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Ethical Dilemmas Faced in Combat

Ethics are probably one of the most debated subjects in our world today. For that matter ethics have always been debated. The word ethics is derived from the Greek word ethos. Defined ethics is the study of morals, values and customs of a group (Wikipedia, 2007). When two primary values are said to be in contrast to one another this presents what is known as an ethical dilemma. Ethical dilemmas can assume many different faces. Soldiers more than anyone face ethical dilemmas on a daily basis while in combat. The American Soldier is guided by his sense of morals and values that are defined by the seven Army values, the Soldiers creed, and the Warrior Ethos.

Ethical dilemma is therefore defined as the conflict between two important ethical values or perspectives, for example conflict between ones professional values and personal values, or it may be the conflict between the values held by different people (Cohen 2007). Ethical dilemma involving two people with different perspectives is typical between a doctor and a patient where the patient may be an enemy insurgent responsible for the deaths of American Soldiers. Professionally and by oath it is his job to give that insurgent the best medical care he can, even though personally he would rather let the insurgent die. For the US Soldier it is the professional value conflicting the personal value for example should they kill or not and if so what are the possible consequences. Further on the Soldiers are also faced with other dilemmas such as destruction of property or unlawful search and seizure of property. There are many scenarios that reflect ethical dilemmas, but they all have the same base, a conflict of values.

Soldiers are military personnel that are expected by the US government to accomplish any mission needed to fight any enemy of the state. With the continued increase in global terror these Soldiers are trained to deal with the enemy in the most brutal way possible even if it means

killing them. Death and destruction are part of what a Soldier is expected to do. Soldiers are always subjected to this ethical dilemma. Most of us are taught as a child that killing is wrong and that we should always find a nonviolent solution to a problem. The Army teaches us differently, we are taught to find, fix, and destroy our enemies. For many young Soldiers this presents quite a dilemma. Some Soldiers find this so perplexing that they declare themselves as conscientious objectors.

The US Army spends countless hours every year on ethics training. This training is reinforced with the values cards, the Soldiers creed, and the Warrior Ethos. All of these programs are designed to help a Soldier make the right decision in the heat of battle. The world expects the US Soldier to hold a higher standard, to be morally and ethically correct at all times. Violations of these values can result in punishment under The Uniform Code of Military Justice or even court martial. The US Army together with other service groups is supposed to direct their service and support to engage the US's enemies in combat to defend our nation at all costs.

Of the seven Army values one that seems to come into question at times is Loyalty. Loyalty can sometimes be used as an excuse for unethical behavior. When a Soldier commits a crime, such as detainee abuse or torture it seems that the number one reason given is "I was just following orders". This may be the case to an extent, but every US Soldier has the right to refuse an order if he feels it is unlawful or immoral. These situations could present an ethical dilemma for some Soldiers, because they don't know what to do. Should the Soldier do as he is told, or should he question the order and if necessary go higher? I believe that all Soldiers are bound by honor, if you believe it is wrong then don't do it. Using Loyalty as an excuse is unacceptable. However studies have revealed that "Mixed Agency" and "conflicting loyalty" is as common in Soldiers as it is in civilians with malicious Soldiers justifying their acts to protection of the state

leaving the straight forward ones in ethical dilemmas since they have to be loyal to the state, they have to kill (Beam 2005). The ethical dilemmas facing the Soldier include conflict in military ethics and health ethics, human psychological ethics as well as military medical ethics. Therefore the Soldiers are left in huge dilemmas on how to address each specific value with respect to their professional ethics that is the military ethics.

One commander in Iraq was reported to have accepted that actually in the battlefield they were at dilemma not with the human value of the enemy or the civilians but also amongst the Soldiers themselves. He said that it is actually it was not a simple matter to kill or to be killed, however the Soldiers have to think about their fellow Soldiers, their country, and the reason why they have gone to war. Sometimes a Soldier kills because he feels threatened, or he feels his fellow Soldiers are threatened. He does this at the risk of being persecuted by the law, if the law, deems that the killing was unjustified. There are other times when he accidentally kills a civilian and then he faces persecution. However those feeling the pinch of the dilemma here are the commanders, they have to put Soldiers to battle knowing very well that deaths will occur.

Soldiers often find themselves in another type of ethical dilemma. Many times you are required to conduct a search of private homes. In over 400 combat patrols, and searching hundreds of houses never once did I have a search warrant. This posed a dilemma at times because inside it did not feel right; however I knew that the mission called for the houses being searched so I searched. This is a dilemma for many because once again by American values, illegal search and seizure is wrong. At times during these searches Soldiers are required to break or destroy private property such as locks and doors to gain entry. In most cases the person whose house is searched, gets compensated for the loss, but not in all.

Continued war all over the world sees Soldiers being sent to various destinations this has by far added greater dimensions to the Soldiers ethical dilemmas. With increased injuries and deaths the Soldiers do not know where to start and end because the dilemma now is actually seen in their lives versus the profession. The US Army does not offer any guideline on whether to withhold treatment from Soldiers with severe brain injuries or not. The military doctors are in turn faced with a very complicated moral and ethical dilemma (Zoraya, 2006). Here the doctor must choose between treating the worst and disturbing wounds he has ever seen or to let his fellow Soldier to die. In these situations the military doctor is faced with a huge decision whether or not to treat the casualty or let him die. This type of dilemma would not happen in a civilian hospital back in the United States, because of clear cut protocol that has been established. The civilian doctor would let the casualty die instead of just keeping him alive.

Recently there have been many cases noted where Soldiers and Marines have committed atrocious crimes. There are numerous cases of rape, murder, and detainee abuse. In all of these cases a fellow Soldier came forward to report these crimes. In a study conducted by the Army Surgeon General it was discovered that out of the Soldiers and Marines surveyed that less than half would come forward and report a buddy for a crime. I think that had that survey been taken at the beginning of the war that number would be much higher. After six years of combat with a ruthless enemy that maybe the ethics, values and morals of our Soldiers are changing. The ethical dilemma of before has changed to a new dilemma. Should I protect my buddy at all cost or do I turn him in? This is a hard situation that will require the Army to continue to train battlefield ethics.

To avoid these dilemmas there should be a well-defined ethics code to guard everybody getting involved with the Soldiers for example there should be a specific line to differentiate

military ethics, personal ethics and medical ethics. The Soldiers should adopt military role specific ethics which only favor military interest exclusively and the medical ethics should also be exclusive to patients. No mixing of ethics should occur in the different values. When it comes to killing for example it is a military ethic that a Soldier is expected to kill and that is ok.

The Soldier should therefore be vigilant not to act inhumanly; they should learn to be flexible in their actions not to be influenced by fellow Soldiers but should consider the values of the people they meet in war. The Soldier should also develop the skills of listening and learning from the mistakes made in the past by them or colleagues to avoid making any further errors. They should also learn to make their own decisions regardless of the unexpected situations they encounter in the battlefields and act accordingly with regard to military ethics and other moral ethics.

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