

# Ethics and the Senior Officer: Institutional Tensions

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Army officers are devoting a lot of thoughtful consideration to the subject of ethics. The purpose of this article is to present a firsthand appreciation of various ethical tensions that confront senior Army officers. To accomplish this I will briefly explore the foundations of our ethical system, offer some thoughts about how this ethical system should apply specifically to the military profession, and finally take an empirical look at the tensions in the military society that provide fertile grounds for ethical abuses.

The term ethics is used to mean the study of human actions in respect to their being right or wrong. Whether we like it or not, ethical reflection has seldom been carried out in isolation from theology. Ethical values generally reflect our view of human life as it is embodied in the teachings of the prevailing religion, because all human conduct, essentially, takes place in relationship to other human beings. Therefore, if I believe that human life, that is, *all* of human life, without exception, has equal and infinite value, then my concept of right and wrong conduct will reflect this conviction. If I believe that human life has limited value, let's say limited by what it can contribute to the common good, then my concept of right or wrong conduct will reflect this conviction. If I believe that some forms of human life have more worth than others—that, say, males are more valuable than females, or whites are more valuable than blacks, or Americans are more valuable than Cambodians, or the rich are more valuable than the poor, or Jews are more valuable than Arabs—then my concept of right and wrong conduct will reflect whichever of these convictions I hold.

Our Western value system of right and wrong is based primarily on what Jesus taught concerning the origin and value of human life, augmented by the Old Testament lawgivers and prophets. This is what we commonly call the Judeo-Christian tradition. Although these teachings have been eroded and

in some cases prostituted radically through the centuries, they still strongly influence the attitudes of Americans and other Westerners and form the core of our ethical concepts. In the Judeo-Christian view, man was created by God in His image; that is, with awareness, with purpose, with personality, and with inherent worth. All forms of human life are equally endowed by God with worth and dignity. There is no distinction between male and female, between black or white, rich or poor, aristocrat or peasant, Americans or Cambodians, Jews or Arabs, old or young, born or unborn, smart or dumb, with regard to inherent worth and dignity. All are created with equal worth, with equal dignity, with equal status, and with equal rights within the human race.

From this basic belief has come the thesis that whatever protects or enhances human life is good, and whatever destroys or degrades human life is evil. Thus, our whole moral and ethical concept of right and wrong stems from this thesis-antithesis of good and evil, and I believe that we cannot consider right and wrong within the military profession outside of this framework; that whatever protects and enhances life is good, and whatever destroys and degrades life is evil. The great concepts of justice, mercy, compassion, service, and freedom are immediate derivatives of this central distinction between good and evil as received from our Judeo-Christian heritage.

Before addressing ethics within the military profession, I will deal briefly with the ethical basis for our profession. The moral justification for our profession is embedded in the Constitution—"to provide for the Common Defense." We are that segment of the American society which is set apart to provide for the defense of the remainder of that society. The word defense is key. We are to defend our territory, because that is where our people live, but in an expanded sense, we are defending our value systems, our way of life, our standard of life, our essential institutions, and whatever our government declares to be our national interest. Our Founding Fathers were realists. They knew that most of the rest of the world did not share our view of the value and worth of human life. They recognized that we lived in and would continue to live in a dangerous world, one in which only the strong, or those allied to the strong, can remain free. Only the strong can influence whether peace will be preserved or broken, because strength deters aggression and discourages conflict, and weakness invites aggression and encourages conflict.

Those who provide for the common defense, who protect the lives of our citizens, can best do so by creating a strong, effective deterrent to would-be

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aggressors. As military people our objective is “not to promote war, but to preserve peace” and to protect life. Even if deterrence fails and we go to war, our final objective is peace. Ours is an honorable profession with an ethical purpose entirely consistent with our basic view that whatever protects and enhances life is good.

I will now turn to ethics as they specifically apply to the military profession. In essence, professional ethics is that body of written or unwritten standards of conduct by which that profession disciplines itself. One writer said, “Professional ethics are designed to assure high standards of competence in a given field.” In the general case, then, that conduct which contributes to the attainment of the purpose of that profession is good. The conduct which detracts from the attainment of the purpose of that profession is bad. Various professions have adopted either written or unwritten codes. Doctors, nurses, engineers, journalists, lawyers, businessmen—all have established standards of right and wrong for their respective professions. For instance, the written code of Hippocrates states that the medical profession is dedicated to the preservation of life and should be of service to mankind. Certain practices inimical to that goal are forbidden in the Hippocratic code.

