

# **Ethics Thought Paper**

“Establishing an Ethical Climate ”

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**2005**

The importance of establishing an ethical climate in a unit is important. In this essay, I will define and discuss ethics, the importance of ethics in the decisions and actions of our military leaders and subordinates. I will show how the lack of an ethical climate resulted in prisoner abuse in Iraq, Afghanistan and Cuba. I will discuss several Soldiers who despite peer pressure and opposition from superiors upheld the ethical training and values they learned in the military.

The most common definition for the word ethics is a set of principles of right conduct; a system of moral values. Morals are the judgment of the goodness or badness of human action and character. A leaders' ethical behavior should incorporate the Army values. Key ethical principles include honesty, respect for others, and fairness. All Soldiers join the Army with their own ethical standard; many differ from Soldier to Soldier. This is the reason the military teaches every Soldier in the military ethics training that focuses on the seven Army values and provides Soldiers with a moral standard to use when making decisions.

The ethical environment in a unit should reflect and support the Army values. Some leaders put their subordinates in ethical dilemmas by deliberately sending the wrong ethical message. Soldiers respect their leaders and want to be just like them. Leaders must always remember their subordinates are monitoring every decision and action they make. How many times has a leader brief their units that a day off depended upon getting all vehicles assigned to a fully mission capable status, despite the fact a backorder of parts created the decline in maintenance. The leader hints that an adjoining unit's motor pool with similar vehicles is currently at 100%. The leader ends the briefing by stating do whatever it takes to acquire the parts needed. The message this leader sends to

his subordinates is that it is acceptable to steal another unit's parts in order to achieve success. Eventually the subordinates forget the ethics involved in making a decision and assume the attitude that it is acceptable to do whatever it takes in any situation to achieve success. Leaders must constantly be aware of sending the wrong ethical message.

Developing an ethical environment for our junior Soldiers to emulate is important to every leader. The recent Abu Graib, Bagram, and Guantanamo base prisoners' abuse case reflect a poor ethical environment in that unit. Many of the subordinates charged in the various prisoner abuse cases claimed they were only following the orders of leadership. Where was the ethical training? Where was the leader presence and oversight? These cases developed from poor judgment and lack of an ethical standard in units. Soldiers face ethical dilemmas daily when capturing prisoners but due to leader's presence and training, the Soldiers take the best course of action to safeguard the prisoner.

Three Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) and one Captain despite pressures from superiors to keep quiet brought forward the unethical treatment of prisoners in Bagram, Afghanistan. These individuals felt that based upon the ethics and value training received in the military, the actions of some leaders and subordinates was unethical and not in accordance with Army doctrine. These individuals elevated the treatment through the Chain Of Command and received no response other than a reminder of loyalty to the unit. Due to a lack of action and interest from superiors, these Soldiers emailed a human rights agency. Some critics say they were not loyal to the Chain Of Command. However, to these individuals the risk was worth taking. An investigation uncovered evidence that several Afghan prisoners died and suffer permanent life altering injuries due to the

physical abuse. Many Soldiers face similar ethical dilemmas daily when handling and capturing prisoners but because of values and ethic training choose to protect the prisoner.

Decisions made by leaders and junior Soldiers in peacetime and wartime reflect the ethical climate of the unit. The ethical environment in your unit must support the Army values. Making ethical decisions occur on a daily basis in the military. The decisions an individual makes, defines that person and the unit they represent. During this time in the military, making the right ethical decision could prove detrimental to the world perception of the U.S Military. The fallout from making an ethical decision could produce more terrorists due to the wrong ethical behavior dealing with prisoners. Too often, senior leaders prefer to look the other way when an ethical situation develops in their unit. They are often times faced with conflicting views between right and wrong. Ethic training exists in the military to help provide leaders with clear-cut guidelines.

How many Soldiers face similar ethical dilemmas daily when handling prisoners but because of values and ethics training select the best course of action. The importance of ethics in the military is very important because the entire world and future generations are watching. The Army has set a high standard of professionalism for leaders. Leader must constantly exceed the standards in ethics. All Soldiers have an obligation to train, and maintain the principles that makes America's Army the best in the World.

In conclusion, I believe that in order to be a truly successful leader you must lead by example and practice what you preach. Ethics are essential to us as leaders and can ultimately make or break the reputation of the U.S. Military.

### ETHICS and the Military

PURPOSE:

Define Ethics:

Ethical behavior

Ethics are principles or standards of human conduct, sometimes called morals.



### ETHICS AND THE MILITARY

Army code of ethics

Consequences of unethical behavior in a military



### ETHICAL DILEMMAS



- SSG to stand trial in drug smuggling scheme (Ft. Bliss)
- Five members of an elite Army unit charged (Fort Benning)
- SOCOM Colonel Indicted For Bribery
- U.S. General, 3 other officers investigated for Guantanamo Bay misconduct



### ETHICS TRAINING

- Commander on Chief: mandatory briefings for all White House Staff on ethical behavior



### ETHICS

- SUMMARY/  
QUESTIONS

- CONCLUSION

