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Handling Prisoners of War

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A major ethical problem facing our leaders in the Army is the abuse of prisoners of war (POW). According to Webster's dictionary, Ethics "the system or code of morals of a particular person, religion, group or profession". News media continues to report POW abuse by our Soldiers, and Army leaders continue to struggle trying to get a handle on the situation. Army leaders must strive to instill Army values in Soldiers. Once Soldiers embrace Army values, they will handle prisoners of war properly.

Today, new recruits average 18 years of age. The United States Army struggles to meet set recruitment numbers, and as a result, continues to drop recruitment requirements. The easing of requirements for a person to join the Army, qualifies more individuals attempting to join the Army. New recruits come from different backgrounds, making the Army a true "Melting pot". Different cultural backgrounds, yields different life styles, making the Army a true "Melting Pot." Leaders in the Army must instill army values in all new Soldiers. It takes new recruits an average of two years to assimilate into the Army's way of living. In some cases, depending on a person's upbringing, Soldiers will take longer than two years to accept army values and ethical reasoning.

The war on terrorism continues to force the United States Army to put young Soldiers on the front lines of our nation's defense. Soldiers in the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, Sergeant (E5) and below average less than three years in the Army. Many of these young Soldiers are still in the developmental phase of their career. Soldiers receive ethical and Army value classes prior to deployments. Ethics and Army value classes are one to two hours in duration; these classes are in no way sufficient training to prepare

young Soldiers for war. Combat in Iraq and Afghanistan is brutal. None of our young Soldiers have combat experience, and as a result we do not know how any of us will react to witnessing a fellow Soldier's death.

Lieutenants or young non-commissioned officers lead many patrols and convoy security operations. During these operations, these leaders find themselves in situations, which cause ethical dilemmas. Think of this situation, a young Staff Sergeant leads his or her squad as they enter a suspected terrorist hideout. During the entry, a firefight breaks out. At the end of the firefight, the Staff Sergeant and the squad attend a wounded enemy Soldier. The Soldier providing first aid for the POW is a young Private First Class (PFC) married with two children. The PFC is close to the squad members and considered as part of the family. The POW suddenly reaches in his coat and retrieves a knife. The POW grabs the PFC by his collar, and cuts his throat mortally wounding him. The squad members immediately attack the POW, but the POW drops his knife and throws his hands up in the air as to surrender. The Staff Sergeant orders the squad to back down, but notices the young PFC struggling for air while losing his battle for life.

The ethical reasoning process would help the Staff Sergeant as he or she struggle with the decision on what to do. Hopefully, the Staff Sergeant has assimilated into the Army way of life, and has prior training on ethics and Army values. This type of ethical dilemma continues to test our young leaders in the battlefield, and their ability to make the right decisions. The ethical decisions our leaders make will influence the way subordinates make ethical decisions. Leaders must remember that subordinates will mimic their actions, and although no one knows how he or she will react in a similar situation, leaders must strive to do the right thing.

Army training on ethics and values must be an integral part of a unit's Mission Essential Task List (METL). Leaders must discuss army ethics and values with Soldiers on a daily basis.

Leaders should use situations, which arise during regular operations as examples when training Soldiers on ethics and Army values. Leaders cannot rely solely on the required quarterly training mandated by Army Regulation 350-1. Every day exists an opportunity to train Soldiers on proper ethics and livings Army values.

The United States Army provides prides itself on producing Soldiers with a warrior mentality, but at the same time treat people fairly. Regardless if a person is a combatant, or a non-combatant, Soldiers must treat people with dignity and respect. Leaders must ensure that Soldiers do not get caught up in anger when making ethical decisions. A Soldier that does not live the Army values, and understands ethical reasoning is a time bomb waiting to explode. Soldiers must remember that by treating people with dignity and respect, we not only win over their minds, but their trust as well.