Mitigating Moral Injuries Through Proactive, Ethical Leadership

Lt. Col. Peter Kilner, U.S. Army, Retired

The military attracts moral idealists—young people willing to risk their lives to serve something greater than themselves—and then places them in the most troubling, morally complex situations. Consequently, soldiers in war often suffer moral injuries.

Even in a just war that is fought justly overall, soldiers are likely to intentionally kill enemy soldiers, unintentionally harm civilians, and witness levels of violence and senseless suffering that challenge their assumptions about their own moral goodness and the goodness of the world. When soldiers commit, fail to prevent, or witness acts in war that violate their own moral codes, they become susceptible to suffering long-term shame, anger, alienation, loss of religious belief, and other effects known as moral injury.[1] Veterans who suffer from moral injuries have an increased risk of mental disorders and suicide.[2]

Ethical, proactive leadership can prevent or mitigate war-related moral injuries. There are actions leaders should take before, during, and after their units' combat deployments that will reduce the prevalence and magnitude of their soldiers' moral injuries.

Predeployment

The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.

—G. K. Chesterton[3]

Protecting against moral injuries should begin at home station prior to a deployment. As leaders prepare their units to deploy to war, they should establish conditions—through education, training, and personal example—that will protect their soldiers' consciences in the moral crucibles that lie ahead.

Educate soldiers on moral frameworks for war. Moral injuries occur when soldiers are unable to reconcile their wartime experiences with their peacetime moral frameworks. Too often in war, there is a gap between what soldiers experience and what they are intellectually prepared to experience.[4] To close this gap between future "wartime acts" and current "moral frameworks," leaders should educate their soldiers on the morality of war, expanding their soldiers' moral-conceptual frameworks to include the context of war.[5]

Soldiers are less likely to suffer moral injuries if they can answer three questions:

1. How can war be morally justified?
2. How can killing in war be morally justified?
3. Why is there so much unnecessary suffering in the world?

All soldiers should be able to answer the first two questions and be familiar with approaches to wrestle

with the third. However, the military's institutional training and education systems neither raise these questions nor offer answers, constituting an enormous blind spot in the profession of arms' stewardship of its people.[6] A profession that recruits, equips, trains, and orders its members to kill should also explain to them why it can be morally (not merely legally) right to participate and kill in war.[7]

Soldiers—especially those who have experienced combat—are intensely interested in the morality of war. I interviewed hundreds of soldiers during and after their deployments to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I was struck by soldiers' recognition of the moral gravity of war as well as their frustration at feeling unprepared to make informed moral judgments about war.

Military leaders are responsible for educating themselves and their soldiers on moral justifications of war and of killing in war. Some leaders disagree, concerned that if they openly acknowledge these moral questions, they might provoke their soldiers to doubt the morality of their actions. If that doubt causes them to hesitate in life-or-death situations in combat, then raising the moral questions would increase the risk to soldiers' lives and mission accomplishment.[8] However, what I have consistently observed is that most deployed soldiers are already asking themselves these questions. Lacking answers, they experience doubt. (Hesitation in combat is less widespread, a credit to their loyalty and training.) The moral gravity of combat cannot simply be wished away, so it should not be ignored. Many soldiers' consciences will raise troubling questions. They and their units will fight more confidently and cohesively when they are equipped with satisfying answers.

Integrate moral reasoning into tactical training. Military leaders' foremost responsibility is to train their soldiers to perform, succeed, and survive in combat. The ways they train them, though, focus almost exclusively on developing their tactical skills but not their moral reasoning. After action reviews (AARs) illuminate and evaluate *tactical* decision-making; for example, why a machine gun was emplaced at a certain location or how well a squad maneuvered. The AARs neglect moral decision-making; for example, why it was morally right to engage an enemy combatant or morally wrong to call for artillery fires that disproportionately killed civilians. Even the doctrinal vocabulary around

killing is sanitized of its moral meaning; rather than kill and wound, our soldiers neutralize and suppress.