In the military profession we do not have an all-inclusive code of ethics, although we do have documents which contain broad and compelling standards of professional conduct. Some would say that the West Point motto of “duty, honor, country,” is all that we really need. But those values, as good as they are, do not give a conceptual basis for their implementation. What is duty? What is honor? What do we mean by country? Lieutenant Calley probably considered that he was doing his duty at My Lai. Our code of conduct for POWs sets forth right and wrong conduct under those limited but extremely trying conditions. Have you ever thought of our Oath of Allegiance as a document of ethics? It is—of sorts. “I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic.” That sounds great. But whose interpretation of the Constitution? The latest Supreme Court decision? And who are those domestic enemies? Anyone who disagrees with our interpretation of the Constitution? And what is the role of the Department of Defense in fighting domestic enemies? I thought that was the role of the FBI. And further, the Oath states, “I will obey the orders of the officers appointed over me.” Well, yes, assuming they’re legal, assuming they’re consistent with my moral standards.

But back to my earlier statement: If that conduct which contributes to the attainment of the purpose of the profession is good, and that which detracts from the attainment of the purpose of that profession is bad, then for the military profession, whatever enhances the common defense essentially is good, and whatever diminishes the common defense is essentially bad. But this must be tempered by the larger issue, that whatever protects and enhances human life is good and whatever destroys life or diminishes the quality of life is bad.

This consideration leads, of necessity, to a brief discussion of means and ends. I think it should be an absolute rule among military people that ends do not justify means. Nor that means justify ends. Both ends and means must be consistent with our fundamental values. Honorable ends cannot be achieved by dishonorable means, nor do honorable means justify dishonorable or unethical ends. Although the general welfare of our nation is an honorable and ethical purpose, the selective elimination of nonproductive members of society, although it would contribute to the general welfare, cannot be tolerated. Domestic tranquility, although an honorable purpose, cannot justify police brutality or unlawful detention. Common defense is an honorable purpose, but misrepresentation of an enemy threat before a congressional committee cannot be justified by the belief that it is necessary in order to acquire funding for an important weapon system.

So can we make any general rules for ethical conduct within the military profession? I think so. Essentially, what is right is that which enhances the accomplishment of our basic purpose, the common defense, provided that it is consistent with our overall view of the value and dignity of all human life and that the means to accomplish it are acceptable. Or, ask these questions: Does the action we are about to take or the policy under consideration contribute to the national defense? Is it consistent with the protection and enhancement of life? Are both ends and means consistent with our national values?

Given these thoughts, I will now turn to the empirical aspects of the subject, the tensions within the Army which provide fertile grounds for ethical abuse. All military officers have experienced these tensions, and they will continue to characterize the environment in which senior officers will serve. The higher the position, the more complex and less precise are the issues. The last job I really understood was being a tank platoon leader in combat. As I progressed upward, the ethical environment became more murky, less clear, less subject to specific rules and simple solutions. However, an officer's usefulness to the nation and overall credibility will be fundamentally affected by his ability to enter an environment where absolutes are hard to find, and still make wise and ethical decisions. These tensions will require of you a bedrock of ethical values.

The one tension that will be most consistently with you involves the ethical use of authority. The authoritarian structure of our profession, even though essential, is the natural breeding ground for the unethical use of authority. The power and influence of a colonel is greater than that of a lieutenant colonel. The influence of a general officer is truly awesome. This fact requires a clear understanding, first, of the meaning of rank.

Within our hierarchical, authoritarian structure, there are various levels of responsibility. Each level of responsibility is assigned a commensurate degree of authority. Rank is simply a badge of the authority vested in a person to carry out a specific level of responsibility. Company-level responsi-

bility requires company-level authority, and the rank of captain is associated with that level of authority. So lieutenant colonel rank represents the authority necessary to carry out battalion-level responsibilities; colonel, brigade-level responsibilities; major general, division-level responsibilities. When authority is used in the fulfilling of responsibility, it is used legitimately and ethically. When authority is used for purposes not directly associated with carrying out assigned responsibilities, it is being used illegitimately and unethically. Conversely, if I fail to use my authority to carry out my responsibilities, my negligence is itself unethical, and someone who will use that authority should be given my job. The question is: Am I using my authority, my rank, fully but solely for the purpose of carrying out my responsibilities?

