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**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**  
THE BASIC SCHOOL  
MARINE CORPS TRAINING COMMAND  
CAMP BARRETT, VIRGINIA 22134-5019

**ETHICS I & II**  
**B130736 | B4W6829**  
**STUDENT HANDOUT**

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## Ethics I, II

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### In This Lesson

These lessons will define ethics and examine those things that guide our actions in and out of combat. We will explore why we study ethics in the military and the particular relevance that study has for officership.

This lesson covers the following topics:

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### Learning Objectives

#### Terminal Learning Objective

TBS-VALU-1002 Given the requirement, define military ethics IAW MCRP 6-11b.

TBS-VALU-1001 While part of a Marine Corps unit, demonstrate Marine Corps Values IAW MCRP 6-11b.

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#### Enabling Learning Objectives

TBS-VALU-1001a Given an evaluation, describe honor IAW MCRP 6-11b.

TBS-VALU-1001b Given an evaluation, describe courage IAW MCRP 6-11b.

TBS-VALU-1001c Given an evaluation, describe commitment IAW MCRP 6-11b.

TBS-VALU-1001d Given an evaluation, describe moral dilemma without omission IAW MCRP 6-11b.

TBS-VALU-1001e Given an evaluation, identify Marine Corps Values publications without omission.

TBS-VALU-1001f Given an evaluation, identify Marine Corps Values training IAW MCRP 6-11b.

TBS-VALU-1002a Given an evaluation, identify Marine Corps ethics publications without error.

TBS-VALU-1002b Given an evaluation, describe characteristics of Marine Corps ethics IAW MCRP 6-11b.

TBS-VALU-1002c Given an evaluation, describe common problems in military ethics without omission.

TBS-VALU-1002d While part of a Marine Corps unit, make ethical decisions when there is no reference or guidance IAW the TBS Five Horizontal Themes.

## Definition of Ethics

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**Ethics** A set of standards or a value system by which free, human actions are ultimately determined as right or wrong, good or evil.

**Military Ethics** The statement of professional ethics applied to a specific group, i.e. the military.

**Morals** Pertaining to or concerned with right conduct or the distinction between right or wrong. Morality covers the extensive field of personal and social behavior.

There are many approaches within the study of ethics. Here we advocate Virtue Ethics. It would be unrealistic to attempt to develop an exhaustive list of actions for every situation and environment Marines may face. The Virtue Ethics approach focuses on the character of the person as opposed to specific moral rules or moral actions.

A person should strive to be virtuous, to have a good character:

- Instead of relying on a list of do's and don'ts, ask yourself, "What kind of person do I want to be?"
- Develop your self-knowledge.
- Raise your awareness of factors that may influence you – despite your good character to make the wrong choices.
- The only constant is you. The only things you can control are your actions.
- You can influence your Marines' actions and you can help / provide opportunities for your Marines to develop their own self-knowledge.

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## Marine Corps Core Values

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No group functions well unless all members of the group "buy in" to the ideals and goals of the group. Individuals have impact, but a team working together is stronger than the individual members of the team. Members of a team with a common mission function more efficiently and effectively if they all believe in the team, its mission, and have a common set of ideals.

The standards of our Corps run the spectrum of ideals, from not leaving our dead on the battlefield, to not going without a haircut even while on leave. But the Code of Ethics for Marines can be summed up in three words: honor, courage, and commitment. These values are the guiding beliefs and principles that give us strength, influence our attitudes, and regulate our behavior.

**Honor.** The Marine Corps is a unique institution, not just to the military, but to the nation and the world. As the guardians of the standards of excellence for our society, Marines must possess the highest sense of gallantry in serving the United States of America and embody responsibility to duty above self, including, but not limited to:

Integrity: Demonstrating the highest standards of consistent adherence to right, legal and ethical conduct. To value human life and dignity.

Responsibility: To be accountable for all actions and inactions. Personally accepting the consequences for decisions and actions; coaching right decisions of subordinates.

Honesty: To be trustworthy; overt honesty in word and action and clarifying possible misunderstandings or misrepresentations caused by silence or inaction. Respecting other's property and demonstrating fairness in all actions. Marines do not lie, cheat, or steal nor tolerate those who do.