This prevailing approach to training is not *immoral*. However, it is *amoral* because it ignores the moral aspect of the situations. To their credit, U.S. military leaders train their soldiers to adhere to the laws of armed conflict, which explains the commendable moral record of U.S. soldiers in recent wars. Yet, those same leaders typically explain soldiers' lethal permissions and limitations solely in terms of legal and professional norms, not as moral principles.[9] Those explanations are sufficient for soldiers in training when they are firing their weapons at inanimate training aids. When soldiers deploy to war, however, they engage and kill real human beings. The amoral explanations (e.g., "it's legal," "it's what soldiers do") that sufficed in training are inadequate for such morally significant actions, leaving soldiers susceptible to moral injuries.[10]

To protect against moral injuries, then, leaders should integrate moral reasoning and language into their tactical training. In AARs, soldiers should be required to evaluate their actions using moral language the same way they use doctrinal and legal language.[11] For example, after a training exercise in which a soldier engaged a civilian on the battlefield who had picked up a weapon and pointed it toward friendly forces, the leader should ask the soldier not only, "Why did you engage him? ("Because he threatened our soldiers") and "Why was that legally permissible?" ("Because the ROE states that any person who is armed and making a threatening action is positively identified as enemy") but also "Why was it morally right to kill him?" ("He chose to fight

Lt. Col. Peter Kilner, U.S. Army, retired, is the John Alexander Hottell '64 Chair for Character Development at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), West Point, New York. He holds a BS from the USMA, an MA from Virginia Tech, and a PhD from Pennsylvania State University. He served as an infantry officer in the 1st Armored Division and 82nd Airborne Division before becoming a USMA professor of leader development and organizational learning. He deployed multiple times to Iraq and Afghanistan to research combat leadership and has interviewed more than five hundred Army junior officers.

for an armed organization that unjustly threatens the fundamental rights of the people we are protecting, so he forfeited his right not to be killed.")

A major difference between *training for* combat and *engaging in* combat is the moral component of actual combat. Soldiers perform the same actions on the training range and downrange, but their actions downrange have immeasurably greater moral conse-

facilitate a conversation about the ways in which they should expect to experience even greater injustices in war. If leaders repeatedly inject unfairness into combat training while continuing to demand high standards of professional conduct, soldiers will learn to recognize and regulate their emotions, developing their ability to maintain their professionalism and act justly even in the most unjust situations.

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quences. Soldiers who are unprepared to deal with those consequences are more liable to suffer moral injuries. Leaders, therefore, should incorporate moral reasoning into tactical training, preparing their soldiers to succeed tactically, morally, and psychologically.

Inoculate soldiers to injustice in war. Citizens raised in a just society and trained in a respectful military organization are psychologically under-prepared for the injustices they will face in war. War is not merely difficult and terrifying; it is also unjust and frustrating. From what I've observed, the stress soldiers experience from facing hardships and death is different than the stress they experience from perceiving that the rules are unfairly stacked against them.[12] When soldiers confront fair challenges, they rely on their values and work even harder. However, when soldiers perceive that their struggles are caused by an unfair playing field (e.g., enemy combatants posing as civilians), they are tempted to lash out and become discouraged, disposing them to commit actions that harm the innocent, tarnish their honor, and result in moral injuries.[13]

Leaders should begin to inoculate their soldiers to injustice-based distress in their predeployment training. For instance, leaders could conduct a twelve-mile forced foot march in which, at the apparent finish line, the standards are suddenly changed without any explanation and the soldiers are required to continue marching, perhaps for an additional three miles. At the AAR, leaders could have their soldiers reflect on how they reacted emotionally to unfair treatment and then

Be leaders of character. Leaders should never underestimate the importance of their own moral character to their soldiers' well-being. In all circumstances—home station and deployed—a unit's ethical climate reflects its leader's moral character. On a combat deployment, the impact of a leader's moral character is magnified enormously. Leaders are the authority under which their soldiers kill other human beings. Leaders develop plans and give orders; soldiers execute those plans and follow those orders. By their oath of enlistment, soldiers are bound to obey their officers. Soldiers are forced to trust their leader's moral decision-making because they typically do not have access to as much information as their leaders do. Combat soldiers' consciences, therefore, can be affected greatly by their confidence in their leader's moral character.

Leaders accumulate or forfeit "moral capital" by their moral decision-making in their everyday behaviors. Leaders who consistently demonstrate good moral judgment and moral courage earn the trust of their soldiers. This is significant because soldiers' trust in their leader's moral decision-making influences the way that soldiers interpret their own actions in war. I've asked many soldiers whether they thought a debatable act of violence they performed in war was morally justified. Soldiers who have confidence in their leader's moral character respond with answers like, "I don't know exactly why it was justified, but I'm pretty sure it was. Our unit always does the right thing." In contrast, soldiers who lack confidence in their leader's character

respond with statements like, "I don't know. The killing probably wasn't justified. War is f**ked up, and we all do f**ked up things when we're in war."

