

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**INTEGRITY FAILURES: A STRATEGIC LEADER PROBLEM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The Army has an integrity problem that is often overlooked and yet, when surfaced, has unwanted strategic implications. Various examples of integrity issues that have been dealt with by strategic leaders prove the implications of the problem. As well, other examples that appear to be acceptable, and thus have little or no consequences give latitude for future unacceptable and more severe inappropriate behavior. Strategically, the implications of immoral and unethical behavior affect our legitimacy, or credibility, public/world opinion, and lend themselves to escalation, that being minor integrity issues can give way to larger and larger issues that strategic leaders must engage. Knowing the factors that cause integrity problems and then showing ways to remedy these problems will ultimately avoid unwanted, embarrassing, and sometimes criminal acts. Lack of integrity within the Army is a strategic leadership issue.



## INTEGRITY FAILURES: A STRATEGIC LEADER PROBLEM

The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office.<sup>1</sup>

Dwight D. Eisenhower

The United States Army has suffered from scandals and abuses over the more recent history that stem from, more often than not, personal integrity problems. Individuals, who compromise their own integrity for whatever reasons, can cause the Army strategic problems. Individual integrity failures have resulted in strategic implications for the Army and will continue to do so unless corrected. The Aberdeen Proving Ground Sexual abuse scandal, the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, and the Guantanamo Bay prisoner abuse all exemplify just such cases. In each case, individuals failed to uphold their own personal integrity through illegal and/or immoral actions, and the result was publicly labeled a scandal. Each of these examples resulted in a negative impression on the Army and had negative implications on the United States as a whole. On a smaller scale, petty larceny and false official documents may lead to later strategic implications as the offenders, left unchecked, continue to rise through the ranks of the Army. Historically there are examples such as My Lai, that lend credence to the fact that this has not been solely a recent issue. In this paper, I intend to show that the acceptance of minor abuses of integrity, the toleration of those abuses, and an unfettered "duty first" atmosphere lead to unintended consequences that must be dealt with by the most senior leaders of the Army.

The problematic examples above represent some of the recent instances where the military, and even the nation, have had to answer critical questions and conduct an in-depth examination as to the cause of these problems. In order to answer those questions, by looking into these examples, we must determine the underlying problem and then examine its potential cause. The Aberdeen Proving Ground scandal came to light as the result of the Army's prevention of sexual abuse program. Soldiers who were abused came forward and reported the infractions. The infractions were investigated and as a result the offenders were tried and convicted of their abuses. This is a strong indication that a problem existed. The Abu Ghraib scandal broke when a few photographs of prisoner abuse made their way to the public media. The fact that it was abuse is undisputed as evidenced by soldiers being tried and convicted of crimes of abuse. Following the Abu Ghraib scandal was the Guantanamo Bay prisoner abuse

scandal. The similarity with the two only exacerbated the problem. In each of these cases, the abuses exploded into a frenzy by the media. This public exposure created a demand by the media for a detailed investigation at all levels of authority. However, I intend to show in this paper that the underlying cause of the problem was at a much lower level than the media ever expected. It was an individual who compromised his or her integrity that led to the problem. This is a key issue that this paper intends to explore. First however, it is important to note that despite the root causes of these incidents being at the lower level, they still have significant strategic implications.

The strategic implications from these examples include: a loss of legitimacy for the nation, a loss of credibility for the Army as an institution, and a subsequent devaluation of both the nation and the Army in the eyes of world opinion. Each of these negative implications has a profound impact. For each abuse and scandal, the perception, within and without the United States Army as a moral institution, is lowered. Historically, the United States Army has prided itself on its maintaining the moral high ground on strategic issues. In order to maintain that high ground, we must, as an institution, remain free of abuses and scandals. If there are indeed strategic implications for these offenses, then there must be evidence to show that strategic leader involvement was necessary to address the problems.

When the Aberdeen story broke, the Army reeled at the potential implications if the allegations were true. Problematically, if it's true at Aberdeen, is it true elsewhere also? As the former Chief of Staff commented:

We will continue to come down hard on it, wherever we find it. And we will stamp it out.<sup>2</sup>

Gen. Dennis Reimer

When the Chief of Staff of the Army must come out publicly and address an issue that deals with handful of individuals at one installation, the problem has clearly become a strategic issue for the Army as a whole. When the Chief of Staff is taking time from his schedule to address this issue as opposed to his delegated Title 10 functions, the problem is serious and solutions must be sought. Clearly General Reimer maintained the moral high ground and his intention was to stop the abuse and punish the offenders wherever they were.

