

Running header: Ethics at War

Ethics at War

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Class 58

L10

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7 December 2007

Abstract

Ethical decisions made in combat, right or wrong, have a significant impact with regards to mission success or mission failure. Leadership must teach Soldiers how to conduct proper ethical reasoning and Army values to help mitigate catastrophic realities in the battle space.

Ethics at War

Ethical reasoning and decision making are in constant flux with a lot of military leaders. Whether it is making the harder ethical choice of more than one right or the wrong ethical choice, the gray area in between is always prevalent. As leaders, our ethics are defined by our organizational teachings and those values we have adopted over the course of our lives.

We have a clear picture of right and wrong but our perception of ethics is often clouded by mitigating factors. Some factors include close association with an individual or an event at hand. Situations that we take personal interest in can often sway our ethical decisions...right or wrong. Either way, accountability of the end result belongs to the doer or non doer. Regardless of whether our ethical decision manifests itself into something beneficial and productive for the entire organization or destroys its very fiber we must keep in mind those most valuable of assets; our Soldiers.

The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has challenged leaders at every rank, in every service, and in every circumstance. The asymmetric battlefield has presented a new and more gruesome enemy confrontation than ever before. The enemy's uniform is obsolete and provides them with hit and run capabilities not unlike the guerilla tactics of Vietnam. Thus, everyone outside of our coalition partners presents a potential threat in the battle space until determined otherwise. We have watched our comrades-in-arms die and survivors become disfigured in the most horrid ways imaginable. We have seen firsthand what human bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) can do to our brothers, our sister's, our mothers, our fathers and our friends. The life and death episodes that continue to play out on many streets, in many neighborhoods, have truly tested the resolve of our ground forces. Most Soldiers have succeeded in reasoning out the attack methods of our enemy and have chosen to remain steadfast with

respect to the Warrior Ethos, regardless of the damage witnessed in the battle space. In areas that concern ethical decision making we have succeeded with superb leadership and mentoring of the majority while a small percentage have failed.

Several of these failures happened during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). We had Soldiers treat detainees inhumanely with blatant disregard for decency and human treatment mandated by the Geneva Convention and the Army values. We had Soldiers accused and convicted of raping and murdering unarmed civilians, to include children in apparent acts of revenge for the loss of a fellow warrior. We had Soldiers killing other Soldiers because they did not like them or the orders they were tasked to follow. We had and still have Soldiers who commit suicide because they feel that is the only way to escape the vial prison of death and despair that comes with war. In each and every case a poor ethical decision was made prior to any outward act or commitment. Somewhere along the way some have lost the azimuth used to guide their moral and ethical compasses. These ethical decisions negatively affect the perception, the readiness, and the camaraderie of our Army. The atrocity of these acts by our Soldiers will forever remain within our ranks in infamy.

Some say the numerous deployments and youthfulness of our deployed force are factors that challenge current ethical reasoning. Soldiers from all walks of life are being exposed to a world of violence and death that they have never seen or experienced before. Some have never had a fist fight growing up let alone fire a weapon with intent to kill another human being. Some of our Soldiers are benefiting from a change in our recruitment policies. Some of our Soldiers are being allowed to join our ranks with more waivers than ever used before. Waivers for those convicted of crimes that include felonies as well as waivers for low aptitude scores on entry level

tests to meet yearly retention quotas has become more of the norm than the exception. Does this mean that we may have additional leadership and ethical problems within our ranks...?

I believe that we are sending some, not all, of our Soldiers into battle before they can truly be assimilated into our organization. We should pause and scrutinize our Soldiers behavioral attributes closely and early on. Maybe this is something that we do not do very well because of the multiple deployment and redeployment scenarios. Time constraints from Soldier reception, to integration, to training, to mission have caused a blank spot to appear in Soldier readiness. Leaders have a tendency to concentrate on the more mission preparation piece than looking into the eyes of our warriors to see what's there before the plane takes off. We are driven at times to get every able body, willing or unwilling, to the fight in a most expeditious manner as possible. These are our orders and this is what we must do.

Let us not forget about the psychological effect war has taken on our warriors. Many have learned to see, feel, and hear war for what it is and really want no part of it. Some sleep in cold sweats induced by the actions of the day and can find no comfort or solace in the orders or values that they are expected to hold dear. It is with great emotional despair that some of our warriors rise each day knowing that they might have to take a life and pray at night for a safe return home and a full magazine.

We as leaders must look for the signs, however slight, of battle fatigue and stress. We need to do our best to mitigate these distracters utilizing every available resource at hand. Can I see why there are ethical dilemmas in war? Hell yes I can!

We must continue to teach and train our force, and remind them daily what the task at hand is. We must remind them daily that they will experience death; whether it's a close friend or someone they just met in the DFAC or in a composite convoy. We must talk to our Soldiers

everyday about any topic and give them our undivided attention and attentive ear. We must share our experiences and knowledge all the while leading by example. As leaders we must take care of our own issues so that we can be ready for the task at hand.

More than ever our values and the Warrior Ethos must be understood and held in the highest regard thus providing a mental sanctuary to house the right ethical solutions our Soldiers can instinctively draw upon.

The more our Soldiers understand the profession of arms and the enormous responsibility charged to each of us, the better management and response to adversity they will have. In the battle space, where decision making is fast and furious, ethical reasoning must prevail.

Conclusion