



Master Sgt. Lou Spinazze, senior enlisted leader for the Police Advisory Team for Train, Advise and Assist Command-South, talks with Afghan senior enlisted leaders, May 25, 2018, during a meeting at the Regional Military Training Center-Kandahar, Afghanistan. TAAC-South is composed of Soldiers from the 40th Infantry Division, California National Guard and the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Neysa Canfield/TAAC-South PAO)

The Importance of Ethics Education in Military Training

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Throughout the decades, ethics education has been a growing topic in many armed forces worldwide. Traditionally, armed forces provided ethics education in senior-level academies with a focus on officer and senior noncommissioned officers. But the new approach to modern ethics training is to ensure an ethical leadership and decision-making process at all levels by targeting entry-level military members. Soldiers at every level have to assess options and make decisions quickly (Baker, 2015). To increase military effectiveness, armed forces must implement an education on ethics in the basic training of all officers and enlisted personnel.

The Ethical Capacities of a Private

Military ethics, like medical or media ethics, are a core capacity that every service member should gain, develop, and enhance throughout their career. The primary purpose of ethics education is to provide individuals with the capacity to morally distinguish right from wrong when laws are no longer helpful. It does not intend to transform the junior Soldier into a philosopher, but instead provide rhetorical questioning skills that help them make informed decisions. At the onset, the teaching portion must be tangible. The most effective method to achieve this is to base the instruction on case studies (Micewski, 2016). The student uses the situations discussed as a reference for

future difficult decision-making. Those decisions can be complex, either due to the intricacy of the parameters or the possible consequences. Many ethical decisions will have an integrity component included, but this type of multi-faceted approach is essential in a ground-level reformation of educational principles.

Identification

Soldiers will deepen their sense of patriotism if they think all actions associated with their nation are just and fair. This sense of duty helps Soldiers overcome their fears when danger is present. Pride in their country helps them choose the mission outcome above the need for their own safety. The importance of a Soldier's acts and its far reach was best acknowledged by President Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address in 1863:

We can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but can never forget what they did here. (Lincoln, Bancroft Copy section, para. 4)

Prevention

An ethical education promotes building strong morals, which prevents internal and external misconduct. Sometimes peer pressure, or the will to show obedience can lead to the acceptance of misbehavior. Many programs are designed to eliminate inappropriate behaviors. In the U.S. Army, programs like Sexual Harassment/Assault Response & Prevention (SHARP) (U.S. Army, n.d.) or Not in my Squad (NIMS) (CAPE, 2017) seek to build the capacity of military personnel to make ethical choices, like the decision to not accept misbehavior, and to report such incidents. A success factor for prevention programs is the capacity of Soldiers to recognize that something is wrong and to act against it. Such action needs strong personal ethics and courage.

Ethics education also helps people to rationalize when the mission imperatives are in contradiction with the personal values of the individual. Knowing that a difficult decision is ethically right helps to cope and support psychological sequelae prevention (Reger & Skopp, 2012). It might also prevent disobedience in other cases. A modern example of correct ethical behavior was depicted in the movie (and book) *Lone Survivor*, based on the true story of Marcus Luttrell and his 4-man Navy SEAL team, in which the decision of an officer to save the life of an innocent civilian had fatal repercussions on the team and prevented mission success, while still being ethically correct (Berg, 2013).



Thomas Tremblay, a sexual violence prevention consultant, teaches Soldiers from 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, about the prevention of sexual assault, domestic violence and dating violence, April 30, 2018, at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. (U.S. Army Photo)

Acceptation

Not all Soldiers serve their country voluntarily. Some countries across the globe still have a conscription-based form of service. This kind of recruitment requires special tact in the way military representatives promote acceptance among the serving and the non-serving population. Forces built on conscription have representatives of all political tendencies and varied cultural backgrounds in their ranks. Leaders must address this multicultural setting to promote acceptance.

If we take the example of Switzerland, ethics education in basic training would help the conscripts to understand the needs and reasons of their service more clearly. Cultivating this understanding would help to decrease the number of Soldiers trying to slip out of their service obligations. A military-wide ethical validation would support the acceptance of the serving part of the population. It would then result in an increased acceptance-rate in its non-serving population, which would benefit the country as a whole.

