

IDEAS & ISSUES (LEADERSHIP)

The Ethical Marine Warrior

Achieving a higher standard

by Jack E. Hoban

With the publication of *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency (COIN)*, the U.S. military is addressing the need for broader and more formal tactics and strategies to address irregular threats. At the grassroots level, new methodologies are being developed to prepare individual Marines to perform COIN operations. The new training must:

- Have at its core a strong ethics element (the ethical warrior).
- Cover a wide range of martial and combative skills.
- Include a powerful cross-cultural conflict resolution element.
- Be a truly sustainable program rather than just a training package.
- Be thoroughly field tested.

In his article, "The Ethical Warrior of the 21st Century" (*MCG*, Feb07),

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LtCol Joseph C. Shusko, USMC(Ret) described such a program. It is the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP). MCMAP is an ethics-based combatives program consisting of three main elements: character (ethical warrior training), mental (military skills and mindset training), and physical (martial combatives and combat conditioning). Notably, the ethical warrior training is considered to be the core of the program.

A Question of Values

The combatives and cross-cultural aspects of the new program are outside the scope of this article and, for the

most part, were well covered in the Shusko article. But, as stated, the core of MCMAP is the ethical warrior training. This focus has led to a need for a clarification of the intangibles that make up the warrior ethic. Even the Marine Corps' core values of honor, courage, and commitment required a hard look. After all, don't our enemies display courage and commitment too? Yes, they do. And there is "honor among thieves." So what makes us different?

We had to go all the way back to our 1776 values for the clue. The foundation of ethical warriorship is that "all men are created equal." This often quoted, but largely unexamined, phrase pertains to the intrinsic value of life (the life value), not to any relative value, such as culture, ethnicity, religion, or behavior. Insurgents operate as if all men are *not* created equal. They don't respect the lives of those they consider nonobservant of their fanatic cultural, political, and/or religious values. And they will kill anyone—even innocent women and children—to reach their goals.

We are not just warriors, we are United States Marine warriors, and our core values of honor, courage, and commitment reflect our uniqueness as Americans. Our warrior ethics have respect for human equality as the premise—just as it is stated in our philosophically enabling document, the Declaration of Independence. Our warrior ethics charge us to act differently than insurgents—more respectful of all life—killing only to protect lives and when absolutely necessary. The ethical warrior shows respect for the value of life, regardless of the relative



An ethical foundation strengthens our capability in combat. We are not just warriors; we are United States Marine warriors. (Photo by LCpl Christopher Zahn.)



He must be as prepared to protect noncombatants as to kill combatants. (Photo by Cpl J. Agg.)

values of culture or behavior. This is a nuance that is very hard to put into words. But it is the secret of stopping cross-cultural violence. It may be the secret to winning the global insurgency.

Winning hearts and minds? Respect for culture won't necessarily do it. Respect for other religious beliefs won't necessarily do it. Our religions, cultures, and behaviors may not be reconcilable. However, even when cultures seem irreconcilable, conflict can often be resolved—and the killing stopped—if a deeper, more fundamental universal value can be activated mutually. That value is the life value as expressed by an acknowledgement of human equality.

Let's not be naïve, Marines must and will close with and kill insurgent combatants. That is our job. However, the role of the ethical warrior is not

only to kill but also to protect life. Whose lives must we protect? Ours and others. Which others? *All* others, if we can. We must protect even our enemies (as Marines are often called upon to do) if we can. Ethical warriors are “defender-protectors” rather than killers. Young patriotic men and women join the Marine Corps to defend their country—not to become killers. MCMAP strives to enhance that natural defender proclivity.

The concept of protecting others not of our “in group,” however, is a difficult one for us tribally oriented humans. To risk our lives for others, even strangers, *even our enemies*, is very anti-intuitive. But there is a great measure of satisfaction in a life lived according to the precept of protecting others—and it is the key to trumping the conflicting relative values between us.

The Story of the Japanese Prisoner

One of our mentors at the MCMAP, an old Iwo Jima Marine and author of *Values for a New Millennium* (Life Value Press, 1992), the late Robert L. Humphrey, when asked near the end of his life to describe his proudest achievement, told a surprising story about an incident that occurred on Iwo Jima with a Japanese prisoner.

