

## FM 7-22.7

- Tell it like it is
- If something is wrong, you must be willing to say so, even to superior NCOs and officers
- Do so in an objective straightforward manner
- Present the facts
- This often takes moral courage
- What you have to say may not be easy or welcome but your candor is necessary to develop and maintain trust. It is also necessary for Soldiers to know whether they have met the standard and for leaders to know the true status of the unit.
- A mark of loyalty is a burning desire to help the unit and one's Soldiers get better at their tasks.
- That demands honesty.
- Make it a habit to be candid – in battle lives will depend on it.

## MY FRIEND SMITH

1 June 2009

Yesterday my assignment was weapons related. Today 12 June 09, I continued and completed the assignment. The rest of my platoon was down at the motor-pool completing their Connex pack-out.

Around 0945 **one of our Soldiers attempted suicide**. This would have been about an hour after I had just seen him in the barracks on my way to go to work at the Company. When I left my quarters around 0845, I saw PFC Smith and one other Soldier sitting at the CQ desk. As is normal, I assumed he was coordinating a ride to the motor pool.

PFC Smith and I have some things in common about our positive attitude towards the Army. When I came to the 23<sup>rd</sup> MP Company in 2008, PFC Smith's enthusiasm towards his sense of Duty and Selfless Service was unmatched by few others of his fellow Soldiers. Smith told me that throughout his Basic Training much of the time he ended up being on Profile - either for his knee and for some other medical difficulties the doctors could not help him with. Unlike many other individuals in his unfortunate position, Smith's dedication to his Army commitment helped him to ride out many of these physically trying storms and his attitude remained strongly positive. PFC Smith has Heart to a degree that few people in better physical condition can match.

The following is my observation on the events that led up to this dedicated young Soldier trying to take his own life.

A common phrase used in the Armed forces to describe discontent among its Soldiers is that the "morale is low" and another one is that "there is no motivation." Additionally, it is a historically proven fact about human nature that people will complain about their circumstances when their freedom to do whatever they feel that they want to, is hindered.

In the Army, Leaders are daily challenged with maintaining Soldier morale and balancing that with accomplishing what needs doing. The way that the Army works is this. Whatever defines a Soldier's daily tasks are derived from the Orders of the "officers appointed over them" and so every Soldier - regardless of his or her rank - is equally subject to obeying those orders passed down to them through the Chain of Command. Soldiers of lower rank are very much in error to assume that a higher rank means greater freedom to "do whatever you want to do". As Soldiers advance in rank, that person's job becomes all the more involved as they take on the Leadership responsibilities that come with the rank.

The Leaders who are the most effective, place the accomplishment of the mission first and yet do not sacrifice the welfare of their Soldiers. Here in the 23<sup>rd</sup> MP Co, it is my opinion that the Leadership of 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon has done this well. Not everything has worked out the way it was planned, but many of the assigned tasks have been

accomplished to the standard. This has automatically placed 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon in the position to come to the aid of other platoons when circumstances are such that they have been unable to meet the given deadline. As part of the Army Team the act of being able to help each other is something to take pride in doing. This should be the case even if, for no other reason than because you would want to receive a helping hand when you need it.

Leaders are continually challenged with justifying to their Soldiers the reason for the sacrifices they are called upon to make. 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon Leadership has offered these justifications. A reasonable person knows that we Soldiers signed up for the good and the bad of not being in control of our lives. Signing the Oath of Enlistment was after all completely voluntary.

The motivated Soldier draws his or her strengths from the Army Values and understands that in something like staying late or missing a meal, sometimes the curtailing of certain freedoms just goes with the territory. As is proven among thousands of patriotic men and women serving in the Armed Forces, a seasoned Soldier, a dedicated person, takes genuine pride in who they are and considers discontentment an act of disloyalty to the unit cohesion, and to the Esprit De Corps. The dedicated Soldier instead makes the best of what he or she has to work with, and works within the limits imposed on them to better their situation.

With some Soldiers there is really no satisfying them and they are what have been termed as “not having Heart”. These Soldiers openly voice their discontent and despise authority of any kind. The time honored concept of taking pride in serving one’s country is but a laughing matter to these individuals, and a concerted effort is made to get as many people to agree to their way of thinking as possible. Their “I don’t give a sh\_\_t” attitude affects everyone around them. This is being written because it directly affected PFC Smith.

