

Running Head: ETHICAL DECISIONS DURING COMBAT

Ethical Decisions during Combat

MSG Ricky Locklear

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

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SGM Rodolfo Garza

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Abstract

Ethical dilemmas are decisions that we face on a daily basis. Whether right or wrong, humans are forced to make challenging decisions that at most times will determine the fate of life or dramatically change someone's life now or in the future. However, not all ethical dilemmas are as drastic as others. Many ethical dilemmas deal with things or decisions as simple as telling the truth or just making a simple decision about honesty or trust. The thing that we as a society tend to forget is that Soldiers are humans too. Many people see Soldiers differently and tend to set higher standards and stereotype the Soldier more. I'm not making excuses for the Soldier, I'm just saying that Soldiers come from our populace and therefore the United States Army shouldn't be judged so hard because of some of the things Soldiers do.

Many combat battles have come and gone and in all there has been some type of ethical dilemmas. Many dilemmas are more serious and have become world wide contemplations that cause many people to share differences of opinion and cause people to question whether it is legal or breaking the law. Ethical decisions during combat have become a world wide dilemma. Whether during the territory wars between the Indians and the settlers or during combat operations currently ongoing in Iraq or Afghanistan, Soldiers and leaders are faced with difficult decisions on a daily basis. Some of these decisions are simple, some are difficult, and yet some are ethical decisions.

The problem with ethical decisions in combat is that in most instances you don't have time to analyze and determine a good decision. Combat actions don't always give you a chance to think things out clearly. For instance, you have a fast speeding vehicle headed towards your checkpoint and you are signaling for the vehicle to stop, yet it continues your way at a high rate of speed. As it gets closer you notice that there are also kids in this vehicle. You must decide whether to shoot or not. What do you do? Do you get shot or blown up or do you shoot the vehicle and chance killing one or all the kids in the vehicle? Most Soldiers are going to shoot because of self defense, fear, and because of the rush and adrenalin that is currently going thru his/her body. We as Soldiers are taught to defend ourselves and that's why we are trained on weapons and issued weapons with ammo. No doubt there are elements to take into consideration before you shoot someone. Time and circumstances have a lot to do with the decision. Some of these elements could be that the driver of the vehicle didn't understand that he needed to stop. Maybe the driver of the vehicle was fleeing from terrorist and was speeding to the nearest checkpoint for help. Maybe the driver of the vehicle had an injured passenger and was

trying to get help. Or, maybe this driver was using his kids as a human shield, because he believes that Americans are sentimental to children and abide by the rules and he could use them to blowup your checkpoint. In any case, you only have ten seconds to decide the best course of action. With this in mind, the army has had to constantly upgrade the Rules of Engagement (ROE) in order to assist Soldiers in making the right decision in a short amount of time.

Another ethical dilemma that has proved detrimental to the reputation of the United States Army is the killing and raping of innocent civilians on the battlefield. Both of these scenarios have happened in all wars, but have recently been advertised widely. These actions are totally wrong whether in combat or civilian life. The army is just like any other organization, it too has people that make bad decisions. A Soldier is never alone on a combat mission and therefore should always have someone there to assist with decisions. The military also has rules and regulations that govern what you can and can't do during combat. Soldiers still seem to let the bad come out and do the wrong thing. For instance, you and your battle buddy are searching a house while the rest of the platoon is searching other homes. As you search the house, your battle buddy begins to get irritated because he can't find any contraband and begins to abuse the family. The family consists of a mother, father, and two teenage daughters. As the search continues your buddy points his weapon towards the family and they still don't talk. The family doesn't speak English and neither Soldier speaks Arabic. The father and his family continue to be confused as they speak in Arabic and the daughters begin to sob. You see this maltreatment and you let it continue. You have just let this situation get out of control. Without intervention, your battle buddy continues to escalate the situation and

his adrenalin kicks in causing him to do abnormal things. Your buddy gets so far off base that he decides to start shooting. He shoots them all, but not before rapping one of the girls. You saw it all, you didn't participate nor did you try to intervene. You are afraid and your buddy tells you that if you tell he will kill you also. You don't tell, however the girl doesn't die and she reports the incident to the authorities who in turn investigates and determines who did the crime. First of all, by not stopping your friend, you are too guilty. By not telling your superiors you just broke the law of ethics and regular law. You are just as guilty as the actual one who did the crime.

As stated before, ethical decisions during combat operations have troubled countries on the battle field for centuries. Soldiers are taught values and laws throughout their military careers and are expected to act accordingly. Even with this emphasis and training, some decide to take the easy wrong over the hard right and do something unethical. There are a lot of things that can contribute to these ethical decisions, however we as Soldiers know what looks right and have rules, guidelines, and regulations that govern our actions. Yes, things get hectic and our emotions or non-logical thinking kind of gets out of control during a controversial time, but we must train our Soldiers in these areas and place them in training situations where they must make challenging decisions. We as leaders must also know our Soldiers, know how they react, know their background, know their feelings, and know their limitations. Education and situational awareness is the key in battling any dilemma. Educate Soldiers on the rules, regulations, and guidelines before any mission. The time invested in these classes and education will pay high dividends in the future and will eliminate any heartache in the future from uneducated Soldiers. Soldiers are our sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters that are

human too; they are our future leaders and should be taught the proper way to do things and to know when something isn't right.

In conclusion, ethical decisions won't ever go away, however leaders have been given the task of educating, mentoring, coaching, and training our subordinates on the appropriate actions to take. Whether in a combat environment or during garrison operations, ethical decisions will always have to be dealt with.