As you go up in rank, those of lower grade tend more readily to assume that you are using your authority legitimately and ethically, because of the high regard with which juniors hold very senior officers. Thus, the general who directs his pilot to arrange a flight plan on an authorized TDY visit so as to remain overnight at a city not specifically on the most direct route, so that the general can visit his mother who is in a nursing home, will be assumed by the pilot to be fully authorized to do so. The Pentagon colonel who calls an action officer in from leave because the colonel thinks his general might ask a question which the action officer is best qualified to answer will be assumed to be using his authority ethically. Think about that.

This gets to the guts of the use of authority. In my opinion, one of the most widespread and patently unethical uses of authority is the exploitation and degradation of subordinates, which is a generally accepted institutional practice. It is an encouraged institutional practice, and it is wrong. We have fostered the image of the successful leader as the one who doesn't get ulcers, but gives ulcers; as the one who is hard, unfeeling, even vicious.

Some may disagree, but I think that is true. Whom do we admire? We admire the man with "guts." What do we really mean by this? We mean the man who drives his people hard, who has the reputation for firing subordinates, who goes for the jugular, who works his people 14 hours a day, and who takes his objective in spite of heavy and possibly unnecessary casualties. We set these people up and idolize them. Even in industry. We like the kind of guy who moves in as the CEO and fires three-fourths of the vice presidents the first week. He gets things done! He's got guts! But what about the perceptive, cool-headed leader who takes a group of misfits and molds them into an effective, highly-spirited team? Or the colonel who can see the great potential of a young commander who is performing only marginally and, through coaching and encouraging, turns him into a first-rate performer? Or, the leader in combat who takes his objective with no casualties? Or the brigade commander who has the guts to resist the arbitrary, capricious order of a division commander to fire a faltering battalion commander because the colonel believes that with the proper leadership that battalion commander can be made

into a successful one? Or, the Pentagon division chief who defies the norm and refuses to arrive in his office before 0730, or to require his action officers to do so, and who manages the workload of his division so that every man gets a reasonable amount of leave, seldom has to work on weekends, and gets home every evening at a reasonable hour?

We seldom hear about those people. We don't hold them up as examples as we should. The higher we go, the more important it is to be careful that our impact on the lives and careers and families of our subordinates is positive and not negative. I can think of a division artillery commander in Germany who ruled by fear, who was hated by his subordinates, and who was the proximate cause of a number of serious domestic crises. I can think of a lieutenant general in the Pentagon who purposely intimidated his subordinates and associates in order to get his own way. I can think of a colonel, the executive to a former Chief of Staff, who blossomed like a rose to his superiors, but who was vicious, demeaning, and bullying to his subordinates. I can think of a colonel in the Pentagon who never showed appreciation and voiced only criticism and whose subordinates gradually became discouraged and frustrated and unproductive.

In contrast, I can think of an Army lieutenant general whose modus operandi was to make his subordinates successful in their jobs. He said, "I'll have no problem with my job if I can make all of my subordinates successful." I think of a division commander in Germany with whom I was closely associated, who spent countless hours talking with subordinates at every level, coaching them, encouraging them, teaching them. I think of a Pentagon division chief who looked for opportunities to push his action officers into the limelight, who volunteered them for prestigious positions as secretarial-level "horse-holders," who worked in the background to cross-train his people so that no one would ever have to be called back from leave, who personally took the rap when things went wrong, and who, in my opinion, ran the best division in the Pentagon. It all gets back to how they looked at people, their value, their dignity, their fundamental worth, their potential.

The higher you go, the easier it is to misuse authority. The checks that we were subject to as junior officers become less evident and less compelling. We gradually begin to believe that we really don't need to seek the counsel of others. We are at first surprised by and then pleased by the freedom of action accorded us.

