

SAMARRA'S SNIPER SON

Situation: The city raged with automatic rifle fires, combat aviation, and various grenades. The coalition assault on the mosque continued with coalition snipers on rooftops engaged in a counter-sniper fight. Beneath me, Soldiers from my unit continued their assault. I had just killed the enemy sniper on a rooftop across from me who had pinned down coalition troops and stopped them from advancing on their target, the mosque. Immediately after killing the enemy sniper, I scattered the other enemy forces on the rooftop with effective fire from my weapon and enabled the pinned-down coalition troops to continue the assault. I continued to observe the rooftop where the dead sniper lay on his weapon, as well as monitored the movement of our troops on the ground. During the scan, I observed the door open at the rooftop upon which the dead sniper lay. I saw an adult within the doorway reach behind him and motion a person forward. I readied my weapon expecting some type of enemy movement. As the adult moved back into the building I saw him send a child of approximately 10 years out to retrieve the sniper weapon. The child scrambled toward the weapon, looked around, grabbed the weapon, and began his movement back to the rooftop door. I tightened my finger on the trigger of my sniper rifle as I sighted on the child moving toward the weapon. I knew the enemy must not get that sniper weapon into hands that would use it effectively against our Soldiers.

Americans elevate women and children within our society. We value them and attempt to protect them. As I observed the child and the actions of the adult in the stairwell I had to decide quickly on the action to take. Do I pull the trigger and kill this child or allow him to assist the enemy in potentially killing one of our Soldiers with the sniper weapon?

REFLECTION...

Sniper training requires a great mental acuity and maturity. I trained my entire career to kill at a distance the obvious enemy presented to me. As that child moved onto the rooftop and advanced on the weapon, I had to ask myself questions I never thought I would ask. At what point does the child in war become the combatant and my enemy? How do you and I prepare for this type engagement? How do you and I prepare our Soldiers to face this type of engagement? I had the choice to make. I could not call anyone for "approval" or assistance. The questions shot through my mind as I weighed my own values. It seemed to take forever yet only about 30 seconds passed from the child departing the doorway and returning to it. I opted to allow the child to take the sniper weapon into the waiting hands of another insurgent.

Role of the Major Participant in the Scenario: I was a senior sniper within my unit responsible for counter-sniper operations and over-watch of the Soldiers' movements.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: The U. S. maintains a high value of human life, particularly that of women and children. This value translates into wars in which the United States participates. I had a clear sight picture on the child. Should I take the shot?

Rules/Laws that Apply: Rules of Engagement and Escalation of Force SOPs.

At What Point Did You Say "Enough is Enough"? When And How Did You Take Action? I could not shoot the child.

Conflict or Tension of the 7 Army Values? How Did You Resolve Those Conflicts? I experienced moments of agony as I balanced the Army values of loyalty and duty to my country and unit with the value of respect for women and children instilled in me by my parents and heritage. I chose the value of women and children knowing to kill the child would create emotions within me that would have been counterproductive to the unit.

Consideration of Other COAs and the 2nd and 3rd Order Effects. I knew I could take the shot and kill the child with no effort. I also knew I would have difficulty living with myself should I do it. A 2nd order effect would be the loss of my rifle to the fight should I choose not to engage again because of guilt and shame.

How do you Process or Judge this was an Ethical Dilemma? This presented a dilemma because I had to balance positive values within myself: the values of loyalty/duty and personal integrity.

How did you get the Courage to do the Harder Right? I have performed as a sniper for over 15 years. I knew that in order for me to remain an efficient and effective Soldier for the unit, I must choose the course of action that kept me in the fight.