

Life Experience of a Commander

I have had many crucible experiences throughout my life. Some have been good and some have not been so good, but they all have greatly influence my life and have made me into the leader I am today. I will only focus on three crucible experiences that have greatly impacted my life and have molded me into that type leader I am today. The three crucible experiences that have greatly impacted my life are three incidents that I had to deal with as the company commander of a basic training company. The three incidents that I had to deal with and will focus on in this essay are an investigation of me by the Inspector General (IG) for trying to help a trainee who was diagnosed with muscular sclerosis, relieving a drill sergeant for having a improper relationship with two trainees; and relieving a drill sergeant for holding his girlfriend and a friend hostage in his home.

Serving as the commander of a basic training company was one of the most challenging, yet satisfying jobs I have ever had as an officer in the United States Army. I truly enjoyed commanding; it made me a better leader, and forced me to deal with issues that I would have never thought I would ever deal with as a commander. It was one early morning while at PT; we had the trainees running laps around the track. As the trainees were running, one of them fell to the ground and her leg was in a very awkward position. We immediately called the EMS and when they arrived they diagnosed the trainee with a broken leg and had to administer her morphine because her pain was so great. At this point I knew her injuries were very serious. Later that day, we found out that the trainee was diagnosed with muscular sclerosis. After the trainee returned from having surgery and was well enough, I counseled her on what would happen to her as far as her military career. She was already being administratively separated from the military for UCMJ, but I made a commitment to her that the Army would do everything

possible to help her with her condition, prior to sending her home. I explained to her that it would be a very slow process for her separation because of the treatment she needed to receive for her condition, and explained that the medication and doctor visits would be very expensive if she had pay out of her pocket. Although, I briefed her on the process of her separation and briefed her that it would take a while for her to be separated based on the treatment she needed, the only thing she could think about was going home. Weeks went by and the trainee became very frustrated by the amount of time it was taking to separate her, although she was receiving treatment for her condition during the time. The trainee became so frustrated that she filed an IG complaint against me because it was taking so long to separate her. At first I was extremely angry and did not understand why someone with such a serious condition would be more concerned about going home then getting the help she needed. After a while I calmed down, thought it through, discussed it with my battalion commander and explained the situation to the IG. The IG cleared me and closed out the case. Needless to say, I kept my commitment to the trainee and ensured she got the treatment she needed prior to separating her from the military.

The next incident was very serious, in which a drill sergeant was having serious marital problems at home, but failed to ask for the help and receive the proper counseling needed before it was too late. We were in the field for the end of cycle field training exercise (FTX) and a couple of female trainees started a rumor that they had slept with a drill sergeant. When I heard the rumor, I immediately contacted my battalion commander and he instructed me to conduct a commander's inquiry. We returned from the FTX and I brought the two female trainees into my office, along with their drill sergeant and the first sergeant. We read the trainees their rights and questioned them on the rumor that was going around about them having an inappropriate relationship with a drill sergeant. They denied everything so I explained to them that we would

get to the bottom of the situation and find out the truth. I was not convinced that nothing happen between them and the drill sergeant. I had them write a sworn statement and released them. Next we brought the drill sergeant into my office, read him his rights and questioned him on the rumor that was going around; he also denied that anything happened. Again, we were not convinced that nothing happened. We interviewed some of the trainees that heard the rumor and questioned each of them on who started the rumor; they all said the rumor was started by the two female trainees in question. We called the two female trainees back in, but this time one by one and questioned them more in depth. One of my female drill sergeants appealed to one of the female trainees in question and really made her understand what the drill sergeant did was wrong and that he should not be allowed to get away with having an inappropriate relationship with them because he would only continue to do it again unless something was done. She broke down, told us everything from how it happened to when it happened. It was the break that we needed. The female drill sergeant even convinced her to have the other female trainee tell the truth. We got written statements from the two female trainees detailing exactly what happened, although they were written separately, the content of what happened was very similar. After collecting the written statements from the two trainees, I called the drill sergeant back in my office, read him his rights, explained the evidence that we had against him and he finally gave in and told the truth. I had him write a sworn statement detailing what happened and how it happened and his description was very similar to the female trainees. After collecting all the sworn statements, I notified my battalion commander of the new information and brought him the sworn statements. The drill sergeant was relieved; he went through legal proceedings, and spent some time behind bars. He was a new drill sergeant and had not even completed a whole cycle, but because he was having serious problems at home and didn't ask for help, it cost him his career.

The final incident really shocked me as a commander, but taught me a very valuable lesson about the mental state of people. It was early one morning, I received a call that one of my best drill sergeants was holding his girlfriend and her friend hostage in his home and threatening to kill them and himself. I immediately contacted my battalion commander, but I could not reach him on the phone, so I had to quickly find out where the drill sergeant lived and go over there to gather information. By the time, I arrived at the house the police had him in custody and the women were released. I was very shocked with disbelief. He was one of my stellar drill sergeants, but he had gotten drunk and into a confrontation with his girlfriend. Regrettably, things got way out of control very quickly, but no one was hurt in this incident, thanks to God. The drill sergeant had a drinking problem and had been receiving professional help, but unfortunately this incident cost him his career. Once he was released from the police department, he was immediately escorted to mental health by the first sergeant and me. We conducted daily follow ups and sent battalion reports on his treatment status until he was finally separated from the Army.

In conclusion, the three incidents that I had to deal with during command taught me great lessons. They forced me to take a look at myself, my vision, and my command philosophy and reflect on the experiences which helped me to grow and develop as an organizational leader. These experiences allowed me to constantly examine myself and ask myself whether I did the right thing and was it enough. One thing my battalion commander use to always tell me is whenever I make a decision, just make sure I am able to sleep at night and can live with the decision.