For instance: "I really have to visit Germany, but should I do so this winter? No, I'll wait until the weather's better. Let's see, where can I go this winter? I really need to visit Panama and Hawaii. Let's visit Panama or Hawaii this winter."

We begin to rationalize small personal indiscretions that we would never accept in a subordinate, like having our personal car worked on by a division mechanic during duty hours, or allowing our wife to bully the post engineer into refurbishing the kitchen of our quarters out of cycle. Sometimes

we begin to believe that we are somehow above the law—they really didn't have a person of our status and responsibility in mind when they wrote it, did they?—and we divert funds, appropriated for barracks maintenance, to refurbish the interior of a rod and gun club, or piece several segments of minor construction money together to accomplish some major construction projects that were disallowed in the last appropriation cycle. These examples are taken from my personal knowledge. As a rule, and this is very important I think, general officers do not get relieved for incompetence. They do get fired for indiscretions, which is simply another way of saying that they've used their authority unethically.

A former Inspector General of the Army for whom I have great regard and who was, in a sense, the conscience of the Army for the four years that he was the IG, told me that at any one time about ten percent of the general officers in the Army were under investigation of some kind or another. Most of those charges turn out to be either false or simply a matter of perception, i.e. where the general did something which others perceived to be unethical but really was not. As General Abrams once said, "The higher you go on the flag pole, the more your rear-end shows."

The second great tension involves the ethical use of military force. The higher you go the more you'll be called on to exercise judgment in this arena, although some with relatively moderate rank in key positions have great influence on such matters. For instance, a US Marine Corps major on the National Security Council staff wrote the point paper that convinced the President to send Marines into Lebanon. The mid-1980s Weinberger-Shultz debate falls into the category of this tension regarding the ethical use of military force. When should it be used? Under what circumstances? In what strength? In defense of US territory only? Or in defense of US interests? Or in defense of our allies? What are our interests? Grenada? Lebanon? The Straits of Hormuz? How about Vietnam? Our involvement in Vietnam was purely ethical in the sense that the United States had no really compelling self-interest. We simply wanted to prevent 16 million South Vietnamese from becoming slaves to a totalitarian neighbor. But what about the level of force used? Was it ethical *not* to saturate-bomb Hanoi in an effort to force the North Vietnamese government to call off the invasion of South Vietnam? How about Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Afghanistan, the Iranian rescue operation? Should force be used only if there is a reasonable chance of effecting a desirable outcome? General Ridgway, then Chief of Staff, went to President Eisenhower in the summer of 1953 and personally talked him out of sending American ground troops to Vietnam after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu at the hands of the Viet Minh. Was he more ethical or less ethical than the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who failed to intercede ten years later to prevent combat troops from being sent into South Vietnam? Could *failure* to use military force in the defense of freedom be unethical? That's a good question. And what of the Bay of Pigs? Was it moral

for the President to call off the air strikes at the last minute, thus practically insuring failure? Was it moral for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to agree to the calling off of those air strikes? Did the operation in and of itself have an ethical purpose? What of the use of military power to accomplish our purposes in Central America? What are our purposes in Central America? Is the use of military force the only way to accomplish these purposes? If so, how much force? In what form?

In addition to these two prime ethical tensions, there are others that every senior officer will confront, although the forms might vary. I will briefly cite several. One ethical tension is that what is just and fair to an individual may conflict with a policy that attempts to correct long-standing injustice. One of the major problems here is that an open and frank discussion is not only discouraged but virtually impossible due to the emotionally explosive nature of the issue. I'm speaking of course about establishing quotas or their look-alikes for minorities and women in various selective processes like promotions, schooling, command, and other visible assignments.

Another ethical tension is loyalty to the organizational position or policy versus adherence to personal conviction when the two are in conflict. In testimony before a congressional staff, how can you present the OSD or Army position if you personally disagree with it? The same ethical dilemma confronts a Chief of Staff who personally disagrees with the President's chosen strategy. Another ethical tension involves the conflict between ambition and selflessness. What is legitimate ambition? We preach selflessness as a sterling quality of character and then we tend to reward ambition. It is ironic that one Chief of Staff who talked a lot about selflessness was, in his rise to that position, one of the most openly ambitious officers I know.

