

# THE INSURGENT "SALT LICK"

**Situation:** I was a new sniper-qualified scout serving in an armored battalion on operations in Iraq; I had just pinned on Specialist rank. Another scout and I were paired up and given pretty good missions to provide over-head cover for our company in a pretty dangerous part of western Baghdad. I stopped counting the number of "bad guys" I had shot during this deployment after they took out four of our guys during a night raid. After that night, I became far more concerned about protecting my guys; they called me the "Angel."

During the mid-stretch of our deployment, my battalion was having considerable difficulty conducting counter-sniper operations against an insurgent sniper who had killed six Soldiers in two weeks. I could not get this guy. We had heard that the Division was sending in a veteran sniper team to get the insurgent sniper. To my surprise, the team arrived and was assigned to me for orientation into the company area of operations. I was pumped; I was going to learn from the best sniper in the Division. One night during our initial "right seat ride" the new team leader put out a fake camera on a light pole in an area we had received sniper fire from. He said it was to draw out the sniper; to give away his position. I fully expected the insurgent sniper to shoot at the camera, but that is not what happened. Later that night, a man approached the light pole and shot at the camera with an AK-47: our new team leader killed him with one shot to the head. It surprised me, because I was not sure if that was against the rules of engagement, but I let it go; he had an AK-47 after all. The next night, the new sniper team leader dropped a second man for the same infraction. I could not believe how dumb these insurgents were. Early the next morning he let me take down another man. By the end of the week we had killed seven insurgents shooting at the camera. With each one, I felt more and more wrong about what we were doing. Finally, the team leader killed a boy who could not have been more than sixteen or seventeen, but this time he was only throwing rocks at the camera. After the last shooting, I asked the team leader if it was legal to shoot someone if I wasn't in harm's way or if he was not attacking civilians or coalition forces. He replied, "Would you rather they kill one of your brothers?" I responded with, "Hell no! But, this seems wrong; they're not even shooting at us." He grabbed my throat and said, "We are at war son; you're a killer... You kill bad guys... got it? Besides, if you tell, you'll go down with me." What was I supposed to do?

## REFLECTION...

I do not regret reporting the incident. We never got the insurgent sniper and he killed four more of our guys. I was not taken off the line only because I came clean and reported the killing. Specific guidance came down from higher about ROE and sniper team engagements. I do not know what happened to the veteran sniper, he was gone within a few days of me reporting our actions. I question myself every day about what happened. Why did not I do something sooner?

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: Do I report what the other sniper and I had been doing knowing that I would probably get into trouble.

Rules/Laws That Apply: Rules of Engagement, UCMJ, Laws of Land Warfare, Geneva Convention

At What Point Did You Say "Enough is Enough"? When And How Did You Take Action? After two weeks we had not killed the insurgent sniper, and he had killed four more of our Soldiers. I was disillusioned and searching for answers. I could not continue to do this and live with myself.

Conflict or Tension of the 7 Army Values? How Did You Resolve Those Conflicts? I was pretty sure, but not certain, it was against the ROE to kill someone who was not harming or attempting to harm civilians or coalition forces. However, I also wanted to get the sniper that was killing our guys. I was torn between loyalty to my brothers and the personal courage to say something. I was also scared, because the new team leader was a Sergeant First Class while I was only a Specialist. Finally, I went to my CO and told him what had happened.

Consideration of Other COAs and the 2nd and 3rd Order Effects: I knew that if I told on the new sniper team leader, we would probably get in to serious trouble. But, if I did not, he would continue killing people, regardless of whether they were insurgents or not. I was also an accomplice. I was risking my own career in the Army I loved.

How did you recognize unethical behavior? You know when something is wrong; you can feel it in your gut. None of those men were shooting at anybody; just the camera.

How did you process or judge this was an ethical dilemma? As soon as I realized that I was also involved and the outcome would directly impact my life.

How did you get the courage to do the harder right? I could not live with myself knowing that someone may have been killed illegally and I did nothing about it. What if the men were just protecting their privacy; maybe be they thought the cameras could see inside their homes.