

**Ethics Thought Paper**

**Abu Ghraib Prison Scandal**

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### Abu Ghraib Prison Scandal an Ethical Dilemma

Ethics is the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment or concepts of right and wrong. Ethics is an essential part of our life as we grow in society. I hope and pray that parents teach their children the attributes required to be successful adults. As adults, we learn to make our own choice. The choice to conduct ourselves in a manner in which there are moral values. The Army as well as other government agencies has ethical values too.

The Army ethics involves the application of accepted principles of a particular profession. In the Army today, every Soldier faces a large number of exterior factors, which can cause problems for themselves, their families, and possibly affect their unit's combat readiness. Many of the problems facing our Soldiers involve some type of ethical dilemma. These dilemmas easily identified in the following areas: drugs, alcohol, family life, fraternization, sexual harassment and developing ourselves as leaders. Certain dilemmas may involve choices between equally undesirable alternatives or conflicting moral codes. One example of a conflicting moral issue that comes to mind is the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

The atrocities committed by the American Soldiers at the Abu Ghraib prison created an ethical problem for the United States Army. The Soldiers and NCOs assigned to the 800th Military Police (MP) Brigade consistently violated the Army's values. The dreadful acts of detainee abuse committed by the members of the MP brigade indicated that the Soldiers and NCOs had no sense of duty, respect, honor, or integrity. They also appeared to have a little or no knowledge of the standards or skills required to perform their jobs. In addition, the seven Soldiers formally charged under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and some are still under investigation, have brought disgrace to the United States Army. They created a cloud of doubt upon which all enemies of the United States will use against us in the war on terrorism.

The Abu Ghraib scandal is a major ethical issue facing the Army today. The prison scandal began when photos of inhumane treatment appeared in the hands of the media. The government and international community have a document in place to protect all prisoners of war. This document known as the Geneva Convention is a mandatory briefing given to all Soldiers once they become a member of the armed forces. The Geneva Convention states, "All prisoners of war are entitled to food, shelter, medical treatment, visits from relief agencies and protection against violence, intimidation, degrading treatment or pressure of any kind during interrogation". Inhumane acts that amount to torture are a grave breach of the Geneva Convention and considered a war crime. This scandal not only involves choices between undesirable alternative and conflicting moral codes, but also questions the ethics of both the Soldiers and leaders.

In this scandal, seven enlisted reservist are the criminals. They violated the Geneva Convention. The enlisted Soldiers charged in the scandal stated, "They handled prisoners according to orders from military intelligence troops who sought information on operations by insurgents". These Soldiers made prisoners put hoods over their faces, piled naked detainees on top of each other, wired electric devices to them, and threatened them with military dogs. This abuse, while heinous, left Soldiers faced with a hard ethical lesson. The ethical dilemma for some Soldiers involved whether they should obey or oppose the order given. Soldiers have the ethical responsibility to embrace core values, meet the standard, and ask for direction when uncertain. Any inhumane treatment of prisoners by Soldiers or civilians is unacceptable. Mistakes happened but were they the fault of a few lower enlisted reservists. Two of these reservists were correction officers in civilian life and knew more about handling prisoners than their bosses. A few reservist treated prisoners inhumanely and their actions were stupid.

Nevertheless, the highest ranking to face possible court martial is a Staff Sergeant Ivan Frederick

## II. Where was the senior leadership?

In various articles about the Abu Ghraib scandal, they constantly talked about the seven enlisted Soldiers. Many articles never mentioned the senior leadership until they pressured the government in finding a scapegoat. The media always see and talk to leaders when things are going well, we see leaders all the time representing their Soldiers and the glory of success; however, when things go wrong where are the leaders? The overall responsibility belongs to General Janis Karpiniski, who was in charge of the 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade. Somewhere she had a Command Sergeant Major and those Soldiers had a commander and First Sergeant. Where were these leaders when these foolish acts were committed? What role did they play in this scandal?

It is apparent the leadership failed these Soldiers. The sole responsibility of all leaders is to make core values and principles known and consistently strive to do what is right. We should never put ourselves in a compromising position. This can lead to loss of power, trust, and worthless leadership. Ethical behavior goes with leadership. To lead effectively, one must visibly uphold core standards. The chain of command should have visited the prison frequently and randomly for three reasons. One of the reasons is the chain of command managed the prison as well as the prisoners. Part of their responsibility is to manage the prison in accordance with laws and regulation of war. Secondly, was to assess the mental and physical condition of their Soldiers in such a stressful environment. Last, I ponder over the question, what leader decided to use that particular place (a place where Saddam tortured political prisoners) as a detainee facility? The location alone created an ethical dilemma. Do the actions of our Soldiers differ from the actions of Saddam? I make no excuses for the Soldiers, but it is the responsibility of a

leader to introduce and suggest ways to model ethical behavior in their subordinates. They have a moral obligation to protect both combatants and noncombatants. In addition, the leader has the responsibility to define and affirm the Army values, provide clarity and act as a standard-bearer to all Soldiers. Both the Soldier and the leader know right from wrong.

My final comment is that our behavior is the most believable thing about us.

Once we put on the uniform and serve our country in a time of war, we must not leave our conscience behind. We must trust in our training and standard operating procedures and allow them to govern our actions or cause us to do what is right. Once we take the oath to support and defend the constitution we are now held accountable to uphold the Army values. As a Soldier and leader, I am bound to provide my Soldiers with all the tools to make them successful.

Ethical training is one of the tools we should provide to our young Soldiers, leaders and peers.

The Army consists of Soldiers and leaders from various backgrounds and cultures that have a common belief. This belief is in the constitution and the American way of life.

In order to live the American way of life we must support the constitution against all enemies both foreign and domestic. Our role as leaders is to ensure all soldiers understand the Army values as well as enforce them. Soldiers observe and judge us by what we choose to confront, reward, or ignore. If leaders ignored what happened at Abu Ghraib then they fail to lead their Soldiers. As a leader, we are always on display. We may never know the exact reason why the leadership failed in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. What we do know is that this lesson is unforgettable to the Nation, the Army and leaders.