

## When in Doubt, Don't Wear Uniform to Off-base Events

Q:

I am very active in community events off base. How do I know when not to wear my uniform?

A:

If you need to even think of the question, don't wear your uniform.

These days, many service members risk projecting the wrong image about the military if they appear in uniform at public demonstrations, marches, rallies or unofficial public speeches. It doesn't matter if people at such demonstrations are protesting a war or Wall Street, or rallying behind a political candidate.

Department of Defense Directive 1334.1 prohibits service members from participating in any of these events while in uniform if their uniformed appearance could imply that the military supported the event's underlying cause.

This does not mean troops can't participate in demonstrations. They just can't do so while in uniform, on duty or in a way that is inconsistent "with good order and discipline and the national security," according to DoD Directive 1325.6.

DoD Directive 1334.1 also prohibits service members from wearing their uniform to bolster their political activities, private employment or commercial interest. There are also prohibitions against wearing a uniform in a manner that "may tend to bring discredit" upon the military.

Army Regulation 670-1, Marine Corps Order 1020.34G, Navy Personnel 15665I and Air Force Instruction 36-2903 feature general uniform wear prohibitions similar to those in DoD Directive 1334.1. These regulations also establish wear prohibitions for specific types of uniforms and situations.

Needless to say, service members should be careful not to wear their uniforms at meetings or demonstrations with shady sponsors, such as terrorist groups.

Service members caught inappropriately wearing their uniform could be charged with failure to obey an order or regulation in violation of Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice or, in the case of officers, conduct unbecoming an officer in violation of Article 133.

Service members facing such charges should immediately contact a military law attorney. Depending on the circumstances, an attorney could argue that the service member did not attempt to use his uniform to wrongly influence others, his attire did not qualify as a uniform or that he wore a uniform in a prohibited environment due to extenuating circumstances or by accident.

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The information in this column is not intended as legal advice.