

Compassion on the Battlefield

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What place does compassion have on the battlefield? Our military force deployed to the battlefield of Iraq for several reasons. “The military objectives of Operation Iraqi Freedom consist of first, ending the regime of Saddam Hussein. Second, to identify, isolate and eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Third, to search for, to capture and to drive out terrorists from the country. Fourth, to collect intelligence related to terrorist networks. Fifth, to collect such intelligence as is related to the global network of illicit weapons of mass destruction. Sixth, to end sanctions and to immediately deliver humanitarian support to the displaced and to many needed citizens. Seventh, to secure Iraq's oil fields and resources, which belong to the Iraqi people. Finally, to help the Iraqi people create conditions for a transition to a representative self-government (Operation Iraqi Freedom).”

When our leaders and Soldiers are confronted with a situation on the battlefield pertaining to helping a civilian, a fellow Soldier or the enemy, should they submit to their emotions or the execution of the mission? Is there enough training on ethics to answer the tough questions that face these brave men and women on the battlefield? Leaders and subordinates at all levels of the Department of Defense and the armed forces received instructions and training on ethics. Everyone has a value system. “Some people are able to remain compassionate because they are lucky to have received a spiritual heritage, kindness and goodness that stayed at least partially intact despite their training. This heritage is transmitted by parents, teachers, and community. Their humanity is preserved to some extent even if they have been damaged during their training (Schneider).” The United States of America is a nation at war. Our military is fighting an enemy that does not have a face. Insurgents and terrorist groups are out to kill or destroy anyone that

wants peace or democracy in the world. The world is focus on the events in Iraq and Afghanistan, but Soldiers and leaders are face with numerous challenges everyday. The war in Iraq or Afghanistan can bring out the best or the worst in people. What are the actions of a service member when a civilian on the battlefield is hurt or need immediate aid? Does the service member render aid or compromise the mission?

Some of the words related to ethics are; moral principles, moral values, beliefs, and viewpoint. One of the most difficult dilemma a Soldier or leader face on the battlefield is when not to show compassion to a non-combatant. Life is a precious thing but when the order to carry out a mission interferes with helping a non-combatant, the Soldier or the leader must execute the order without giving that order a second thought. The battlefield is not a place most people want to be. "Civilians who find themselves on the battlefield are, in most cases there by accident or at least unintentionally. Wounds, death, and destruction accompany combat. People will be wounded and perhaps killed. Buildings and personal property will be destroyed. What sense of duty is owed by soldiers to those civilians who find themselves caught up in the fight (Elliott)?" There are no obligations to any Soldier to render aid to noncombatants on the battlefield. Some Soldiers are put in a situation where helping a noncombatant can be an ethical dilemma. A Soldier can be overwhelmed by compassion to help the noncombatant who is in need of immediate aid. Does the service member risk his or her life or the life of others in order to save a life of someone their do not know?

There are countless stories of heroes that gave their life for a fellow Soldier. The war in Iraq alone has claimed the lives of over 2,000 service members. What are the feelings that service members have when their fellow Soldier dies during an attack, in a fire fight,

in raid, or on a convoy? There is no book or a formal instruction that teaches an individual on how someone should show compassion towards a fellow Soldier. In the heat of battle or in an emergency situation, human instinct takes control over your mind and your heart. During field training exercises, live fire exercises, and mission readiness exercises, service members react to emergency situation concerning a fellow Soldier without giving the notion a second thought. There are humane qualities of understanding suffering of others and wanting to do something about it without realizing the danger that is before you. "When fellow Soldier CPL Leonard Hamm lay fallen after one of the unit's many battles, Rubin fought to go back for him when the first sergeant issued orders to leave him behind. Rubin was pinned down by snipers and forced to low-crawl for several hundred yards when rescuing Hamm, whose body was so loaded with shrapnel that he could hardly lift a limb (Reece)."

During wartime, Soldiers are trained to kill or destroy the enemy in defense of their lives. Some people might label the Soldier as a killing machine but deep down inside that Soldier has something call a heart. He or she will protect themselves at all cost but they will render aid to the enemy. The Geneva Convention states that "The human dignity of all individuals must be respected at all times. Everything possible must be done, without any kind of discrimination, to reduce the suffering of people who have been put out of action by sickness, wounds or captivity whether or not they have taken direct part in the conflict (Geneva Convention)."

"Compassion as displayed by that American soldier is not only the power that binds up the baser side of human existence, a side war so readily unleashes, but it is also the great enabling power that brings with it compliance to the codes of conduct and laws of war. Our soldiers are trained to kill, yet

also trained to avoid attacking noncombatants or using altered ammo to increase enemy suffering. Our soldiers are trained to destroy enemy targets, yet also taught to not cause more destruction than is necessary, nor destroy property unless absolutely required by their mission. Our soldiers are encouraged to take prisoners and obligated to treat them humanely. Compassion is the driving force that facilitates and ensures compliance with these and other principles of the Code of Conduct (Shurtleff).

A scenario that addressed a situation on the battlefield whether to help a group of civilians that needed first aid or to execute the mission that the unit was conducting received mixed opinions. Will compassion on the battlefield be an ethical dilemma for our leaders and Soldiers in the future? American men and women are dying every day in the war-torn country of Iraq and Afghanistan. How many of them are heroes or heroines that gave their life to save a fellow Soldier or Soldiers? I believe that the stories will reveal how much compassion these brave men and women display to save a fellow service member or member's life. Nations are required to uphold the laws of war under the Geneva Convention. For decades American forces have abided by these rules. During combat the service member will show compassion to the enemy by rendering first aid and the comforts of life. What place does compassion have on the battlefield? As long as the American Soldier has a soul, this will be an ethical dilemma on the battlefield.

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