            While my US Army air defense unit trained for our upcoming certifications, my father’s often repeated mantra echoed in my head: “Mission First, Team Always.” He had said it countless times since my childhood, instilling in me the importance of balancing the needs of the operation and those of the team members. To certify the unit, each of the 12 crews I managed would have to certify on its system as well. This was more than just our job; it meant defending South Korea in the event of a North Korean missile attack. As one crew fell behind in their preparations, my Commander ordered me to defy everything that my father’s mantra, and I, represented.

At that time, my top Soldier was on leave in Texas with his young family for his sister’s wedding. His back-up, a brand-new Soldier to the Army, struggled to replace him. With the certifications looming, our Commander told me to order my Soldier to return to Korea immediately to ensure the unit’s success.

Prematurely ending my Soldier’s hard-earned leave seemed heartless. He had never requested leave before and consistently outperformed. Worse, doing this would cause him to purchase multiple last-minute, trans-Pacific airfares, rendering his family unable to pay their bills.

I pushed back hard, but my commander refused to reconsider. This certification was crucial, but I was stunned. “Mission First, Team Always” was *the* foundation of leadership in my mind. I naively assumed my fellow Army leaders would share a similar philosophy. It was disheartening to discover my ethos represented an unfortunate Venn diagram: Mission Leaders or People Leaders. My commander clearly was the former.

Though discouraged, and intimidated by the potential consequences of disobeying orders, “Mission First, Team Always” resounded in my mind. I was determined both to keep my Soldier with his family and to pass the certification. I rallied my direct reports to strategize how to rapidly develop the back-up crew. Achieving the level of proficiency required to certify would normally take a crew at least 30 days. Through intense instruction and rigorous drills, our back-up crew certified after 72 hours. As a result, our unit fully certified and my soldier’s family time continued uninterrupted. My commander acknowledged that creative thinking and determination can accomplish our missions, and my soldier still thanks me for supporting him.

         My time in Korea amplified the importance of balancing “Mission First,” and “Team Always,” for leaning too heavily on either undermines organizations. Achieving results *while* supporting those around me matters most to me. With MBA core classes like Leadership in Organizations, Kellogg emphasizes developing its students to be ethical, self-aware leaders. I’m excited to join an institution and community that shares my values.

**AG comments:**

I think overall the sentiment is good and this is a great example of how you stuck to your values, even in a really hard situation like disobeying orders in the military. I worry that there is too much set up and not enough time to drive that home. I didn’t really get your values out of it until the last paragraph so I would move that up. I would also say something more specific about Kellogg than a class you can find online. Maybe a leadership anecdote from a student? Or just make the last sentence punchier – it feels very generic right now.