

Return to the Vietnam Era Military 2.0?

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Recently, some retreads pontificated the known. Individuals in the military should not obey unlawful orders—dah! What else you got Captains Obvious?

They decided to go global with this free advice, expressing concerns that some orders are possibly not lawful and/or future orders may or may not be lawful. It is my understanding that the military personnel are already trained regarding definitions of unlawful orders and available remedies.

As a commissioned junior Army officer (1970-74) during the Vietnam era, I knew what an illegal order was and what orders were not.

The perfect example of that period was the My Lai Massacre on March 16, 1968, during the Vietnam War where US soldiers killed as many as 500 unarmed Vietnamese villagers. That's a war crime and the perpetrators were dealt with under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

The Vietnam war devastated my generation and while I did not go to Vietnam, I know many who did and some who did not return. This war made the headlines for years and all us so-called 'baby killers' were treated like crap by fellow citizens.

In my opinion, the Army of that period was in disarray and very poorly led. I only knew one three-star general I would follow across the street and he could have led me anywhere. He was the best of the best and I had huge respect for him.

All the other flag officers I knew and worked for, and there were many were marginal to pathetic leaders. This lack of competence fell all the way down the chain of command to the field grade officers with which I had daily contact.

There were over 900 incidents of fragging in Vietnam, the deliberate attempt to kill fellow soldiers and marines using fragmentation grenades (specifically commissioned and senior non-commissioned officers) between 1969 to 1972. Drug use was rampant, morale in the toilet and so on. Lovely place to spend one's youth, and the result was the US lost the war.

Some seem to believe that we can return to that model of yesteryear and somehow life in the military will be better than it is today—by extension society in general.

As a career civilian executive with decades of experience in heavy industry field operations, I always encourage field personnel at all levels to report unsafe situations and take the initiative to STOP WORK if necessary. No-Harm No-Foul rules are in place if they are wrong.

In fact, I have published a book and numerous other documents on this subject. My understanding is today's military has similar policies in place as well.

These retreads, from the security of having no field responsibilities and are not in any chain of command are encouraging young men and women to refuse what they think may be ill-defined, *possibly* illegal orders. A real time judgement call for non-lawyers!

The apparent target audience for these rants is not the few in the career senior commissioned and noncommissioned officer Corp, but the many junior commissioned and enlisted volunteers without that experience or political cover.

This is not leadership; it is not even fake leadership! Just another self-serving personal agenda.

What if that 20-year-old (military) volunteer is wrong when refusing to obey a direct order?

He or she may face disciplinary action that could result in a dishonorable discharge or even incarceration. The lives of these individuals may be destroyed by listening to these armchair intellectuals.

Paraphrasing the Mission Impossible 1960s television show, "they will disavow all knowledge." Who would join and stay at such a place?

Seems like some want the United States to return to the quality of leadership and the overall military disarray we so enjoyed in 1970. A military environment NONE of them have ever been in unless they are almost 80+ years old.

My generation gave up way too much so the military could learn and recover from Westmorland, McNamara, and Johnson. Thank God, General Norman Schwarzkopf learned these Vietnam era lessons and led Desert Storm, or we would have lost that war too!

Yeah, let's return to 1970, I miss my leisure suit.