

Running Head: ETHICS AND COMBAT DECISION

Ethics and Combat decisions

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Abstract

In 2003, the United States and coalition forces attacked Iraq in a combined effort to oust Saddam Husain and both restore Democracy and confiscate supposed weapons of mass destruction. The coalition was not prepared for a long stay, and subsequently did not prepare their Soldiers for dealing with the local population. Soldiers who are placed in dangerous situations react as they are trained. The right people must be brought in to address situations and approach problems with the right attitude, training and experience to fix issues. Soldiers with no formal training in legal and infrastructure problems will only compound issues if they are not properly briefed, guided and led by the experienced unit leaders. Local inhabitants meanwhile are trying to live a descent life and stay out of the internal strife. The two group's collision on the battlefield will only lead to death and misery. It is imperative that leaders take control of Soldiers and lead and teach them to deal with violent situations with professionalism and humility.

Soldiers have always fought and died in horrific battles and campaigns. Their individual actions and collective fights shape the outcome of most battles, but definitely influence the consequences and effects of those people who follow. Their actions and conduct write history and leave a lasting impression on the entire country's population and of those of the world's population. Communities and individuals both harbor feelings and beliefs about a population or group of people. Their training, discipline and focus contribute greatly to the good order and welfare of the relationship with the community they are based in.

Attila the Hun used different techniques and tactics to capture ground and incorporate other tribes into his empire. The techniques and procedures he used to incorporate the neighboring tribes were not friendly or morally upright. He had a gift of gab or a way with words, but when that did not work, he resorted to violence. He directed his subordinates to ensure the loyalty of the people he conquered. He was a great leader who is studied today. His strategy, tactics and leadership were revolutionary at the time and other people could not react to his actions successfully. Attila lost in the end because he fostered a behavior of fear and hatred. His plan of torturing, murdering and imprisoning people to bring a population under span of control backfired.

During an operation in the village of My Lai, South Vietnam, LT. Callie murdered and ordered the murder of almost an entire South Vietnamese village in the course of an operation that was to receive international attention. (My Lai Massacre, 2007) This affected the United States Armed forces ability to present a positive appearance to the American public and the

world. It provided a snapshot into the culture and beliefs of a military in the midst of radical change and the leader's inability or refusal to act with integrity and honor.

The U.S. government did little to address the problem. LT. Callie was tried and convicted, but President Nixon later pardoned him. No others in the unit were convicted of any crimes committed that day. Captain Medina, the company commander, was investigated, but cleared of all charges. The entire chain of command avoided responsibility for the massacre that involved an entire infantry company. The incident actually took a year to surface because the Army brass did everything possible to bury it.

That was only one of many situations in which American Soldiers committed unspeakable acts against both civilians and insurgents. Our ability as an Army to conduct operations without strict controls placed on us ceased to exist because of our actions in Vietnam. Unfortunately, this was not the only war in which we have failed to police our ranks. These lessons are more important today than ever before. Iraq and Afghanistan pose serious questions with regard to our present conduct and future consequences.

Today, young Soldiers face the possibility of death or debilitating injury in combat in a region most are ignorant of. They deal with complicated situations and deal with cultures they are not familiar with. Add to that their knowledge, or lack thereof, of the local religion, and there is now a possible flashpoint. A Soldier is trained to take action in the absence of orders. If standards are not established, or the rules of engagement are vague or too complicated, young leaders may act too aggressively, or allow subordinates to take actions that may spiral out of control.

In war, leaders get younger and younger as casualties take their toll. These leaders may be overwhelmed by the events that take place around them. They still have to address Soldier

issues, accomplish all assigned missions and deal with their own feelings fears and beliefs at the same time. Their maturity level, level of training and personal discipline all influence these young leader's ability to decipher situations and make morally and ethically based decisions. A person who sees a Soldier wounded or killed who he is responsible also comes to a decision point. He can act responsibly and also set the example for his people or move in the wrong direction.

Leaders must be able to turn off their emotions and continue to toward the objective. Those leaders cannot allow the unit to get side tracked to address personal vendettas against a village or group of people. They will not only fail to complete the mission, they will lose any relationship they had with the population and make it harder for the government to complete its mission as well. These actions may also turn certain members of the population against the military and government.

In 2003, combined forces from several nations invaded Iraq to secure weapons of mass destruction and depose Saddam Husain. The four years of multiple combat tours, rules of engagement issues and evolving insurgent tactics have taken their toll. In March, 2006, five Soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division broke into a home in Mahmoudiya and raped and murdered a 14 year old girl. They then killed her and her family and attempted to make it look like the work of insurgents. (World News, 2007) Unfortunately, this is only one of a growing numbers of incidents coming out of the war.

Combat, by its very nature, creates difficult and horrific situations. Leaders have an obligation to mentor their subordinates and guide them through situations that may shock the senses and cause them to react in an unethical or immoral manner. The problem is that leaders cannot be in every place at once and some situations will be out of their reach. Some Soldiers

may not read the situation right and take action that may cause the situation to deteriorate. This will lead to a decision point that the young subordinate may not be able to address with the necessary knowledge or experience.

Soldiers develop a skewed sense of reality when faced with the overwhelming circumstances of combat. According to a recent survey of troops serving in Iraq, only 47% of our Soldiers stated that noncombatants should be treated with dignity. (World News, 2007) This is a disturbing indicator of our servicemen and women and their view of the population in Iraq. The insurgents are capitalizing on this problem and working the Iraq population to turn against the allies and Iraqi forces. The enemy is doing much worse than the coalition forces, but they do not get the publicity that coalition forces get.

The military has taken action to address this problem by ensuring Soldiers go through ethics training and education. However, if the unit leaders do not enforce this training, the individual Soldier will be hard pressed to remember and exercise this conduct during a firefight or any other tense situation. Leader presence is necessary during violent incidents or situations that can turn violent. Soldiers must be able to learn from their leaders and develop the skills needed not only to address these problems, but pass them on to their subordinates. A simple act of restraint may connect that soldier's mind to the process of appropriate response.

Conclusion

Military organizations develop personalities based on the leadership in place, the unit's lineage and the current state of affairs. Those leaders must acknowledge that they play a crucial role in developing their subordinate's attitude and mission focus. They do not simply issue orders to blindly loyal subjects or make statements that confuse or give too much leeway to their subordinates. Young Soldiers emulate what and how their leaders act and react to dire and

stressful situations. In the end, these young Soldiers will have to make difficult and deadly decisions. Their training and education will play a critical role in their ability to decide on the appropriate course of action that will ensure success on the battlefield and in the world arena.

References

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