In everyday peacetime life, our consciences are primarily impacted by our own actions and decisions. In war, soldiers' consciences are impacted by their own actions in carrying out their leader's orders, which soldiers often lack the means to morally evaluate. Frequently, lethal actions in war are "judgment calls" made by the leader. When soldiers have learned that they can trust the moral decision-making of their leader, they are less likely to judge themselves harshly after a questionable killing during a combat action led by that leader.[14] It follows, then, that leaders can mitigate moral injuries in their soldiers by demonstrating trustworthy moral judgment in all circumstances—before, during, and even after a combat deployment.

During Deployment

He who fights monsters should look into it that he himself does not become a monster. When you gaze long into the Abyss, the Abyss also gazes into you.

—Friedrich Nietzsche[15]

Combat-related moral injuries often result from acts of violence that soldiers judge to be morally wrong. As discussed above, predeployment education and training can prepare soldiers to make sense of justified violence in war by closing the gap between soldiers' moral frameworks and what they encounter in war. Moreover, soldiers' confidence in their leader's moral character sets conditions for them to interpret morally complex acts in a positive way. Nothing, however, can—or even should—protect soldiers who deliberately commit unjust acts in war from suffering a moral injury. Therefore, leaders on a combat deployment can prevent some moral injuries in their ranks by setting and enforcing standards that make unjust acts less likely to occur, by speaking and reporting truthfully, and by continuously helping their soldiers make sense of their wartime experiences.

Inspire and require respect for all. A simple way that leaders can reduce the likelihood of moral injuries is to demand that their soldiers treat enemy combatants and local-national civilians with respect. A war zone constitutes the ultimate "us versus them" environment, so it is easy for soldiers to lack empathy for anyone who is not "on their side." This attitude can easily lead to a dehumanization of "the other," which is often reflected in and exacerbated by soldiers' language. Soldiers' usage of pejoratives to describe their enemy has, unfortunately, a long history (e.g., "heinies," "nips," "krauts," "chinks," "gooks," "ragheads," "sammies," and "hadjis").[16]

Some leaders support the use of dehumanizing terms for enemy combatants, believing that it helps their soldiers overcome their natural aversion to killing and thus enhances their mission effectiveness and safety. If dehumanization does make killing easier, however, it's only because leaders have not explained to their soldiers why it is morally right for them to engage in that war and to kill enemy combatants. Soldiers who understand the moral justifications for their actions do not need to employ dehumanizing pejoratives to avoid cognitive dissonance.

Instead, leaders should do all they can to help their soldiers acknowledge the humanity of their enemy counterparts. After all, dehumanization typically holds up only for so long; at some point, soldiers will realize that the targets they engaged were indeed human beings. When that realization happens, soldiers feel deceived, and if they have already left military service, they may lack ready access to resources that can help them deal with this realization. So, rather than perpetuate a wartime lie, leaders should lay out the truth. With support from intelligence staffs, leaders should discuss with their soldiers the demographics and motivations of the enemy, who in many cases share much in common with their own soldiers. In truth, the enemy combatants are someone's child, sibling, or parent; they, too, are young, idealistic, and willing to die for a cause they believe in. Leaders should explain that they believe the enemy fighters' cause to be objectively unjust, which is why they must be defeated, even though the enemy fighters often do not realize the error of their ways. Having acknowledged to their own soldiers the enemy's humanity, leaders would find it easier to develop soldiers who kill efficiently yet respectfully, defend the innocent without hating the aggressors, and ultimately appreciate both the necessity of fighting and the tragedy of war.[17] By not denying the humanity of their enemy, soldiers would retain their own full humanity.[18] Treated as the responsible moral agents they are, soldiers would not feel the need to divorce their "soldier selves" from their "moral selves"

while deployed. They would fight with full awareness of the moral situation and thus be better enabled to come to terms with their violent actions.