Another ethical tension is between people and mission. Does the goal of having combat-ready units justify neglect of families? Conversely, does the proper care and nurture of families excuse having noncombat-ready units? Can we achieve both? Should dependents accompany their sponsors overseas? Does it detract from readiness, or contribute to it? Is it ethical to separate families from their sponsors in peacetime under any circumstances? What are the effects of separating families? We've muddled through this one, perhaps not very successfully.

A final ethical tension involves the difference between honesty and deception. Decisions at every echelon in our structure are made based upon the information available to the decisionmakers. If that information is inaccurate or incomplete, the decision may well be faulty. The decision may be faulty even if the information is accurate and complete, but it is more likely to be faulty if the information is inaccurate and incomplete. Therefore, it is essential that information provided to our superiors, to our subordinates, and to our peers be accurate and complete. The oath of a witness in a trial to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" should be the oath of a professional officer.

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This was brought home to me as a tank platoon leader in the Korean War. It was nighttime. The tank battalion of which I was a part had been heavily engaged during the day in support of an infantry regiment in a river-crossing operation. Now we were defending against a flank attack by a Chinese force on the near side of the river. There was a lot of mortar and artillery fire, including illumination and white phosphorus, many casualties, and general confusion. The friendly force was withdrawing and I ended up with my tank platoon fighting sort of a rear-guard action in pitch dark along a road. About the time I got my platoon past a certain checkpoint, I got a radio call from my battalion commander asking if I was the last friendly force to cross the checkpoint. Since we were in close contact with the advancing Chinese force, I said yes, we were the last. Shortly thereafter a long and intense American artillery barrage was laid down in the area I had just vacated. The next morning my battalion commander came to me in our assembly area. He told me he had called the artillery into that area because of my statement that I was the last unit out. In fact, I was not. A friendly infantry unit somehow had been intermingled with the Chinese force and had sustained casualties in the artillery barrage. Gently, but clearly, the battalion commander said, “Buck, you made me tell a lie.”

I’ve never forgotten that. I had told him what I perceived to be true, but was not. I should have qualified my answer, explaining that in the dark and confusion I could report only that my tanks had crossed the checkpoint. That was the only thing I knew for sure. The rest was speculation. Many times since then I’ve been tempted to speculate beyond what I knew and was certain to be true and I have sometimes yielded to that temptation.

As DCSOPS of USAREUR during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, I was reporting to CINCUSAREUR on the situation so far as we knew it. The actual invasion was of less importance to us than the threat to our nuclear weapons in both Greece and Turkey, stemming from intense animosity by both sides toward Americans for failing to take a clear stand with either country on the invasion. I was discussing the threat to our nuclear weapons with CINCUSAREUR and unconsciously began to drift away from known facts into speculation about what might be true. The CINC looked squarely at me and said, “General, stop bugling. I can’t make decisions on speculation. You’re intermingling facts with possibilities.”

In many situations at high levels of command, the issues of honesty and deception are not recognized as such. One of the most common deceptions is the exaggeration of need in order to get what is really needed, knowing that the initial request is certainly going to be reduced. Money is usually the object, at least in the Pentagon environment. In fact, the whole program budget procedure, in my view, is essentially deceptive and unethical. The annual requests for operations and maintenance funds come in from the major commands over four-star signatures claiming that the request is the bare minimum they can live with. The DA action officers in the planning and budgeting arena don't believe a word of it. They look at what the command got the previous year, do some puts and takes, and come up with their own figures. The whole process at the major command level was a waste of time, energy, and money. Commanders' statements are given about as much credence as a Dan Rather commentary on the objectivity of the news media. Then the Programming and Budgeting System, in crunching together the Program Objective Memorandum, inflates those requests which are the "pet rocks" of influential Pentagon pachyderms, and submits them to OSD knowing full well that OSD will cut some of these programs back, knowing they have been inflated by the Army. Of course, OSD may take the money thus "saved" and add it to other programs based on what some assistant secretary of defense perceives to be important, or what is the current wind of opinion regarding what will sell on the Hill and what won't.

