

JUICE SQUEEZE: A YOUNG OFFICER'S CONUNDRUM

Situation: : I had just reported to Fort McClellan, Alabama to attend the Military Police Officer's Basic Course (OBC) and was thrilled to begin my Army career as a young second lieutenant. I was no different than any other fresh second lieutenant – young and searching for my comfort zone. Reporting to the officer basic course provided ample opportunity to reflect on the blessings of the past few years. With solemn pride I was enthusiastic and savoring the opportunities that had opened up to me with my new career as a military police officer. Since childhood I had always longed to be a Soldier and, as I matured, I gravitated to law enforcement too, finding nobility in both professions. Like others, I worked hard in school and was proud of the fact that I was embarking into an honorable service long regarded for its high standards for personal integrity. However, I quickly found myself in an unexpected twist of fate that pitted my moral conscience and sense of duty against my loyalty to a colleague and friend.

I always felt driven to be a Soldier and easily embraced the physical demands of military service as I have always been committed to fitness and strength conditioning. I spent countless hours conditioning myself and fellow lieutenants immediately recognized that I was a little more passionate about conditioning than most, but there was another lieutenant in our class that was even more dedicated than me. In fact, 2LT Kyle was downright impressive. We were newly minted college graduates, yet, he exhibited the muscle mass of a seasoned competitive body builder, and that was exactly what he was training for. Kyle was as strong as an ox and he looked the part to. Such a specimen might intimidate many but he was among the nicest, most generous officers of the group. At one time others in the class approached me and inquired of my opinion of Kyle's considerable muscle mass. "Can one get that big naturally," they asked? I only knew Kyle as an acquaintance at this point, and I could only answer such a question with honest speculation. I thus far had never known a body builder that was as muscular as Kyle who was not using some form of steroids or other performance enhancing drugs. This was no accusation; it was simply a reflection of my personal observations of other body builders of comparable mass whom I knew to be using steroids.

Kyle befriended me quickly, presumably because we shared similar passions for strength fitness. Kyle was sharp as a tack and a capable officer who managed to balance his obsession for weight training with four years of rigorous military academics at West Point. At one point, Kyle offered to buy me a steak dinner some time and I graciously accepted.

The next Tuesday Kyle picked me up in his car to head to the local steak house in Anniston. As I stepped into the passenger side he cleared my seat and advised me to place a small box on the floorboard below so that I could sit. As soon as we drove off he reached into the center console, grabbed something, and handed it to me. I reflexively opened my hand as he dropped a small bottle into my palm and directed me to place it into the box. Without even a chance to inspect it I found myself staring at its label identifying it as Deca-Durabolin – an anabolic steroid and a controlled substance. I felt blood rush to my face as I struggled to piece together what had just happened. Before I could even muster a response Kyle commented not to worry, that he's getting rid of it tonight. He admitted that they were steroids as I made direct eye contact with him. I opened the box to immediately discard it from my custody and discovered several more like it inside. Kyle continued to explain that he had tried them and that since he was now an officer he wanted a fresh start and was going "natural."

The next few minutes were awkward. As we exited the car at the steakhouse, he asked me to hand him the box and said that he was meeting someone that would dispose of them for him. In the restaurant, we took our seats as he greeted another broad-shouldered man older than either of us already in a booth. Dinner conversation was light, and I cannot recall whether the steak was good or not, as I had already concluded that no steak was worth this experience. No mention of steroids was made by either of us, not even when Kyle handed off the box to the stranger. We pretended like nothing ever happened.

The drive home was even more awkward as I further tried to not reveal my physical discomfort with the predicament Kyle had put me in and attempted to assess what happened and what to do about it. The night ended like a sour date. Kyle and I parted. I thanked him for the dinner and kept my comments to myself as I was unsure where we stood. He left in good spirits almost as though he was more at peace than before. I didn't sleep so well that night as I continued to wrestle with what had happened and what my options were. I felt violated. Kyle clearly knew what he was doing, and I was certain that the entire evening was a charade. I concluded that he deliberately arranged the dinner and the exchange of drugs in the car. Moreover, the presence of the mysterious stranger who supposedly was going to dispose of the steroids made our fraternal steak dinner an awkward threesome. As I pieced together the facts, the conundrum became clearer to me. Kyle had befriended me after others in the class had previously inquired of my opinion of the secret to his muscularity and size. Although I believe them to be innocent I am sure the gossip of my theory must have traveled to Kyle.

