

L564 ETHICS THOUGHT PAPER

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Problem: Soldiers' decisions and events that challenge the Army's professional ethics and values during recent military conflict.

Thesis Statement: The decisions and actions of some soldiers can create an unethical foundation for other soldiers to disregard Army values and ethics during deployments and military conflicts.

The current war on terrorism is a major focus of the United States government and other countries. Today there are currently more active duty and reserve component soldiers wearing the combat patch since the early 1990s. This patch visibly represents their participation or deployment to a combat region. Army soldiers can expect continuous rotations to areas of major conflict for years to come. What does the future hold for current and future Army soldiers in the area of ethics? Can Army service members today and in the future confront the ultimate sacrifices and challenges military ethics dictate? These questions and many like them play an extremely important role in the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of Army soldiers in combat situations. Soldiers are at the forefront of current deployments to the Middle East region and the war on terrorism. Military personnel must execute patriotic sacrifices while continuing to perform in their duties and responsibilities. The decisions and actions of some soldiers can create an unethical foundation for other soldiers to disregard Army values and ethics during deployments and military conflicts.

Army soldiers who ignore professional military ethics can set the groundwork which challenges practicing mandatory Army's ethics. This holds true and pertains to the demands of enforcing Army values and basic ethics in the treatment of fellow soldiers. All soldiers should constantly employ both respect and personal courage in all situations. This applies to the increasing number of Army female soldiers reporting sexual assault by fellow male soldiers in the past year. More than half of these assaults took place during deployments to combat regions. Soldiers reporting sexual assault were not treated with respect nor did anyone willing challenge the leadership on their treatment of the victims. The soldiers responsible for these crimes did not think ethically about the wrong committed against a fellow comrade or battle buddy. In many cases the soldiers' chain of command did not exercise Army ethics "to do the right thing" in handling the assault situations.

The Army's moral standards and values of loyalty and duty can adversely affect the way some officers and enlisted soldiers comply with Army ethics or military orders. Take the situation involving an Army senior officer in Iraq. In this incident, the officer decided the best way to extract information from a detained Iraqi police officer was to employ his own method. He took the process of interrogating the police officer in his own hands. The Army officer took the detainee outside to the nearest clearing barrel and fired a warning shot. He then placed his 9mm weapon near the Iraqi police officer's head and fired off another round. His method encouraged the prisoner to reveal vital information about insurgent activities and an ambush plot against American soldiers. The information did provide important facts which saved the lives of numerous soldiers. The officer felt his main obligation and duty was to his soldiers. Therefore, he used his own method and not his professional military ethics. Although the officer's method uncovered beneficial information, his technique fell short in what the Army deems as acceptable ethical behavior.

Army missions dictate soldiers to uphold and maintain the ethics and values of the Army. For senior Army soldiers, these ethics are deeply engraved in everything they do. These values, which are moral codes of conduct and expected behaviors, can sometimes become conflicting. This holds true when the conflict involves a soldier's professional and personal ethics. When dealing with others, Army ethics are nonnegotiable. The most recent occurrence of soldiers committing unethical acts is the four soldiers charged in smothering an Iraqi general officer to death last year. Investigations in the general's death uncovered that he die from asphyxia and not of natural causes as reported. His death was the result of smothering and chest compressions inflicted on him by his interrogators. The soldiers responsible for interrogating him committed acts which constitute violations of what is ethically correct and what is not according to Army ethics.

The decisions some soldiers make while in a “combat situation and area” are not always the ideal solutions. The Army expects and demands a professional system of moral standards and values from each soldier regardless of their rank. Army military members must uphold a sound and ethical foundation. The Army’s success in wars and minor military conflicts depends on the soldiers. Since the war in Iraq, soldiers have committed numerous crimes against prisoners and detainees. They have also committed immoral crimes against other soldiers. Soldiers must practice the Army’s values and ethics regardless of his or her military mission. Army soldiers who violate the professional codes also relinquish and discredit the reputation of the United States Army.

The Army should analyze how receptive soldiers are to handling situations in a combat zone. The current assumptions are that all Army warriors will continue to uphold professional standards and conduct regardless of the mission or situation. These assumptions need reevaluating. The continuous information about soldiers committing criminal acts against prisoners and battle comrades indicates a vital need to reassess how the Army values and ethics are taught. The examples in this paper represent choices soldiers made during challenging situations. The actions and decisions soldiers make impact the Army’s values and ethical foundation. The ethics of the Army were not a part of their decision to take appropriate actions. Instead, the choices made only served to weaken the code of having and practicing good Army ethics during a period that demand obedience. What other soldiers see and hear can provide an avenue for them to conduct themselves in the same manner. If Army ethics and values fail, the Army as an institution can not survive professionally.