

Duty, Honor, Country ... Profession?

In the 2007 NSPE Milton F. Lunch Ethics Contest, NSPE member Philip Brach, Ph.D., P.E., F.NSPE, submitted the winning entry on behalf of the District of Columbia Society of Professional Engineers and students at the University of the District of Columbia. Brach and the D.C. Society received \$500 each, provided by the NSPE Educational Foundation.

The Situation

Engineer A is a professional engineer in private practice who is being mobilized as a[n] Army Reserve engineer officer. Unlike previous roles as an Army officer (combat engineer, etc.), Engineer A is being mobilized as a design engineer and is expected to use his civilian skills and judgment as a professional engineer. Engineer A is advised that in the performance of his actions as a member of the military, Engineer A is subject to military law (e.g., Uniform Code of Military Justice, etc.), which would exempt Engineer A from civil liability associated with his work. However, Engineer A believes that he still has obligations as a professional engineer and that his professional and ethical obligations still apply.

What Do You Think?

Does Engineer A continue to have ethical obligations under the NSPE Code of Ethics as a member of the U.S. military?

What the Winning Entry Said

Engineer A while mobilized as an Army Reserve engineer officer is still accountable for the safety, health, and welfare of those (public, be they military or civilian) that may be affected by the exercise of his professional engineering duties. While Engineer Officers help the Army and the Nation in building structures, developing civil works programs, working with natural resources as well as providing combat support on the battlefield, this function does not relieve the officer from his professional obligation under section I.1. of the Code of Ethics. The Uniform Code of Military Justice may exempt him from civil liability, but not from his ethical obligation under the Code of Ethics (NSPE).

An Army Reserve (engineer) officer is prepared to fulfill future responsibilities to country in a military venue. The engineering profession is particularly suited for the preparation of dependent, able leadership. An essential attribute of this lead-

ership is the commitment of professional engineers to conduct themselves honorably, responsibly, and ethically as specified in section I.6. of the Code of Ethics.

The formal code of ethics, which is developed, maintained, and applied by the NSPE, addresses those circumstances when an engineer perceives a potential conflict in the performance of his professional duties. Section II.1.a. says "if an engineers' judgment is overruled under circumstances that endanger life or property, they shall notify their employer or client and *such other authority* as may be appropriate." In the case of the military, that "other authority" would be the chain of command. Furthermore section III.1.b. says "Engineers shall advise their *clients or employers* when they believe a project will not be successful," the "client or employer" again is the military chain of command. Therefore, the NSPE Code of Ethics spells out the appropriate action to be initiated, even when in the military. The notification of appropriate authority of an action deemed to endanger life or property is provided both in the Code of Ethics and in the military chain of command. Each branch of the military has guidelines for behavior and conduct that are strictly enforced. Failure to comply leads to sanctions such as punishment or discharge. Formulation of the ethical standards, investigation of violations, and application of sanctions are also conducted by military officers. Self-regulation of ethical principles of conduct relating to the professional group's conduct of practice, behavior toward clients, interaction with colleagues, and relationships with allied professions is a professional criterion that applies to military officers as it does to other professions.

Engineer A, both as a military officer and a professional engineer is bound by two "Rules of Conduct": as a military officer, by the Code of Uniform Military Justice, and, as a professional engineer, by the NSPE Code of Ethics. There is nothing in either guideline that conflicts with the other. Therefore, Engineer A continues to have an ethical obligation under the NSPE



Code of Ethics when performing duties as a professional engineer as a member of the U.S. military. Section III.1.e. of the NSPE Code states "Engineers shall be guided in all their relations by the highest standards of honesty and integrity." Consequently, the practice of engineering is linked directly and vitally to the quality of life for all people. The services provided by engineers require honesty, impartiality, fairness, and equity and must be dedicated to the protection of the public health, safety, and welfare be they civil or military in nature.

NSPE Code References: Section I.1.; Section I.6.; Section II.1.a.; Section III.1.b.; and Section III.1.e. The NSPE Code of Ethics can be found at www.nspe.org/ethics.

This essay expresses the personal opinions of the author and not the positions nor the policies of NSPE.