

Military Leaders' Obligation to Justify Killing in War

Major Peter Kilner, U.S. Army

During the nation's worst conflicts, soldiers have wrestled with the morality of killing during combat. Pete Kilner argues that leaders have a responsibility to train combat soldiers to kill during combat, but leaders also have an obligation to explain the moral justification for such killing. He further argues that leaders must explain the morality of killing so soldiers can live with themselves in the years after combat.

THE METHODS that the military currently uses to train and execute combat operations enable soldiers to kill the enemy, but they leave soldiers liable to postcombat psychological trauma caused by guilt. This is a leadership issue. Combat training should be augmented by explaining to soldiers the moral justification for killing in combat to reduce postcombat guilt. Soldiers deserve to understand whom they can kill morally and why those actions are indeed moral.

Military leaders are charged with two primary tasks—to train and lead units to fight effectively in combat in accordance with the war convention and to care for the soldiers they command. Military professionals generally hold these two tasks to be complementary, accepting Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's statement that the best form of welfare for troops is first-class training.

American military leaders have been very successful in creating combat-effective units. In response to the U.S. War Department's research indicating that less than half of World War II riflemen fired their weapons at the enemy in combat, the military instituted training techniques. These techniques—fire commands, battle drills, and realistic

marksmanship ranges—resulted in much-improved combat firing rates. During the Vietnam war, similar research reveals combat firing rates of 90 percent.¹ Unfortunately, this improved combat effectiveness has come at a cost to soldiers' welfare. The training techniques leaders have employed to generate the advances in combat firing rates have resulted in increased rates of postcombat psychological trauma among combat veterans.

Training that drills soldiers on how to kill without explaining to them why it is morally permissible to kill is harmful to them, yet that is currently the norm. Modern combat training conditions soldiers to act reflexively to stimuli, such as fire commands, enemy contact, or the sudden appearance of a "target," that maximizes soldiers' lethality, but it does so by bypassing their moral autonomy. Soldiers are conditioned to act without considering the moral repercussions of their actions; they kill without making the conscious decision to do so. In and of itself, such training is appropriate and morally permissible. Battles are won by killing the enemy, so military leaders should strive to produce the most efficient killers. The problem, however, is that soldiers who kill reflexively in combat will likely one

day reconsider their actions reflectively. If they are unable to justify to themselves that they killed another human being, they will likely, and understandably, suffer enormous guilt. This guilt manifests itself as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and it has damaged the lives of thousands of men who performed their duty in combat.²

This article argues that military leaders' important and legitimate role—transforming civilians into combat soldiers who kill to defend their country—carries with it the obligation to help soldiers cope with the moral repercussions of their actions. If military leaders train soldiers to kill others in combat, they should also educate soldiers to live with themselves in the years after combat. Military leaders should augment current training by morally justifying killing in combat to soldiers.³ This education would improve the U.S. Army's mission effectiveness.

Why Soldiers Deserve a Moral Justification for Killing

Military leaders should be concerned with morally justifying killing in combat; it stems from their duty to care for their troops. Soldiers are human beings who naturally feel it is morally wrong to kill other human beings. As a result, without training that overcomes that moral aversion, most soldiers in combat would choose not to kill the enemy. Military leaders enable soldiers to kill by using training techniques, such as popup marksmanship ranges, fire commands, and battle drills, that emphasize reflexive rather than reflective action. Such techniques create a bypass around an individual's normal moral decisionmaking process so that soldiers act without deciding to do so. While these techniques have greatly increased combat effectiveness, they have exacted a psychological cost on many soldiers.

Many soldiers who have killed in combat—yet are unable to justify to themselves what they did—suffer from PTSD. Finally, proactive leadership can solve this problem. Military leaders do not need to abandon proven training techniques. What they must do, however, is to prepare their soldiers' consciences for postbattle reflections. Leaders must help soldiers understand that what they learn to do reflexively would be the same choice they would have made reflectively because it is the morally right choice. They must also enable soldiers to make morally justified decisions in morally ambiguous circumstances. By doing so, military leaders can empower their soldiers to live with clear consciences after they have justifiably killed for their country.

Most soldiers do not want to kill. Soldiers are people. People are taught from their earliest days that it is wrong to kill another human being. "Thou

shalt not murder" is arguably the closest thing there is to a universally accepted moral norm. Yet, military leaders expect young soldiers to ignore

Soldiers are conditioned to act without considering the moral repercussions of their actions; they kill without making the conscious decision to do so. . . . The problem, however, is that soldiers who kill reflexively in combat will likely one day reconsider their actions reflectively. If they are unable to justify to themselves that they killed another human being, they will likely, and understandably, suffer enormous guilt.

well-learned moral codes and to kill whenever ordered to do so. Leaders should know better. Research conducted on U.S. soldiers in World War II suggests that most infantry soldiers chose not to engage the enemy, primarily for moral reasons.

