

Do I allow my soldiers to drink alcohol

in the combat zone of Iraq?

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Class 58

L564 Ethics Thought Paper

L-13 SGM Forsyth

Do I allow my soldiers to drink alcohol in the combat zone of Iraq? While serving as the Senior Enlisted Adviser for the 1st MTR, I had to deal with this question more than any other. NCOs and Officers would come to me with this ethical dilemma. The scenario was almost always the same. Fine, outstanding, hard working groups of men just need a break. Insurgents frequently shoot at them. Further, they would state their worry about improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and similar dangers that are common threats inside Iraq. These Soldiers did not plan for a “beer bust”, but their comrades just “show up” with a case of beer purchased on the black market. The comrades ask for permission to “drink a few”. I can easily overcome this ethical dilemma. The answer is NO!! I prove my thesis by referring to General Order 1 and the Army Values that all enlisted soldiers wear with their dog tags.

General Order 1 prohibits the consumption of alcoholic beverages by soldiers in the AOR. During in-briefings, all soldiers arriving in country receive a laminated hard copy of these orders along with the rules of engagement. This order makes it clear that US soldiers will not consume alcohol.

I relate to the NCOs asking for guidance that I have personal knowledge of soldiers and officers disciplined for violating this order. Soldiers and officers found guilty of consuming alcohol in the AOR receive a general officer letter of reprimand. Basically, their career ends.

Because of General Order 1, the Army Values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage all come into play.

Loyalty requires the soldier to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution, the Army, the unit, and other soldiers (FM 22-100 2-3). The CENTCOM Commanding General issued this order and we must be loyal to it. Soldiers violating this order do not bear true faith and allegiance to the correct order of the Army or the organization they serve.

Duty requires the soldier to comply with policies and directives and to fulfill obligations: professional, legal, and moral (FM 22-100 2-4). Duty also requires a soldier to set the example. If you allow your soldiers to drink, you violate the policies and directives of your unit. You also fail your moral obligation to comply with this order.

Respect requires a soldier to show concern for and make an effort to check on the safety and well being of others (FM 22-100 2-5). Consuming alcohol while conducting military operations in a combat zone endangers the safety and well being of your soldiers. By allowing your soldiers to consume alcohol in a combat zone, you fail to respect the concern, safety, and well being of your soldiers.

Selfless service requires a soldier to share subordinates hardships and sustain team morale (FM 22-100 2-6). If this is a hardship for your subordinates, you share this hardship with them. If this is a cause for a reduction of team morale, you must create ways to boost morale without allowing your soldiers to consume alcohol. Leaders commit errors by taking a position of believing they boost team morale by allowing subordinates to violate orders.

Honor requires a soldier to live up to Army values. A leader violating any of the Army values violates the value of honor (FM 22-100 2-7). I illustrated by violating

General Order 1, a leader violates all the Army values. Violating General Order 1 is dishonorable.

Integrity requires a soldier to do what is right legally and morally and put being right ahead of being popular (FM 22-100 2-8). As a leader, if you allow your soldiers to violate General Order 1, you have legal problems facing you. Additionally, you violate your moral obligation to lead soldiers. A leader commits an error by allowing his soldiers to consume alcohol. A leader must place the importance on doing what is right ahead of allowing discipline and order to slip.

Personal courage requires a soldier to show moral bravery (FM 22-100 2-9). Leaders allowing soldiers to violate General Order 1 commit an error. It may be popular to allow your soldiers to consume alcohol, but it is morally wrong. To enforce General Order 1 with your soldiers may require personal courage and moral bravery, but you must make the correct decision.

In conclusion, numerous NCOs approached me in Iraq and Kuwait for guidance concerning General Order 1. Their concern was do I allow my soldiers to drink alcohol in the combat zone of Iraq? Based on General Order 1 and the Army Values, my decision was no! Allowing soldiers to consume alcohol in a combat zone violates General Order 1 and the Army Values. In violating General Order 1, you place your soldiers in jeopardy should there be an accident or fire fight while your soldiers still have alcohol in their system.

I recommended this perspective to any NCO with soldiers having problems understanding this decision. The NCO could conduct a brief class and cover the points

outlined in this paper to assist soldiers understand why General Order 1 should not be violated.

Leaders needing an extra punch should consider this statement. NCOs are the backbone of the army. Tough answers to tough questions require tough NCOs. If you do not have the backbone to make the tough answers to the tough questions, you are not tough enough to be an NCO.

Works Cited

United States. Department of the Army. Staff Organization and Operations. FM 22-100.

Personal experience