

REAL PTSD

Situation: I am a former battery commander who served in an armored cavalry regiment for five years. During my time in command, I deployed with my battery to Iraq on two separate occasions. During our first deployment, we saw relatively little direct combat action with the enemy; although we were engaged by RPGs and some small arms fire a few times while operating in cities within our area of operation. However, we spent most our time out in the far western desert of Iraq, conducting area security operations. I had four Soldiers earn the Purple Heart for injuries, and I lost one Soldier in a helicopter crash. Our second deployment was significantly different. This deployment saw us serving in northern Iraq in a hotly contested area infiltrated by Al Qaeda. We were engaged in direct action almost daily and several Purple Hearts were awarded; we were lucky not to have lost any Soldiers this time around.

It's been three years since I left battery command. On several occasions since leaving, I have been contacted by past Soldiers asking for help attaining Combat Action Badges, resubmitting awards, asking for character references for medical boards; even a reference for ROTC. I have never had a problem helping these great Soldiers who deserve the best I can give, until now. I recently received an email from a past Soldier asking me to help him prove that he has Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Normally, it is an easy process; I write a memorandum for record and have it delivered to the medical institution. This time was different. This Soldier was my driver during both deployments; I know exactly what happened to him because I was there every time. SPC Young told me that the medical system was giving him a hard time and not accepting his justifications for PTSD. He stated that the memorandum I had sent earlier had not sufficiently demonstrated the level of contact with the enemy necessary to warrant PTSD. I asked him to call me. SPC Young told me that the doctor he was seeing did not believe his stories from our second deployment; particularly, an extended all day fire-fight with insurgents while conducting squadron operations. I had several Soldiers hurt that day and SPC Young helped with medical evacuation. I asked SPC Young what he needed me to do; he replied, "Sir, I need a memo from you that makes it look like I was in the fire-fight that day. If not, the doc says there is nothing wrong with me."

REFLECTION...

In the end, I went to the hospital and talked with the doctor in person. I explained the general scenario of the past three years with my unit and SPC Young and how he had seen as much combat as I had and that he was telling the truth. I did, however chastise SPC Young for asking me to breach my integrity, but I left it at that. He finally got the care he needed.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: I could not have been in a more difficult position. I knew SPC Young was telling the truth about his condition. Why the doctor did not believe him was beyond me. SPC Young also had a family of four and was about to be discharged from the Army for medical reasons not related to PTSD and with only a 10% disability. Did I breach my integrity to help this young Soldier, or should I have allowed the system to fail him?

Rules/Laws that apply: UCMJ, medical protocol

At what point did you say that "enough was enough"? When and how did you take action? After going back and forth through email with SPC Young, I got frustrated at the lack of care he was given and went to the hospital to meet with the doctor.

Conflict or Tension of the Seven Army Values? How did you resolve those conflicts? I wanted to ensure SPC Young was taken care of, but I also did not want to breach any medical protocol. Going to the hospital was risky and I could have gotten in trouble for it; the doctor was quick to point that out to me.

Consideration of others COAs and the 2nd or 3rd order affects: SPC Young was hurt in a non-combat related accident, which crushed his leg. He was going to receive disability for that incident. If I had embellished my memorandum, it could have later been tracked to me and I might have paid the price with my career. If I had done nothing, SPC Young would have been discharged with only 10% disability for his leg injury.

How did you recognize unethical behavior? I knew it was difficult for SPC Young to ask me to lie. We had spent considerable time together over two deployments and had seen a lot together. The mere fact that he asked me to lie was obviously unethical.

How did you get the courage to do the harder right? I took risk and challenged the doctor; I am not sure if I would have changed the memorandum if that did not work. This Soldier deserved to be taken care of for his service.