In the Iraq War, I never heard the term "hadji" used during the 2003 invasion. That pejorative came into use later that summer to refer to insurgents, and then expanded in many units to refer as well to unsupportive Iraqi civilians or even to all Iraqis. Language shapes attitudes, and attitudes influence behaviors. Leaders who set a good example and demand that their soldiers

routinely accompany their soldiers on missions, engage with them personally between missions, and conduct inspections to reinforce standards and to identify any aberrant behaviors in their ranks before those behaviors take root and grow.[19] Perhaps most importantly, leaders should anticipate and intervene in morally high-risk situations, acting proactively to identify and mitigate the risk of soldier misconduct. For example, in the emotional days after a unit has suffered casualties, leaders should ensure that moral standards are reiterated in all mission

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use respectful language emplace a healthy obstacle that blocks the moral slippery slope of attitudes and behaviors that lead to unjust acts that result in moral injuries.

Maintain standards of conduct. An inherent responsibility of leaders is to establish, embody, and enforce high standards. However, the conditions that characterize soldiers' experiences of combat deployments—such as fatigue, frustration, fear, grief, and anger—impose a steady downward pressure on standards. For example, soldiers frustrated by civilians who don't provide information about insurgents may feel justified in smashing or stealing items while searching their home. Soldiers grief-stricken at the death of a buddy may feel entitled to acquire and abuse alcohol or drugs, or even to rough-up a detainee or two. Behaviors such as these are wrong and likely to result in moral injuries. They are also indicators of leaders who failed their soldiers. I have never seen or studied a unit that maintained moral standards on relatively minor issues (e.g., respectful language, no substance abuse) suffer a major moral breakdown (e.g., rape, murder). Rather, the typical pattern is for a unit to become "morally worn down" over time by the extraordinary pressures of war. Its leaders unintentionally and unreflectively accept lower and lower standards of behavior until a final step down the slippery slope lands them all in the abyss.

Leaders have a duty to maintain moral standards in their units throughout their deployments, regardless of their feelings or competing priorities. They should

briefs. They should also increase their supervision of higher-risk situations such as detainee operations.

A U.S. Army infantry company commander in Iraq expressed well his commitment to preventing moral injuries through his enforcement of strict rules of engagement:

> I keep my soldiers on a tight leash when it comes to the rules of engagement, and they hate me for it. When they're frustrated and angry, especially after we've taken casualties, they want to unleash hell on somebody, anybody, to get some payback. At times like those, any Iraqi who appears at all sketchy looks like an enemy. I don't allow them to engage targets that are at all questionable. This is my third deployment, and I've seen what happens to the guys who kill recklessly. When we go home, they drink too much, beat their wives, get divorced, and kill themselves. I won't let that happen again. My soldiers are angry with me now—thinking I put too many restrictions on them—but once this deployment is over, they'll be thanking me for the rest of their lives.[20]

Be honest with your fellow Americans. Leaders who take pride in never lying in their everyday lives often discover that they ought to lie at times on combat deployments. It's admirable to deceive the enemy, and it can be permissible to withhold the entire truth

from untrustworthy local-national civilians or "part-nered" security forces. That said, leaders should never lie to those on their own team, up and down their chain of command.

It is widely acknowledged that lying destroys trust in organizations and undermines mission accomplishment. What is less recognized is the effect of leaders

it calls for discretion.[22] Nevertheless, for the long-term welfare of all soldiers involved in the situation—the perpetrator and witnesses—any wrongful act should at least be named as such and criticized, and any soldier who intentionally commits an unjust act should be punished appropriately. Soldiers cannot be expected to recover from wounds they haven't even been permitted

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lying on their soldiers' belief in the moral justification of their wartime actions. No one wants to die for a lie; no one wants to kill for a lie. Soldiers desperately want to believe that the bad things they do and witness in war support a morally good cause. Lying by their leaders, however, undermines soldiers' confidence in their cause. An Army captain, disillusioned by witnessing an accidental killing of civilians reported by higher headquarters as a justified killing of combatants, put it this way: "The good guys shouldn't have to lie. And I thought we were the good guys."[21]

Discuss candidly the morality of actions in war. The predeployment practice of including moral decision-making in AARs should continue during the deployment. The stakes are higher when real lives are involved, which makes the AAR-sensemaking process even more important. When soldiers kill in war, it is always done in support of a collective mission. Their coming to terms with killing, likewise, should also be treated as a collective mission. Soldiers who killed justly should be reassured that they killed justly. Soldiers who killed questionably should be given the benefit of the doubt and then coached to discover what can be learned from the experience. Soldiers who killed unjustly should be told unequivocally that they acted immorally. That said, I believe that not all wrongful actions in war should be treated as war crimes. Context matters, and the context of war is so demanding that

to acknowledge. The violence of war is a collective act; soldiers should not be left alone to make sense of their own roles in that violence.