Another blatantly unethical practice in the programming and budgeting arena is what I call the "multiple stampede effect." Newly assigned Lieutenant General A or Assistant Secretary A comes along with Project A which has been his obsession for years. It requires major multi-year funding. He forces it into the program, stampeding the appropriation directors to get on the team, and so the program is funded at the expense of other ongoing programs. Lieutenant General A is then promoted and made a MACOM commander, where his influence in the central programming and budgeting procedure fades considerably. Now Lieutenant General B arrives on the scene with Project B, his personal pet rock, and he is able to push his project through the Program Budget Committee and into the next year's Program Objective Memorandum. And where does the money come from? From Program A. So Program A and all the other Program A's are cut back to make way for Program B and all the other Program B's sponsored by the powerful new Lieutenant General B's who will be replaced the next year by Lieutenant General C's with their projects.

Thus we have programs by the dozens, originally spawned by the stampede effect of strong-willed, powerful proponents, which are distorted from their original purpose and deflated by inadequate funding, and flop around from year to year due to changes of emphasis and priority at DA level. The people assigned to manage these programs in the field never know from year to year what they can expect in the way of support. Over the course of my last 12 years on active duty, I was involved in the programming and budgeting

procedure for ten of those years, eight of them at the DA level and two at the MACOM level. I used to leave Program Budget Committee meetings in the Pentagon feeling unclean, polluted, like I needed to go to confession. The whole system is wasteful of the money our citizens have entrusted to us for their common defense. And most of the senior programming and budgeting participants recognize this. Almost every year that I was in the Pentagon, the Director of PA&E or the Director of the Army Staff or the DCSOPS or the Vice Chief of Staff vowed to implement reform and instituted new and different procedures—none of which, as of 30 June 1982, when I retired, had fundamentally improved the system in my opinion.

Another aspect of the honesty/deception tension involves readiness reports. First of all, even the most accurate unit readiness report is a deception unless it is considered in the context of the Army's capability to sustain that unit in combat. The tooth-to-tail, combat-support ratio debate is a case in point. Combat divisions in Europe with C-1 ratings give our national leaders a false sense of confidence if these divisions cannot be sustained in combat past the first few weeks. The readiness of the whole force is what is important. If you are in the force structure business you are contributing to a massive deception if you fail to provide adequate combat support and combat service support to our combat divisions. If you are in the programming and budgeting business you are contributing to a massive deception if you fail to program sufficient ammunition or repair parts to sustain our divisions in combat. The readiness reporting system is not and cannot be purely objective. Subjective judgment always enters in, but the intent, the motive, is what is important.

Consider a new division commander in Europe who has been in command about a month. His predecessor, a young, ambitious major general, is the new USAREUR Chief of Staff. The new division commander makes his assessment and gives his division a C-3 in training, a drop from C-2. As USAREUR DCSOPS, I review the reports. All the other divisions report C-2. I discuss the reports with the Chief of Staff. He takes strong exception to the C-3 rating of his old division, recognizing that if the report is accurate, his own leadership, judgment, and candor are in question. The Chief of Staff challenges the judgment of the new division commander, indicating to him that he's using an unrealistic standard to measure the training status of the division. The new division CG holds his ground. The Chief of Staff then questions the motive of the division commander, saying that he obviously wants to show a lower rating on his first reports so he can show improvement later on. The division commander holds his ground. The Chief of Staff then begins a subtle campaign to discredit the division commander in the eyes of the CINC. Time passes. The Chief of Staff moves rapidly on to a three-star job and is promoted to lieutenant general. The division commander, who is highly respected both by his peers and by his subordinates, completes his tour and transfers to a job in the Pentagon, and eventually retires as a two-star with 35 years of service. In

retrospect, the division commander's subjective judgment on the training status of his division may have been too severe, although I do not in any way question his motive. As DCSOPS, I would have judged all divisions essentially the same in training. Maybe they all should have been C-3. Who was right?

The officer efficiency report system is even more complex. Here the ethical principle of fairness conflicts directly with the ethical principle of honesty. Am I being fair to my people to rate them honestly in accordance with the intent of the OER regulation when I know that across the Army my contemporaries are inflating the reports of their people? Am I justified in waging a one-man campaign for strict honesty when it comes at the expense of my people?

