

Why Soldiers Go Wild
Or The Army Is a Sandcastle

A few soldiers in Iraq brought shame on the whole U.S. Army and Nation. It's happened before in my lifetime - at My Lai and Kent State/Jackson State. It will happen again and maybe it'll be worse. Soldiers go wild because war is evil and some very bad people are soldiers. The evil in war breeds more evil. Bad people are made most terrible. Despite the screening, training, and retention bars, scumbuckets are in all of our Armed Services. I served over and under such human refuse in five Army Divisions. And I served over and under the best men I have ever known. Bar none.

It's said better in The Centurions where one soldier says the "dirtiest dogs are in the Army" and another says, "Yes, and so are the finest men in the world." Yet, even fine men fall in sin during war. War is evil which leads good men to do terrible things. We are all sinners by our human nature. Power corrupts and evil corrodes our thin veneer of civilization. The military at war is the awful blending of power, evil necessity and depraved choice. Soldiers are at their worst when their leaders are the weakest and wrong and without moral compass.

Three things rot a unit from the inside out - drugs, racism and favoritism. When sex is favor for unequal treatment, a tight wire of tension rips the unit apart as much as the cancer kills it. Putting women in combat units and open homosexuals anywhere creates too many points of failure. Sexual predators have powerless prey in military units. The dynamics in military units are well known. I saw the damage drugs and race did on the Post-Vietnam Army. I lived it in troop units.

The U.S. Army killed off or wounded - literally - the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) ranks with multiple tours to Vietnam. The failure to call out the Reserves and National Guard made the Regulars eat the combat with the draftees. The losses were replaced by 'shake and bake' NCOs. The result was an armed mob. Too many NCOs knew just enough to survive in Vietnam and not nearly enough to train and lead soldiers for other combat. It took decades of bars to reenlistment, new sergeants' schools, and training, training, training to rebuild the NCOs.

The Officers weren't much better. The difference was the ruthless Reductions in Force in the early 70s tossed thousands of officers on the street. Those who remained and stayed through the lean years of declining wages during inflation, social experiments and lack of resources for training and maintenance, were pretty hard core. They had a fire in the belly. They felt ownership for 'their' Army.

The Army turned around with the only treatment that works against drugs, race and favoritism. Apply leadership and discipline. Demand task-condition-standards compliance in all things. Like, wear your helmet and keep your chin strap fastened all the time. Lead butt-kicking Physical Training (PT). Knock off the stupid seminars to explore our differences (I understand the Clinton's brought them back for girl issues), slam dunk racists of all colors, and demand performance without excuses. Piss test all the time and court-martial the drug users. The cancers were cured. Use the resources President Reagan brought to train better, harder, more often.

The Army that won the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and crushed Iraq in 2003 was built like a sandcastle. The sandcastle is huge, detailed - just glorious. Yet, every tide washes it out. No matter how magnificent, it has to be re-built every day. The sand is people - soldiers. They must be trained, educated, disciplined, equipped, and lead - daily.

To fix the problem at the prison, start with the privates and work your way up the chain of command. Sooner or later you will find an officer who didn't know what was happening. Find out if that was culpable ignorance or fooled by slick deceit. If he/she was negligent, then let the hangings from that person down begin. Try to not over-react, which the services always do, and make prisons into Club Med.

Finally, consider the coarse culture of these young soldiers. No one in public schools ever told them not to have sex, but how to have 'safe' sex. The Golden Rule isn't an absolute moral standard because of multiculturalism. They didn't fall far from what is celebrated in the MTV popular culture.

Hooah - build that sand castle, the Army, every day!

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