Comparison and Contrast: SFC Paul Smith and 2Lt Ilario Pantano

Description

After reading with interest the stories of the two men in the topic line, one the first Congressional Medal of Honor Winner in the GWoT, the other, a combat leader who has been subjected to an Article 32 (equivalent of a civilian Grand Jury proceeding). That contrast, for each man, is their distinction is a result of combat action in Iraq. One a hero, one accused of murder.

Thatâ€™s about as far at the opposite ends of the spectrum as you can get. Now for some comparison:

In the stories of who each of these men are, there was a common thread between the two. They both demanded their men were ready for combat. Training was the method, and it sounds like was used for thier units by SFC Smith and Lt Pantano, while other units went on Liberty.

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Paul Smith had been called â€œthe morale naziâ€• by his men, implied in the St. Petersburg Times articles, because he made them do things over and over, making sure they had them right. SFC Smithâ€™s life philosophy seemed to be that his profession was what he focused on. His troops, after his death in the firefight, credit his training, taring, and training, as what kept them alive, while he took on the terrorists. The men in his charge, who thought he was some kind of fanatic about traiing, I suspect are now â€œrebornâ€• and will hammer the lesson into their units. They are the next generation of â€œmorale nazisâ€• as well as combat heros. SFC Paul Smithâ€™s legacy will save more lives.

2Lt Pantano sounds like he is cut from the same cloth. Insisting on doing it right through training, and then demanding those procedures on the battle field. As a result, he was accused of murder. The man who accused him was a sargent who was relieved of his squad leader position for failing to follow procedures while the platoon took a break in the field. the sargent didnâ€™t have his men follow the correc tsecurity procedures. Sounds like a good reason to pull someone out of leadership to me. Not only can a mistake like this get the sargent killed in combat, but many of the other members of the unit. From my experience, I cannot see how the reprimand and relief of duty could not have been a causative factor in the bringing of charges against his platoon leader.

Not to compare any of my work with these two combat heros, but Iâ€™ll tell you what I found while in the training world, to help frame the Lt Pantano case issues. for three years, I was assigned to a mobile training team and my duty in the organization was to evaluate the Combat Systems readiness of Atlantic Fleet surface units. I reported as a senior O-4 and left as an O-5. Iâ€™ll say this: I didnâ€™t have the job to make friends, nor to make enemies. I had it to report to a 3 star the status of his ships, as they worked their way up through the readiness for deployment cycle. As a result, I had to make some calls, based on established criterai from printed Navy and DoD references. In a few cases, the â€œgradeâ€• wasnâ€™t to the liking of the Captain of the ship, or maybe his boss. The bottom line: A few senior officers wanted to throw me under the bus, along with my team, because we did what we had to do. One very senior O-6 Squadron Commodore, made a point of publicly berating me on the bridge wing of a ship because I was â€œflunking his best Engineering ship.â€• I donâ€™t know about you, but it sure seemed like a disconnected argument to me. The equipemt to ward off attackers

wasnâ€™t working to design specs, and under preformed (by a big margin) that day. I had an obligation to report it. The Commodore flew to Norfolk to walk straight into the Type Commanderâ€™s office the next morning. Thankfully, the Type Commander â€œgot it.â€• Case closed, grade stood.

My point: Most of the people I met in the service, to include my two tours while assigned to training organizations, really werenâ€™t interested in doing training, training and more training. The ones who did were looked at, at the least, like they had three heads.

SFC Smithâ€™s actions on the day of his death dispelled any thoughts of him being a morale nazi. The sargent who accused Lt Pantano of committing murder is alive to do so, because he served a leader who knew it was important, above all else, to be ready for combat and to carry out that training.

With luck, Lt Pantanoâ€™s case will be dropped,as the Article 32 board seems to have recommended. I just hope the leadership of the Corps does the right thing.

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