When the Abu Ghraib story first broke, it was apparent by the photographs that prisoners were in fact abused. The antics in the photos were appalling and served no military value. The story soon made national headlines and the Army needed to respond. In a *60 Minutes II* interview, Brigadier General Mark Kimmett, Deputy Director of Coalition Operations in Iraq, had

this to say, "The first thing I'd say is we're appalled as well. These are our fellow soldiers. These are the people we work with every day, and they represent us. They wear the same uniform as us, and they let their fellow soldiers down," Kimmett went on to say, "Frankly, I think all of us are disappointed by the actions of the few. Every day, we love our soldiers, but frankly, some days we're not always proud of our soldiers."<sup>3</sup> Once again we see here that one of the Army's strategic leaders must defend the institution because of the failures of a few.

On the heels of the Abu Ghraib scandal was the Guantanamo Bay prisoner abuse scandal. Once again, the Army was required to defend itself from the opinion that this issue is the norm rather than the failure of a few. Col. David McWilliams, a spokesman for the U.S. Southern Command, had this to say, "The claim that detainees have been physically abused, beaten, or tortured is simply not true. From the beginning, we have taken extra steps to treat prisoners not only humanely, but extra cautiously. We do not use any kind of coercive or physically harmful techniques."<sup>4</sup> In this case, the FBI reported the abuse of individual guards at the Guantanamo Bay facility abusing prisoners. Once again the Army was forced to answer the allegations.

Clearly, a significant amount of senior leader time and effort was devoted to settling these recent examples and supports the fact that these are strategic issues with strategic consequences. Continuing to use the more recent examples, a key focus is on our value system. Our value system starts at the national level, from which our Army values stem, then our unit values, and finally the values we came into the service with.<sup>5</sup> Ideally these are all nested and support each other. In this ideal situation, if an individual finds congruence at all levels, the potential for conflict diminishes. When there is a conflict between values, either inter-level or intra-level, the likelihood of a questionable issue is high. But, as we've seen from the examples above, the ideal is not always the reality. In the Aberdeen case, the offending soldiers' individual values were incongruent with the unit, Army, and national values. In the Abu Ghraib and the Guantanamo cases, the Army value of duty was incongruent with the Army value of integrity. Nevertheless, it is important that we have a value system at all of these levels.

Our national values are what made us a free country and the most powerful nation on the face of the earth. With such power comes responsibility. That responsibility is to act appropriately toward the other nations of the world, friend or foe. It is normally the world body, through the United Nations, that determines appropriate, or legitimate actions toward other nations. We must be careful to not abuse the power we have for fear we may alienate the world. Yet we also have a responsibility to uphold our

core national values. In addition to upholding those values as a nation, we must impart those values down to our national institutions, organizations, and individuals.

Historically, our national values come from three primary sources: the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bible. The Preamble to the Constitution states, “[w]e the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”<sup>6</sup> Also from the Constitution, we get many of our freedoms from the First Amendment which says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”<sup>7</sup> From the Declaration of Independence, we read, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>8</sup> These two documents, the Constitution and the Declaration, set a national framework of values that have been consistently relied upon to create equality and individual rights over the last two centuries.

As far as the biblical values, it is sufficient to say that many of our laws are drawn from the values demonstrated in the bible. The Ten Commandments brought us four such laws. From the book of Exodus, Chapter 20, verses 13-16 we get, “Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”<sup>9</sup> Stated another way, our laws say, don’t murder, don’t cheat, don’t steal, and don’t lie. Our forefathers brought these values with them to the new world while fleeing from religious persecution.

The next level down from the national level is the institutional level. As one looks at the Army as an institution and a microcosm of society, you might expect some wrong doing on the part of individuals within the Army. In other words, you cannot expect to stop all criminals from being criminals merely because they signed a contract or swore an oath. But there are ways through leadership, training, and discipline, that we can minimize those instances. We can change behavior of others who would have otherwise committed an offense. Accepting that the Army is in fact a microcosm of society, we should perpetuate and even build on the values of the nation favors as a whole. Each of these values is important in its own right, but not always congruent with each other. The Army Values are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.<sup>10</sup> In the recent Army scandals, an individual or group of

individuals have failed uphold their integrity by not simply doing the right thing, legally and morally.