Tradition: Demonstrating respect for the customs, courtesies, and traditions that have produced a common Marine Corps history and identity. Respect for the heritage and traditions of others, especially those we encounter in duty around the world.

**Courage.** Moral, mental, and physical strength to resist opposition, face danger, and endure hardship, including, but not limited to:

Self-Discipline: Marines hold themselves responsible for their own actions and others responsible for their actions. Marines are committed to maintaining physical, moral, and mental health, to fitness and exercise, and to lifelong learning.

Patriotism: Devotion to and defense of one's country; the freely chosen, informed willingness to support and defend the Constitution of the United States.

Loyalty: Steady reliability to do one's duty in service to the United States of

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America, the United States Marine Corps, one's command, one's fellow Marines, Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen, citizens, oneself, and to family.

Valor: Boldness and determination in facing danger in battle, and the daily commitment to excellence and honesty in actions small and large.

**Commitment.** The promise or pledge to complete a worthy goal by worthy means which requires identification with that goal and demonstrated actions to support that goal, including, but not limited to:

Competence: Maintaining, and improving one's skill level to support the team; commitment to growing toward a standard of excellence second to none.

Teamwork: Individual effort in support of other team members in accomplishing the team's mission; Marines take care of their own.

Selflessness: Marines take care of their subordinates, their families, their fellow Marines before themselves. The welfare of our country and our Corps is more important than our individual welfare.

Concern for People: We are in the business of creating honorable citizens. Everyone is of value, regardless of race, nation of origin, religion, or gender. Concern includes a commitment to improving the level of education, skill, self-esteem, and quality of life for Marines and their families. On the battlefield, a Marine is the fiercest of all warriors and the most benevolent of conquerors.

Spiritual Heritage: The U.S. Constitution, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the creeds that guide our nation recognize the value of religious and spiritual heritage of individuals and base our understanding of rights and duties on the endowment of all people, by God, with the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Marines maintain spiritual health and growth to nurture enduring values and acquire a source of strength required for success in battle and the ability to endure hardship.

### **The Life Value (*The Ethical Warrior* by Hoban)**

Virtually all “core” values are relative. All relative values are ultimately subordinate to one universal value – the life value. There is only one vital moral interest for human beings that provides the measure of worth for all other interests, and that is the value of life. It is the only objective value in that it applies to everyone. It is the *core* core value. This value means a balanced regard for your life and the lives of others. It is consistent with our concepts of an “unalienable right to life” and “human equity” found in the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

Most other values are neutral until they are qualified. We eventually need to ask, “how is it good?” or “good for whom?” When we do that, we find that the “good” is often subjective. There are many examples of values dichotomies. For example, food is good and necessary for life, but we may like some kinds of food and not others. Another

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person may have a different opinion about what kind of food is “good”. If you overeat or eat the wrong kinds of food, food can be “bad”. Nearly all values can be good or bad, depending on the circumstances or even one’s point of view; however, the Life Value can be expressed as a binary code, 1 or 0, on or off, living or dead.

A relative value is moral when it serves to support the objective value of life (protects life); when the same relative value does not support the Life Value it can be deemed harmful or immoral. Moral values protect/support/respect/honor/sustain the Life Value.

Marine Corps core values are consistent with the warrior role as protectors and defenders of our constitution, country and Corps. They are “good” core values as long as they are tied to the Life Value.

## Rules vs Character

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Laws are said to be man's attempt to codify his ethics. Laws and regulations often define accepted ethical behavior. Unfortunately, laws and regulations deal with specifics and are unable to address every possible human situation. Therefore conflicts can develop between the law and ethical behavior. For example, the law says it is wrong to speed; however, a man whose son has just been bitten by a poisonous snake and who is speeding his son to the hospital would certainly not consider his speeding as unethical.

## Dilemmas

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“An academic understanding of what is right and wrong is irrelevant unless it is coupled with appropriate actions.” – *Leading Marines*

Most people think they behave more ethically than they actually do. The purpose of discussing Ethics at The Basic School is to focus on the gaps between intended and actual behavior and to identify means to close those gaps. The first step is to recognize the limitations of our brains and to acknowledge the existence of our “should” and “want” selves.

