

**Ethical Decision Problem #14**

## Investigating Tactical Incidents

**Situation**

You are a captain, on the division staff, deployed in a large city in a Third World country during a humanitarian/peacekeeping operation. Things have gone well. Since the Marines landed a month ago the criminal elements that had caused most of the trouble have melted away. Most importantly, the local populace remains generally supportive of the presence of U.S. troops.

Upon arriving at the division command post early in the morning 2 days ago, you heard news that a Marine patrol had been ambushed in the early morning hours. Two Marines were wounded, and a Navy corpsman was killed in the incident. The patrol had reportedly been passing through a neighborhood controlled by a faction believed to be friendly.

At a hastily assembled staff meeting later that same day, the division commander directed that a rapid investigation be made into the circumstances surrounding the ambush. He also instructed the G-3 to begin planning a show of force operation in the same neighborhood. Its execution would depend on the results of the investigation. Shortly after that meeting you were directed to conduct the investigation and to be prepared to brief your conclusions to the division commander personally within 24 hours. Although you conducted an extensive search for information

from all likely sources during the time allotted, details related to the identity of those responsible for the ambush and the reason for it eluded you.

Just before the scheduled briefing, you are approached by a second lieutenant. He is clearly nervous and asks to speak to you privately about matters related to your investigation of the ambush. The lieutenant, who is the adjutant of an infantry battalion, tells you that he thinks he knows why the ambush occurred. According to him, a fire team from his battalion had patrolled the same neighborhood the day before the ambush occurred. In the course of that patrol a young Marine, exhausted from the heat and stress, had become enraged with a local boy. The boy had tried to steal his first aid kit, and the Marine had retaliated by butt-stroking him in the head with his rifle. The boy was carried away by locals before first aid could be rendered by other members of the patrol. His condition is not known. The lieutenant goes on to state his belief that the ambush was carried out by members of the boy's family or clan in retaliation for the incident. He concluded by reporting that at an officers' meeting a few hours earlier the battalion CO had ordered that no word of this incident leave the battalion.

As the lieutenant leaves, you realize you have only 10 minutes until your briefing with the division commander. In a time limit of 10 minutes decide how you would handle this situation.

EDPs involve real-world leadership challenges that usually have a significant ethical/values component. They are typical of challenges that have confronted Marines in the past and could easily be encountered in the future. Readers should analyze the problem carefully and decide what action they would take.

**Turn to page 70 to see how others say they would have handled this problem.**