Reinforce the moral purpose of the war. The only ends that justify the violence that soldiers perform in war are protecting the innocent and pursuing a just peace.[23] A challenge for leaders is that their soldiers personally witness the violence they inflict, but they do not always see the people they protect (except for their fellow soldiers) nor their part in the war's progress. Soldiers who lose sight of their role in the war's overall scheme also lose sight of the meaning of their actions. Among the most dangerous phrases to hear on a combat deployment is, "It just doesn't matter." Meaning and morality are inherently connected, so soldiers who don't understand why their actions matter are also unlikely to understand how they could be morally justified.[24] Therefore, leaders should regularly remind their soldiers of the big picture—which includes the people they are protecting from unjust violence and their role in contributing to a just peace—that justifies the violence they are inflicting.

Post-Deployment

Only people who are capable of loving strongly can also suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving serves to counteract their grief and heals them.

—Leo Tolstoy[25]

The conclusion of a combat deployment marks the beginning of life as a combat veteran. Those who have shared "the best worst experience of their lives" have become forever bonded, connected by shared experiences that only each other can fully understand. Because a deployment never completely ends—soldiers will always be making sense of some aspects of it—neither does a leader's role ever completely end. There are things that leaders can do in the days, weeks, and even years after a deployment that may mitigate and heal moral injuries and even promote posttraumatic moral growth in their soldiers.

Take responsibility for all that your soldiers did or failed to do. After each combat action and at the conclusion of a deployment, leaders should personally thank their soldiers for performing their duty and then express their own responsibility for putting their soldiers in that situation. Soldiers do not start or conclude wars, nor do they plan patrols. Leaders in their chain of command are the ones who make decisions that bring about soldiers' morally tragic situations. Therefore, it is fitting that a member of that chain of command who personally knows what the soldiers experienced should take responsibility for the requirement that they engaged in violent acts against fellow human beings. The dual nametapes on military uniforms convey a deep moral truth—that soldiers act as individuals (last name) on behalf of the collective (e.g., U.S. Army). Soldiers in war should be commended often by their leaders for their individual acts, and they should also be reminded that they acted as one small element of a national collective body that bears the ultimate responsibility for each mission, each deployment, and the war itself. Leaders in the chain of command, which creates the situations that breed moral injuries, should take full responsibility for those situations.

The burden of command in war—already laden by casualties, second-guessing of fateful decisions, etc.—will become even heavier as leaders willingly take on additional risk of moral injuries in order to reduce their soldiers' risk of suffering them. Yet, that is the right thing to do, and well-prepared leaders will be able to handle the load.

Make post-deployment reflection and conversation a unit priority. Leaders are trainers, and they can influence (if not control) their own units' training schedules. After a deployment, leaders should fence off time and space for their redeployed soldiers to talk deeply with each other about their experiences. Soldiers benefit greatly from reflecting on and talking about their traumatic deployment experiences, especially with others who shared those experiences. This should be done as soon as possible after redeployment before soldiers depart on reassignments and to establish a culture of honest conversation.

Leaders can ensure that such conversations happen in their units by putting them on the training schedule. They can emphasize their importance by personally participating in them.

Maintain connections. Combat is a life-altering experience, for better and for worse, and leaders are an essential component of that experience before, during, and after a deployment. In a peacetime environment, leaders should not have emotionally intimate relationships with their soldiers, and leaders who have been reassigned to other duty positions should not "interfere" in their former formations. A combat deployment changes those rules. Leaders who have shepherded soldiers into and through life-defining experiences have bonded with them in a profound way and should maintain nonduty relationships with them even after one or both have moved to different jobs or posts. At a minimum, leaders should maintain lines of communication that enable them (leveraging subordinate leaders) to check in periodically on their former soldiers, to acknowledge and commiserate with them on significant dates, to remember their fallen comrades, and overall to continue to help them make sense of the wartime experiences they both shared.