We all face personal dilemmas – the right decision is clear but it’s difficult to make and execute. For example, if you caught your best friend cheating on an exam, the right decision would be to notify the test moderator; however, the value you place on that relationship and the value you place on loyalty to friends may cause you to experience personal conflict with deciding to do what you should do.

**Moral Dilemma:** a situation that requires a choice between equally undesirable alternatives.

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## Discussing Values and Ethics with Marines

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Specific Rules that govern a military member's behavior are Title X of the U.S. Code, the Law of Land Warfare, Code of Conduct, Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Marine Corps orders, commander's intent, rules of engagement, promotion warrants, and the Oath of Office to name a few. Additionally, at The Basic School, you have the Five Horizontal Themes and the Moral Compass.

Unfortunately, no regulation can cover every human situation. Therefore, conflicts develop between the law and ethical behavior. For example, the law says it's wrong to target civilians in combat; however, the enemy's decision to hide and fight amongst the population often leads to civilian deaths in the name of self-defense or military necessity. In these cases there are often no specific rules to guide an officer's actions. One must, therefore, rely on character to select the most appropriate course of action.

### United States Code: Title 10

Section 5947. Requirement of exemplary conduct. All commanding officers and others in authority in the naval service are required to show in themselves a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination; to be vigilant in inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command; to guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Navy, all persons who are guilty of them; and to take all necessary and proper measures, under the laws, regulations, and customs of the naval service, to promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the officers and enlisted persons under their command or charge.

### From Leading Marines (MCRP 6-11):

Our actions as Marines every day must embody the legacy of those who went before us. Their memorial to us—their teaching, compassion, courage, sacrifices, optimism, humor, humility, commitment, perseverance, love, guts, and glory—is the pattern for our daily lives.

The moral courage of leaders is the key to keeping effective combat units from becoming armed mobs. Moral courage is a private courage, a form of conscience that can often be an even tougher challenge than physical courage, especially in peacetime. It serves not only as a foundation of our leadership philosophy; it is also a challenge that Marine leaders must face every day. If Marines do not have the moral courage in peacetime to meet consistently the high standards and expectations of the Marine Corps, then they are not likely to have the moral courage to make the difficult decisions that may determine the outcome of a battle or a campaign.

### From Sustaining the Transformation (MCRP 6-11d):

We make Marines through a process called transformation. During this process, we change young men's and women's lives forever by imbuing them with our nation's highest ideals.

Transformation does not end at the conclusion of entry-level training; it continues throughout a Marine's service—whether that service ends after a single enlistment or lasts 30 years. Marines maintain standards that are consistent with our core values of honor, courage, and commitment, and they are held accountable for maintaining the legacy of valor established by the sacrifices of those Marines who preceded them.

Our warfighting capability depends upon a lasting transformation. Every Marine must possess the intellect, skill, and solid moral foundation to fight in the increasingly chaotic battlespace of the 21st century.

**From Marine Corps Manual (Paragraph 110 – Military Leadership):**

Marine Corps Leadership qualities include:

Inspiration -- personal example of high moral standards reflecting virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination in personal behavior and in performance.

Technical proficiency -- Knowledge of the military sciences and skill in their application.

Moral responsibility -- Personal adherence to high standards of conduct and the guidance of subordinates toward wholesomeness of mind and body.

To discuss values and ethics with Marines, leaders additionally can reference:  
**MCRP 6-11b, Marine Corps Values: A User's Guide for Discussion Leaders.**



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# Ethics I

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Ethics I represents the first of three classes in the Ethics package. The intent of the class and discussion group is to introduce professional military ethics to new officers; critical thought about good and bad, right and wrong. The class and discussion group focus on the influences of moral friction and command authority. If the discussion is successful, officers will appreciate that despite their backgrounds, they are all vulnerable to committing, ordering, or allowing atrocities. Future success will depend on their ability to value ethical training as much as they do the study of tactics and techniques.

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## The Individual

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Develop an understanding of our limitations as human beings and factors that influence our decision making.

Ethical judgments are based on factors outside of our awareness. Our failure begins when we hear of the failings of others and think, “That would never be me ... I would never let that happen.”