In *Men Against Fire*, Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall, the official historian of the Central Pacific and European theaters of operations, describes the problem: "[The American soldier] is what his home, his religion, his schooling, and the moral code and ideals of his society have made him. The Army cannot unmake him. It must reckon with the fact that he comes from a civilization in which aggression, connected with the taking of life, is prohibited and unacceptable. The teaching and ideals of that civilization are against killing, against taking advantage. The fear of aggression has been expressed to him so strongly and absorbed by him so deeply and pervadingly—practically with his mother's milk—that it is part of a normal man's emotional makeup. This is his great handicap when he enters combat. It stays his finger even though he is hardly conscious that it is a constraint upon him."⁴

Marshall claims that his extensive postcombat interviews with combat soldiers reveal that most of them were unable to overcome their moral reservations about killing.⁵ He asserts that less than 25 percent of the riflemen in combat fired their weapons, and "that fear of killing, rather than fear of being killed, was the most common cause of battle failure."⁶ Many subsequent researchers criticize Marshall's research methods and dispute his precise claim, yet all serious students of World War II do recognize that a significant number of World War II soldiers were nonfirers.⁷

In *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, the authoritative study of World War II soldiers, Samuel Stouffer and his associates do not directly address firing ratios, but they do make this

understated observation about soldiers' moral reservations about killing: "Combat required a sharp break with many moral prescriptions of peacetime society. As easy as it seems to be for men to kill when their immediate group sanctions it, and as ambivalent as normal people often are about killing, it is still true that to kill another human being requires of most men from our culture an effort to overcome an initial moral repugnance. Under the requirements of the situation, men in combat were

Marshall claims that his extensive postcombat interviews with combat soldiers reveal that most of them were unable to overcome their moral reservations about killing. He asserts that less than 25 percent of the riflemen in combat fired their weapons. . . . Many subsequent researchers criticize Marshall's research methods and dispute his precise claim, yet all serious students of World War II do recognize that a significant number of World War II soldiers were nonfirers.

careful to hide this feeling, and it was not a subject of much discussion among soldiers. Killing is the business of the combat soldier, and if he is to function at all he must accept its necessity. Yet the acceptance of killing did not prevent the ambivalence revealed by such comments as that of a veteran rifleman who said, 'I'll tell you a man sure feels funny inside the first time he squeezes down on a Kraut.'"⁸