On the surface there was little at stake for me personally, except what I thought to be a genuine friendship. What Kyle decided for himself was mostly his business but he was aware of the code of ethics that the Army expected us to abide by and only a fool would be so naïve as to not recognize that his use and distribution of an illicit drug was nothing short of criminal. My fairy tale visions of an honorable profession were quickly being clouded with conspiracies of drug use and Kyle's disregard for personal integrity. Moreover, I knew that he was not being forthright with me and was setting me up as a conspirator to his drug use. He believed that he cleverly crafted the drug deal as a cover to discard his past ways. If I treated it like that, I was sure that all would be well. He would likely feel that he gained my trust as a friend and would move on knowing that I wasn't a threat. However, if I responded to his criminal enterprise in a way befitting of a military police officer, he would have tangible evidence of my fingerprints on a bottle of illicit drugs that he could use to blackmail or discredit me should I report the incident. In a flash I became part and parcel to a crime and only my imagination could speculate on what lengths Kyle would be willing to go to preserve his profession and honor. Kyle was sharp as a tack, and he knew at this point he held the upper hand. Should I blow the whistle and take my chances of "he said you said", should I accept that Kyle had actually decided to "go natural" or should I just let it go and save my own skin?

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Although I was somewhat haunted by the night's events, time provided distance from the uncertainty. I did not report the incident, and Kyle and I remained amicable towards each other. To this day he still does not know how I felt about what he had done that night. I wagered that this is an officer that I would likely see again throughout my career and was burdened by the thought of the brute that ate dinner with us participating in or advising Kyle to take further steps to eliminate my threat to his career. Years passed, and Kyle and I have crossed paths again. By all external accounts, Kyle is a capable and competent officer. I had learned years later, following his successful competition in several bodybuilding contests, that Kyle was apprehended by customs agents at the Mexico border for smuggling illicit substances. Kyle was never charged in the military court system for the infraction, I was told, and dismissed it by asserting that he simply thought that they were innocent supplements. I am not witness to these circumstances, but the story came as no surprise. Years later, Kyle is still serving in the Army and I still regret allowing him to believe that I can tolerate his drug use. I realized that strong character is as much defined by what you do not do as it is by what you choose to do.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: My professional obligations were clear – report criminal activity and maintain the integrity of the officer corps. This decision would not require a nanosecond of deliberation if it were not for a small bottle of steroids graced with my fingerprints, to this day – whereabouts unknown. Add to this situation 2LT Jorgensen's betrayal of trust, and a mysterious stranger who could easily be a witness against me. I was thoroughly intimidated by the thought of what lengths Kyle would be willing to go to protect his character and livelihood. After all, I truly did not know him or the depths to which he might descend in a criminal drug culture who is interested in protecting his livelihood and "honorable" character. The least of my considerations was my noble desire to preserve my personal integrity; after all, I would have to weather an interrogation regarding my involvement in the drug deal and why I did not act to stop the crime.

Laws/Rules That Apply: The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) specifically prohibits the wrongful use, possession and distribution of controlled substances in Article 112a. Violation of this article is punishable by courts martial.

Consideration of Other COAs and 2nd and 3rd Order Effects: The "hard right" in this matter would have been to confront Kyle directly the instant I recognized what was happening. Unfortunately, this was complicated by my failure to fully recognize the scope of his actions. Moreover, had I confronted him directly it may have triggered him to become more belligerent and precipitate self-preservation actions on his part that could truly place my welfare in danger. Perhaps it would have been more prudent to report the matter at a later time, but in my youth I truly questioned how deeply Kyle had prepared the set-up against me and it could risk my career. I wagered that his career was less valuable than mine, and that he would have to answer for his skeletons. I belabored the consequences of my decisions and reasoned that they mostly affected Kyle personally and damaged his character the most.