**Some limitations:** (From *Blind Spots, Why we fail to do what's right and what to do about it* by Bazerman and Tenbrunsel)

- People fail to recognize their ethical judgments are biased in ways they would condemn with greater awareness; however, informing people about their biases does not always help. We tend to believe that while others may fall prey to such inconsistencies, we ourselves are immune to them. We underestimate the degree to which our behavior is affected by incentives and other situational factors.
- People have the innate ability to maintain a belief while acting contrary to it. How people evaluate their own moral transgressions tends to differ substantially from their evaluations of the same transgressions committed by others.
- We tend to predict that we will behave as we should behave, but at the time of the decision, we behave how we want to behave. Compounding this, when we reflect back on the decision, we believe that we acted as we thought we should have.

**Darley and Batson Experiment:** The experiment concluded that self-selecting a population (seminary students) and priming them to think “help people” (prepare and deliver a sermon on the Good Samaritan) was not enough to make the people in the experiment do the right thing when provided the opportunity to help someone. Factors like time pressure (you're late), tunnel vision on the mission (you have to get across campus and deliver this sermon – mission was deliver sermon not help people in need), and expectations from higher (the sermon was a graded exercise in their curriculum) caused a good number of these individuals to not help the person in the doorway. Out of the ones who were told they were late, many said they didn't even remember seeing a man in the doorway. Time, mission focus and expectations from higher created

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perceptual blindness. Not doing the right thing by the person in distress was not about the character of the seminary students; it was about people who would normally have the right internal impulses getting distracted from doing the right thing.

**The Vulnerability Gap:** The vulnerability gap only applies to people of good character. Psychopaths don't rationalize their actions, they just act. Does it matter how long you have to think about something if in the end you do the right thing? In the end - no. But, that "thinking time" is you trying to rationalize doing the wrong thing. Is that the kind of leader you want to follow or be? One who mulls over doing the right thing or one who does the right thing without hesitation?

## The Situation

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Develop an understanding of situational pressures that may affect the decision making of you and your Marines.

**The Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE)** was a study of the psychological effects of becoming a prisoner or prison guard. The experiment was conducted at Stanford University from August 14–20, 1971, by a team of researchers led by psychology professor Philip Zimbardo.

Twenty-four male students out of seventy-five were selected to take on randomly assigned roles of prisoners and guards in a mock prison situated in the basement of the Stanford psychology building. The participants adapted to their roles well beyond Zimbardo's expectations, as the guards enforced authoritarian measures and ultimately subjected some of the prisoners to psychological torture. Many of the prisoners passively accepted psychological abuse and, at the request of the guards, readily harassed other prisoners who attempted to prevent it. The experiment even affected Zimbardo himself, who, in his role as the superintendent, permitted the abuse to continue. Two of the prisoners quit the experiment early and the entire experiment was abruptly stopped after only six days.

The SPE began as a simple demonstration of the effects a combination of situational variables can have on individuals who are role-playing prisoners and guards in a simulated prison environment. It has since come to illustrate "the potentially toxic impact of bad systems and bad situations in making good people behave in pathological ways that are alien to their nature." – *The Lucifer Effect, Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* by Philip Zimbardo.

## The System

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Officers are naturally expected to behave responsibly, both personally and professionally. Officers promote just behavior in their subordinates by setting, enforcing, and publicizing high standards. Good training and leadership will prevent irresponsible actions in peacetime or combat. If you have done your job in creating an appropriate command climate where discipline, responsibility, and good judgment define your unit, the Marines and Sailors will weather the morally corrosive effects of combat and continue to fight with success and pride.

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Elements of the military system are: obedience, cohesion, discipline, culture, training and education, trust and in the center - the leader.

## **The Milgram Experiment (Lessons on Obedience)**

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In response to a newspaper ad offering \$4.50 for one hour's work, an individual was asked to take part in a Psychology experiment investigating memory and learning. He was introduced to a stern looking experimenter in a white coat and a rather pleasant and friendly co-subject. The experimenter explained that the experiment will look into the role of punishment in learning, and that one will be the "teacher" and one will be the "learner" (or "student"). Lots were drawn to determine roles, and it was decided that the individual who answered the ad will become the "teacher."