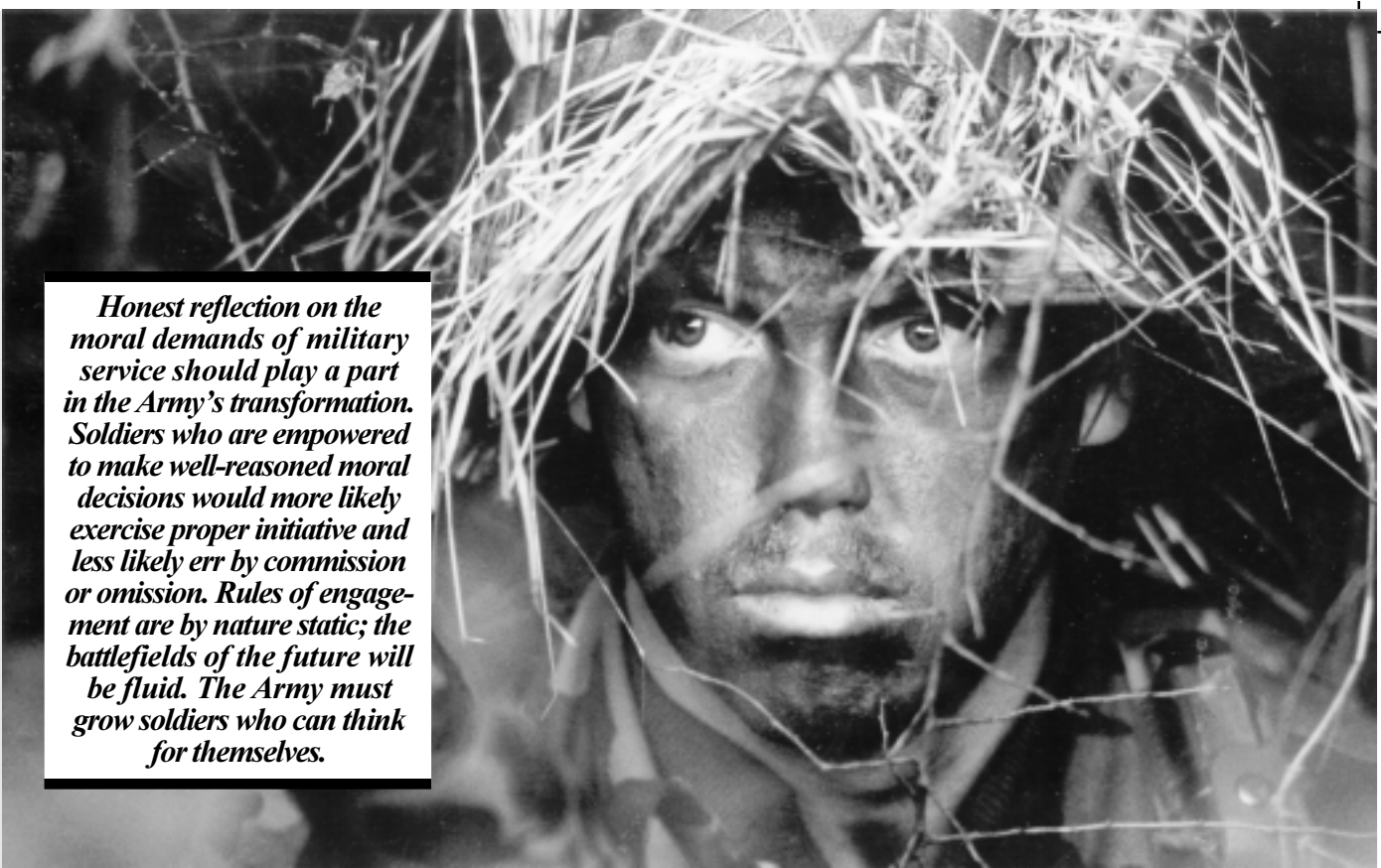
Lest we think that people are somehow fundamentally different today than they were during World War II, consider the experience of this U.S. Army officer during the Gulf war: "Well, later that evening, the battalion that I was supporting (as Engineers) hit four T-72s and a multitude of dismounts in trenches. The action lasted approximately 1/2 hour. Take note of this. The only soldiers who fired during that entire period were the tankers. They fired both main gun and coax. Not even [the engineer unit's] .50 cal's engaged the enemy. I have since often wondered what it would take to get a U.S. soldier to fire in combat. Although we had rounds flying by our heads, we failed to engage the enemy. I think it merits mentioning that the main gun rounds were fired using thermal sights and you know how a coax works [again, thermal sights]. Did the gunner ever really see the people he was shooting at? Why didn't my soldiers fire? Did they not see enemy whom they could engage? I doubt that. I could see them from my track without the use of NVGs [night-vision goggles]. Were we confident that the

tanks could take out all resistance? A possibility, but shouldn't we have returned fire when fired upon? Hard to say what went through our minds. I'm not so sure that I would have the courage to fire a round if I knew that it was going to result in the death of another human being. Sure, I can fire on a range and score expert. I can fire a round blindly. Then I can justify to myself that I wasn't responsible for any deaths that occurred. I would say that long distance killing is easier than facing an enemy face to face. They say that artillery is the King of Battle. No doubt considering that they don't actually see who they are killing."⁹

While some may find the idea of military professionals being unwilling to kill during battle a bit embarrassing, we should instead think of it as encouraging. We want soldiers who choose to do what is morally right, who kill enemy combatants yet protect all noncombatants, who reintegrate into civil society after a war. What military leaders have to do, then, is to explain to their soldiers why what they expect them to do is morally right.

Military leaders train soldiers to kill reflexively. Despite this Gulf war platoon's unwillingness to fire in combat, the military has made great strides in improving its soldiers' firing rates since World War II.¹⁰ Whether or not Marshall's research was rigorous, the Army responded to it as if it were. Marshall's claim about nonfiring rates lifted the taboo surrounding the issue, and the Army took action to increase firing rates. By adopting Marshall's recommendations and incorporating lessons from psychological research, the American military improved its riflemen's firing rates to 55 percent during the Korean war and to 90 percent during the Vietnam war.¹¹

Marshall notes that "at the vital moment, [the rifleman] becomes a conscientious objector."¹² To help soldiers overcome their aversion to killing, Marshall offers several recommendations, two of which are that military leaders give fire commands and that they train on more realistic marksmanship ranges.¹³ Marshall also notes that soldiers who otherwise would not fire their weapons did so when their officers were watching them and when they fired crew-served weapons.¹⁴ He therefore recommends that junior leaders give specific firing orders to their troops.¹⁵ Subsequent civilian research on obedience and aggression demonstrates that people are much more capable of aggression when ordered by an authority figure.¹⁶ As the military instituted the doctrinal use of fire commands down to squad level, firing rates increased. In fact, in a 1973 study, Vietnam war combat veterans listed "being told to fire" as the most critical factor in making them fire, even more important than "being fired upon."¹⁷



Honest reflection on the moral demands of military service should play a part in the Army's transformation. Soldiers who are empowered to make well-reasoned moral decisions would more likely exercise proper initiative and less likely err by commission or omission. Rules of engagement are by nature static; the battlefields of the future will be fluid. The Army must grow soldiers who can think for themselves.

