

JFCOM Ethics Conference Remarks
LTG Robert L. Caslen
Suffolk, Va
3 June 2010

Thank you for that kind introduction and that warm welcome. General Mattis, Major General Layfield, and distinguished guests I appreciate this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you today at this very important symposium. Also, a special thanks to Dr. David Fautau from JFCOM, Colonel Sean Hannah from ACPME at West Point, Dr. Al Pierce from NDU and all those involved with coordinating, organizing, and hosting this symposium on this extremely timely and critical topic of ethics in our Military.

Our path to the future is marked by the rising threat of a violent extremist movement that seeks to create anarchy and instability throughout the international system.

Embedded in this system, we also face emerging nations not satisfied with the status quo seeking a new global balance of power.

As our Nation continues into this era of uncertainty and persistent conflict, the lines separating war and peace, enemy and friend, have blurred and no longer conform to the clear boundaries we once knew.

Understanding how to operate successfully in this complex and ambiguous environment of the 21st Century is critical. This environment will require leveraging every element of our national power and includes cooperating, collaborating, and coordinating with governmental, non-governmental and international organizations.

The increasing competitiveness of the future security environment suggests that we may not be able to dominate everywhere across the spectrum of conflict as we have for the past quarter century. However, we must remain capable of gaining and maintaining superiority at times and in places of our choosing. Moreover, this increasing competitiveness exists in an environment of increasing complexity, requiring leaders who

are adaptive and innovative. They must also operate in a variety of situations against a myriad of threats and with a diverse set of national, allied and indigenous partners.

It is extremely difficult to predict the course of our constantly changing security environment. Uncertainty is the only thing that is certain. And with increasing uncertainty we have to be methodical in our analysis and approach. Since we will never be able to accurately predict the exact threat we will face next... if our future environment is uncertain... the difference between success and failure will be, and arguably always has been, the quality of our leaders.

Because our adversaries have shown the ability to make transitions rapidly and engage effectively across the spectrum of conflict... between full scale war and stable peace. We must develop leaders capable of operating between these extremes and meeting those inherent challenges.

This is why our leaders must be creative, agile, and adaptive. And what I hope to show you -- it is why leaders must lead from an ethical imperative. Said another way, there is hardly a sliver of difference between ethics and leadership!

To complicate these challenges even further, this shifting balance of operational and tactical views, combined with decentralization, requires more, not less, focus on developing our junior leaders. Because of this distributed battlefield and the requirement for decentralized operations, we are realizing more and more the importance of our junior leaders to prosecute combat under ethical conditions. As an aside, let me speak for a minute about this incredible generation of men and women who are volunteers, all of them, have made the decision to serve selflessly for our Nation, when they are needed the most.

Repeatedly tested in this era of persistent conflict, our service members have emerged stronger with a deeper commitment to our core values and beliefs. The tremendous men and women serving in our military today are members of the 9/11 generation; a

generation that saw our nation attacked and elected to be a part of the military while our country was at war knowing full well that they would join a unit deploying to war.

They never wavered or questioned - they quietly stand among the generations that have gone before them, standing in the gap between the evil that is out there, and the values of our nation and our way of life. Our Country has put the security of our nation on their backs again and again, and they consider it a privilege to do their duty each and every time.

This generation doesn't just recite the words of our Warrior Ethos -- they live them. "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade." Many in America do not understand the incredible value and worth of this treasure, but this humble, yet competent generation, would want it no other way.

History will gloriously record what they have accomplished for not only our country, but also for the men and women of the free world, who thirst for democracy, and repulse extremism, violence, and exclusion – and seek moderation, tolerance, and inclusion for all human beings.

They are the men and women who believe in the power of our Nation's values and civilization. They are the ones who confront the menace of extremism and terrorism. And they are the ones who seek to expand opportunity and decency for all who thirst for it.

Few service members in our history have faced a greater challenge. But in this challenge, they reflect the very best in our military and our Nation and most important, they reflect our Nations most treasured values. They have been called – and have answered.

We've been at war for 9 years and it's essential that we take this opportunity to reflect on what this means to our profession -- which I'll define later. Professional and personal development are essential to the growth of our leaders and a critical component in this growth is reflection. Reflection allows us to assess the state of our world, to reassess whether we are achieving our goals, whether we are following the path and adhering to the values that have proven true over numerous conflicts and generations.

There have been numerous examples of leadership and ethical successes and failures throughout these past 9 years of war. Learning from both success and failure is a hallmark of our profession. However, though, the successes aren't necessarily what grab headlines or go viral across the internet. Arguably now -- more than any other past conflict -- is the power of the lowest ranking member of our organization impacting the strategic landscape in a less than productive way.

This notion of was first addressed in 1999 by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Charles Krulak, in his article "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War". We know it now in the Army as the "Strategic Private". Meaning, even the actions at the lowest levels can transcend the echelons of war and all levels of command resulting in strategic 2nd and 3rd order effects.

