



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER
AND PRESIDIO OF MONTEREY
OFFICE OF THE STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE
1336 PLUMMER STREET, BLDG. 275
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA 93944

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

ATZP-JA

July 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL

SUBJECT: Tattoo Policy Guidance for Commanders

1. PURPOSE: To provide commanders with guidance in determining whether a Soldier's tattoo complies with the Army's Tattoo Policy.

2. REFERENCES:

a. Army Regulation 600-20, Army Command Policy, 18 March 2008.

b. Army Regulation 670-1, Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia, 3 February 2005.

3. DISCUSSION

a. Tattoos or brands that are anywhere on the head, face, and neck above the Class A uniform collar are prohibited.

b. Existing tattoos or brands on the hands that are not extremist, indecent, sexist, or racist, but are visible in the Class A uniform (worn with slacks/trousers) are authorized. Examples are pre-existing small, inconspicuous, or inoffensive tattoos or brands on areas of the body other than the face, neck, or head (i.e. ankle or hand) that do not detract from a soldierly appearance.

c. The following tattoos or brands are a violation of Army policy and must be removed, regardless of their location on the body. Tattoos that are:

(1) Racist/Intolerant. Racism is defined as advocating discrimination or intolerance based on race, color, gender, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. It also includes advocating unlawful violence or other unlawful means of depriving individual rights under the U.S. Constitution, Federal laws, or State laws. It is also prohibited for a tattoo to reflect association with a racist or extremist philosophy, organization, or activity. Examples of prohibited symbols are "KKK" or swastikas.

(2) Indecent. Indecency is defined as grossly offensive to modesty, decency, or propriety. Something is indecent if it shocks the moral conscious due to its vulgar, filthy, or disgusting nature. Something is indecent if it incites lustful thoughts, tends to reasonably corrupt morals, or incite libidinous thoughts.

(3) Sexist. Sexist tatoos are those that advocate a philosophy that degrades or demeans a person based on gender, but that may not meet the same definition of "indecent."

(4) Very Large. A tattoo or brand is very large if it covers a majority of one or more limbs and detracts from a soldierly appearance.

(5) Eccentric, Exaggerated, or Trendy. Unusual and noticeable cosmetic styles and colors, to include makeup designed to cover tattoos, are inappropriate with the uniform and are prohibited. However, permanent makeup, such as eyebrow or eyeliner, is authorized as long as the makeup conforms to the standards outlined above.

d. Commanders may not order the removal of a tattoo or brand. However, the commander must counsel Soldiers and afford them the opportunity to seek medical advice about removal or alteration of the tattoo or brand.

e. A Soldier may be administratively discharged for failing to remove a tattoo that the commander finds prejudicial to good order and discipline. The commander must first properly counsel the Soldier regarding the tattoo policy and tattoo removal procedures. Again, the commander should not order the Soldier to remove the tattoos.

f. If necessary, Administrative Law Division will assist the commander to determine whether a tattoo violates Army policies. Provide photos of the tattoo(s) to the Administrative Law Division. Commanders are ultimately responsible for making the appropriate judgment call. In difficult cases or cases where there is a question of enforcement, DA recommends that the decision be reviewed by the Special Court-Martial Convening Authority after consultation with SJA.

g. If the commander finds the tattoo violates Army policies, he or she should counsel the Soldier in writing about the policy and provide the Soldier an opportunity to seek medical advice about tattoo removal and the associated risks. The Soldier's medical clinic should provide a consult to dermatology. A dermatologist should give the Soldier information regarding tattoo removal. The commander can also advise the Soldier that the tattoo can be modified to conceal its offensive nature at the Soldier's expense. For example, clothing could be added to an indecent tattoo.

h. If the Soldier refuses to remove or modify the offending tattoo, the commander should counsel the Soldier in writing that he is not in compliance with Army policies. The counseling form will state that the Soldier's refusal to remove a prohibited tattoo or brand will result in discharge. If the Soldier elects not to pursue removal/modification of the tattoo, the commander may proceed with a separation action.

4. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, Administrative Law Division, at (831) 242-6402.



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