Marshall further notes that soldiers have great difficulty shooting at another human being, so he recommends that they be trained to fire at locations rather than at persons: "We need to free the rifleman's mind with respect to the nature of targets. . . . The proper educating of group fire requires constant insistence on the principle of spontaneous action developing out of a fresh and unexpected situation."¹⁸

The modern-day transitional (popup-target) marksmanship ranges follow Marshall's advice. They enable soldiers to overcome their aversion to killing by conditioning them to act spontaneously to conditions that are combat-like, yet morally benign. In his book, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, psychologist Dave Grossman explains the process: "What is being taught in this environment is the ability to shoot reflexively and instantly and a precise mimicry of the act of killing on the modern battlefield. In behavioral terms, the man shape popping up [E-type silhouette] in the soldier's field of fire is the 'conditioned stimulus,' the immediate engaging of the target is the 'target behavior.' 'Positive reinforcement' is given in the form of immediate feedback when the target drops if it is hit. In the form of 'token economy' these hits are then exchanged for marksmanship badges that usually have some form of privilege or reward (praise, public recognition, three-day passes, and so on) associated with them."¹⁹

This conditioning, training on popup marksmanship ranges, enables soldiers to kill on the battlefield, and the 1993 battle at Mogadishu provides evidence

of that. In that 17-hour fight, a few hundred soldiers from Task Force Ranger and the 10th Mountain Division battled thousands of Somalis in fierce, urban combat. The United States suffered only 19 dead while they killed an estimated 300 to 1,000 Somalis. They achieved this extraordinary casualty ratio by being well trained. Based on extensive interviews with the soldiers involved, journalist Mark Bowden wrote a best-selling account of the battle, *Black Hawk Down*, which states: "[Ranger Sergeant Scott] Galentine just pointed his M16 at someone down the street, aimed at center mass, and squeezed off rounds. The man would drop. Just like target practice, only cooler."²⁰

Bowden continues: "[Specialist John] Waddell shot the man. In books and movies when a soldier shot a man for the first time he went through a moment of soul searching. He didn't give it a second thought. He just reacted."²¹ During an interview with *CNN/Frontline*, Ranger Private First Class Jason Moore described his willingness to kill: "I just started picking them out as they were running across the intersection two blocks away, and it was weird because it was so much easier than you would think. You hear all these stories about 'the first time you kill somebody is very hard.' And it was so much like basic training, they were just targets out there, and I don't know if it was the training that we had ingrained in us, but it seemed to me it was just like a moving target range, and you could just hit the target and watch it fall and hit the target and watch it fall, and it wasn't real. They were far enough away so that you didn't see, or I didn't see, all the guts

and the gore and things like that, but you would just see this target running across in your sight picture, you pull the trigger and the target would fall, so it was a lot easier then than it is now, as far as that goes.”²²

Clearly, modern military leaders are doing half their duty—they are training soldiers to fight effectively on the battlefield. They are doing so using techniques that allow soldiers to fire their weapons at the enemy despite the natural moral reservations

We want soldiers who choose to do what is morally right, who kill enemy combatants yet protect all noncombatants, who reintegrate into civil society after a war. What military leaders have to do, then, is to explain to their soldiers why what they expect them to do is morally right.

they may harbor. By conditioning combat soldiers to reflexively engage targets and giving them leaders who issue fire commands, military leaders greatly reduce moral deliberation for soldiers in combat.

At one level, this training accomplishes both aspects of military leaders’ duty—it accomplishes the mission, and it takes care of soldiers by keeping them alive. At a deeper level, however, this approach is inadequate. It makes soldiers able to kill even if they are not willing to kill. Conditioning soldiers to reflexively engage targets prepares them to deal with the enemy, but it does not prepare them to deal with their own consciences.

Reflexive killing training may be harmful. Training soldiers to kill efficiently is good for them because it helps them survive on the battlefield. However, training soldiers to kill without explaining to them why it is morally permissible to kill in combat is harmful because it can lead to psychological trauma. When soldiers kill reflexively—when military training has effectively undermined their moral autonomy—they morally deliberate their actions only after the fact. If they are unable to justify what they have done, they often suffer guilt and psychological trauma.

