

CHALLENGING MILITARY SCENARIOS

(Situations are real, names are fictitious)

1. During a counseling session with a Special Forces officer and his wife, she shares that her husband comes home angry night after night. When asked for his perspective, it became apparent that he is oblivious to how his lack of emotional control is oppressing their children and poisoning the atmosphere in the home. His wife had been begging him to join her for counseling for years, but he steadfastly refused, seeing counseling as a sign of weakness. But yesterday his oldest son finally found the courage to say, "Dad, we're all so much happier around here when you're deployed." That shook him up enough to move him to seek help, but he hasn't got a clue about how to improve his emotional and relational skills. What can be done to help him become more self-aware, self-controlled and empathetic toward others?
2. Specialist Jones had been deployed for three months when the "love of his life" sent him a text saying their relationship was "so over." She wouldn't respond in any way to his communication attempts. Life seemed empty without the hope of seeing her again. Suicidal thoughts kept popping up in his mind ... and daily work in sweltering heat became unbearable.
3. Major Atkinson was frustrated: so many younger officers and senior enlisted folk were complaining to him of their Commander's "toxic leadership." The CO was a nit-picker, never saw good in anyone, tried to manage every detail of the command, and seemed to not know anything about relaxing. Morale was low and going lower. Major A was a respected trusted officer, so a growing number of officers and NCOs were pressing him to "talk to the CO about his leadership style."
4. SSGT Perry felt like no one appreciated his work. He worked overtime many days to "get the job done" and tried to encourage others to do the same, no matter who they were. Yet, he had again been passed over for promotion on the latest board, and no one would give any feedback as to why. He'd seen plenty of others get promoted who put in less than half the effort he put out every day. "Discouragement" was growing into bitterness and plans for early retirement.
5. An airman has returned from deployment and placed a call to me, the duty chaplain. When I arrive I meet him and his girlfriend. He shares how he has been sent home due to suicidal ideations and is currently getting help from mental health. While he has found mental health consultations to be helpful, he is still constantly fighting with his girlfriend. Both are young and display little to no knowledge on how to resolve conflict or control their emotions during an argument. The airman shares that the conflict in the relationship is intensifying his mental health struggles, and his girlfriend indicates that she is close to giving up on the relationship.

6. I (a chaplain) meet with a frustrated commander who shares with me that there are constant tensions between the active duty unit and the reserve tenant unit. The reserve unit has brought continual complaints to command and the active duty members have responded defensively and with little self-control. This has only complicated the manner. What can be done to help the team work well together and reduce the workplace drama, blame shifting and stress?
7. A maintainer loses his temper at work. He snaps due to pressures at home and pressures from the monotonous and needlessly complicated tasks given to him by the Air Force. He punches a wall and completely snaps. When he is brought into the chaplain's office he asks, "What happened? I never lose my cool like this. I am just at my breaking point." Where does the chaplain start?

Real Life Readiness and Resilience Case Study #1: Decommissioning Slowdown

I was a Navy LTJG (0-2) and the communications division officer serving on a FRAM 2 destroyer (built in 1945 and used as an NGFS (naval gunfire support) ship in Vietnam. We had just returned from a seven month deployment to Vietnam (1970), and as soon as we arrived in our home port of San Diego it was announced that our ship was to be decommissioned. We had three months to remove all sensitive communications equipment and prepare the ship to be "mothballed" and placed in reserve status in the "boneyard" at Vallejo, CA.

Removing communications equipment was a relatively easy task compared to what the crew had to do below decks to prepare the ship for indefinite storage. The "Snipes" (below deck engineering personnel) had to remove all bilge rust and paint the entire inner surface of the hull. The "Boatswains" (above deck crew) had to do the same for the exterior of the hull and superstructure. That exterior work wasn't too bad ... working outdoors in San Diego Harbor was a rather pleasant environment. Working below decks was like being condemned to hard labor punishment in Hell.

My guys, the radiomen and quartermasters of the operations division wanted nothing to do with this gruelling and unpleasant chipping and painting work, especially below decks. Therefore, they decided that preparing sensitive communications equipment for removal from the ship and preparing it for secure shipment to classified communication depots was certainly a job that would take all three months rather than the one-month plan I had submitted to the ship's Captain. In other words, there was a staged work slowdown in progress because the handwriting was on the wall that if you finished work early you were headed to the bilges.

I was being held accountable to finish my division's work on time according to the schedule I had submitted and knew we should be able to keep. I pushed my men to get

it done, but they made every excuse why it couldn't be done. Even my chief radioman, the senior enlisted man of the division, was supporting the strategy of staying out of the bilges by slowing work to a crawl. I couldn't blame my men for wanting the "clean work" they were used to in the operations department. But manpower was needed below decks and that was the Captain's order that I had to follow.

How was I to get my guys to complete their work so they could head below to work alongside their shipmates in the bowels of Hell? The pressure to get my men to finish their task and get below decks grew as personnel began to receive transfer orders for their next duty stations, particularly for those needed in new assignments in Vietnam. As the crew shrank and the time for scheduled completion shortened, it was obvious that all my guys were needed below deck to complete the work "down there."

This is a common "management dilemma scenario" that military officers below the command level face...pressure from above that can't be solved simply by ordering their enlisted men to do what they don't want to do, especially when those enlisted men have the technical expertise that the junior officer doesn't possess.

If you would like to know how this officer applied the principles of relational wisdom to solve this challenge in a way that satisfied both his Captain and his crew, email your suggested solution to ken@rw360.org, and then you'll receive a detailed description of the officer's solution.

Real Life Readiness and Resilience Case Study #1: Sweltering Uniforms

I was the Commanding Officer (CO) of a Coast Guard deployable port security unit during Desert Storm. I was an O-5 (Commander) and had 111 Coast Guard active duty and reserve personnel under my command. We had completed a six-week intensive training course at Camp Blanding in Northern Florida before being deployed to a port in Saudi Arabia.

We deployed in late February to relieve a unit that had been there through the short war and needed to come home. We deployed in the woodland green BDU's (battle dress uniform) we had trained in over the winter (believe it or not North Florida in January and February can get quite cold...a wet cold), but the environment we were headed to was already hitting the high 90's and low 100's (fortunately it was a "dry heat!").

As soon as we had been in theater for a week I knew the "uniform issue" was only going to intensify. My guys and gals (three women were assigned to the unit), operated 22 foot high speed heavily armed small boats in the harbor and along the Persian Gulf coast. These boats were "open," that is, they had no shade cover, no sun or sea protection. My personnel were exposed to intense heat in the direct sun of the Middle East almost continuously during daylight hours (we worked 24 hours around the clock)

protecting the shipping assets of the U. S. and allied coalition partners from any waterborne threat.

As the weeks passed and my requests for summer BDU's went unanswered and the area flag officer insisted that all personnel were to wear complete BDU attire (that is, no T-shirts or cutting off pant legs) and the temperatures began reaching the 115 to 120, morale began to suffer.

When I called Coast Guard HQ via secure satellite comms to get this "supply issue" resolved, I was told that since operations were now in the "redeployment stage," no new uniforms would be forthcoming. Redeployment would take another three months as the Army and Marines and coalition forces came in from the desert to load their tanks and other vehicles on the ships for transport back to their deployment points of origin. Meanwhile, our security task of waterside protection continued.

Seeing Navy SEALs come into to my port wearing only shorts and no shirts compared to my men and women in full woodland green camouflage BDU's grated more than a bit!

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