

"HELL NO, I WON'T GO"

Situation: In May 2006, I proudly raised my right hand and joined the world's greatest fighting force, the United States Army. I finally achieved what I had worked so hard for through my four years of college, the rank of second lieutenant. I was eager to get through all of my training to get to my first operational assignment and be in the "real" Army. I was flying high until I heard through the grapevine that my new unit was getting ready to deploy soon after I was projected to arrive. As a newlywed, this sent fear through both my husband and me. I put it in the back of my mind and powered through training in hopes that my unit of assignment would perhaps change or that the deployment date for the unit would move up before I arrived so that I could not deploy with it. When I finally arrived, I learned the unit was deploying in just 60 days. I was in-processed and briefed that I was to jump straight into my unit training in preparation to lead my Soldiers effectively downrange in Iraq.

Things became crazy as preparations were made to deploy in the unit. Meanwhile, my new husband of six months was eager to get started on our family. We made the decision to begin trying to have our family to avoid the deployment. The Army cannot dictate to me when the right time is to have children, so I felt it was within my right as a woman and future mom to make the best decision for me and my family. My husband and I were scared about a 15-month deployment and even more so that there was a slight chance, but still a chance, that I would not come back in the same condition physically and mentally in which I had left. Never mind that not more than 6-months ago I swore to uphold the Army's 7 Values especially "Duty, Selfless Service, Integrity, and Honor."

When I learned the ready to load date, the deployment became real. My husband and I tried everything we could to get pregnant. I changed my diet and sought medical advice off of the installation and outside of my reporting chain of command. If pregnancy did not happen, my husband and I talked about actions we could take. We knew that medical disqualification was the only way I could avoid the deployment and still save face. We talked about numerous ways, perhaps a fall down the stairs or something of the like. I never considered how my unit up and down the chain of command would view my actions. Not getting on the airplane was the only thing I focused on. Within 3 weeks I was pregnant and removed from the deployment. But what would my Soldiers think if they knew what levels I was prepared to go to?

REFLECTION...

I failed to get the courage to do the harder right. I chose to do what was right for me, not what was right for the Army. I put my fear and needs above the Army, and no Soldier has that right. Soldiers have given their lives before me while serving full of fear, but I gave into the fear instead of conquering it. I regret the decision I made. I saw my unit return after only 12 months of deployment. Morale was high and the unit cohesion was almost visible as my peers and Soldiers shared their stories. I took myself out of a great opportunity to learn about the Army and myself because I was just too scared. I hope someday I will be able to tell my son his birth was for purely selfish reasons. I have learned so much from this missed opportunity that I work harder than anyone in my current unit so I do not miss any other opportunities to do my part and put service before myself.

The role of the major participants in the scenario: A young inexperienced lieutenant full of fear of the unknown.

Ethical dilemma at the time of the incident: The ethical dilemma was putting myself before service. I had just recently sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States and to accept the duties of the rank which I am paid for. The fear my new husband and I felt was debilitating. Ethically I chose perceived self-preservation over doing my duty.

Rules/Laws that apply: UCMJ

Conflict or Tension of the Seven Army Values? How did you resolve those conflicts? "Duty, Honor, Selfless Service, Integrity" all were contradicted in the decision I made. The method I chose to resolve the conflict left my leadership and Soldiers internally questioning my motivation for getting pregnant. They did not ask the question directly but instead treated me as if they suspected the pregnancy was an avoidance tactic. Through time and reflection I learned to just deal with it as best I could because I created the conflict to avoid uncertainty.

Consideration of others COAs and the 2nd or 3rd order effects. My only other COA was to invent another reason for getting medically disqualified. Just not wanting to go or being scared did not matter to the Army or my unit. My choice set a poor example for my Soldiers. Even though they only suspected my motivation for the pregnancy, it placed a shadow of doubt into their perception of me and my character. At the time I did not clearly consider these effects, fear won out.

How did you process or judge this was an ethical dilemma? When I walked into my company commander's office and told him I was pregnant the look on his face and the feeling in my gut clearly told me I had made a very questionable decision.

How did you get the courage to do the harder right? I did not do the harder right. I let fear conquer what I knew was the harder right: deploying with my unit as I had sworn to when I accepted my commission. I missed the opportunity to grow personally and professionally, a high cost for a young, inexperienced lieutenant.