

Running Head: Soldier Ethic

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Reading

“People behave evil not because they are evil but because they don’t know that to be honest is beneficial for themselves” (Socrates).

Soldiers are continuously preparing for war. War has a perfuse connection with destruction, savagery and murder. War on the Soldier’s level — taking the life of another human being — conflicts with the moral principle, “thou shall not kill.” Soldiers feel contradictions and ask themselves, “to kill or not to kill.” Human principles dictate that Soldiers’ education – to kill - must be based on moral and eternal value. “Making the right choice and acting on it when faced with an ethical question can be difficult. Sometimes it means standing firm and disagreeing with the boss on ethical grounds. These occasions test character. Situations in which a leader thinks an illegal order is issued can be the most difficult.” (2 – 4-15).

Humanity observes the age-old battle between good and evil. Most people understand that it is not enough just to observe; they need to choose sides. From the moment a human finds himself in this world, he is faced with a clash, a dilemma of choice that must be answered with resolve and action. Good and evil, courtliness and meanness, truth and lie, altruism and egoism, propriety and debauchery, honor and dishonor: these are the choices that a man is faced with. When a man’s choice becomes action, his moral is unmasked. It is said that a man is great when his choices are made with an eternal value – conscience, honor, obligation, love, and devotion. A man whose choice is opposite is called “hangdog.”¹

What morality does the nation demand of those who choose the military as their profession? The people who are responsible for the dooms and lives of others must have the highest morals and ethics. This applies not only to Soldiers but also to all who hold the life and future of others in their hands: medical personal, teachers, and the justice system.

¹ “Hangdog” – man who act vilely.

“In combat, ethical choices are not always easy. The right thing may not only be unpopular, but dangerous as well. Complex and dangerous situations often reveal who is a leader of character and who is not.” (2 – 4-14). Military service is a duty that places the highest responsibilities in the hands of the Soldiers and his leaders. In training for war, Soldiers must find a meeting point for the ideals of warfare and their ethic-moral-eternity value. What connecting fundamentals are there? In general, Soldiers’ training gives them knowledge how to kill. To overcome hardness, unwieldiness and negative feelings Soldiers must acquire knowledge, ability, and concentrated effort to reach skills of his profession.

One of the most important demands for Soldier professional ethics is professional conscience - it ensures honorable duty and liability. Professional conscience obligates Soldier to acquire professional skills and to be responsible for choosing proper application of those skills. In the face of danger, Soldiers must take the initiative and act self-sufficient. On the spot, the Soldier’s self-control, self-discipline, and self-trust come automatically as professional capabilities. If those capabilities were built on moral principles, the Soldier will act as a great man. A Soldier keeps fighting even when situations look bad; he takes care of his brother; he helps to secure casualties. The Soldier conscience is the biggest affluence for the Army. Conscience does not deviate and does not depend on the Soldier’s placement in a peaceful duty or on the battlefield. Honor and morality are not inherent traits. That is why moral traits a Soldier requires are formed while educating him.

The educating of a Soldier is strictly based on the statutes that are the regulations of behavior and interpersonal relationships. In comparison with other professions, the interpersonal relationship in the Army is regulated very strictly and anyone who is close to the military can see it easily.

Statutes, FMs, and Army Regulations are very detailed laws that maintain the discipline and order in the Army. They form the habits of behavior and the regulations of courtesy and respect. Article 14, of the National Defense Statute of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, states: “The Soldier must obey the orders of his commander heartily without talking-back and without delaying.” (3). Article 22 states, “All commanders and superiors must require from subordinates to obey rules of courtesy.” (3). “Under normal circumstances, a leader executes a superior leader’s decision with energy and enthusiasm. The only exception would be illegal order has a duty to disobey. If a Soldier perceives that an order is illegal, that Soldier should be sure the details of the order and its original intent are fully understood. The Soldier should seek immediate clarification from the person who gave it before proceeding.” (2 – 4-15).

Civilians often think that military service demeans a Soldier’s individuality because the Soldier has to obey his commander without any hesitation. This is only a shallow minded point of view. Military members understand this in a completely different way. The requirements that are stated in statutes are military discipline and it’s a reflection of acquired experience, which often is proved through blood. A very true explanation can be found in the Handbook for Marine NCOs, “To many persons, discipline simply means punishment, that is, something to be afraid of. In fact, discipline is a matter of people working well together and getting along well together, and – even if there is a lack of harmony among them – discipline is a means of cementing them as a fighting organization.” (1-59).

The ability to obey is a form of self-control, which influences development of self-restriction when regarding other people. That is the reason why every commander or superior who assumes and understands his (her) responsibility for their subordinates, makes every effort to instill the best qualities in his (her) Soldiers. Qualities such as: confidence, loyalty, fairness,

honesty, intelligence, and endurance. “Military discipline is tangible in terms of its results. It allows no room for familiarity, which truly breeds contempt. On the other hand, honest comradeship is a by-product of discipline and a pillar of unit esprit.” (1-60).

As a rule, former Soldiers respect the commanders who were strict, those who set higher standards, but were fair. The concepts of “strong man” and “weak man” are relative. The will cannot be inherited it is fostered. Without training, the will grows weak. The military service provides the best opportunity to educate will and courage. This kind of education is based upon common concepts and understanding of ethics. The rigidity and respect declared in the statutes neither degrade the Soldier, nor denigrate his personality when the concept of sense of duty is understood properly as one of the eternal values. “Adhering to the principles that the Army Values embody is essential to upholding high ethical standards of behavior. Unethical behavior quickly destroys organizational morale and cohesion – it undermines the trust and confidence essential to teamwork and mission accomplishment. Consistently doing the right thing forges strong character in individuals and expands to create a culture of trust throughout the organization.” (2 – 4-14).

To protect the country is the professional duty and ethos of every Soldier. The oath gives the right to kill an enemy who encroach on the freedoms of the country, and endangers the security and lives of countrymen. It is a right to self-defense. However, humanity from time to time reviews universal moral values but eternal values remain as an interminable standard or the essence of ethics. The Soldier’s profession requires keeping height standard of moral. Violation of common ethics, in the most cases, is violation of military discipline as well. After Soldiers understand to be honest is beneficial for everyone their interpersonal relationship become professional, efficient, and comradely; there behave in peacetime or on battlefield - honorable.

Lists of Works Consulted:

1. Estes, Kenneth W. *Handbook for Marine NCOs*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996.
2. Headquarters, Department of the Army. *FM 6-22 (FM 22-100) Army Leadership*. Washington, 2006.
3. Lithuanian Armed Forces. General Staff. *National Defense Statute*. Kaunas, 1993.