

Running head: DWI in the Military

DWI in the Military

MSG Raymond T. Price III

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Class # 58

SGM Lucero

2 January 2008

*Abstract*

The American People take great pride in the level of moral behavior, military order, and display of discipline of the Military Soldiers. Even with the strong values the military hold, there are always some individuals who bring shame and embarrassment to our beloved Army. There is an average of one DWI every three days. These acts of criminal behavior and displays lacking military order and discipline need to be dealt with to end this disgrace. After you graduate from the Sergeants Major Academy, you will be advising commanders and helping them weigh out proper punishment. As senior leaders, we need to ask, “what causes these DWIs and what are we doing to change the outcome?”

*DWI in the Military*

The week has been long and finally has ended. You settle in for a full nights rest when at 0300hrs at night the phone rings and you hear the dreaded word are in your ears, "First Sergeant this is SGT Smith from the MP desk". Could this be that frightening phone call that is in the mind of every leader when the phone rings? Chills go down your back in suspense that no one has died. As the fear subsides, your blood pressure raises as SGT Smith inform you of a Soldier from your unit, is charged with DWI. During the thirty minute drive in to pick the Soldier up, the only thing you in your mind is "when are they going to learn, how long will it take and what can I do to get it through to them before someone dies.

As you drive through the gate at FT Bliss TX, the flashing sign that states DAYS SINCE LAST DWI "0". Ft Bliss, along with a few other military installations is having record high numbers with DWI and DUIs. Here at FT Bliss there has been over 120 DWI since 1 January and we still have the month of December to face more DWIs to bring shame and embarrassment to our beloved Army. There is an average of one DWI every three days. These acts of criminal behavior and displays lacking military order and discipline need to be dealt with to end this disgrace. This disgrace of morals and discipline are not just limited to young lower enlisted, it includes our officers and NCOs as well. Soldiers of all ages and ranks think of themselves as invisible and let the alcohol fill there brains with the common myths and excuses that are used over and over: "I've only been drinking beer", "I don't feel any effects", "I don't have far to go", "I'll drive slowly and carefully", and the biggest myths "Coffee will sober me up" and "I just need some fresh air".

This lack of discipline is not due to a shortage of education by no means. The Army spends countless efforts to help reduce the numbers of DUIs and DWI every year. The Army

Safety Center promotes safety programs along with civilian agency like Mother Against Drunk Drivers (M.A.D.D.) whom provide many Army post with displays of car wrecks from recent DWI in hopes convince Soldiers to take DUI and DWI seriously. Week after week Squad Leaders, First Sergeants and Commanders giving safety brief continue to emphasize the legal and moral consequences of a DWI arrest and the negative impact on a military career.

Leadership constantly stresses that the decision is not to be made at 2AM on a Saturday night it needs to be made prior to going for the night. The simple act of using a Designated Driver could help ensure everyone's safety. In situations where your so call Designated Driver shows lack of discipline, call a cab. The use of common sense could still save the night, someone's career and even someone's life. Units have implemented a verity of programs in efforts to help reduce DWI. Units require Soldiers to have numbers available on their persons at all times of who to contact if they become impaired. Designated drivers, Call-a-Cab, and "Battle Buddy" these concepts have been established for years and are continuously encouraged at unit and team level. Some units have a Cab Fund where the Staff Duty has control of limited cash to pay for cabs in the event a soldier is short on fund that night. The Staff Duty logs the information and the Soldier repays the fund with no fear of recourse. Units make it a team effort that involves every leadership, supervisors, duty driver or volunteers to prevent their soldiers from violating the law.

Civilian Law Enforcement agencies across the United States have stepped up enforcement off post with numerous arrests and checkpoints along. Our Military Police who also have an aggressive DWI enforcement program as well, but the number of DWI and DUI still come rolling in. Whether Civilian Law Enforcement or Military Police, there is an enormous amount of man-hours and million of dollars involved for these Soldiers who cannot display self-control or discipline of their behavior. The clock on man-hours start when the driver is

apprehended, searched, and transported to the Police Station. At the Police Station, the driver is advised of his rights and brought before a State Certified Chemical Analyst. Once the test reveals if the driver is proven legally intoxicated, the driver is further processed, cited for all charges and placed in the holding cell (Drunk Tank). If the suspect is a military member, the soldier's chain of command is woken up in the middle of the night, notified and advised to come pick them up. The Clock doesn't stop just yet, there is still more man-hours wasted in filing reports, Article 15 punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and trial defense services. Until the family car is returned again, the unit leadership is responsible for taking care of the family. Countless hours are spent picking up the Soldier for work, taking the family for Groceries, doctor appointments and numerous other things that place a negative impact and strain on the unit.