In most challenging situations, the large majority will uphold these values and stand by their own convictions. Most soldiers would not abuse trainees or prisoners. But for those who do compromise, we need to get to the issue of “why” and “what corrective action” should be taken. The first reason why soldiers compromise their integrity is they don't know what they are doing is wrong. But, this is probably a rare instance with the amount of values and ethics training soldiers receive in basic level training, through their units, and through follow-on schooling. So, when confronted with a problem, the preponderance of soldiers have had at least a basic level of schooling that taught them what they need to know to do the right thing. Not knowing “right” therefore is a rare scenario. In our basic training and our basic courses, we are first exposed to the Army values. Depending on the values base that an individual enters the Army with determines whether that individual is already congruent with the Army values or whether he must change his perception in regards to proper versus improper conduct. Not all soldiers entering the Army are the same as for as their base values and those base values may change over generations.

However, all have received the classes and the training. Many of us have been issued a wallet and a “dog tag” card that expresses the Army values. We're given those items to remind us of what we stand for. Anyone who has been in a unit for any length of time has seen fellow soldiers punished for not abiding by our values by way of court martial or Article 15. The judicial and non-judicial punishment actions reinforce the values taught before. We also all come into the Army with a set of personal values that are either reinforced or reversed by the training received. Some of us came into the Army already espousing the values that the Army holds dear. Others have had to correct their way of thinking and acting in order to conform. Others have committed infractions and having been punished, changed their ways in order to remain in the service. This training is a means to reduce the incongruence between inter-level and intra-level values.

Given the training and exposure to the Army values, it is doubtful that an individual could plead ignorance and say they just didn't know what “right” was. But, in the Guantanamo Bay case, there was changing and confusing policy given that left some actions in the gray area. The perception on the part of the offenders was that the institution wanted information from the prisoners by nearly whatever means necessary to get it. This caused conflict at the unit and individual level as to just how far they could go with the prisoners. Given that, the error should have been on the side of “do the right thing, morally and legally” and a problem would not have

surfaced. Personal choices are what make the difference even without specific or conflicting direction.

The second reason why soldiers compromise their integrity is they don't care. Their individual values are incongruent with the other three levels. Although they've been told to do right and know what right is, they don't care enough to do it. Whether it is their upbringing, the societal norms they are used to, or their immaturity, they just don't feel compelled to obey the values trained in them. While you could argue any or all of these factors, I want to focus on the immaturity factor in the Abu Ghraib abuse case. Our Army institution brings soldier into the service at age eighteen. We train them in the basics and a follow-on specialty and then expect them to perform admirably. Many do just that. But when it comes to our military police force, what we do, as an institution, is give a teenager a badge, a gun, and a title and from that we get a teenager who, without the proper leadership and discipline, will act like a teenager. I don't want to fault the system of accessions here but rather emphasize the need for proper supervision of a relatively young force that needs to be focused and properly led. That did not happen at Abu Ghraib. Too much latitude was given to junior noncommissioned officers and soldiers and, despite their training, occupied their time with antics that were amusing to themselves, but humiliating to those they abused. Frankly, they did it for the fun of it.

The third reason is their leaders fail to reinforce these values. Leaders are the key to creating congruence. Leaders only have 24 hours in a day and of that, maybe 8-16 hours exposes them to their soldiers or a portion of their soldiers. So, if they are not reinforcing values as they walk the hangar floor or the motor pool, they are missing an opportunity to impart their beliefs in a one-on-one or small group setting. Also, there are only so many hours dedicated to ethics and values training and those hours must be maximized. I am not an advocate of dedicating more hours in the training schedule to values training. Rather, senior leader contact with subordinates can make a difference. If leaders will reinforce the values to which they subscribe to those subordinates they come in contact with, it will certainly help them make proper choices. The other venue to reinforce these values is in performance counseling. Both officer and noncommissioned officer have a values block on their evaluation reports. Leaders must take the time to do the counseling and reinforce those values. When subordinates know it's important to you, they will make it important to themselves.

The fourth reason is that leaders fail to set the proper example. When a subordinate sees a leader take a short cut or compromise his integrity, the leader has just made the same action allowable to every one of his subordinates. When a leader falsifies a report or lies about a task that wasn't accomplished, the subordinate feels justified in doing the same thing. Even

worse, the subordinate may feel justified in doing worse because if integrity on a small scale is not important, then perhaps, in the mind of the subordinate, it's not important on a larger scale either. In 1943, General George S. Patton, Jr. put it this way, "It is absurd to believe that soldiers who cannot be made to wear the proper uniform can be induced to move forward in battle. Officers who fail to perform their duty by correcting small violations and in enforcing proper conduct are incapable of leading."<sup>11</sup> I'll illustrate this point with the following example cited in the Miami Herald in December, 2004:

There was a time when creativity and ingenuity were considered military virtues, but don't tell that to Army Maj. Cathy Kaus. A reservist from Ohio for 27 years, Maj. Kaus' transportation company landed in Kuwait three days before the invasion of Iraq. Her unit's job was to haul fuel across dangerous stretches of road, including the Sunni Triangle, and it never missed a mission or lost a single soldier. Her performance: The unit hauled 33 million gallons of fuel during its tour of duty. She was one of 10 members awarded Bronze Stars. Her citation noted her "exceptionally meritorious service" and "initiative and courage" in a combat zone. Her mistake: Two members of her company commandeered two trucks and trailers left unattended on a military lot in order to transport tools and other supplies that were essential to the unit's safety and mission. Why? Because the brass bungled the run-up to the war so badly that units were sent overseas without the proper support. Later, her company took a third truck from another unit and cannibalized it for spare parts. Her punishment: After pleading guilty to a charge of misappropriating military property, she was court-martialed, stripped of her rank, sent to a military prison for six months and fined \$5,000. Maj. Kaus didn't report the taking of the vehicles and tried to hide her unit's involvement afterward. That was wrong, but the punishment seems excessive in the extreme, particularly when the Pentagon's leaders -- who failed to plan the war properly -- skate by without even a slap on the wrist. U.S. Senator Mike DeWine (R-Ohio) is among the members of Congress asking the Army to grant clemency to Ms. Kaus, allowing her to keep the retirement benefits she earned after nearly three decades of sacrifice as a citizen soldier. We support this request. Ms. Kaus risked her life, excelled in performance under hazardous conditions and did not act for personal gain.<sup>12</sup>

In this case, the organizational and institutional values were incongruent. Maybe the punishment was excessive, but the crime was committed. Unfortunately, MAJ Kaus' case is not the only lapse in judgment that leaders have portrayed to their subordinates. As far as soldier creativity and ingenuity, it can only go so far. When it comes to breaking the law in order to be creative and ingenious, you've gone too far. The bottom line is that she set a very poor example for her subordinates, especially in the aftermath by lying about the circumstances. By this illustration, lying about what you've done lends credence to the fact that you knew it was wrong in the first place. Perhaps she could have told the truth, explained why she made the decision she did, and accept the consequences. But again, a personal lapse in integrity has a

United States Congressman questioning what the Army is doing about one of its integrity failures.

The fifth reason is that leaders make poor decisions. For example, what happens when the executive officer tells the motor officer to have the HMMWV “up” by tomorrow evening? Looking at the problem, the HMMWV needs a new starter to be fixed. The motor officer doesn’t have one, the one he ordered is not due in for four days, and he’s checked the entire post for an available part and none are available. So, the motor officer has a mission (duty) to get the HMMWV “up” and in order to do that he can either falsify the report and call it “up”, have a fellow soldier steal a starter from another HMMWV, or pass the buck to his motor sergeant. The dilemma is that duty and integrity are at odds with each other. So either the motor officer or motor sergeant must compromise his personal integrity or fail in their duty.

We can make the correlation between the example above and the dilemma the soldiers faced at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and to the MAJ Kaus case. The dilemma is what comes first, duty or integrity. At Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, the accused cited the fact that they needed to obtain intelligence. That was their mission. In order to do that, they felt as though humiliating prisoners was acceptable. In other words, the duty came before the integrity. MAJ Kaus argued the same principle in that getting fuel to the brigades justified the means to keep her fuel trucks up. Keep in mind, her subordinates stole tools, parts, and other supplies, not actual fuel trucks. In each case, the leaders felt that the ends justified the means. This is where the root problem lies in this argument. The impact of making a poor judgment call was not considered in the decisionmaking process. The impact on other units, other peers, or the subordinates didn’t seem to figure significantly into the equation.

So how do senior leaders of the Army correct the problems? What means should senior leaders use to establish congruence? It boils down to good leadership, good training, and accession awareness. First, the leader has to set the proper example -- always. Any real or perceived impression that the leader may show that is contrary to keeping his integrity opens the door for his subordinates to do the same or worse. The leader must reinforce the values subscribed to by the nation, the institution, and by his organization, regardless of the circumstances. If we will keep in mind that we do not have to obey an illegal order and if we can justify why we made the decisions we made, based on moral principles, we should not be concerned with the consequences. When a noncommissioned officer or commissioned officer gives even the tacit approval to an unethical act, it sets him or her up for a command climate that will do exactly the same.

