



"Right Is Always Right"

"In the most difficult of situations, make decisions based on your sense of honor, not emotion, and it will not fail you. Your soldiers and subordinates will respect you more for it."

- Special Agent Derek Dela-Cruz, Diplomatic Security Service, U.S. Department of State

(This scenario was submitted by a Special Forces officer who served as an SF company commander during Operation Enduring Freedom.)

We had been heavily engaged, losing two of our Afghan militia on the opening of the ambush. I was able to recover my downed Afghans by providing suppressive small arms fire and by throwing grenades while two of my Special Forces (SF) guys rushed in, under fire, and grabbed the downed men, dragging them back to cover. Unfortunately, they had both been killed outright, taking multiple head and chest hits from PK machine guns and AK-47s. As the close-quarters fight continued, I was able to withdraw my troops to within about 250 meters of the compound we had been entering. As a result of small-arms, grenade, and RPG-7 fire, I had four wounded U.S. infantrymen, one severely wounded SF soldier, and two dead militia. My Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) was able to obtain close air support (CAS), and the fight continued over the course of the next 5 hours. The foreign Al Qaeda (AQ) fighters were well placed and prepared; however, the CAS was able to steadily degrade their ability to fight. After there appeared to be no more resistance, I believed that the air support had destroyed the enemy force, so I gave the order for a final assault on the compound. The SF and Infantry force closed on and entered the rubble of what was left of the compound. As they did so, one surviving Al Qaeda terrorist, badly wounded, threw a hand grenade that seriously wounded SFC Spear, one of my SF operators, a piece of the shrapnel penetrating his skull and entering his brain. The terrorist was immediately shot twice, and he went down.

SF medics worked hard on SFC Spear, but it was clear that the wound was probably going to be fatal. Once they had done the best that they could for SFC Spear, the SF operators began to search the dead AQ who were being guarded by the infantrymen. It was discovered that the terrorist who threw the grenade was still alive, though barely. The senior SF NCO, one of my guys, came to me and said that SFC Spear was in bad shape and that the terrorist who threw the grenade was barely alive and was not going to make it. He then asked what I wanted him to do.

I knew what he was actually asking; he was asking if they could let the terrorist die. This was the guy who had thrown the grenade and had badly wounded SFC Spear – mortally as it later turned out. He also had participated in the same firefight that had wounded five other soldiers, including one SF soldier who would

later lose his right eye as a result. Emotions were running high. They didn't want to treat this guy; they wanted him to die.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER...

1. This incident occurred shortly after September 11, 2001. There was still a great deal of lingering anger and resentment against the Taliban, particularly by those soldiers in units that had suffered several combat casualties. What should this SF commander have done?
2. What existing laws apply to this situation?
3. What would be the consequences to treating – and not treating – this man?
4. Would it have been dishonorable to simply have allowed the enemy to die? Explain your answer.
5. As an American Soldier, how does this incident make you feel?
6. Discuss this vignette from a US public relations point of view.
7. Discuss this vignette from an Afghan public relations point of view.
8. Discuss this vignette from a Coalition public relations point of view.

THE REST OF THE STORY

There was not a moment's hesitation in my answer. Right is always right, no matter what the situation. I told the NCO to "treat him." He looked me in the eye for a second, then replied, "Yes, sir." He then ensured that it happened. In fact, the terrorist survived and is in Guantanamo today. He is a Yemeni with a Canadian passport, as he was raised in Canada.

Right has its own reward, so no other reward was necessary for having done the right thing. However, in this case, the terrorist recovered from his wounds and eventually succumbed to interrogation which provided significant information that led to the destruction of two AQ cells in the United States and Canada. His father, a high AQ leader, was later killed in Pakistan, and his two brothers were killed by U.S. troops in Pakistan and Afghanistan.