The financial heart ach for the family begins when the thoughtless drunk driver is apprehended and the vehicle is towed. That may have been the only car for the family, if the vehicle is wrecked or totaled most insurance companies will not cover the damage. Civilian courts involve heavy fines, court fee and high lawyer fee. When the civilian courts turn over charges to the military, the Soldier faces Article 111 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), that state: where drunken or reckless operation of a vehicle, an arrest for DWI resulting in personal injury can result in a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances and imprisonment for 18 months. Where no personal injury is involved, service members still face a bad-conduct discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances and 6 months confinement.

Additionally, military members who are convicted by courts-martial have a felony record. For NCOs and Officers they also face removal from their position and Relief for Cause Evaluations. All of this because the Soldier gave in to peer pressure and could not restrain themselves from

alcohol before driving. These Soldiers never relies the legal and moral consequences of a DWI arrest and the negative impact on a military career until it is to late.

These DWI are a result from lack of morals and discipline, but the more frightening fact is when a death accurse. Lets look at the basic facts, Last year, about 30% of national traffic deaths were related to drug or alcohol use. According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 1999, 38% of all fatal crashes and 7% of all nonfatal crashes nationwide had alcohol involvement, that's 15,786 fatalities in alcohol related crashes during 1999. Twenty-six percent of young male drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2000 had been drinking the time of the crash, compared to 13% of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes. Last year, over 300,000 persons in 2006, were injured in crashes where police reported that alcohol was present. With statistics like this we can understand why three in every ten Americans will be involved in an alcohol related crash at some time in their lives.

As Leader, we need to enforce harsher punishment on these Soldiers who bring disgrace to the Army and place so many lives at risk. Fifteen years ago when an Officer or NCO received a DWI they were first given their Field Grade Article 15 Punishment and processed out of the military. These leaders were held to a higher standard, expected to know better and lead by example. Junior enlisted soldiers received their Field or Company Grade Article 15, however because they were young they were allowed to stay in to finish their obligations that remained on their service contract, but they were bared from re-enlistment. Currently most DWI Soldiers only receive a Field or Company Grade Article 15, serve their extra duty and remain in the military. I understand that we are a nation at war, I know that we need every man in the fight, but at what cost. Units waste enormous amount of man-hours for these Soldiers who cannot display self-control or discipline. The same display self-control or discipline that is needed on a battlefield

where many Soldiers lives are at stake. Soldiers know the legal and moral consequences of a DWI arrest and the negative impact on a military career; their leadership needs to hold them accountable for these actions.

Imagine if when an Officer or NCO they received a DWI, were given their Field Grade Article 15 Punishment, ending their military careers and processed out of the military. Imagine if when a junior enlisted who received a DWI, were given their Field Grade Article 15, serve community service, remain on their service contract, but were bared from re-enlistment. I feel this would convince Soldiers to take DUI and DWI seriously. Yes at first we would still have DWI and lose some Soldiers out of the military. However once these Soldiers were used as examples Soldiers faced the reality and the consequences, leading to a reduction of a DWI arrest. Visualize the 107 DWI FT Bliss received last year, if the 33 DWI that happen in January – March were kicked out, and instead of 64 through the rest of the year there were only 10. If the number of DWI reduced and even if only one innocent life was saved, would those 33 really be a loss.

### *Conclusion*

As senior leaders, after you graduate from the Sergeants Major Academy, you will be advising commanders and helping them weigh out proper punishment. As you weigh the cost and the standard, hold to a higher standard. Expected others to know better and lead by example. Soldiers know the legal and moral consequences of a DWI arrest and the negative impact on a military career, their unit and the safety of someone life. As senior leaders, we need to hold them accountable for these actions and be the one who makes a difference in the future of our Army.