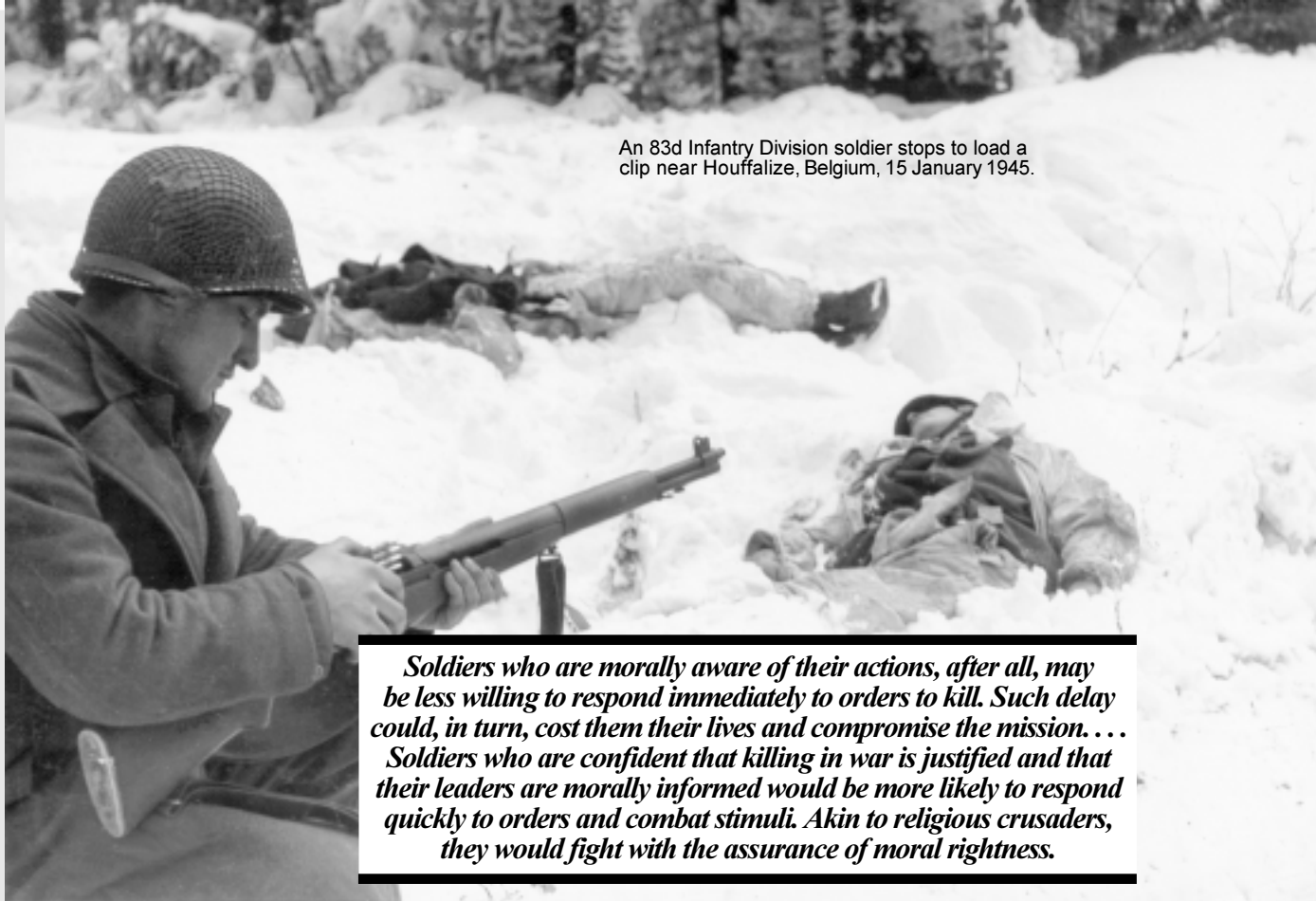
Many combat soldiers experience feelings of guilt in the months and years following their wartime actions. The following are reflections from combat veterans who performed their wartime duties as their leaders trained them to do. A young soldier who fought in Somalia shares his experience: “Well, that day, I had absolutely no ethical or moral problems with pulling the trigger and taking out as many people as I could. And being back here, years later, I think that they had wives, children, mothers, sons,

just like I have a mother and a dog, and all these things. Our government sent us there to do a mission, and I’m sure somebody was paying him to do a mission. [I just] reali[zed] that he was another human being, just like I am. And so that’s hard to deal with, but that day it was too easy. That upsets me more than anything else, how easy it was to pull the trigger over and over again. . . . It took a long time to wear off, a real long time, because we were still there for a little while, and then when we came back you were still sort of riding the waves of what happened. And I know for me, the hardest thing to live with is knowing that you took another human life, for no other reason than your government told you to. That’s hard. I mean, I’m sure it’s been said before but here I would have [gone] to jail for exactly what I did over there and got medals for.”²³

