

Running Head: RISKING SOLDIERS LIVES

Risking Soldier's Lives and Mission Success to Assist and or Cooperate
with Civilians on the Battlefield

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Class 57

Saving Private Ryan

In the movie Saving Private Ryan, CPT Miller (Tom Hanks) and his small unit are moving through France during World War 2 in search of a young Soldier (Private Ryan) whose 3 brothers had all been killed in action in the previous weeks. As they move through a French town they encounter a family in a bombed out building. The father wants the Americans to take his children to safety, CPT Miller is telling the father and his Soldiers no. One Soldier (PVT Carparzo) disregards this direction, picks up the man's Daughter, and brings her back to the team, saying it's "the descent thing to do" and that "she reminds me of my niece". As he sets the girl down he is shot by a German Sniper and goes down in an open area with no protective cover. His fellow Soldiers can only watch as he slowly bleeds to death while the Sniper is shot and killed.

Ethical dilemma: Disregarding a direct order from a superior.

Cause and Affect: Because PVT Carparzo felt an overwhelming sympathy and compassion towards the little girl, he disregarded a direct order to leave the girl. He thereby jeopardized the mission by unnecessarily exposing himself to sniper fire which ultimately lead to his death.

Ethical dilemma: Leaving an innocent and unprotected child on the battlefield.

Cause and Affect: To any Soldier or leader who has a child, it tears at your heart to see any child in this situation. In this case, the child was not alone; her parents were still with her. It is their responsibility for her safety and welfare. The safety of a civilian on the battlefield should always be secondary to jeopardizing the success of the mission and the safety of your fellow Soldiers.

Local Nationals as Interpreters

Regardless of whether you are operating in the Iraq area of responsibility (AOR) in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom or in the Afghanistan AOR in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, you will encounter Local Nationals being employed as Interpreters in support of US missions. My definition of a Local National is someone who is from the area. Part of the reason for hiring these Local Nationals is to help inject money into the local economy and to show trust and good faith in the cause. There is generally little background investigation done prior to hiring these individuals, after all there is no database to search or historical records to look at. Even if they go as far as to ask other locals, more often than not, you will only be told what you want to hear. In my experience, the Civil Affairs (CA) Unit that was on my Compound when I arrived had already established an Interpreter pool that was used in support of CA and Engineer Operations. CA trusted these LN Interpreters inexplicably, while those of us in the Engineer community did not. There are several reasons for this. Obviously, the CA mission is quite different from the Engineer mission, they win hearts and minds and identify humanitarian and infrastructure projects and make recommendations to the Engineers. While the Engineers, manage, oversee and or execute the project once it is approved. In my opinion CA was constantly and easily influenced by the LN interpreters to recommend projects that would benefit them either directly (by getting kickbacks from the eventual contractor) or indirectly (by increased stature or preferential treatment in the local community). Certain Interpreters would not go on certain missions. The reasons were many,

but most amounted to “I have to stay home and wash the cat” type of an excuse. Therein lies the ethical dilemma, when the Interpreter was a no show and no other interrupter was available, the mission has to be cancelled. To go on the mission without an interpreter would have definitely put Soldiers lives in danger unnecessarily.

The Media – Public Affairs Office or National Media

Unlike previous Wars, the National Media has been embedded within some Units, especially during the initial push to Baghdad. While this can be argued as a good thing in terms of the public’s awareness of military operations, more often than not the media paints a negative perspective of the Military as a whole. The major issue regarding this is that when executing a mission, Soldiers and Marines have to be aware either consciously or unconsciously of a civilian news reporter and a cameraman in most cases. These individuals are unarmed and for the most part wear little or no protective gear. They are not trained to effectively participate in a combat mission much less cover it media wise without getting in the way or risking their personal safety. This could cause a member of the mission to have to do his job and take care of the media member(s) thus causing the Soldier or Marine to lose focus on the task at hand. This could result in the mission not being completed on time, if at all. This could also result in the injury or death or persecution of a Soldier or Marine or the member of the media. An example of this is when the Marines were fighting in Fallujah. Media footage showed a Marine shooting and killing a wounded enemy during a room clearing operation. There were those that called for that Marine to be prosecuted for

murder because of the way the media portrayed that incident. What wasn't reported is that this happened in the heat of combat, that the Marines had taken casualties, that the enemy had been booby-trapping wounded and dead personnel. That fellow members of that particular Marine had yelled "gun" and that his reflex was to eliminate the threat. Therefore, I am against the Civilian Media being embedded with Military units during Combat operations.

As this pertains to the Military Public Affairs Office, they have their place. In most cases they at least can defend themselves in a Combative situation which in and of itself puts them light years ahead of their civilian counterparts. I have no ethical issues with military media on the battlefield as long as they are included in the planning and preparation prior to mission execution. To often they are an afterthought or request to be part of the mission just prior to execution. This can lead to some of the same potential pitfalls as stated previously concerning civilian media on the battlefield.

Local Nationals - Government Officials

One ethical issue that I was exposed to involved an Afghani Government Official who demanded that he be allowed to accompany us on several missions in order to observe the progress of reconstruction through several provinces in and around Kabul. Our command agreed to it more out of diplomatic pressure than out of common sense. This individual accompanied us on several missions and all were uneventful. The only info he was given was what time to meet us on the day of the mission. SP times were varied and destination of the mission was not disclosed. It was SOP that if he was a no-show we were to continue the mission

without him as ultimately he was not the reason the mission was being conducted in the first place. On one particular day he was a no show even though he said he would be there for sure. We departed IAW with the published SP time and were subsequently hit by 3 command detonated IED's about 40 miles southwest of Kabul. One cannot help but think that this individual played a part in this ambush and that a Local National Interpreter somehow fed him the info. We could not prove any of this but it is real in my mind. In cooperating with civilians, we unknowingly and unnecessarily risked the lives of Soldiers.

Conclusion

The bottom-line is that in this current war we are fighting is like no other war we have ever fought in terms of civilians on the battlefield. It can be argued that Viet Nam may have been similar but times and circumstances were entirely different. The culture of the enemy we are fighting creates an environment in which the civilian population can not and should be trusted during combat operations. The National media should also not be included in combat operations due to the risk of injury or death of Soldiers/Marines and the Media members themselves. There is also the issue of compromising the mission by the media and or Local National civilians. This is unacceptable in terms of completing the mission with minimal or no military casualties.