The "learner" (student) was then taken to a room where he was strapped in a chair to prevent movement and an electrode was placed on his arm. Next, the "teacher" was taken to an adjoining room which contains a generator. The "teacher" was instructed to read a list of two word pairs and ask the "learner" to read them back. If the "learner" got the answer correct, then they moved on to the next word. If the answer was incorrect, the "teacher" was supposed to shock the "learner" starting at 15 volts.

The generator has 30 switches in 15 volt increments; each was labeled with a voltage ranging from 15 up to 450 volts. Each switch also has a rating, ranging from "slight shock" to "danger: severe shock". The final two switches were labeled "XXX". The "teacher" was supposed to increase the shock each time the "learner" missed a word in the list. Although the "teacher" thought that he/she was administering shocks to the "learner", the "learner" was actually an actor who never experienced the shocks. (The drawing of lots was rigged, so that the actor would always end up as the "learner.")

After a number of voltage level increases, the actor started to bang on the wall that separated him from the subject. After several times banging on the wall and complaining about a heart condition, all responses by the "learner" ceased. At times, the worried "teacher" questioned the "experimenter," asking who was responsible for any harmful effects resulting from shocking the learner at such a high level. Upon receiving the answer that the "experimenter" assumed full responsibility, the "teacher" seemed to accept the response and continue shocking, even though some were obviously extremely uncomfortable in doing so.

### **Results**

Today the field of psychology would deem this study highly unethical but, it revealed some extremely important findings. The theory that only the most severe monsters on the sadistic fringe of society would inflict cruelty is disproven. Findings showed that, "two-thirds of this study's participants fall into the category of "obedient" subjects, and that they represent ordinary people drawn from the working, managerial, and professional classes (*Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*)." Ultimately 65% of all of the "teachers" punished the "learners" to the maximum 450 volts. No subject stopped before reaching 300 volts!

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## The Asch Experiments (Lessons on Conformity)

In psychology, the Asch conformity experiments were a series of laboratory experiments directed by Solomon Asch in the 1950s that demonstrated the degree to which an individual's own opinions are influenced by those of a majority group.

## Urination Incident (Lessons on Culture, Conformity and Discipline)

### Urination video investigation cites discipline lapses

By: Jim Michaels, USA Today 5 March 2014

WASHINGTON — A breakdown in leadership and discipline contributed to an elite team of Marine snipers urinating on the bodies of dead insurgents in Afghanistan in June 2011, according to an investigative report released Wednesday.

The lengthy Marine Corps investigation is a case study in the importance that leadership plays in maintaining discipline amid the chaos of war. It also highlighted the role of snipers, who are critical in Afghanistan because of their ability to strike targets precisely across great distances.

"Because snipers are so independent, lack of discipline in their ranks was a legitimate concern that was regularly discussed" by the top commanders, the investigation said.

The report concluded that "while certain members of the battalion held the scout sniper platoon in high regard, others believed that the snipers thought very highly of themselves and were not held to the same discipline standards because they were 'doing great things.'"

The number of kills racked up by the snipers "became equated with the battalion's success," the report said.

The incident became explosive when it surfaced on the Internet in January 2012, prompting fears that it would trigger anti-American violence and risk American lives in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world.

The videotape was made on July 27, 2011, during a patrol consisting of 20 troops, including six members of a sniper team.

The video, which spread widely on the Internet, showed four Marines urinating on three dead insurgents. The maltreatment of dead bodies is considered a war crime under the Geneva Conventions.

But the report highlighted a number of other disciplinary lapses during the patrol. The Marine Corps emphasizes the importance of small unit leadership and discipline throughout its training.

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A boy walking with the insurgents was seriously injured during the shooting that killed three insurgents. The Marines on the patrol did not call for an immediate evacuation despite the seriousness of his wounds.

The investigation said the Marines should have aborted the patrol and called for a helicopter medical evacuation. He was later brought back to a U.S. base where he was treated and later recovered.

The report also cites an incident in which Marines entered a village and cut a rope used to hoist water from a well and attempted to puncture a tractor tire. The investigation also concluded that the team provided inaccurate reports of enemy killed.

