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Custom or Crime

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Custom or Crime

DAVID SIEG

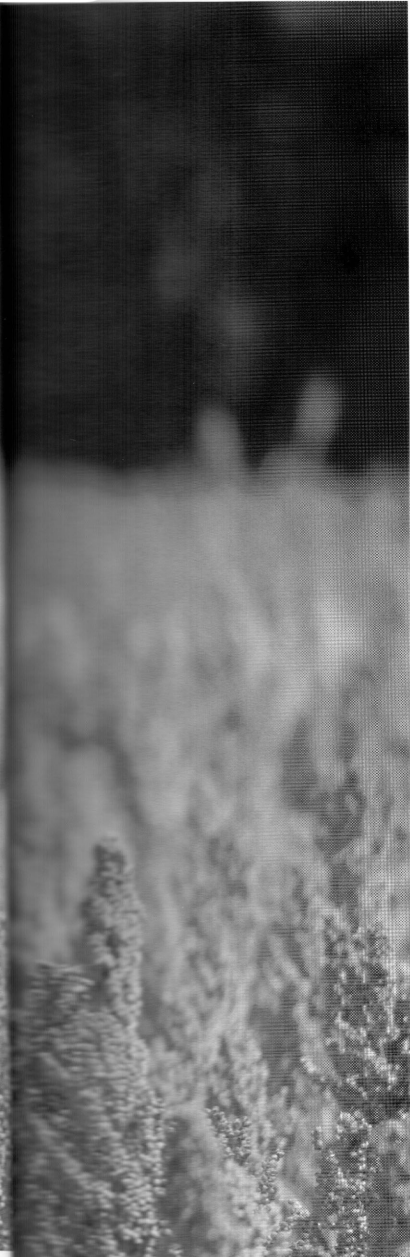
“IN GOD WE TRUST”, “LIFE AND LIBERTY”,

“De Oppresso Liber” (liberate the oppressed). Are these just words to make people feel all warm and fuzzy inside? Or, do they really have a meaning? What lengths will we go through to ensure these words hold true in our hearts? I am a soldier and I have a protocol to follow. The soldier’s creed says I should place the mission first and I do, but I also took an oath to preserve life, defend my nation against all threats foreign and domestic and to uphold the laws of the United States. I am also bound by my duties as a soldier of the United States Army not to interfere in the daily lives and customs of the host nation. Iraq has her own customs and

laws. Does this mean I have to set aside my beliefs that I hold true, just to appease the powers that be? What kind of soldier, father or man would I be if I let this happen?

These words ran through my mind that morning when we stopped in a little village outside of the city of Rabbah, in the Ninawa Province, Iraq. We were on our way to Rabbah because I needed to check back with the mayor of the city. We had problems concerning insurgents crossing the border from Syria into Iraq. We stopped in this village due to an unusual gathering of female villagers. The men in the village acted as if nothing was happening. Lt. Resole, Sgt. 1st Class Naylor and myself dismounted from our vehicles and stood watching. Another soldier

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Why do we do what we do...

said he could see a lone young female in the center of the circle of women. There was a lot of screaming and a form of uniform chanting going on.

I could see that all the women (20 to 25 of them) were holding rocks in their hands. Some of the rocks were quite large and could inflict serious damage and I deemed it a life-threatening situation. I started to step toward the crowd and Lt. Resole reminded me of the mission and the "No Interference" orders that were in place.

I was not Cavalry. I was Special Operations. I knew Resole and Naylor wanted to intervene, but were bound by higher authority. I wasn't in a position to violate an order, but what order do I listen to? I decided to follow the order to do what was right and that was to preserve life! I knew that I would pay dearly for this one, but I wasn't about to let this 15-year-old girl be stoned to death. I walked up to her and stood between her and the crowd.

I situated myself (weapon in the down position and my arms crossed) and stood there. I hoped no one would launch a rock in my direction. Just then I heard something behind me and I turned. It was Sgt. 1st Class Naylor and he was on the other side of her facing the other way. Because I placed myself in a situation now, it gave the others reason to react. Naylor said, "Sieg, if I get hit with a rock, you are buying my coffee for the next month." I responded, "Well, what if I get hit?" He replied back, "Well if it hits you in the face, it would be a definite improvement." We both chuckled and waited to see what would happen. Just then, the town elder and an Imam approached us. I had my interpreter Max exit the vehicle and we all talked.

It seems the young lady had held hands with a boy and this was her punishment. Her mother was in the crowd and was sporting the largest rock. This action is the norm for their society, but not here, not at this time on this day. I informed the Imam that back home, I had children and would never punish them in such a way as to cause them bodily harm. I told him that in a free society, doing harm to another is a crime in itself. The Imam understood and disbursed the crowd. I talked with the village elder and found that he supported the efforts to have a society with a little more freedom. As the situation was brought to a close, the young girl was led off by her mother. I felt that the worst was yet to come for me. We completed the mission and returned to Forward Operating Base Sykes.

I was ready to accept responsibility for my actions. I was to meet Lt. Resole and Sgt. 1st Class Naylor in front of the Cinnabon coffee house at 7:00 p.m. I arrived for this "formal" counseling and figured I would lose rank or face an Article 15 (non-judicial punishment). As it turned out they were glad I took the step to protect the well-being of a local civilian. However, I was informed by Lt. Resole, that I had to write 100 times "I will listen to what my daddy says from now on" and I had to buy the coffee that night. So, at the end of this day we had a successful mission, practiced our beliefs, helped a young girl out and made an ally in our efforts to bring freedom to a foreign land. A tired hand from writing and \$12.75 for coffee was a small price to pay for the day's accomplishments.