Second, the leader has to set the proper command climate that allows subordinates to not feel compelled to compromise their own integrity. We need to train leaders that while we give credit to subordinates for all the great things the unit does, we take the personal blame for all the things the unit fails to do. When leaders stand up and say to their leaders, "It's my fault." Then they have gone a long way toward keeping the values we should be subscribing to. When we stand up and give credit to the company commander and platoon leader for doing the right thing in the right way, we have gone a long way toward subscribing to the values we should be striving for. Command climate is so much more than subscribing to the "consideration of others" policy and the "equal opportunity" policy and the "prevention of sexual harassment policy." All of those are part of the climate, but the underlying theme is to simply do what's right, legally and morally. We write those policies to reinforce the philosophy of the integrity value because it's the right thing to do. If we don't carry it forth to all aspects of what we do then we set ourselves up for confusion and allow subordinates to decide for themselves what they should do.

Army units have to train to proficiency in all tasks. That training is focused on mission essential tasks as approved by the chain of command. But, in addition to the mission essential tasks, time is carved out to train a host of other important tasks and one of them is ethics and values. I am not a proponent of increasing the amount of time spent on ethics and values training, there is just not enough time for more formal training on this issue. I am however, a proponent of making that training as effective as possible. Throwing a chart up on a screen showing the Army Values is substandard. Defining the values is substandard. Proposing that these values are nonnegotiable and must be abided by is substandard. Taking the time to develop real vignettes that are applicable to the unit's organization and mission and then discussing them as a group of professionals gets us closer to the mark. The reinforcement of that training is reinforced by good leadership. When a compromising situation comes up, the leader stands on the moral high ground and does the right thing himself and ensures his subordinates do likewise.

This brings us to accession awareness. As senior leaders we must be aware of the fact that the generation of soldiers coming into the Army today is not the same as generations before. We must be cognizant of the fact that the methods of teaching and training our generation may not always be the best methods for every generation. This again is where personal interaction with new soldiers will help us find better and more effective ways of training that will not waste the time we have to accomplish it. We should not hesitate to explore the methods used by our most effective high schools and colleges that are successful in reaching the future leaders of our nation.

In summary, the issue of integrity failures within the Army can easily become a strategic problem. We have seen that this problem is not new and has continued as illustrated in the recent examples illustrated here. The Aberdeen, Abu Ghraib, and Guantanamo problems are just three examples where even with our multi-leveled values system , problems surfaced that required senior leader action. Whether it was because of an inter-level or intra-level incongruence in values, problems arose that questioned our credibility, our legitimacy, and devalued the nation and the Army in the court of world opinion. We as leaders must strive to reduce the incongruence between values. It will take effort by way of leadership, training, and accession awareness to minimize the number of poor choices that might be made. While it is doubtful that these types of issues will never happen again, by our effort and awareness, we can certainly make a difference in the scope and volume of instances.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> ThinkExist.com, *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, available from [http://en.thinkexist.com/quotation/the\\_supreme\\_quality\\_for\\_leadership\\_is/202972.html](http://en.thinkexist.com/quotation/the_supreme_quality_for_leadership_is/202972.html); Internet, accessed 3 October 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Remark by Army Chief of Staff Dennis J. Reimer, 1997, Year in Review, CNN Website, available from <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1997/year.ender/us/09.milscandal.html>; Internet, accessed 21 December 2005

<sup>3</sup> Remarks by BG Mark Kimmett, 2004, 60 Minutes II, CBS Website, available from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/27/60II/main614063.shtml>; Internet, accessed 9 March 2006

<sup>4</sup> Remarks by COL Dave McWilliams, 2004, The Washington Post Website, available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A25962-2004Dec25.html>; Internet, accessed 9 March 2006

<sup>5</sup> COL Dave Brooks shared with me the levels of values from which we as United States citizens and soldiers draw from within this country.

<sup>6</sup> House of Representatives, *The Constitution of the United States of America as Amended* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1992), 1.

<sup>7</sup> House of Representatives, *The Constitution of the United States of America as Amended* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1992), 13.

<sup>8</sup> The Declaration of Independence, linked from the *USHistory.org* homepage, available from <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/index.htm>; Internet, 24 October 2005.

<sup>9</sup> *Holy Bible, containing the King James Version*, (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers , Inc., n.d.), Exodus 20:13-16

<sup>10</sup> The Army Values, linked from the *United States Army Homepage*, available from [http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/LC/The%20Mission/the\\_seven\\_army\\_values.htm](http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/LC/The%20Mission/the_seven_army_values.htm); Internet, accessed 21 August 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Famous Quotes, General George S. Patton, Jr., available from <http://quotes.tubegator.com/patton.php>; Internet, accessed 22 March 2006.

<sup>12</sup> An Unjust Punishment, linked from the *Free Republic Homepage*, available from <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1309930/posts>; Internet, accessed 9 March 2006.