It is a fact that each Soldier’s actions represent the entities in authority over them. In place of even the most basic sense of loyalty, the discontent Soldier just out of spite, actually wants to see his superiors take a fall.

As a member of the Army team, it is the Duty of every Soldier to not only support the NCO or Officer over them, but to do their own job to the absolute best they possibly can. At all times the individual Soldier’s actions directly affect the success of his or her Unit.

When the overall Company reputation is at stake (which is always) the discontent Soldier is so concerned about themselves that he or she makes no effort to at least *meet* the standards. These Soldiers are in fact self-centered individuals and will never *truly* understand the meaning of being a member of the Army Team or taking pride in that.

The Leadership that succeeds does so because of the refusal to compromise their meeting of the standards on account of the complaining Soldiers. However, certain discontent Soldiers, in response to an increasing pressure on discipline have become downright hateful – blaming the Chain of Command for their problems - openly expressing their grievances even outside the Company. The enforcing of discipline is taken by the Soldiers and used as an excuse for being “unmotivated” to do the right thing. Nothing that the Leadership says or does will satisfy these Soldiers who are determined only to tear down the Esprit De Corps.

Since joining the Army, it has been my experience that the strength of a person’s own moral sense of obligation will enable them to retain their “motivation” no matter what the person to their left and right may express. While it is absolutely critical to Unit solidarity that all Soldiers strengthen each other’s resolve, my situation is proof that it is *also possible* to be “self motivated” – i.e., to put in your 100% at *all* times. The example has been on the meaning of professionalism and of both truly caring about your battle buddies, and respecting those who will lead you into battle.

Additionally, it has also been my experience that regarding the Soldiers who remain supportive of the authority, who refuse to give up their Loyalty and who continue to uphold the Army Core Values - these Soldiers are treated with contempt and purposefully ostracized. The discontent Soldier knows their attitude against authority is wrong, so they automatically feel threatened by the ones who will not compromise, and respond by trying to smother that example out of existence. This treatment is deliberately intended by the wrongdoer to take the attention off from having to do what is required of them.

Peer pressure is often a subtle thing that wears at a person much like water on a rock. In this situation, PFC Smith and his once upbeat, positive attitude was the victim. He is not the only victim. The saying goes, *it only takes one rotten apple to spoil the whole barrel of good ones*. Among our Soldiers we have more than one such apple.

**The Battalion Commander, COL Neldon challenged every Soldier to take an active part in preventing suicide.** In order to prevent tragedies such as PFC Smith’s near death, the source of the problem needs to be revealed for what it is.

As just one example of PFC Smith’s character, this Soldier often took it upon himself to take care of the cleaning and it is his selfless actions on behalf of his buddies, that are regularly the reason 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon’s assigned area in the barracks passed its inspection. Among other things, he takes the same dedicated, meticulous approach to cleaning our weapons. PFC Smith is acting on the part of the Soldier’ Creed, “I will always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself...” The results of his work show that obviously he takes pride in doing so.

As stated at the beginning, the following is my observation on the events that led up to this dedicated young Soldier trying to take his own life.

I witnessed the negative attitude of the Soldiers around him began to work away at him like water dripping on rocks. This went on for months until finally it began to change him. PFC Smith had less and less positive things to say, and began to mirror the negative things his buddies were saying.

One by one almost every member of this platoon indirectly contributed to tearing down the principles and the things about the Army that he took pride in being a part of.

When you take away a Soldier's pride in what he is doing, and the worthiness of his right cause, he or she is sometimes left with little reason to go on.

**His buddies were sending him the worst possible message that you could say to a dedicated person like PFC Smith.** They were telling him that:

- we Soldiers should give up on doing the right thing
- that too much is being required of us
- that there is no reward for doing the right thing
- that a person having given their word is under no obligation to have meant it
- that there is no reward for meaning it
- that we Soldiers have a *right* to demand whatever we want – like our free time
- that the PSG and the LT do not care about their Soldiers
- that our NCO's do not care
- that anytime we want, we can question the decisions made by those in the place of authority
- that we Soldiers have every right to feel justified in hating the Army
- that it is okay to despise the day you took the Oath of Enlistment
- that any of us have the right to make judgment-calls based on this or that other Unit stating that our chain of command doesn't know what they are doing
- and finally his buddies were telling him that that we Soldiers can decide what orders are important enough to obey and which ones "don't matter!"