At least one senior enlisted soldier who killed during the Gulf war may have found his actions to be too much to live with. An officer in his unit describes the situation: “Let me give you the results of one person who did kill. We will call him 1SG [First Sergeant] Doe. He was a 12B, combat engineer first sergeant. Known as hard charging and didn’t put up with much bullshit. While in Desert Storm, he was assigned to my unit. He volunteered for a bunker-searching mission. Upon coming to one particular bunker, he heard movement inside. Without bothering to clear the bunker, he yelled at the people inside to come out. When they failed to respond, 1SG Doe fired three rounds from his .45 pistol into the bunker. The noises ceased. They then entered the bunker. 1SG Doe seemed okay with the fact that he had killed two Iraqis at the time. It was a very disturbing experience for everyone else. Note this. He is now [1999] at the psychiatric ward at Walter Reed [Army Medical Center]. The pressures of his actions during Desert Storm and Somalia led him to two suicide attempts in the past few months. He is a great guy and I consider him a good friend. However, I believe that in the heat of battle he did something contrary to his (and possibly human) nature. I don’t believe that there really is a moral justification to killing in combat.”²⁴

In *On Killing*, Grossman writes about a soldier who struggles to justify his combat actions. Ray, a veteran of close combat in the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama, told [Grossman] of a recurring dream in which he would talk with the young Panamanian soldier he had killed in close combat. “Why did you kill me?” asked the soldier each time. And in his dreams Ray would attempt to explain to his victim, but in reality he was explaining and rationalizing the act of killing to himself: “Well, if you were in my place, wouldn’t you have done the same? . . . It was either you or us.”²⁵

An 83d Infantry Division soldier stops to load a clip near Houffalize, Belgium, 15 January 1945.



Soldiers who are morally aware of their actions, after all, may be less willing to respond immediately to orders to kill. Such delay could, in turn, cost them their lives and compromise the mission. . . . Soldiers who are confident that killing in war is justified and that their leaders are morally informed would be more likely to respond quickly to orders and combat stimuli. Akin to religious crusaders, they would fight with the assurance of moral rightness.

These soldiers were good soldiers who effectively killed the enemy when their nation and its leaders asked them to do so, only to later suffer guilt. Their experiences are not exceptional. In fact, one senior noncommissioned officer who fought in the battle at Mogadishu commented that many of the veterans of Mogadishu suffer from PTSD. The senior noncommissioned officer explains, "I have come to terms with what I did. I talked to my priest. I have religious faith and a supportive family. The guys that don't have these [tools] are pretty torn up."²⁶ The psychological toll of the battle fell most heavily on the junior enlisted Rangers. Nearly all of them left the military at the first opportunity, and at least one committed suicide.²⁷

This is a leadership issue. It is not surprising that soldiers, such as 1SG Doe, suffer debilitating guilt over killing in combat when even their own leaders believe that their actions were unjustified. Soldiers who perform their duty in combat deserve better from their leaders. If killing in combat was not morally justified, then the military profession would be an evil one. Because, however, at least some killing in war is morally justifiable, military leaders must understand that justification—train soldiers to kill only when justified, and explain to soldiers why it is justified. Military leaders who train soldiers to kill in combat without justifying that killing are treating their soldiers as commodities, not as persons. A values-based Army can and must do better than that.

Refuting a Concern About Offering a Moral Argument

Teaching soldiers the morality of killing would actually harm them by fostering hesitancy on the battlefield. Soldiers who are morally aware of their actions, after all, may be less willing to respond immediately to orders to kill. Such delay could, in turn, cost them their lives and compromise the mission. In fact, the opposite is more likely true. Soldiers who are confident that killing in war is justified and that their leaders are morally informed would be more likely to respond quickly to orders and combat stimuli. Akin to religious crusaders, they would fight with the assurance of moral rightness. Moreover, warfare is becoming increasingly decentralized and ambiguous, so military leaders must move beyond reflexive training. The U.S. Army requires soldiers to make life-or-death decisions in the absence of fire commands or obvious stimuli. In operations other than war, soldiers must make judgment calls that cannot be trained in the traditional sense. To maximize military effectiveness, leaders must empower soldiers to make morally informed decisions about when and whom to kill.

The words of an infantry battalion commander during Operation Just Cause in Panama should serve as a wakeup call to improve the moral element of combat training. He recognized that the nature of the battlefield—urban, full of civilians, with enemy soldiers of uncertain loyalties—could lead to morally ambiguous situations, and he gave these final

instructions to his combat troops before launching an attack: "Let me tell you the bottom line on our rules of engagement, your conscience . . . your moral conscience is going to carry it. I don't want you shot; I don't want your buddies shot . . . you don't have time to call me to clear fires. Make your

One senior noncommissioned officer who fought in the battle at Mogadishu commented that many of the veterans of Mogadishu suffer from PTSD. The senior noncommissioned officer explains, "I have come to terms with what I did. I talked to my priest. I have religious faith and a supportive family. The guys that don't have these [tools] are pretty torn up." The psychological toll of the battle fell most heavily on the junior enlisted Rangers.

best call."²⁸ That was an enormous burden to place on soldiers whose "moral consciences" had not been prepared for the moral complexities of combat. Soldiers who cannot morally justify killing would be more likely to hesitate on the modern, low-intensity, make-your-best-call battlefield.

