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Running head: History Essay

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Abstract

It is important for all leaders, officers, non-commissioned officers to analyze the cause and effects of the actions of the NCO Corps from the Vietnam War to Desert Shield/Storm and to include all current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. I will convey the need to understand why, if we do not change the way we develop our future leaders in the NCO Corps we will never be successful in any future operations. The Non-commissioned Officer Corps needs to instill in every Soldier, that each one of their decisions they make affects how the military, the nation, and the world views Today's military.

Several comparisons have been made between the atrocities of Vietnam, the Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The facts show there were many instances of abuse, torture, and mayhem by American Soldiers and their leaders. My first argument would be by examining the mistakes many leaders made during the Vietnam War in such cases as My Lai Massacre and Massacre at Hue. I conclude it was understood by some Soldiers that because the Viet Cong used such brutal tactics of guerilla warfare they had used in previous battles with the French military prior to the start of the Vietnam War. Some thought that our leaders would expect them to be just as brutal and treat the enemy and any others suspected of assisting them the same way. The Massacre at Hue is one example of an atrocity that may have fueled some Leaders and Soldiers views of the events of Vietnam. “The killings were perceived as part of a large-scale purge of a whole social stratum, including anyone friendly to American forces in the region.” (Anderson) “Some of the company Soldiers, including platoon leaders, later testified that the orders as they understood them were to kill all guerilla and North Vietnamese combatants and “suspects” (including women and children, as well as all animals), to burn the village, and pollute the wells.” (Smith) Soldiers that were drafted had only a few weeks or months to train and may not have been properly trained on how the enemy and civilians living in the war zone should be treated. Also some of these Leaders may have not clearly articulate their orders based on their own personal biases of the war. This may have resulted in some instances where Leaders and Soldiers felt they had free rein to abuse and kill without any consequences.

One may argue the reasons our military responded with such malice was because of a few overzealous Soldiers that may have misunderstood their leader's orders. I feel they may argue that these newly drafted Soldiers which were thrown into an environment such as Vietnam. With a short period of time, could they be able to comprehend the rules of engagement and capable of understanding orders that some leaders gave in the heat of battle. One reference from a newspaper article was: "The military made similar changes to basic training during the Vietnam War. Starting in the 1960s, recruits were taught how to avoid booby traps and how to search villages where Viet Cong guerrillas might be hiding. Army basic training, a rite of passage for generations of Soldiers, is designed to transform civilians into fighters by teaching them to march, shoot rifles and kill the enemy."(Moniz)

My second argument is the differences between the military's current operations in the Global War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan and how it was affected by the cases in Abu Ghraib and Bagram torture and prisoner abuse scandals. I argue that by comparing the trials of Soldiers involved in Abu Ghraib and Bagram had more to do with the failures of the non-commissioned officers in charge not ensuring Soldiers working at the prison had the opportunity to abuse prisoners. I concluded that based on the Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade, and the recommendations stated in Part Three of the findings was "There is abundant evidence in the statements of numerous witnesses that Soldiers throughout the 800<sup>th</sup> MP Brigade were not proficient in their basic MOS skills, particularly regarding internment/resettlement operations." (Taguba) Also some of the same abuses occurred at Bagram Theater Internment Facility in Bagram,

Afghanistan, where again I argue that some of these Soldiers may have received orders telling them to make these prisoners talk or they would have failed in their duties. Even if this was the case I feel Today's newest Soldiers are taught Army Values but I feel that most Soldiers do not understand their meaning as I do. For all of the lessons learned from previous wars, there still seems to be a failure in our leadership that allows Soldiers to believe their actions have no consequences and the Army Values means very little to the modern day Soldier besides just a slogan. In the mid to late 1990s, the Army officially adopted the 7 Army Core Values. The Army instituted teaching of these Values as early as the first day of basic training and then proceeded to push this initiative out to all Soldiers with posters and other advertisements. One such Value I feel plays a key role is Integrity which means do what's right, legally and morally. All of the Army Values are key to the way all Soldiers should live their lives. As non-commissioned officers I feel we should train all Soldiers that during the Vietnam War it was about spread of communism, the Gulf War was about tyranny, and the Global War on Terror is about the challenges of America's Values against political will.

Some will argue the trials of Soldiers involved in the cases at Abu Ghraib and Bagram to those trials and court-martials during and after the Vietnam War are not because of the failures of Soldiers not being trained but that of a few bad Soldiers who decided as a small group to participate in these actions. They can argue these Soldiers probably thought no one would care and in some cases it would be fun to harass the enemy and show their friends back home through the technology of digital cameras to include camera phones what they were doing. They may argue that by stating the problem is

isolated it has no value in making decisions in current or future operations.

In conclusion I asked myself, where was the senior non-commissioned officers or any other leaders? When did Soldiers ever sit in a classroom during WLC, BNCOC, or ANCOC and hear any lessons that stated this type of abuse would be tolerated? I was ashamed and felt everything I believed in was gone due to the blatant actions of these Soldiers. I feel the team leaders or NCO have the responsibility to ensure no Soldiers have the opportunity to perform such atrocities. I also feel that in the last few years the Soldiers that enlist do not have the respect for the Army Values and when given the opportunity to do the hard right they choose the easy wrong. I have been in the military for over 30 years and to this date I do not remember any instance where I was given specific instructions of any legal recourse. I have seen so many brave Soldiers sacrifice so much for this country by risking their lives on a daily basis and some paying the ultimate sacrifice, that for their memories to be overshadowed by these few Soldiers actions is an atrocity in itself.

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