Most Marines know the story of Iwo Jima. One of the “dirty little secrets” of that battle was that the Japanese did not believe in taking prisoners, as surrendering—even when wounded—was considered a violation of the warrior code of Bushido. Unfortunately, some Marines began to follow suit with the killing of wounded or surrendering Japanese soldiers.

One day on patrol, Humphrey and his men came upon a young Japanese soldier emerging from a cave waving a white flag. This act, in and of itself, was unusual, as Japanese soldiers rarely surrendered. One of the Marines on the patrol, not trusting that this wasn't some kind of trick, raised his rifle to his shoulder to kill the Japanese boy. Humphrey found himself ordering the Marine to put down his weapon. A short, intense confrontation occurred between Humphrey and the Marine. But good order and discipline prevailed, and the Marine lowered his weapon. It turned out that the Japanese soldier's surrender was genuine, and he was taken safely to the rear. It even turned out that he was of some small intelligence value.

Humphrey thought little of the incident at the time. Yet, nearly 50 years later, when asked to name his proudest achievement, he cited this incident. He explained with words to the effect that:

On Iwo Jima it was life or death every minute of every day. There was unavoidable killing every day. When I saw that Japanese boy trying to surrender and understood that this was perhaps the only time that I didn't *have* to kill, I took the opportunity. I believe that action saved my humanity. Like most veterans of Iwo that survived, I was deeply affected by the ex-

perience. Yet, I never suffered the profound depression and shell-shock PTSD [posttraumatic stress disorder] that some of the others did. I attribute it to saving that boy's life. Protecting my enemy, if you will.¹

It is obvious that the primary role of the Marine Corps in combat is accomplishing the mission, which often involves closing with and killing the enemy. Each individual Marine must accomplish this duty—with honor, courage, and commitment—as a defender of self and others. This ethics-based approach actually makes for more skillful warriors on many levels—able to accurately assess many different kinds of situations and utilize the level of violence appropriate and necessary for each. In other words, ethical warriors are nicer when being nice works and more aggressive when aggressiveness works—with the ability to make better judgments along the entire continuum of force.

At this point, the reader may be thinking, "This is pretty philosophical stuff! Where's the 'martial' part?" Those Marines who have participated in MCMAP know that there is plenty of combatives training. If you haven't participated, what are you waiting for? You will love it! It is what you joined the Marine Corps to do! If you are up for a real challenge, the grapevine now compares the difficulty of the martial arts instructor-trainer course "favorably" with the Army's Ranger School.

People also ask, "If the program is ethics-based, wouldn't that tend to make the Marines 'too nice'?" Not to the bad guys it doesn't. Fear not that the Marines are somehow "going soft." There is only one thing more dangerous than a U.S. Marine and that is a "fired up" U.S. Marine in the act of defending his fellow Marines and the innocent people under his protection. But ethical warriorship is also more

dangerous for the Marine who must get out of the compound, out of the armored HMMWV, and walk the streets with the people. However, being the ethical warrior is living a noble life—a better life.

The final thing we challenge our MCMAP students with is to always remember that human nature bids us to protect our loved ones and families—before ourselves. There is an old saying, "you always hurt the ones you love," and we know that after a difficult tour of duty—or even a tough day in garrison—it is common to bring the stress and fear home with you. But the ethical warrior recognizes that his job as warrior knight is not done when he comes "home from the wars." Rather, job number one is just starting. That job is to protect and defend the ones he loves the most. We encourage MCMAP Marines to adopt the motto, "Whenever I return home, everyone is glad." In many ways, living this part of the credo is the most difficult. But if we can, it is a better life. Living by this simple admonition may also take us a long way toward decreasing domestic problems and PTSD.

In closing, it seems clear that a Marine who operates according to a set of life-protecting moral values protects the reputation of the United States, brings honor to the Marine Corps, and gains a feeling of nobility as a warrior knight. When practiced consistently (at least weekly), the combination of the MCMAP physical training, mental training, and the values-activating tie-ins is an ethical warrior sustainment methodology that works.

Note

1. Humphrey, Robert L., taken from *Values for a New Millennium* presentations to various Marine Corps groups.



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