

COMMENTARY

'Captain Lawrence Rockwood in Haiti'

Albert C. Pierce

ter for the study Professional Military Ethics, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapoli: MD, U: Te 410
6057. Fax 1 293 6081. E-mail: acpierce@usna.edu

We commissioned this case and included it in our Ethics Center's Case Study Program not only because it is an interesting story, but because we made two important assumptions: (1) that U.S. armed forces, as well as those of other nations, will be involved in other humanitarian interventions in the future, and (2) that other soldiers may well feel torn between duty to obey the orders of their superiors and duty to humanitarian values. While Haiti itself and Rockwood himself are both unique, the ethical challenges he faced there are not. Thus this case is important because it sheds useful light on some of the problems nations and their troops may well encounter in future humanitarian interventions.

As with all good case studies, this one unfolds on two levels: One is the particular story of U.S. Army Captain Lawrence Rockwood in Haiti during September 1994, and the other is the larger lessons one can derive from those particulars that might be applicable in other circumstances. I have taught this case more than 20 times with groups ranging from undergraduate military cadets to senior military officers. The discussions are always lively, and a wide range of opinions almost always come into play.

One useful way to approach the case is to examine the tension between two important values—obeying orders and helping the helpless. As a professional soldier, Rockwood is bound to obey the orders of his superiors. This is what makes military organizations work. It is at the core of the military profession. In his classic book *The Soldier and the State* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), Samuel P. Huntington writes: 'loyalty and obedience are the highest military virtues.... When the military man receives a legal order from an authorized superior, he does not argue, he does not hesitate, he does not substitute his own views' (p. 73). Rockwood, a fourth-generation military man, understands this tradition and this principle, yet he violates his orders with conscious intent.

Rockwood's intent is the result of another, competing value—helping the helpless. As Wraga explains in this issue (p. 46), '[r]escuing the helpless and opposing the tyrannous is precisely what a military is for', in Rockwood's mind. As a counterintelligence officer, Rockwood has followed events in Haiti for more than a year, and he knew well the horrors of the regime in power. He draws inspiration from President Bill Clinton's 15 September 1994 address in which the President said that a primary objective in sending U.S. troops to Haiti was 'to stop the brutal atrocities' (ibid.: 48).

Deeply moved by a visit to Dachau when he was eight years old, Rockwood remembers the lesson his father taught him during that visit: 'My father told me that these camps are not the creation of a few evil, brutal men. They're really the creation of cynicism and blind obedience to authority' (ibid., 47). It is this lesson that gives rise to the tension between following orders and helping the helpless. In Rockwood's mind, in September 1994, he cannot do both, and so must choose between them. In Huntington's terms, during his week in Haiti Rockwood argues, he hesitates, he substitutes his own views. On the night of 30 September, he opts for helping the helpless, and then pays the price. After his return to the States, he is court-martialed and found guilty of several serious offenses. (As of this writing, he is still appealing those convictions.)

Sometime after Rockwood was sent home, the U.S. military did enter the prisons in Haiti, and at least one senior commander has since argued that Rockwood was right—that the U.S. military should have gone into the prisons much sooner than they actually did—but that Rockwood went about it in entirely the wrong way. Pursuing this complex point has proven to be a very productive line of inquiry in classes: How might Rockwood have done things differently and perhaps achieved a more positive outcome—for the Haitians in the prisons, for the U.S. operations in Haiti, and for Rockwood himself? Could he/should he have, for example, waited for the issue to get to the commanding general, pressed his case more persuasively and less confrontationally, gone quietly to the press to draw attention to the prisons? Or should he have just followed orders and gone about doing the job he was told to do?

Another related, interesting, and important question is, what others—his battalion commander, the chaplain, the military lawyers, the inspector general, and others he confronted with his requests to visit the prisons—could have done differently that might also have produced a better outcome all round? One retired senior officer, after listening to a lively discussion of this case among cadets, told them that one important lesson is, 'listen to your subordinates', not necessarily to do what they suggest, but to listen to them carefully and with an open mind, and not to brush them off precipitately. There are both leadership and 'followership' lessons to be derived from the case of Captain Lawrence Rockwood.

The point of teaching this case, especially to military students, is *not* to argue that one *ought* to disobey orders, to argue, to hesitate, to substitute one's own views. Rather, it seems to me, the value of this case—especially for military professionals—is in examining the tensions this particular officer felt between his sworn duty to obey the lawful orders of his superiors and his humanitarian values, examining them with an eye towards better understanding those tensions, which may well be felt by other soldiers in other humanitarian interventions. This goes back to the assumptions that drove us to commission and publish this case study—that there will be other humanitarian interventions in the future, and that among the troops deployed in them may well be others wrestling with similar dilemmas. *Everyone's* interests, it seems to me, would be well served by being better prepared to deal with such tensions and dilemmas.

Biography

Albert C. Pierce is first director of the Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD, USA. He is a graduate of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., with a major in politics, and he holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. in political science from Tufts University in Medford, MA, USA. His many publications include works on just war and crisis management.