The Concept of the Strategic Private

You do not have to be a high-ranking leader to endanger mission success through a wrong decision. "Even the lowest-ranking Soldier can have a negative strategic effect" (Belanger & Lagace-Roy, 2016, p. 20). The most prominent example of this concept is the 2003 Abu Ghraib scandal. This case perfectly represents the importance of an absolute need for an ethics education at the base level. The illegal actions of those involved individuals had repercussions at the strategic, political, and international level.

The unit responsible for the criminal misconduct in Abu Ghraib, to include torture and public humiliation, was the 800th Military Police Brigade. The public outcry and anger over the scandal was so fierce that the Army discharged the unit commander, who was

not directly involved. The illegal actions of the few guilty individuals overshadowed the achievements of the thousands of committed men and women that did great things at Abu Ghraib and during the Iraq War (Karpinski & Strasser, 2005).

The crimes committed by the perpetrators cost them their credibility and the credibility of many of the forces acting in the operational theater. The world population, through social and traditional media outlets, blamed the U.S. of willingly torturing prisoners. The whole case brought discredit upon the U.S. Army and the government agencies involved.

After the Abu Ghraib scandal emerged, and after a long and broad investigation, the Secretary of the Army (2005) stated, "These incidents of abuse resulted from the failure of individuals to follow known standards of discipline and Army Values, and, in some cases, the failure of a few leaders to enforce those standards" (p. 632). To put it plainly, the individuals involved, including its leaders, could not recognize their actions as morally and ethically wrong. They knew the standards yet blamed other government agencies saying that they were told to pressure the inmates in such a way (Karpinski & Strasser, 2005). They did not demonstrate ethical behavior, either in righteous disobedience of the orders or in a personal refusal to preserve human integrity and good conduct, even with an enemy, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions (ICRC, 2010).

Analyzing this situation could lead to less experienced leaders thinking that ethics education might encourage disobedience from subordinates. This is partially true. Before the emergence of ethical questioning in the armed forces, one of the highest virtues of a Soldier was blind obedience. Leaders would assess their Soldiers by the rapidity and willingness to accomplish orders (Huntington, 1957). A Soldier's act was legitimate if ordered because, philosophically, the responsibility falls on the superior, not on the subordinate. Shakespeare (1971) gave an accurate explanation in *King Henry V*: "It is enough that we know we are the king's subjects. If his cause is wrong, our obedience to the king clears us of responsibility for it" (p. 553).

Today, this reasoning has become obsolete. The values and virtues of a Soldier have changed greatly since the beginning of the century. A Soldier must know what ethical behavior is, as he or she is a representation of their country. This is why ethics training must begin early in a Soldier's career. The world cannot afford another Abu Ghraib scandal.

From Trainee to Trainer

The chain of command usually selects future NCOs out of the private's ranks. Some armed forces around the world even select officers from among the privates. Regarding the growing importance of ethics in the

military environment, it is essential to assess the ethical capacities of a future leader along the four phases of the promotion process (STEP, 2015).

Selection

Leader selection can best be characterized as separating the wheat from the chaff. More than just grading performances, a recruiter must analyze the potential for development presented by a candidate. If a military member presents unethical behavior early on in their career, then they are most likely uneducated in morals and values and they run a high risk of making even poorer choices further on in their career once they begin leading others. Which is, again, why a continuous ethics education needs to be implemented at the lowest level and constantly sustained throughout a military career (Mooney, n.d.).



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Anton Hillig, left, senior enlisted leader for the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, congratulates Sgt. Daniel Fernandez, right, human resource noncommissioned officer with 2IBCT, 4th Infantry Division, Sept. 30, 2018, after a promotion ceremony in Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. Fernandez received the only battlefield promotion in Train, Advise and Assist Command-South. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Richard Barker/TAAC-South Public Affairs)

Training

Practice makes perfect. Throughout its history, ethics has been a very broad field of study. Ethics' undefined borders are the reasons why it is essential to integrate it into all training sequences (Robinson, De Lee, & Carrick, 2008). The U.S. Army should establish a practical ethics education based on case studies to provide additional elements of reflection. If the instructor would expose the Soldier to ethical dilemmas or challenging situations, they will force the trainee to make use of their critical thinking skill set (Micewski, 2016). The training should increase in complexity, and ethical questioning should become a part of all after-ac-

tion reviews or debriefings. The information processing work would then take place, and would result in a better comprehension of all options and outcomes. The trainee will learn how to assess the options better before making choices.