Marines also fired their weapons and tossed grenades for the benefit of cameras they were carrying, according to the report.

The report was released in response to a Freedom of Information Act request. The report was released because disciplinary actions in connection with the case have been completed.

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## **Pointing North: Lessons Learned by an Infantry Platoon Commander in Afghanistan**

by First Lieutenant Paddy Bury, First Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment, May 2009

*“The platoon is a gun, the platoon sergeant the bullets, and you are the safety catch.”*

Most soldiers do not want to kill. Almost all of us have an inherent belief that killing is wrong. However, the situations we find ourselves in often mean we are forced to consider the use of lethal force.

*Our training helps us differentiate between threat and appropriate use of force, but also, by its very nature, makes it easier for us to kill. Moreover, the environments to which we deploy increasingly display large and growing grey areas where threats and rules of engagement can be interpreted in a number of ways. Thus it falls to the junior tactical commander on the ground to not only make the correct judgements given the situation, but to maintain a sense of morality in seeking the right course of action.*

I distinctly remember sitting in Sandhurst, trying not to nod off, through one of the many morality lectures. I found them boring, as to me it was explaining the obvious. ‘Morality, as a leader is something you have to hold inside you, like a moral compass’, they said. ‘Well then’, I thought, ‘why are you harping on about it so much?’ To me, at the time, it seemed the least important, most obvious lesson I had learnt at Sandhurst to date. How wrong I was.

*Killing, whatever its form, can be morally corrosive. Mid-intensity counter insurgency, with its myriad of complex situations, an enemy who won’t*

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*play fair and the constant, enduring feeling of being under threat, compounds such corrosiveness. A good tactical leader must recognise this and constantly maintain the morality of those he commands.*

In 7 Platoon I was lucky to have an excellent working relationship with both my sergeants during our tour of Afghanistan. I was also lucky in that my platoon did not contain any psychopaths, which studies show make up about two per cent of any army. Thus especially at the beginning of the tour, it was relatively easy to maintain a sense of morality amongst the platoon. But when the threat to our lives increased, as the Taliban began fighting increasingly dirty, as the civilians became indifferent and as we were either nearly killed or took casualties, this became increasingly difficult. Soldiers who did not want to kill for no reason began to become unconcerned.

There is a balance to be struck between morality and operational effectiveness, between softness and hardness. It is a fine line to walk, but one which must be walked nonetheless. My platoon sergeant would always strive to keep the soldiers sharp, aggressive and ready to fight their way out of any situation. 'I would rather be judged by twelve than carried by six' was his watchword at our platoon discussions on rules of engagement scenarios. He was completely right, and the robustness he bred into the platoon, especially at the psychological level, would stand it in good stead during the most testing parts of the tour.

However, as a junior officer I felt the need to morally temper what the platoon sergeant had said to the men. His could not be the final word on the subject. I would take their point of view and use it to explain a complex situation as best I could. In the morping, grey conflict we found ourselves in I pointed out that the civilians, even if they were untrustworthy and indifferent, were still our best form of force protection. They told us where the IEDs were. If we lost them, we lost everything. Therefore, we had to maintain the softer approach at first. We had to smile and we had to joke and we had to be friendly, even if it was the last thing we felt like doing. We had to not shoot them if we could avoid it in any way. We had to treat captured Taliban correctly. Otherwise we might as well not bother coming out here.

I think, in hindsight, this unacknowledged agreement I had with my platoon sergeant worked well. **He kept the platoon sharp and ready—'loaded' as it were—and I just made sure the gun didn't go off at the wrong place at the wrong people.** As the tour progressed and the commanders and rangers alike became increasingly familiar with their surroundings and the situations they found themselves in, but also increasingly frustrated, it became my primary role. The platoon was so well drilled it barely needed me for my tactical acumen. But they did need me for that morality.

Sometimes I felt my own morality begin to slip, that hardness creeping in. Sometimes I thought that I was soft, that my platoon sergeant was right and I should shut up and get on with it. Sometimes I'm sure the platoon felt like that! I was unsure. And at these times my memory would flit back to Sandhurst, to the basics, and I would find renewed vigour that what I was saying was indeed right. My moral compass, for all its wavering, was still pointing North. And that was the most important lesson I was taught in Sandhurst, and that I learnt in Afghanistan.