Justified killing in self-defense. The moral justification for killing in combat is based on elements that provide legal and moral justification for killing in self-defense in civilian circumstances.²⁹ This justification presumes a rights-based morality that is consistent with Judeo-Christian and Kantian moral thought.

It is morally permissible to kill another person under certain conditions: that another person has consciously decided to threaten your life or liberty, that that person is imminently executing that threat, and that you have no other reasonable way to avoid the threat.³⁰ Moreover, it is morally obligatory to use the force necessary to protect an innocent person from such an attacker as long as you have the means to do so, especially when you have volunteered to protect that person. For example, if a person intentionally attacks you with a lethal weapon and you have no reasonable way to escape, you are justified in using lethal force to protect yourself. Likewise, if you are a police officer, you are morally obligated to use force to defend an innocent person's life against an attacker.

All four of these conditions—a conscious choice, a threat to human life or a comparable value, an imminent threat, and no lifesaving option—must be met to ensure that the killing is morally justified by self-defense. For example, if the attacker were a 2-year-old child or a sleepwalker, then the attacker probably would not have chosen to cause the threat

and thus would not be morally responsible for it, so killing the attacker in self-defense would not be justified, although it might be excusable. The "conscious choice" condition would not have been met. If, likewise, the attacker were a robber who only wanted someone's wallet, the value at stake would not justify killing him. The "value comparable to human life" condition would not have been met. A human being should not be killed to prevent mere monetary inconvenience and loss.

If someone were to threaten to kill you next week, you would not be justified in killing him today; the threat must be imminent. The choice to kill in self-defense must be in response to the attacker's actions, not merely his intentions. Finally, if the attacker were wielding a knife but confined to a wheelchair and you were fully mobile with access to a staircase, you would not be justified in killing him. Instead, you should simply escape up the stairs. There must be a forced choice between fundamental values. If there is a way to escape the situation without compromising life or liberty, you are obligated to choose that lifesaving option and are prohibited from using lethal force in self-defense.

These conditions also apply to justify killing an attacker's accomplice. For example, if a gang member were chasing you with a knife intending to kill you and you had to escape from the room but another (unarmed) gang member consciously blocked your escape, you would be justified in using lethal force against your attacker's unarmed accomplice. In legal terms, that person would be a conspirator to attempted murder. Morally, that accomplice would have chosen to threaten your life, and you would have had no other way to avoid the imminent threat. These conditions are more stringent than those required for legally justified homicide in self-defense, yet they are met when soldiers kill enemy soldiers in combat.

Justified killing applied to war. When soldiers kill enemies in war, they meet the conditions of justified killing in self-defense. Enemy soldiers are morally responsible for the threat they pose. At some time, they chose to be soldiers, and they must know they are at war against other people. Fully informed volunteers, of course, are more responsible than poorly informed conscripts, yet even conscripts chose to become soldiers. They had other options, however unpleasant they may have been. Human beings, after all, are not responsible for circumstances beyond their control such as whether their nation goes to war. They are, however, responsible for the choices they make within those circumstances. People who choose to be soldiers in war are morally responsible for the threat they pose to their enemy.

Soldiers fight to defend values that are worth killing and dying for.³¹ At least, they hope so. In

a just war, that is the case. Because the moral responsibility for going to war lies with political authorities and because the political authorities' intentions are often opaque, soldiers should be largely immune from judgments about the just ends of a war. Therefore, unless soldiers have strong reason to believe that war is being fought for values other than defending life and liberty, they can assume they are fighting to defend those fundamental values.

Soldiers do face an imminent threat from the enemy. All enemies are either direct threats or accomplices to direct threats. They all act for the same end—to deny the target any right to life and liberty. Soldiers have no recourse to a higher authority to defend them; they must fight, or they will lose those rights.

Finally, soldiers do not have a nonlethal option. If they flee before the enemy, the enemy will follow them. Again, there is no higher authority to protect them or those who depend on them to defend their lives and freedom. Therefore, not only is it morally permissible for soldiers to kill enemy soldiers in combat, but they are also morally obliged to use the force necessary to defend those who depend on them. Soldiers are the last line of defense for the rights of life and liberty.

Honest reflection on the moral demands of military service should play a part in the Army's transformation. Soldiers who are empowered to make well-reasoned moral decisions would more likely exercise proper initiative and less likely err by commission or omission. Rules of engagement are by nature static; the battlefields of the future will be fluid. The Army must grow soldiers who can think for themselves.

