

NAVAL NONSENSE

Situation: The USS Manchester cruised into the port of Pireas (Piraeus), Greece during the Christmas season; the crew looked forward to some much needed liberty from the NATO mission upon which it embarked 4 months earlier. Prior to cruising into the port, the Captain relieved the executive officer (Exec) and appointed me as the new Exec.

The Captain gathered his department heads (senior officers) and me together to accompany him on liberty at which time the Captain purchased a statue of Hercules and Diomedes from a local vender and brought it on board, setting the 15 pound statue in the center of the wardroom. The wardroom is the sole territory of the officers, both genders, on board the ship. The statue of Hercules and Diomedes by Vincenzo Rossi remains a famous work of art depicting the two men struggling. However, the sculpture also contains nudity and to some is slightly suggestive.

The Captain made no overt mention of the statue's sexual dimension nor did anyone comment specifically on the statue in a formal manner. Some officers commented in an informal manner to include the equal opportunity officer.

When the Manchester pulled into the port of Aksaz the crew again took liberty. During the first night of liberty the statue went missing from the wardroom. I noticed the absence of the statue and informed the Captain the following morning.

The Captain assumed the theft a prank and asked for the statue back with a "no attribution" statement attached to the return. No one returned the statue and the Captain stated, "I do not expect any officer to take liberty until the statue is returned." One hour later, with no statue returned, the Captain told the department heads and me that he "trusted us" and took us on liberty letting the junior officers "stew". During liberty, the Captain expressed confusion with the lack of response and integrity from the junior officers. During this time the junior officers emailed and phoned home to parents, girlfriends, and wives bemoaning their current situation. On ship, the Captain may monitor and read all correspondence. The Captain checked the recent emails upon returning to the ship.

The next day the Captain told me to search the junior officers' rooms for the statue. As I searched, I discovered numerous instances of contraband. I chose not to report these items and also found no statue. The Captain assigned an investigating officer in order to formalize the investigation and theft of the statue. The Captain again expressed his frustration at the lack of integrity evident in his junior officers.

The Navy ranks protocol very high onboard ship. We maintain certain rituals and traditions that enable us to live with one another for months on end in confined spaces. The wardroom consistently represents a place of fellowship, training, and community. The misuse of this area serves to segregate and invite hostile thoughts and feelings to insinuate themselves into daily life onboard. How could I have better honored the age old officer code of not lying, cheating, or stealing nor tolerating those who do?

REFLECTION...

I did not act quickly nor show the personal courage needed in a senior officer. I was a new Exec and had served with this Captain for the last 4 months. Had I approached the Captain earlier and used the privilege accorded an Exec I might have forestalled this act of thievery. By acting earlier I would have also assisted the junior officers in addressing their concerns, avoided unnecessary loss of privileges, and maintained the integrity of the crew.

Role of the Major Participant in the Scenario. I was the Exec of the ship responsible for the training of junior officers and maintaining order on the ship.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: I knew various members of the wardroom felt uncomfortable with the statue's sexual undertones and the Captain's apparent disregard of those feelings. Knowing these feelings existed I could either approach the Captain or remain quiet.

Rules/Laws That Apply: Sexual discrimination policies and regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

At What Point Did You Say "Enough is Enough"? When And How Did You Take Action? Throughout this entire action I never stepped up and responded in a proactive manner. I monitored the situation; I spoke with various personnel before and after the theft; and, thought about approaching the Captain. I did not take any action to assist our Sailors until after the fact.

Conflict or Tension of the 7 Army Values? How Did You Resolve Those Conflicts? I experienced a conflict between my personal honor, loyalty to the Captain and loyalty to the junior officers, personal courage, and duty to the nation.

Consideration of Other COAs and the 2nd and 3rd Order Effects. I had multiple courses of action available to me throughout the entire event. I could have reported the feelings and thoughts of the wardroom personnel to the Captain and forestalled the theft, emails, and contraband findings. I could have worked with the EO representative to informally advise the commander about the thoughts and feelings evoked from those who disliked the display of the statue. Either of these actions could have assisted in the removal of the statue before a theft occurred and assisted in maintaining the integrity of the crew.

How Did You Get the Courage To Do the Harder Right? I did not.