Reflecting on a superb example of the ethical value of courage is Marine Corporal Jason Dunham who on April 14th 2004 jumped on a hand grenade sacrificing his life to save the lives of his fellow Marines.

However, not all of our reflection is on positive ethical values.

In May 2008, a Soldier assigned to Multi-National Corps-Iraq used a Koran for target practice at a rifle range in western Baghdad. The bullet riddled Koran was left behind and found by a local Iraqi man. This act made instant international news across all media venues. Not only was this act reprehensible, but it had the potential to destabilize all of western Baghdad. One person... three bullets... international news.

And how can we forget about Abu Ghraib? The release of photographs taken by Soldiers guarding Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib sent strategic shockwaves throughout the international community. The complete moral and ethical collapse of one army unit completely overshadowed and neutralized the many hard fought tactical successes and boosted recruitment for anti-US Islamist extremists. Interviews with detained foreign fighters asking why they joined the jihad revealed that the # 1 answer was because of the pictures and videos they saw of Abu Ghraib. This ethical lapse created more foreign fighters and increased casualties to coalition and Iraqi security forces, I would argue -- than any other effort our adversary puts together. This ethical failure further caused an exaggerated impression that poor ethics were prevalent in our Armed Forces. Granted, there were many Soldiers within this unit that were doing the right thing, but many knew... and condoned these actions through silence.

It took the personal courage of one Specialist to bring all of this to light. This young National Guardsman was not initially heralded for his personal courage, but branded a traitor across the internet and blogosphere, and even by some of his fellow Soldiers. After his return from Iraq, there was so much criticism that he and his wife were forced to uproot and relocate for their own safety.

So what is an ethic? And what is the Profession of Arms?

It is important to note the difference between an “ethic” and “ethics”. An ethic is our collective values, beliefs, and virtues that we hold as a professional organization. Our “ethics” is the instrument through which we exercise our “ethic”. It is the systems, rules, and processes that we develop as a professional organization.

The ethic of the profession of arms is most importantly built upon a relationship of trust with the American people. They expect us to be experts and to be professionals. If we lose the moral bearing of our profession, then we risk losing our society’s trust. When this trust relationship breaks down, as it did, for example, toward the end of the

Vietnam war, then society is well justified to step in and reign in an unprofessional, unethical military. However, I would argue that, the opposite can be just as dangerous. When society gives the military a blank check of unquestioning trust, then that is rife for abuse as well. The balance is for the military to have an espoused and enacted ethic which earns daily the trust of the American people.

So what exactly does this professional ethic require of us?

Like any profession's ethic, the military is an expert group, charged by its client to conduct extraordinary expert business with an extraordinary ethic unique to that group. We have expert knowledge and judgment in the profession of arms; we have a unique history; we have special entrance requirements; we conduct unique, ongoing professional education and training. The profession of arms must measure itself by a more rigorous yard stick, since we are called upon to make extraordinary sacrifices as well as make ultimate acts in the taking of life. We are therefore called upon to have a more scrupulous standard by which we do indeed judge ourselves.

The book, "Crisis in Command", originally published in 1978 as an examination of the Vietnam era officer corps, offers this insight into the differences between military and corporate ethical obligations and responsibilities.

It says and I quote... "Military systems, especially the small-unit subsystems which are expected to bear the burden of killing, are categorically different in nature and function from the modern business corporation and its subsystems. No one expects anyone to die for IBM or General Motors, but the expectation that one will "do one's duty even unto death" is very real in the military and becomes ever more vivid as one moves closer to combat.

Thus, the tasks which each system are required to perform are quite different. Consequently, the forces which compel an officer to fulfill his obligations to himself, his command, and his superiors are categorically different from those which press the corporate official to fulfill his obligations." End quote.

As professionals, we are called upon to provide expert advice to those civilians to whom we report. We must be candid and thorough in our assessment of ourselves. Based on our informed knowledge, we also maintain a distinct cohesion unique to our profession, providing us with extraordinary motivation and identity developed through uniquely shared experiences, unknown to the citizens we serve. We share a common life, developing a commitment to and identification with the profession. Because the stakes are so high for us, we must justify to ourselves and to the American people the basis for our service. We must have a professional ethic which earns and holds the trust of our nation. Our expert service has moral meaning precisely because we are engaged in the defense of the prosperity, security and the values of our families and of our Nation.

Ethical dilemmas are challenging and, to a certain extent, overwhelming when situations are ambiguous, time is critically short, and a combat environment are present. For these reasons, but not limited to these alone, we rely on creeds and codes to cement a foundation for Soldiers, civilians, and practitioners to rely upon.