Wars tend to make more sense to soldiers when they are in them than when they have returned—especially when a unit's tactical-level successes and sacrifices appear not to have accomplished any worthwhile strategic gains or when the war concludes as a loss.[26] As a result, a leader's sense-making role may become even more important in the months and years after returning from a deployment. Setting up a persistent shared space, such as a Facebook closed group, can facilitate the process.

Provide a vision for post-moral-injury growth. Many combat veterans who suffer posttraumatic stress disorder eventually enjoy posttraumatic growth.[27] The same can be true of moral injury. Leaders can facilitate healing processes by fostering a unit narrative that

acknowledges the moral tragedies of war yet frames their soldiers' experiences as opportunities for increased moral self-awareness and moral growth. After all, a sociopath would not—in fact, could not—experience the grief, shame, anger, and moral disillusionment that are indicative of moral injury. The possibility of moral injury presupposes a morally good person who holds and values deep moral commitments. Leaders should remind their soldiers of this fact, encourage them to reflect on their injurious experiences to gain greater self-awareness of their moral values, and challenge them to live those values more intentionally in their everyday lives. In this way, the same deeply held moral commitments that created psychological distress can become springboards to happier, more purposeful lives.

Conclusion

Some years ago, an experienced combat leader posed a question to me.[28] "Do you think of your subordinates primarily as soldiers who happen to have personal lives on the side, or as people just like you who happen currently to be soldiers?" I had to admit to myself that I unconsciously held the former attitude. I thought of my soldiers as resources to be developed, trained, and led to accomplish missions. I did genuinely care about their welfare, but I related to them as *soldiers*, not as *people* who had grown up as civilians and would (God willing) live many more decades as civilians after they'd finished their military service. I don't think that I was unique in my approach, which may explain the military profession's relative inattention to its members' moral concerns.

Military leaders have always been entrusted with the well-being of their soldiers, and that responsibility should extend to them as people, not merely as soldiers. Leaders already prepare their soldiers for war in many ways—tactically, technically, culturally, mentally, physically, legally, administratively, etc. This article has argued that leaders should also prepare their soldiers morally. After all, even in justified wars, military leaders compel their good people to do normally bad things to accomplish the war's morally praiseworthy goals. Given that soldiers' experiences in war will likely remain with them for the rest of their lives, leaders should do what they can before, during, and after a deployment to empower their soldiers to act morally while at war and to make peace with their participation in war for the rest of their lives. ∎

Notes

1. Brett T. Litz et al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy," *Clinical Psychological Review* 29, no. 8 (December 2009): 695–706, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003; David Wood, *What Have We Done: The Moral Injury of our Longest Wars* (New York: Little, Brown, 2016), 8.

2. Blair E. Wisco et al., "Moral Injury in U.S. Combat Veterans: Results from the National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study," *Depression and Anxiety* 34, no. 4 (April 2017): 340–47, https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22614; Douglas Pryer, "What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About War," in *War and Moral Injury: A Reader*, ed. Robert Emmet Meagher and Douglas A. Pryer (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 60–67.

3. "Quotations of G. K. Chesterton," The American Chesterton Society, accessed 5 September 2023, https://www.chesterton.org/quotations/war-and-politics/. The original quotation appeared in *Illustrated London News*, 14 January 1911.

4. Peter Kilner, "Military Leaders' Obligation to Justify Killing in War," *Military Review* 82, no. 2 (March-April 2002): 24–31. Marc Livecche also addresses this problem in *The Good Kill: Just War and Moral Injury* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

5. Lt. Col. Kevin Cutright, U.S. Army, contributed greatly to clarifying this idea.

6. Logan Mehl-Laituri, *Reborn on the Fourth of July: The Challenge of Faith, Patriotism, & Conscience* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 41. A notable effort to justify killing in terms of just war theory is Sean Wead, "Ethics, Combat, and a Soldier's Decision to Kill," *Military Review* 95, no. 2 (March-April 2015): 69–81, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20150430_art013.pdf.

7. Peter Kilner, "A Moral Justification for Killing in War," *Army* 60, no. 2 (February 2010): 55, https://juniorofficer.army.mil/pubs/armymagazine/docs/2010/CC_ARMY_10-02%20(FEB10)%20Morality-of-Killing.pdf.

