

ETHICS PAPER

**A LOOK AT
CONCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS (CO)**

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Headline in the local paper reads, “Enlisted Soldiers have a change of heart, just prior to deployment!” Is this a conscientious objector (CO) or just a way out? Is it an ethical dilemma? Lets take a look into this touchy subject, and learn about different circumstances when having to deal with this issue. Keep an open mind, and don’t jump to unfounded conclusions before the system has its chance.

Task Force Infantry is getting ready to deploy. Training is increasing; weapons qualification, media relations, improved explosive device (IED) awareness, customs and culture awareness, checkpoint operations, convoy security operations, and physical fitness. This training is critical to make sure these young Soldiers can survive on the battlefield. The days don’t seem to have enough time. Hundreds of Soldiers are preparing for a yearlong deployment. Make sure finances are straight, family issues in order, car gets into storage, get immunizations up to date, and the list goes on. The Soldiers need to focus on the training and preparation that is taking place. What can happen next? The unit is full of excitement, so much to get done and so little time. It will all happen, because the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) will make it happen. The last thing we need is for a few Soldiers to bring a great unit to its knees. Some things can get in a unit, like an infectious disease.

The war is in a foreign land; the enemy does not wear a uniform, what is this war about? Should the U.S. be involved? Two enlisted Soldiers from Task Force Infantry want to talk with the commander. The Soldiers say the war is not right; it goes against their beliefs. Okay, lets take a look at what is going on here. Keep the unit focused; this is only an isolated incident. The Soldiers go into the First Sergeants (1SG) office. What is going on here? Well 1SG, the recruiter never mentioned going to war. All the

benefits, training, college money, and travel were talked about, but never war. 1SG replies, "What does an Army do?" Fight and win wars. Is this deception? Who is misleading whom? Are these Soldiers being misled?

Lets take a look at the oath of enlistment. Here are a few key statements: Support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Bear true faith and allegiance to the same. Obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me; sounds very clear, concise and to the point. Lets not forget, Soldiers don't make policy, they only enforce it. The elected civilians are the people that write amendments to the constitution and establish new policies. Where is the confusion? Isn't this a voluntary Army? The draft is over and has not been around since Vietnam. What values have changed within the Soldiers? Is it just because this unit got orders to deploy to that country? Could these Soldiers have a legitimate defense for not supporting the oath of enlistment? Does this go against the way we are raising our young kids today, now young adults? Some major feeling and values must be in conflict to have this happen. People don't wake up and join the military without knowing what they are signing up for. If the draft was in place, it may be a different story. Not all U.S. citizens agree with what goes on with the wars we fight. If the draft was in place and it causes someone to get drafted, and that person doesn't believe in war or killing, that makes for a very different situation when dealing with conscientious objectors. Are the recruiters misleading the young people that are gathering information for a job? Are these young people that naive to not really know that the nation is at war? It is up to the panel of experts to decide. Once the objector has made their beliefs known, the legal office will assemble a panel to review the case. Will

this be the end or will there be others? Until then, lets get back to training and stay focused. What can be done? Schedule classes on ethics; get the chaplain to talk with the unit about the religious view of the different groups in practice today. Lets make sure the Soldiers understand that these are extremists fighting against the U.S.

Remember what we talked about today. Could this be your next unit? Make sure to do the right things and get a tough situation out the way, so that you can drive on and get the Soldiers ready for deployment to the battlefield. The war on terrorism will not be won tomorrow!