

My Thoughts on Ethics in Operation Iraqi Freedom

By

MSG Nathan R. Fulks

Thought Paper L564, Current Group M11

SGM Branan

Date: 15 November 2005

MY THOUGHTS ON ETHICS IN THE ARMY

As leaders, we have three general ethical responsibilities:

First, all leaders are role models. Setting the example in everything we do on and off duty and leading from the front. Every leader is a mentor for some soldier under you whether you know it or not. As a First Sergeant you will not affect the leader who replaces you, but you will influence a future 1SG ten years down the road. There is someone in your company right now who either wants to be just like you as a First Sergeant, or someone is taking notes on what not to do as a First Sergeant from your actions. Let's discuss how this equates OIF and OEF, as leaders you have to lead by example in all situations. Leaders are not allowed to get scared to the point where they freeze up and can not make decisions. Leaders have to lead Soldiers on patrols, re-supplies, Quick Reaction Force missions and any direct action missions. They cannot hide inside of the parameter while the Soldiers go out into the danger zone. As a platoon level leader or lower this is usually not a problem, however at the company and higher levels it is easy for leaders to hide in the background. This causes several problem how can you tell a subordinate leader how to accomplish a mission if you have not participated in that type of mission. Your Soldiers will begin not to trust you, morale will fall, and Soldiers will not follow you when the time comes. Lead by example all the time no matter what the situation and you will meet the first requirement of leader ethics.

Second, avoid putting subordinates in compromising positions. Placing soldiers in situations of ethical dilemma, where the possibility exists that they might make the wrong decision because of misinterpreted instructions. Misinterpreted instructions are a common factor in the war on terror in Iraq. The enemy is constantly using unethical methods of fighting. For

example, the enemy will hide behind civilians, or use civilians to move equipment for them.

Soldiers have to know what is ethically correct when making decisions on the amount of force to use in these types of situations. In one incident we had the enemy trapped in a house. They were becoming low on ammo and weapons. They used a child and a woman to go back in forth from houses to get them more ammunition and RPGs. A 240B gunner had to shoot the child and the lady so that we could secure the house. The 240B gunner's duty was to stop them, so he killed the young lady and the child. He will have to live with that for the rest of his life. I only hope that we as leaders instilled the Soldier's ethical character, so that he knows that what he did was ethically correct. If not, we failed, and that Soldier will probably never forgive himself for those actions. Leaders have to know how to make ethically correct decisions and give ethically correct sound guidance. A bad decision or ethically unsound guidance not only has terrible consequences now, but in the future when that subordinate has to make a similar decision as a leader. If you do the right thing soldiers will follow now and in the future. One of the largest Ethical dilemma in Combat (OIF and OEF) is the Rules of Engagement (ROE), how much force to use and when. The ROE is sometimes very vague and should be explained to the letter by leaders. If the leader does not explain every aspect of the ROE then the soldier will be set up for failure and you have put the Soldier in a compromising position. Lots of leaders are Kill, Kill, Kill, and that is not the right answer in Iraq. It does not meet ROE and will not solve the problems in Iraq. You have to be specific with ROE or the Soldiers will pay the price. If you are specific with all of your instructions and orders will meet the second leader ethical responsibility.

Finally, we must develop good ethical traits in subordinates, constantly re-enforcing the fundamentals of duty, loyalty, selfless service, and integrity. The seven army values (loyalty,

Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage) were developed to help leaders and subordinates with their ethical decisions. The seven army values are covered in FM 22-100 and they are taught in every school from basic training to the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy. Doing the right thing is not always easy, but to fulfill your duty, maintain your integrity and serve honorably, you must be able to apply ethical reasoning. If we as leaders do not build ethical traits in our subordinates then we can not expect them to make the right ethical decisions in the future. We as a country will be in OIF and OEF for years to come and many of the Soldiers that we lead today will be the leaders of tomorrow. We have to train them in the ethical decision making process for the success of the Army in the future.

Many of the long-standing values implemented since the beginning of the Army are still in place today. The four basic elements that make up the professional Army ethics are *duty*, *loyalty*, *selfless service*, and *integrity*. These fundamentals have influenced every leader past and present. There have been times in the army when the ethics and values have fluctuated up and down. During the Vietnam Conflict values and ethics were at an all time low. With the training that has occurred in the past few years with the seven Army Values I believe that ethics and values are at an all time high in the Army.

In summary the army values has had its ups and downs, but with the seven army values and good leadership, ethics in the army will remain and the leaders of tomorrow will continue to set the example for all Soldiers who shall follow.