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Values, Ethics, and Military Leadership

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Abstract

The following ethical dilemma discusses an issue that took place while stationed at Tripler Army Medical Center, Hawaii. This paper focuses on the challenges one Soldier faced regarding the group of Soldiers he called peers, the dilemma that was before him regarding accusations of inappropriate relationships with Soldiers, and the negative counseling that ensued. This is a true story. The names mentioned have been changed to protect the innocent (and not so innocent).

The year was 1991 and SGT Smith, Richard moved from a busy assignment in Memphis, TN. to the beautiful island of Oahu where he was stationed at the Veterinary Services, Ft. Shafter Branch, Ft. Shafter Commissary Section. He had just made his SGT and quickly learned all he could about food inspection in the commissary. Right away, his branch NCOIC, a SFC who was close to retirement, knew he had filled a much-needed hole at the commissary where other junior Soldiers were not doing the job effectively. Over the course of the next several months, SGT Smith was growing nicely into his position and was branching out, communicating with other branches on Oahu about work related issues and really making a name. About a year into the assignment, SGT Smith left for BNCOC and that is about the time things started going a different direction for him. In the food inspection world, the number of enlisted personnel is small and common to know what other Soldiers around the world are doing. The Soldiers doing good things for Veterinary Services are known, but even more so when Soldiers do bad things.

BNCOC is four months at Ft Sam Houston, TX. For anyone that has been there, they know it's a great place to visit, network with fellow AMEDD Soldiers, and pretty much let loose every now and then. To make a long story short, SGT Smith gained the reputation as being arrogant, an alcoholic, but liked by the staff and faculty. The relationships made at BNCOC, both good and bad, followed SGT Smith when he returned to Hawaii. Unfortunately, for him, the friendships went bad for whatever reason that gave SGT Smith an even more arrogant attitude and was very standoffish around the other Soldiers in the unit. The bottom line was SGT Smith thought he could not do wrong and thought he was untouchable.

SGT Smith was married and had a young child. His wife was also in the military and noticed the change in his personality. Over the next few months, their relationship deteriorated due to Smith's excessive drinking and partying. The year was 1992 now and while at BNCOOC SGT Smith had met another SFC that was due to rotate to fill the position of Schofield Barracks Branch NCOIC. SFC Miller had a reputation of being a wild partier herself and a warrant officer for a husband who was one of Veterinary Services best. The reputation SFC Miller had was very attractive to SGT Smith because he was becoming bored with his current job, home life, and was quickly becoming an outsider in the branch.

After some investigating as to the availability of positions in Schofield Barracks, SGT Smith jumped the chain-of-command and went to the SGM requesting a transfer to work for SFC Miller. Smith chose the timing to do this perfectly because his current branch NCOIC was about to go on terminal leave and the new NCOIC had not checked on board yet. After a good sales pitch, the SGM agreed to move SGT Smith to Schofield. This move not only left a vacancy at Ft. Shafter, it put an even bigger strain on his home life because the area he had to drop his son off, was completely opposite to Schofield Barracks which meant his wife had to pick up that slack. That was not too big of an issue; however, SGT Smith never consulted with his spouse about the move.

Within a month of the SGM agreeing to move SGT Smith, he was in Schofield Barracks working at the Troop Issue/Cold Storage. Smith was a hard charger and quickly made a name for him helping the units at Schofield with all their food inspection related issues. The branch

consisted of five NCOs, three junior enlisted Soldiers, and a CPT. SFC Miller was the boss and they all got along.

After six months on the job, SFC Miller held a meeting with the NCOs. For the first time, SGT Smith felt like he was truly part of a team not just another Soldier. SFC Miller discussed branch related issues with them and introduced a new Soldier to the branch. SGT Yeager was an animal care NCO who arrived from another duty location somewhere in the states. After the meeting, SFC Miller released the junior soldiers who were waiting outside and proceeded to bring a cooler in the office full of beer. Not surprised by the other NCOs they opened the cooler and started drinking. SGT Smith, who has not, drank on the job before, though a very heavy drinker was in complete shock. This went on for almost a year.

The Soldiers of Schofield Barracks Veterinary Branch often performed various missions throughout Hawaii. The Soldiers of Schofield Barracks worked hard and played harder. That is what most of the other Soldiers knew about them. The office drinking became the norm and often moved to SFC Miller's house. This strained all the Soldiers who were married. One day SFC Miller was talking with another SFC at their branch office. She was talking to him outside, with her patrol cap on backwards, her BDU top off, as if they were a couple. The other Soldiers in the branch saw this and saw how she was getting away with it and other alleged inappropriate relationships began. SGT Smith began hanging with the wrong crowd and threw himself in the middle of a huge investigation into alleged inappropriate relationships. Dominoes started to fall, and marital separations became as normal as getting up to go to work. The aftermath, three divorces, two alcohol Substance Abuse Program inductees, and SGT Smith forced out of the

branch into another. SFC Miller had a long conversation with the SGM and cut a deal to come clean as to what was going on in Schofield Barracks. The other NCOs were close to PCS so they left unscathed. As for SGT Smith, he received a counseling statement from the SGM and a negative NCOER for an alleged unsubstantiated inappropriate relationship with a junior enlisted Soldier. When SGT Smith asked for the support from SFC Miller, she could not give it based on counseling by the SGM (supposedly). SGT Smith took the documents he received to JAG for guidance. JAG suggested that if he felt strongly that his move was unjustifiable and the negative counseling and NCOER was unwarranted, than perhaps, he could convince the Veterinary Service Commander to start a Commander's Inquiry. By now SGT Smith was separated from his spouse, limited to seeing his son on weekends, and went from a solid food inspection NCO, to a branded leader of bad people, he just wanted to put the whole mess behind him.

Understanding the difference between right and wrong never crossed the mind of SGT Smith at the time. Everything from personal counseling, marital counseling, better mentoring, and conversations with the SGM (who was a good person) should have taken place. SGT Smith thought he was in a place where he could not be touched because, hell the rest of the branch was doing the same thing.

If we look back at SGT Smith's military career up until that point, there was a pattern of alcohol abuse, spousal abuse in the form of mental abuse, and a feeling of wanting to fit in no matter the consequence. He manipulated the system at times to get what he wanted even if that meant breaking the rules. The lesson here is that he deserved what he got and was extremely lucky that UCMJ or other chapter action was not taken. SGT Smith two years later, now SSG

Smith applied to become a Warrant Officer and is now a CW4, remarried, and has two more children, one of which is in the military today. SFC Miller and the rest of the Schofield Barracks NCOs that made the wrong names for themselves have all since left the military.