In the Army, there is, however, no specifically published officer's creed like the NCO, Civilian, or Soldiers Creed. Granted, all officers are Soldiers in general terms, we espouse to the tenants of "The Soldier's Creed" and the "Warrior Ethos". However, officership is codified and exercised through historical context initially by the appointment and then the acceptance of the formal commission upon entrance into service. An officer's commission is expressly detailed as a presidential responsibility as his duty as Commander-in-Chief under Article 2, Section 2 of the Constitution. Also, under Article 6 of the Constitution, it expressly mandates that "the Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and the executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution, but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any officer or public trust under the United States."

Therefore, officers are bound by Oath to support the Constitution and to obey the laws enacted by Congress. In his article published in Parameters, Richard Swain further details these requirements by writing, "Officers are thus bound to respect the authority of the President as Commander-in-Chief, the powers and authority of Congress in its prescribed roles, and the authority of the established judiciary system to interpret the law laid down in Article 3."

Before the Oath is the commission. The commission, bestowed upon an individual by the President, details with confidence the President's expectations of subordinate conduct. Patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities are the President's criteria for ethical service. These expectations echoed in the Oath of office stating that an officer will "well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter."

Congress, in turn, and acting on its Constitutional obligation adds the language in Title 10 of the US Code of a "Requirement of Exemplary Conduct" for appointed commanders and others in positions of specific authority. Among the list of specific charges for commanders and those in roles of authority set forth by Congress are; "to show in themselves a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination; and to guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Army, all persons who are guilty of them."

Through an officer's commission, Oath of Service, and the requirements of Title 10 of the US Code, an ethical and moral framework for officership can be summarily compiled in general terms. However, simply using these as a sole framework is a very constricted view of ethical officership as a whole. Conversely, they do provide a starting point for educating junior leaders on the historical foundations of their appointed ethical and moral responsibilities.

Why are ethics important to commanders in today's operational environment?

First because the complex OIF and OEF operational environments coupled with the nature of a decentralized and adaptive enemy have posed many challenges to commanders at all levels. These challenges are not only in how we fight, but our junior leaders are finding themselves faced with ethical challenges without the immediate supervision we saw in a more centralized maneuver battlefield. These challenging circumstances, however, do not diminish a commander's ownership of success or failure. This is something we all have learned even during our pre-commissioning times - that according to AR 600-20, Army Command Policy - a commander is responsible for everything their command does or fails to do.

The second point I want to highlight of why ethics are important to our current fight are because of risk and standards. Many of these operations are increasingly decentralized. Decentralized operations, as you know, are key in a counterinsurgency fight. They enable increased contact with larger portions of the people, protection of the population, increased situational awareness and an understanding the operational environment. However, decentralization poses many leadership challenges as well.

As we discussed, lower level leaders are being asked to do increasingly more tasks with much less experience, training, and education. Such is the nature of complexity and the current fight. But what I want to highlight with this issue are risk and standards.

Picture a Platoon Leader, in a COP, in a remote area of Afghanistan, 1 hour flight distance from his nearest friendly force. What risks is he or she under and how is he or she expected to mitigate these risks?

What is critical at this point is the risk assessment discussion that must take place between the small unit leader and his or her more senior commander. Such a command climate must be present where subordinate commanders can come forward with the necessary candor to tell their boss what they feel is acceptable risk or not. This command climate must create a degree of trust between these leaders. The special trust between leader and led is essential and is earned through integrity,

competence, and nurturing relationships. Said another way, a command climate that allows this conversation to take place is essential and is built upon the values inherent under the practice of ethical leadership.

The same principle applies to the standards and discipline our leaders must establish and maintain. Given the great confidence we have in our unit's ability to fight, we can become complacent in implementing standards and discipline.

Experience shows that the further a unit decentralizes and the further along we are in our deployment, the greater the emphasis must be placed on standards, discipline, values, and character. Oversight of these and monitoring of the command and ethical climates become more challenging the further we distribute our forces. Senior leaders set the tone. The organization's Ethical Climate is both established and affected by leaders.

There are other reasons why ethics are important in today's operating environment. One was mentioned earlier -- which was the impact of Abu Ghraib as a catalyst for inciting our enemy's extremist ideology. But probably more important is the need to maintain the sacred trust that must exist between the American people and the military. We are fortunate to have that trust today because despite what Americans feel about this war, all you have to do is walk through an airport with this uniform on and you are quickly overwhelmed with thanks from a grateful Nation for our service.

As Clausewitz once said, "to prosecute a war, a Nation will need its government's commitment, its military's capabilities, and the will of its people." We don't need to look any further than to the Vietnam conflict of what happened when we lost the support of the American people.

In conclusion, today's wars are prosecuted in tremendously complex environments, where the actions of leaders at all levels have strategic consequences.

Inherent in our professional military ethic are the values of our Nation -- values like Duty and Honor and Country -- and the values of our service -- and this ethic helps define the parameters of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in this complex operating environment.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to speak with you today, and thank you for all that you do and continue to do for our service members, our military, and our Nation! I'd be happy to take any questions you may have.