Those are just some of the comments that I personally have overheard. When I learned that my friend Horace Smith had tried to kill himself, I was filled with an overwhelming sense of grief - knowing immediately what had caused it.

**The disloyalty of his fellow Soldiers almost killed him.**

I know now that in pretending to care, the ones truly responsible for this boy's near death want only to use what happened to him as an excuse to *further* blame the Chain of Command. However, it should be pointed out that PFC Smith's life was saved by the

very system and the very Leadership these Soldiers have come to hold in such contempt.

My fellow Soldiers do not think they are responsible for what happened and would not even consider themselves as having to **make this injustice right**. Many would instead say that writing this is overreacting.

If this is the reader's reaction then answer this question,

How many deaths by suicide are acceptable? How far does one go to *prevent* it?

I owe it to my battle buddy, PFC Smith to tell you these things and to say it how it is. This is a problem that needs to be seen for how very serious it is.

On 01 June 09, COL Garrity spoke to the Soldiers of our two deploying MP Companies, and all of us were afforded the opportunity to recite the Soldier's Creed. With every Soldier expressing his and her pride for their country, the auditorium should have shook from that many Soldiers' voices - had they been at full volume. One of the Corporals had the audacity to make fun of one of the Soldiers who did put their Heart into the words. This Corporal's reaction shamed not only himself but the whole NCO Corps. He of course doesn't see anything wrong with the bad example he set just then.

Soldiers bearing the rank of Specialist and Corporal are in the position to set the right example about Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage.

Personal Courage means that the Jr Leadership will not be more concerned about appeasing the men than upholding the standard of conduct all Soldiers *must* abide by.

In addition to the Soldiers at my level upholding the Army Values, the following recommendation is being respectfully submitted:

If you are an NCO or in a Team Leader position, and do not yourselves exhibit perfect discipline - taking pride in being an American Soldier - you are as guilty as Smith's buddies for what happened to him. NCO's who lend their voices of disapproval for the orders given, may make friends among the joes - but can expect to come across ineffectively against what is nothing short of a deliberate despising for authority. Your Soldiers need to see your genuine enthusiasm for who we are and they will have no choice but to be inspired to do their DUTY.

If however as an NCO or as a Specialist your years spent in a less than perfect Army, with a less than perfect Unit, under a less than perfect Chain of Command have caused you to become embittered and you feel that you *cannot* inspire your Soldiers with a *genuine* enthusiasm, then challenge yourself to do so anyway - challenge yourself to do this for the sake of the dedicated young Soldiers like PFC Smith, who need the strength of your Leadership to guide them through the hard times they will face in the journey ahead. Set the kind of example for your Soldiers that

lets them know to hang in there, that things are not at all as bad as they seem – give them the encouragement they need to keep driving on.

Additionally, if your years in the Army as an NCO or as a Specialist have been spent under Leaders you did not feel were qualified to lead, then challenge yourself to set the right example and support the Leadership anyway. Even if you cannot bring yourself to give these men and women the same undying loyalty you have for your friends, do not ever be the one your Soldiers hear you say, “I am not going to take a bullet for *that* son-of-a-bitch.”

The men and women who have dedicated their entire lives to the Army, have deployed numerous times, and who worked hard to be where they are now are themselves an inspiration to the Soldiers under them. These men – these NCO’s like SFC Williamson and these Officers like 2LT Yankey - as your Leaders, *deserve* your loyalty and respect. You represent them and they *deserve* your very best.

Lastly, it is on you as the NCO to set the kind of example that gives your Soldiers the confidence so essential to Morale. This is the confidence – **the pride that comes from knowing that they are being constructive and serving a useful purpose.**

PFC Smith’s attempt to take his own life is witness to the deadly effects of letting the wrong attitude go on virtually unchecked.

Respectfully submitted,

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PFC Prince

23<sup>rd</sup> MP Co – 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon



Main Entry: **es·prit de corps**

Pronunciation: \is-,prē-də-'kôr\

Function: *noun*

Etymology: French

Date: 1780

**: the common spirit existing in the members of a group and inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honor of the group**