

# REALLY BAD TIMING

**Situation:** I was a Company Commander at a TRADOC installation where my unit shared a building with a United States Marine Corps (USMC) detachment. The two units got along well, but there was not much interaction between them: we stuck to ourselves. I considered myself to be extremely lucky; I had great command going, my First Sergeant was what every commander looked for in a leader. He was also a friend from a previous duty station, was a geographical bachelor, and I knew his wife and family well.

After commanding the company for about six months, one of the USMC Non-Commissioned Officers stopped by to see me. He was well-rehearsed in what he had to say, and I could see he was nervous and upset. After a few tense moments, he informed me that his wife and my First Sergeant were having an affair.

As mentioned earlier, my First Sergeant and I were pretty close. He had 29 years of service and was planning on retiring to return to his family in about six months; he was going on terminal leave very shortly. I had no idea what to do. I knew I needed time to decide so I asked the USMC Staff Sergeant for 24 hours and immediately called in my First Sergeant to get his take. When I asked him about the affair, he denied it and reminded me that his wife was coming to visit soon and that this type of news would be very difficult. I had no idea who to believe. I called my Battalion commander for advice but got very little help from him. He reinforced what I already knew; adultery is very hard to prove, and this type of investigation could ruin an otherwise exemplary 29-year service record. I was faced with two questions: "Who should I believe?" and "What role does my friendship with my First Sergeant play in my decision process?"

## REFLECTION...

This was a really tough decision for me. A 15-6 had to be conducted, and I remained worried that the relationship I had built with my First Sergeant would be ruined. I was also concerned the effects this type of incident could have on unit morale. We were TRADOC unit and because the vast majority of my unit were young, initial-entry Soldiers, rumor control was always something that had to be managed. In the end we were able to keep the investigation secret from most of the Soldiers and Marines in both of the units. The results were "inconclusive" but there was certainly evidence pointing to an improper relationship. My First Sergeant retired shortly thereafter. I knew that adultery is almost impossible to prove and also knew that initiating this investigation, regardless of the outcome, could have damaged my First Sergeant's career, his relationship with his family, our command relationship, the unit, etc., I do not, however, regret my decision. Not because of the result of the investigation, but because of the manner in which we managed the situation, and the fact that the investigation was the right thing to do, I honestly think it made me a better leader.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: I had several choices: 1. Do nothing and protect my First Sergeant and my company's reputation, 2. Initiate a 15-6 investigation and let the cards fall where they will, or 3. Stall long enough to let my First Sergeant go on terminal leave.

Rules/Laws that Apply: Adultery is prohibited under Article 84 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

When and How Did You Take Action: After taking the weekend to think about the right course of action to take, I decided to initiate the 15-6 investigation. Much to my surprise, my First Sergeant took it very well; he agreed that it had to be done.

Conflict or Tension of the 7 Army Values? How Did You Resolve Those Conflicts: The conflict that I dealt with the most was that between Loyalty and Duty. I knew all along that needed to do something, but I also deeply wanted to protect the First Sergeant and the company.

Consideration of Other COAs and the 2nd and 3rd Order Affects: It would have been easier to take either the first or third course of action. I probably could have met with the USMC detachment commander and made this whole thing go away. I could have played along slowly enough to see if it would disappear; again I did not know who to believe. My First Sergeant was not afraid to make on-the-spot corrections and was generally not concerned with making friends; my first reaction to all of this was this could be the result of retribution for something else. Had I decided to stall or sweep this under the rug, I do not think the lasting effects would be much different than the actual outcome. My Battalion Commander was not too concerned and early on, all parties involved knew we had to keep this from the Soldiers.

How Did You Get the Courage To Do the Harder Right? For me this was not a "harder right" decision this was a right or wrong decision. When I really thought about what I had to do, I asked myself "what would you do if the person accused was not your friend?"