for our families and loved ones to enjoy.

But don't lose all hope, the majority of army skill badges are still hard to earn such as the expert field medic badge, you can be a medic for twenty years and still not have one. The process varies only slightly from MACOM to MACOM but the EFMB must be earned through a long series of STX lanes and written exams. The expert infantrymen's badge EIB, is the same way, prospective candidates test and train for days to have a chance at wearing the symbol of excellence. Paratroopers can jump a hundred times and still only have novice jump wings. Senior and Master ratings can only be obtained through graduating what is described by most to be the hardest course in the military, the Advanced Airborne School's Jumpmaster course. Three weeks of training and evaluations on everything Airborne. Normally only a little over half of the 75 students per class see their graduation certificate their first time through there are no word that can adequately describe the feeling of relief upon completion of that prestigious school. There are several others worthy of mention, but the bottom line is there's no need to throw trinkets at true professional Soldiers because they'll be there in rain or shine badge or not to answer the call.

This may seem like a rant, but to me the Army needs to maintain some consistency through these years of transition and not invent badges and buttons so someone can visit a hostile area and receive a prize.