The Army should include the moral justification for killing in combat in training not only because it would enhance the Army's effectiveness but also because it is the right thing to do. The profession of arms is a noble calling, and military leaders perform their duties honorably. They devote their lives to preparing soldiers—mentally, physically, and materially—for the rigors of combat. They conduct demanding, realistic training; they keep them physically fit; and they equip them with the best weapons. Unfortunately, they fail to prepare them morally, and in doing so, they fail to care for soldiers' welfare. They leave soldiers unprepared to deal with their postcombat consciences and unprepared to make morally right decisions about who to kill in morally ambiguous circumstances. This is a leadership problem that is solvable, and it demands military leaders' attention. **MR**

NOTES

1. Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1996), 189.
2. The prevalence and degree of PTSD among combat veterans is a disputed issue. See Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam* (New York: Atheneum Publishing, 1994). Shay, Grossman, and others contend that PTSD severely affects hundreds of thousands of veterans. Other researchers, such as B.G. Burkett, *Stolen Valor* (Bangor, ME: Verity Press Inc., 1 September 1998) and syndicated columnist Michael Kelly, dispute their claims as being exaggerated. All informed parties recognize that combat-induced PTSD does exist to some extent and is a problem worth solving.
3. It goes without saying that military leaders must first understand moral justification themselves before they can teach it to others. Therefore, military leaders have a duty to develop their own skills of moral discernment. I owe this good point to Major Tony Pfaff.
4. S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1961), 78.
5. Many military officers disputed Marshall's findings, which did not surprise him: "In the course of holding post-combat interviews with approximately four hundred infantry companies in the Central Pacific and European Theaters, [Marshall] did not find one battalion, company, or platoon commander who had made the slightest effort to determine how many of his men had actually engaged the enemy with a weapon." Marshall discovered that what the military's leaders had taken for granted—that well-trained soldiers will use their training to kill the enemy—was a false assumption.
6. Marshall, 78.
7. Roger Spiller, "S.L.A. Marshall and the Ratio of Fire," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* (December 1988), 63-71; and Russell W. Glenn, *Reading Athena's Dance Card: Men Against Fire in Vietnam* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 134-36.
8. Samuel Stouffer, et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, Vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), 85-87.
9. Captain John "Ike" Eisenhower, personal e-mail correspondence with author, November 1997. Ike is an outstanding officer whom I greatly respect. His candor on this issue is admirable; others with whom I have spoken share his sentiments, but they are not willing to be quoted.
10. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* (Great Britain: Basic Books, 1999), 57-90. The practice of employing psychologists to train men to kill in combat is not a post-World War II phenomenon.
11. Grossman, 35. I have not yet found data on more recent wars.

12. Marshall, 79.
13. Ibid., 71 and 81-82.
14. This perhaps explains why nearly all the officers Marshall interviewed reported that all their soldiers fired their weapons. The ones they were watching fired their weapons.
15. Marshall, 82.
16. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 186-89.
17. Grossman, 143. He identifies the researchers as Kranss, Kaplan, and Kranss.
18. Marshall, 82.
19. Grossman, 254.
20. Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999), 64.
21. Ibid., 46.
22. Ranger Private First Class Jason Moore during an interview with *CNN/Frontline*, at <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/rangers/moore.html>>.
23. Ibid.
24. Eisenhower.
25. Grossman, 240.
26. Discussion between author and anonymous senior noncommissioned officer, veteran of Mogadishu, West Point, New York, 20 November 1999.
27. E-mail exchange between author and an officer veteran of Task Force Ranger, 30 January 2002.
28. Lieutenant Colonel Harry B. Axson, commander, 2d Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, during Operation Just Cause, quoted in U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-100-2, *Leadership and Command on the Battlefield* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 21-22.
29. Major Pete Kilner, Master's degree thesis, "Soldiers, Self-Defense, and Killing in War," at <<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/public/etd-41998-18346/etd-title.html>>.
30. Richard Norman, *Ethics, Killing, and War* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
31. Although my argument addresses what are traditionally considered *jus in bello* concerns, I reject the absolute *jus in bello/jus ad bellum* distinction held by Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (Portland, OR: Book News Inc., February 2000) and others, because I reject the concept of invincible ignorance. Soldiers are responsible moral agents, so they should concern themselves with the *jus ad bellum* question of the justice of the war, and they should not kill in war if their nation's war is immoral.

Major Peter G. Kilner, U.S. Army, is a student at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He received a B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) and an M.A. from Virginia Polytechnic Institute. He has served in various command and staff positions, including assistant professor, Department of English, USMA, West Point, New York; company commander, D Company, 2d Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and scout platoon leader, 4th Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Division, Sandhofen, Germany.