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## Ethics II

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### The My Lai Case Study

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On March 16, 1968 the men of Charlie Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion/20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division entered the Vietnamese village of My Lai. The Company represented the average army unit in Vietnam; perhaps even a cut above. They had enjoyed a lengthy pre-deployment work-up in Hawaii and were by all accounts a technically proficient and cohesive unit. My Lai, however, was to be their first real test of combat, and after months of petty casualties lost to an elusive enemy, they were eager to fight.

#### 3-Months of Frustration

My Lai lay in the South Vietnamese district of Son My, a heavily mined area where the Vietcong were deeply entrenched. In their first 3 months in country, Charlie Company had lost 4 KIA and 32 WIA to IEDs and snipers in the area. The agitated troops were told by higher that My Lai would be hot and all inhabitants were to be considered enemy. Charlie entered the village with clear intent to destroy it.

#### Massacre

In the early morning of March 16<sup>th</sup>, Charlie air assaulted the village with open guns. After facing no resistance and finding no military aged male combatants, the mission soon degenerated into the massacre of over 400 unarmed women, children, and elderly. According to eyewitness reports offered after the event, several old men were bayoneted, praying women and children were shot in the back of the head, and at least one girl was raped and then killed. One of the Platoon Commanders, Lt William Calley, himself rounded up groups of villagers into a ditch, and ordered his men to execute them.

#### Call for Investigation

Word of the atrocities did not reach the American public until November 1969, when journalist Seymour Hersh published a story detailing conversations with veterans who had been at My Lai. The military investigation that followed resulted in an international media frenzy and Lt Calley being charged with murder.

#### Questions about Soldiers' Conduct

As the gruesome details of My Lai reached the American public, serious questions arose concerning the conduct of American soldiers in Vietnam. A military commission investigating the massacre found widespread failures of leadership, discipline, and morale among the Army's fighting units. As the war progressed, many "career" soldiers had either been rotated out or retired. Many more had died. In their place were scores of draftees whose fitness for leadership in the field of battle was questionable at best. Military officials blamed inequities in the draft policy for the often slim talent pool from which they were forced to choose leaders. Many maintained that if the educated middle class ("the Harvards," as they were called) had joined in the fight, a man of Lt. William Calley's emotional and intellectual stature would never have been issuing orders.

#### Orders from Above?

Calley, an unemployed college dropout, had managed to graduate from Officer's Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1967. At his trial, Calley testified that he was ordered by his company commander, Captain Ernest Medina to kill everyone in the village of My Lai. Still, there was only enough photographic and recorded evidence to convict Calley, alone, of murder. He

was sentenced to life in prison, but was pardoned by President Nixon after serving just two days. Calley remains the only officer in the chain of command to be held responsible for the institutional failure of My Lai.

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## The Haditha Case Study

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On November 19, 2005, a squad of Marines from Kilo Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marines killed 24 civilians. The dead included elderly people, women and children who were shot multiple times and at close range.

### **The Loss of LCpl Terrazas**

On the morning of Nov 19, a squad of Marines led by Sgt Frank Wuterich was conducting a resupply mission. On the return to base their convoy struck an improvised explosive device (IED). LCpl Miguel Terrazas was killed in the blast and two other Marines (PFC Salvador Guzman and LCpl James Crossan) were wounded.

### **“Military Aged Males”**

Shortly after the IED detonated; a white car containing five men (a taxi driver and four adolescents) was spotted. The men were ordered out of the car and shot by Sgt Wuterich and another Marine when they failed to follow orders to get on the ground.

Taxi—5 killed: Passengers were students at the Technical Institute in Saqlawiyah

1. Ahmed Khidher, taxi driver.
2. Akram Hamid Flayeh
3. Khalid Ayada al-Zawi
4. Wajdi Ayada al-Zawi
5. Mohammed Battal Mahmoud

Lt William Kallop then arrived on scene and, after receiving small arms fire from an undetermined location to the south, ordered Sgt Wuterich and his squad to “clear south”. Although Sgt Wuterich didn’t know for sure where the fire was coming from, he identified one house to the south of their position as the only logical source.