8. Dan Baum, "The Price of Valor," *The New Yorker*, 4 July 2004, 49.

9. This point is also made well in James H. Toner, *Morals Under the Gun* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); and in Brian Imiola and Danny Cazier, "On the Road to Articulating Our Professional Ethic," *Military Review* Special Edition (September 2010): 11–18.

10. Robert Emmet Meagher, *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 142.

11. This technique is suggested in Jonathan Silk, "Making Sense of Killing," *Army* 55, no. 11 (November 2005): 89–98, https://juniorofficer.army.mil/pubs/armymagazine/docs/2005/CC_11-05-sense%20of%20killing.pdf.

12. This insight emerged in light of my interviews after reading "The Fairness Assumption" section in Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in*

Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character (New York: Scribner, 1994), 10–14.

13. Nigel Biggar, In *Defence of War* (New York: Oxford University Press), 85. I've heard these frustrations in expressions like "the enemy cheats," "the civilians are two-faced," "our 'allies' are our enemy," and "our strategy sucks."

14. Empirical evidence points to this phenomenon. "Platoons that collectively rated officers positively were more resilient than platoons that rated officers negatively. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 22." Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT) VI, *Operation Iraqi Freedom 07-09* (Fort Sam Houston, TX: U.S. Army Medical Command, Office of the U.S. Army Surgeon General, MHAT, 8 May 2009), 34.

15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Leipzig, DE: G. G. Naumann, 1886), aphorism 146.

16. Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 364–65; Peter Fromm, Douglas Pryer, and Kevin Cutright, "The Myths We Soldiers Tell Ourselves (and Harm These Myths Do)," *Military Review* 93, no. 5 (September-October 2013): 60, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20131031_art010.pdf.

17. Respecting enemy soldiers has a long tradition in the warrior ethos. See Steven Pressfield, *The Warrior Ethos* (New York: Black Irish Entertainment, 2011), 18; J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1998), 158–59; also see Kevin Sites, *The Things They Cannot Say: Stories Soldiers Won't Tell You About What They've Seen, Done, or Failed to Do in War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 71.

18. Seth George, "Moral Injury and the Problem of Facing Religious Authority" (Command and General Staff College Ethics Symposium, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 20–23 April 2015); Peter Kilner, "Know Thy Enemy: Better Understanding Foes Can Prevent Debilitating Hatred," *Army* 67, no. 7 (July 2017): 22–23, https://www.ausa.org/articles/know-thy-enemy.

19. Company Commanders, "Leading Our Soldiers to Fight with Honor," *Army* 56, no. 11 (November 2006): 58–62.

20. Interview with an Army captain by the author, Afghanistan, 2011.

21. Interview with an Army captain by the author, Iraq, 2007. A very similar point is made in Phil Zabriskie, *The Kill Switch* (self-pub., Amazon Digital Services, 2014), chap. 2, Kindle.

22. I have observed that when soldiers believed that their command would not exercise discretion and instead would—in their minds—unfairly punish soldiers' mistakes, they responded by collectively lying on their reports about those incidents.

23. *Biggar, In Defence of War,* 77. Expressing the just war tradition as far back as Augustine in the fifth century.

24. During World War II, "General Eisenhower overheard many soldiers wondering why they were fighting this long and brutal war so far from home when it seemed to not directly concern them. Eisenhower had all battalions within fifty miles of liberated concentration camps send troops on a tour through them to be reminded of their moral purpose." Edward Tick, *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul After War* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014), 14.

25. Leo Tolstoy, *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*, trans. Isabel F. Hapgood (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1886), 109.

26. "Communicating the strategic mission to your Soldiers in terms they understand" was cited as a leadership challenge by 28 percent of company commanders in Operation Iraqi Freedom. See Company Commanders, "Leadership Challenges in Iraq," *Army* 57, no. 9 (September 2007): 77–82, https://juniorofficer.army.mil/pubs/armymagazine/docs/2007/CC_09-07-Challenges.pdf.

27. Lawrence G. Calhoun and Richard G. Tedeschi, eds., *The Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006). Read more about this topic at the Posttraumatic Growth Research Group, https://ptgi.uncc.edu/.

28. Capt. Nate Self, the Ranger Quick Reaction Force platoon leader, was awarded the Silver Star for his actions in the 2002 Battle of Takur Ghar.