Another aspect of honesty involves what you show your boss when he comes to visit. Conversely, what you should be looking for when you visit your subordinates may be inferred.

The scene is Fort Hood. I am Chief of Staff of the 2d Armored Division. The Army Chief of Staff is coming to visit the post and wants to see tank gunnery training in progress. Recently the division has received a large number of infantrymen rotating back from Vietnam combat duty. Department of the Army has directed us to convert these infantrymen quickly into tankers, and to integrate them into our tank battalions. Most of these Vietnam veterans have only a few months to go before leaving the Army. They are not at all interested in becoming tankers, and as a matter of fact, they're not really interested in anything but getting out of the Army. We have developed a strenuous, four-week TBT (to be tankers) program, which includes familiarization firing on ranges 1 through 5 of the tank gunnery course. The TBTs will be firing Table 4 main gun when the Chief of Staff visits. All indications are that they will be doing poorly, considering the extreme brevity of their preliminary gunnery training, their record on the subcaliber ranges, their general lack of technical aptitude, and their negative attitude.

A senior adviser suggests to the division commander that we should take our best NCO gunners and have them firing when the Army Chief of Staff visits the range. The point is made that an Army Chief of Staff usually visits any given division only once during the tenure in command of a division commander. Our division is a fine division. It has a good reputation. We have some great battalions. Field training has been going well. Maintenance is up. To show the Chief of Staff what we know would be subpar marksmanship will give him a distorted view of the overall standards of the division and will be a disservice to the Chief of Staff. An alternative is put forth. Why not simply change and reprint the training schedule with attendant back-dating, bringing one of our better-trained tank battalions off of maintenance cycle and putting them on the range on the day the Chief visits.

As division chief of staff, I opposed these proposals, stating that the Army Chief of Staff needs to know the trauma we are undergoing resulting

from a DA decision to convert short-term Vietnam infantrymen into qualified tankers in four weeks. After all, I argued, the Chief of Staff is an experienced commander with a reputation for fairness and will understand our situation, and anyway, it would be deceptive to alter the training schedule and substitute training in which he might be more pleased. We owe it to him to tell it like it is, to show him what he needs to see, not just what he may want to see.

The division commander sides with me, and we make no special arrangements to change the schedule. The Chief of Staff visits the range. The outward appearance of the range—that is, the police, the ammunition stacks, the communications, the flags, the condition of the tanks, the saluting, the uniforms—is superb. But the gunnery is atrocious. Few rounds hit the targets. Although the CG had carefully briefed him on the whole situation en route to the range, the Army Chief of Staff is incensed. He calls the firing to a halt, dismounts the TBTs, the NCOs, the officers, and gathers everyone around him. He berates everyone for such a rotten example of gunnery, for the waste of ammo, for the poor NCO instruction, for inadequate officer supervision. Then he takes the CG aside, mercifully out of hearing of the troops, but in their full view, and proceeds to tear the division commander apart; he thereafter leaves the range without a single word of appreciation for anyone. The division commander is philosophical. “The Chief of Staff is in a foul mood today,” he says, “Nothing would have pleased him. He is exhausted from a killing schedule. He has been under severe attack by the press in recent weeks. He will calm down and the whole episode will pass away.”

The Army Chief of Staff never visited the division again during the CG’s tenure of duty. And the CG, until then considered to be a rising star, eventually moved on to another major general’s position, well out of the mainstream of the Army, from which he retired.

Before I left the division, the CG gave me a superb efficiency report, and I was selected for brigadier general just a year later. Was I right or wrong in recommending that we not change the schedule or substitute experienced gunners for the TBTs? Did my decision contribute to the common defense? Was it consistent with our basic value systems? It certainly ruined a great division commander’s career, and the influence of his character and competence was lost to the Army. On the other hand, I got away unscathed, except for a deep sense of continuing sadness at what I had done to my boss.

**I**n conclusion, I can give no easy answers regarding these ethical tensions. I can, however, from my experience, conclude that an officer’s ethical framework for addressing each of them needs to address the three fundamental questions: Does the action contribute to the national defense? Is it consistent with the protection and enhancement of life? Are the means to accomplish it acceptable? Standing firm ethically can exact a cost, perhaps a steep one. As professionals we must be willing to pay it. □