Education

Education is the cornerstone of critical thinking. Once selected and properly trained, a future leader will receive an additional lens to perceive reality (CAPE, 2013). If they already have some ethical comprehension skills, they will then be able to enhance it through academic education. If the future leader knows the primary application of ethical behavior and decision-making, they will then be able to transfer it into their growing leadership skills (Micewski, 2016). At the end of the educational process, they will be able to consider ethics in all four fields of the leadership model: proper ethics, ethical conduct of the subordinates, ethical decision making towards the objective, and ethical management of their environment (Swiss Armed Forces College, 2016). This leadership model allows them to grow into a system that will nourish their critical thinking, which will prepare the future leader to better observe their environment and provide a morally sound solution to every situation.

Promotion

With great power comes great responsibility. After a young Soldier is promoted into a leadership position, the new NCO, accustomed to assessing the ethical aspects of their environment, can act directly to change it. With this skill, they will be able to give sound explanations on their decision-making process and address future challenges expected from their command. Mentoring is also a decisive aspect of developing ethical leadership further. Soldiers, no matter what rank, should regularly assess their actions and results with a more experienced peer, allowing them to continuously improve.

An ethics education will also take an essential place in the counseling and disciplinary processes. It is often an excellent base to rightfully counsel or punish as necessary. As an experienced military professional, they will have the opportunity to display exemplary leadership. Being a role model will help them to gain personal authority on a daily basis. An additional advantage is that ethics are not specific to the military environment. It will also allow leaders, and their subordinates, to better interact with all counterparts, furthering their post-military careers and family life.

Civilian-Military Relations

The Soldier is a direct representation of their nation. Because they wear their country's flag, their actions are the only interactions that many around the world will ever have with that specific society. An ethics education will help them to better interact with others, either directly or over different media, because they are better able to understand the consequences of their actions and conversations. They have to display model behavior to better ensure mission success.

Civilian populations

The civilian population of a country can be a large opposing group to armed forces actions, as some consider the act of serving unethical due to the inherent violence associated with the job and view all armed actions as fundamentally corrupt (Evans, 2014). But an education in philosophy and ethics can create a morally-centered base of knowledge with which to form opinions and create solutions from. This ingrained value system can further mission success as ethically-based choices are more likely to gain the trust of indigenous populations living in theaters of operation who might initially consider the military presence as an invasion and attack on their way of life. Occupying forces have to demonstrate their good will and intentions to win their hearts and minds. And much more than just completing objectives, the mission must be accomplished while still preserving a sense of right and wrong, so that the end justifies the means.



Master Sgt. Janet Bretado, logistics advisor for the Military Advisory Team, Train, Advise and Assist Command-South, meets with her Afghan counterparts, March 27, 2018, in Kandahar, Afghanistan. TAAC-South, composed of Soldiers from the 40th Infantry Division, California National Guard, and 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, mission is to train and advise Afghan forces and assist with counterterrorism operations. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Neysa Canfield/TAAC-South Public Affairs)

Multinational Joint Forces

Multinational joint forces are a standard setting in today's military operations. Privates of many nations come together to create a global backdrop. Within particular organizations, cultural diversity must be addressed to prevent problems or misunderstandings before they occur. At some point during a joint mission, individuals from varied backgrounds will face complex situations together. Value-based decision-making and an ethics education are the universally essential skill sets needed to discover a common solution. This education will expose Soldiers to cultural awareness and acceptance, enabling them to unite as a team.

Study on U.S. Army Ethics Training

William Wallace (2008) conducted a study on U.S. Army ethics training changes and implementation since the beginning of the war on terrorism. He focused mainly on lessons learned management and his findings supported the idea of implementing ethics education early on in basic training. He proved that strong

improvements in decision-making were due to ethics training courses taken before deployment. He also proposed a theory, based on his research, that more time, personnel, and resources for ethics training, especially starting in basic training, would create better-rounded Soldiers.

Conclusion

In our ever-changing world, the challenges faced by our Soldiers evolve daily. It is essential to provide them with a set of skills that both mentally and physically enable them to react properly to achieve the best possible outcome in any situation. An education that dives deeply into ethics, and is maintained throughout a career, is the best way to create and continuously sharpen those skills. An ethics education enhances the well-being of our troops and deters the probability of misconduct. When conducted at early stages it helps to forge better leaders from the beginning and is a critical factor in reaching mission success at all levels. ■

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