### **The Assault on the Houses**

Sgt Wuterich led his squad to the house from which he thought they were receiving fire. He told his Marines, “shoot first, ask questions later.” He led his Marines in a house-to-house search that left 19 men, women and children dead.

### **The Dead and Wounded Iraqis**

First House—7 killed, 2 injured (but survived), 2 escaped

6. Abdul Hamid Hassan Ali, 76— Died with nine rounds in the chest and abdomen.
7. Khamisa Tuma Ali, 66—wife of Abdul Hamid Hassan Ali
8. Rashid Abdul Hamid, 30.
9. Walid Abdul Hamid Hassan, 35.
10. Jahid Abdul Hamid Hassan, middle-aged man.
11. Asma Salman Rasif, 32.
12. Abdullah Walid, 4.

Injured: Iman, 8, and Abdul Rahman, 5.

Escaped: Daughter-in-law, Hiba, escaped with 2-month-old Asia



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Second House—8 killed, 1 survivor: Shot at close range and attacked with grenades

13. Younis Salim Khafif, 43.

14. Aida Yasin Ahmed, 41—wife of Younis Salim Khafif, killed trying to shield her youngest daughter Aisha.

15. Muhammad Younis Salim, 8—son.

16. Noor Younis Salim, 14—daughter.

17. Sabaa Younis Salim, 10—daughter.

18. Zainab Younis Salim, 5—daughter.

19. Aisha Younis Salim, 3—daughter.

20. A 1-year-old girl staying with the family.

Survived: Safa Younis Salim, 13.

Third House—4 brothers killed

21. Jamal Ahmed, 41.

22. Marwan Ahmed, 28.

23. Qahtan Ahmed, 24.

24. Chasib Ahmed, 27.

### **Statements on the Incident:**

[First Lt. William T. Kallop, said that soon after the killings, he inspected one of the homes with a Marine corporal, Hector Salinas, and found women, children and older men who had been killed when marines threw a grenade into the room.

“What the hell happened, why aren’t there any insurgents here?” Lieutenant Kallop testified that he asked aloud. “I looked at Corporal Salinas, and he looked just as shocked as I did.” ...

He said Sergeant Wuterich had told him that they had killed people in one house after approaching a door to it and hearing the distinct metallic sound of an AK-47 being prepared to fire.

“I thought that was within the rules of engagement because the squad leader thought that he was about to kick in the door and walk into a machine gun,” Lieutenant Kallop said. “Corporal Salinas told me the same thing.”

Later he added, “I had no doubt in my mind that they were telling the truth.” – New York Times, 9 May 2007]

[Lt. William T. Kallop wrote in a praise-filled memo that the incident on Nov. 19, 2005, was part of a complex insurgent ambush that included a powerful roadside bomb followed by a high volume of automatic-weapons fire from several houses in the neighborhood. He lauded Sgt. Frank Wuterich for his leadership in the "counterattack" on three houses while the unit received sporadic enemy fire.

The proposed citation indicates that Kallop -- the only Marine officer at the scene as the incident unfolded -- believed the unit was under a coordinated insurgent attack when Marines stormed civilian homes and opened fire, killing women and children. – Washington Post, 30 August 2006]

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[According to the rules of engagement, Wuterich and his Marines were justified in using any amount of firepower in assaulting a "hostile" structure without identifying whether the people inside were combatants, Kallop said.

A Marine lawyer, testifying after Kallop, gave a different interpretation of the rules of engagement. Maj. Kathryn Navin, who had lectured Marines before they deployed, said a house cannot be declared hostile unless the people inside are known to have "hostile intent" or have committed "hostile acts."

But Kallop said that in training at Camp Pendleton and March Reserve Air Base, and at briefings delivered in Iraq, Marines were not told they needed to identify individual targets as threatening when assaulting a "hostile" structure.

He said that he ordered "Clear south" and Wuterich responded, "Roger that, Sir." He did not tell Wuterich that the house was "hostile," Kallop said. – Los Angeles Times, 14 January 2012]

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## Notes

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