

Freedom of Expression and Religion

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The Army does a great job of turning civilians into Soldiers. The process starts at Basic Combat Training (BCT), and continues through the Soldierization process. The training begins with phases 1, 2, and 3 at Basic Training to phases 4 and 5 at Advance Individual Training (AIT) and continues through a Soldier's career in the Army. But should this training start prior to enlistment into the Army?

The Bill Of Rights affords every American a set of basic freedoms under the law. Civilians who are considering coming into the Army need to understand certain things about the Army and for that matter about military service in general. These rights don't disappear while serving in the armed forces, but the Army is a complex organization and Soldiers must adapt and accept certain conditions of military life.

Leaders in the Army, Noncommissioned Officers as well as Commissioned Officers, are faced with making ethical decisions everyday. Some of the most difficult non-combat related decisions deal with infringement or perceived infringement on freedom of expression and/or freedom of religion. For example: A Soldier comes into the Army who believes that any sort of harm to animals is wrong. You are the First Sergeant of Company X. The Soldier comes to you and states that he/she cannot wear combat boots because the boots are made with cow leather, and killing cows for leather is wrong. The Soldier can possibly find boots made of synthetic leather that meet the criteria within AR 670-1 of wear and appearance for combat boots. Can the Commander and First Sergeant of this company accommodate the needs of this Soldier? Leaders often have to make decisions which might infringe, or might be perceived as infringing on a Soldier's freedom of expression or religion.

Holidays are another example of a possible ethical problem a leader may be faced with. A Soldier who is not a Christian might approach the leadership of a unit and ask for an alternate

holiday to Christmas. The Soldier feels that since the Army gives Christmas off as a holiday that he/she should be able to get an alternate day off to observe his/her religion. Christmas is based solely on an important day of Christian history; the birth of Jesus Christ. The Soldier might feel that other religions including the Soldier's own religion are being excluded. Again, can this Soldier's command accommodate this request? A person can argue that this is a legitimate request, and that the Army could easily accommodate this need.

Since the war in Iraq and Afghanistan started the Army faces yet another ethical issue. Soldiers and leaders at all levels are trying to address the issue of Soldiers who practice the Islam faith. Soldiers have approached the command and requested to be excluded from deployment to one or both of these areas. The Soldier might not want to go fight against fellow Muslims. Some believe that Soldiers who practice the Islam faith shouldn't have to deploy to these areas and fight against fellow Muslims. Others believe that these Soldiers volunteered to serve in the Army and should go. The latter individuals' train of thought is that Soldiers of the Christian faith went to Europe and fought other Christians in World War II. Which group is right? Should these Soldiers have to deploy to Iraq and/or Afghanistan? Should any Soldier be excluded from a deployment to a country based on religious practice or belief if the country's population predominantly practices the same faith?

There are many more examples of ethical issues related to rights and freedoms which arise within the ranks of our great Army everyday. Some Soldiers and leaders lose sleep over these issues. Leaders must very carefully weigh their decisions on whether to accommodate or not to accommodate. The commander must weigh how the decision will affect the individual Soldier, and the unit. The leader must also ensure that there is balance by accommodating without isolating an individual Soldier or group.

The Army's leadership continues to adjust to make our Army a more accommodating Army. Individual rights and freedoms are more widely accepted, observed and safeguarded. Army Regulations and policy clearly instruct commanders to safeguard the rights of individual Soldiers in relation to freedom of religion and expression. Commanders can and will accommodate certain practices unless these practices have an adverse effect on the mission readiness, safety, morale, cohesion, or health of the unit or the Soldier. The Army and its leadership have come a very long way to recognize and preserve the rights of individuals. The Army has implemented Consideration Of Others Training, Equal Opportunity Training, and Prevention Of Sexual Harassment to train Soldiers and leaders on the diversity and needs of people in the Army. These programs educate not only Soldiers but also their leaders. This enables leaders to make better decisions in regards to the rights of the individual Soldier. The Army has gone so far as to incorporate vegetarian meals into the field rations to accommodate the needs of Soldiers. Nonetheless individuals have to understand that all cannot be accommodated all the time.

As an organization, the Army has Seven Army Values, Army Regulations, Policies, and a common mission that drive us. Some non-military people do not understand how complex the Army and its mission are. Even though leaders attempt as much as possible to accommodate individual rights of Soldiers, these rights have to conform to the good of the Army and its mission. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper the Army begins training civilians to be Soldiers in BCT. Perhaps a solution for the Army is to educate civilians prior to enlisting. Maybe if civilians who want to enlist understand that all Soldiers give up some individual rights some times for the good of the Army and its mission, this would be less of an ethical problem.