

RUNNING HEAD: Alcohol in Combat. Why Not?

Alcohol in Combat. Why Not?

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ABSTRACT

Today's Soldier faces many challenges during the multiple deployments into combat for extended periods of time, time away from home, and the everyday stresses that come with being an American Soldier. Alcohol helps the Soldier to relax, reduce stress, and escape the pressures of military life abroad at least for a brief moment. Facing the dangers of death and not returning home, Soldiers should have leaders that allow them to drink in theater, or should they. Senior leaders in the Army must learn to mitigate stress for Soldiers and ensure that each Soldier is focused, mentally alert, and able to perform their duties at a moments notice. Consuming alcohol does not allow Soldiers to perform their duties to the best of their abilities.

The ethical decision to have or allow alcohol in combat can drastically affect the unit morale and safety within a military organization. Soldiers and alcohol serve as synonymous allies throughout military history. Historical references to military functions that include alcohol are countless. Alcohol had its place in the United States military, but times change. The combat theater or environment is not a place for alcohol because the risks and liabilities of alcohol consumption outweigh the positive affects of alcohol and the safety of United States service members.

Soldier Challenges

The Soldiers in the Army today face challenges, stress, and responsibilities that the “old Soldier” did not face. Advanced technology and combat operational experience generates Soldiers who operate independently of orders, and immediate supervision. The absence of senior leaders during combat operations leaves young Sergeants and Lieutenants leading Soldiers in combat missions. Many of these young leaders may desire to consume alcohol and could become unethical by allowing Soldiers to “wind down” after missions by overlooking the consumption of alcohol. The decisions made by these young leaders affect all levels of operations, and can affect the international relationship that the United States maintains with many countries.

Soldier Impacts

Young Soldiers’ decisions have a tremendous impact on the outcome of a mission, and affect combat operations from unit level to even global ramifications. The Abu Ghraib prison scandal is an example of the global impact that young Soldiers can have on the world, and the outlook that other countries or organizations have on the United States. Obviously, Soldiers do not think

about the huge set backs that their actions cause. The enemy can use these Soldiers' actions to their advantage.

Terrorists groups exploit the actions or failure of action from the United States service members by utilizing the media for propaganda methods. A small problem can turn into a major issue for the United States and the service men and women in the Armed Forces. Service members make enough mistakes on accident in the war on terrorism everyday without adding alcohol to the mix.

Military Rules for Alcohol in Combat

The Army's current position does not glamorize alcohol in social settings. The Army does not accept the risks of alcohol being a factor in the disciplinary actions within subordinate commands while deployed forward in theater. The abuse and effects of alcohol is a factor in toughening of laws and regulations in the United States society, and the United States military. Military branches in the Department of Defense have different rules for each branch. The Army has General Order Number 1, which states that Soldiers will not consume alcohol while in theater. A person with basic cognitive abilities will conclude that alcohol contributes to actions and behavior that is not in the good order and discipline of the United States Army. Many subordinate commands place their interpretations on the use of alcohol but the same remains true, no alcohol in theater.

Reasons for no alcohol

Time is the only way to remove alcohol from the human body. Time is not a commodity that units can afford while under an enemy attack. Attacks can finish within minutes and sometimes, seconds of the initial contact. A Soldier under the influence of alcohol can have a detrimental impact on the unit and individual lives.

Consuming alcohol in the combat theater can decrease the combat readiness of a service member. The stresses of combat coupled with alcohol presents many problems that the command has to endure. The facilities to allow Soldiers to recover from alcohol usage are minimal, and the enemy has a vote in the time and place of attack. Sober Soldiers would have to rely on their teammates who are not sober to protect and assist them in a combat situation. A Soldier's mind is their most important weapon.

Bad decisions and disciplinary actions are highest in a garrison environment with a majority of incidents being alcohol related. The combat environment plus alcohol consumption would only heighten the reoccurrence of disciplinary problems. Commanders alleviate these potential problems by making drinking in theater against Army regulation.

Supervising Soldier's who are drinking in theater would take manpower and time away from the unit mission. Units do not have the time or facilities to accommodate Soldiers to drink and provide for them a safe place to become sober.

Many of the countries that the United States Soldiers deploy to are Islamic countries. Islamic countries do not use alcohol. The United States allowing Soldiers to have alcohol could have a negative impact on the relations with the country and the local communities where Soldiers are living. It is easier not to consume alcohol than to apologize for breaking local traditions and customs.

An effect of alcohol is a heightened sense of depression. Statistics show that people who commit suicide do so while they are drunk or intoxicated. Soldiers being people and coupled with being in a combat environment would add to the increased number of combat related intoxicated suicide. Suicides equal alcohol plus live ammunition plus depression and wanting to escape.

Devil's advocate

Soldiers who drink may prefer to have a couple of beers to “wind down” from the stress upon returning from a mission. Soldiers can do physical training (PT), play video games, watch a movie, call home, do laundry, go to the Post Exchange (PX), but they cannot have a beer. Can the Army’s leadership not control alcohol? The most disciplined and well-trained Army on the face of the earth cannot control their Soldiers enough to consume alcohol. Leaders fool themselves to think that there is not alcohol in theater.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, there are Operating Bases with units that have alcohol. Sister services in the Department of Defense have alcohol and their Soldiers seem to be able to handle consuming alcohol. Either those services mitigate their service members’ consumption or they understand that because of heightened security at those select bases, they can afford to allow their service members to consume alcohol during the down time. Many of the jobs that the service members who are able to drink alcohol are “banker hours” jobs with a regular schedule and not detrimental to the security or safety of unit personnel during combat operations. If Army Soldiers want to drink alcohol, they should have joined the Air Force.

Alcohol and its effects are in no way, shape, or form positive influences to the good order and discipline of the United States Army. The Army leadership made a great choice in precluding alcohol from the military lifestyle. Soldiers and leaders must find ways to alleviate stresses that combat actions cause. Soldiers’ lives are at stake.