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Pardoned: Army 1st Lt. Clint Lorance speaks out

After spending six years at Ft. Leavenworth, Clint Lorance is pardoned by Pres. Trump and now speaks to Blue about the injustices of the legal system

By Eddie Molina

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What is your personal worst-case scenario as a law enforcement officer while on duty? The first answer is most likely getting shot and killed by a suspect. Then there are other tragedies; getting into a serious car accident during a high-speed pursuit, being held hostage in a prison riot or having a human being (God forbid a child) die in your arms. Those are all tragedies that could occur, and we pray that they never do.

But what about the scenario of a split-second decision that could be the difference between life and death—or the difference between being hailed a hero or getting indicted?

There is often a lot riding on the line of a split-second decision. For example, say you have a suspect who's fumbling around inside his jacket even though you continually tell him to show his hands. You're thinking ... *Is he rattled and just nervous? Does he have a lethal weapon he's reaching for? What's his intent? It's nighttime and I can't see well. Whatever I do, I better decide quickly!* That entire conversation is going on in your head in a matter of seconds.

That is a very real part of law enforcement that carries enormous legal and life-threatening consequences. The best-case scenario is your instinct was right and your actions were perfectly appropriate in the eyes of the law and public opinion. The worst-case scenario is you made a controversial decision—a decision your department is pressured to call 'the wrong decision' and now you face charges. It is then left in the hands of an unpredictable jury in a social climate geared toward a growing anti-police state.

That's what happened to Army 1st Lieutenant Clint Lorange. On July 02, 2012, Lt. Lorange and his platoon were on patrol in an area of Kandahar province, Afghanistan, known for enemy combatants masquerading as civilians who are hell-bent on killing Americans and our way of life.

Members of Clint's platoon observed three individuals on a motorcycle approaching the patrol. Given the frequency of Vehicle Born Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) and suicide bombers in that area, Clint, with only moments to decide, ordered his soldiers to fire on them, leading to the death of two and the capture of the third.

That is the fog of war.

Clint stands by his decision, but the upper echelon of the Army's chain of command disagreed. Clint was later charged and found guilty of two counts of murder and sentenced to 20 years at Fort Leavenworth. The case made national headlines and was recently featured as a documentary on the Starz Channel entitled *Leavenworth*.

It wasn't until November of 2019 (six years into his sentence) that President Trump called Fort Leavenworth to speak directly to Clint to give him a full presidential pardon.

In an exclusive interview, Blue Magazine sat down with Clint to get the full story on what happened that fateful day and the events that followed it. We covered everything; his leadership philosophy, his theory on government officials and top brass politicizing incidents (sound familiar?), and much more.

Blue: Tell us about your military experience.

Clint: I enlisted into the Army as soon as I turned 18 and chose to be an MP (military police). I deployed to Iraq and then decided to go to college while I was in the Army. Once I finished school I went into OCS (Officer Candidate School).

Blue: Where did the desire to serve in the military come from?

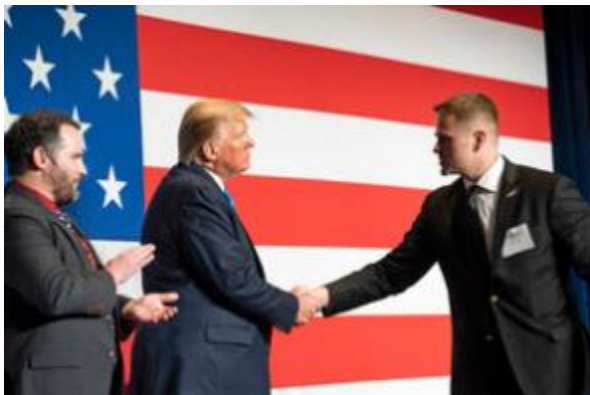
Clint: I did it because of this city right here (New York City) due to the events of 9/11. I really wanted to be a Texas state trooper. Even though they don't make much money, they are highly respected in Texas. But I don't know if I would do that now because of the way police get treated.

Blue: Prior to becoming an officer in the Army, had you considered the fact that you may have to make a split-second decision that carries enormous legal and life-threatening consequences?

Clint: Yes. While I was in Iraq, I saw it all the time. I saw officers making critical decisions that were later scrutinized. I felt I could handle it because I know I'm a good guy, I loved the Army and I love America. Like most people, I never *wanted* to kill people. That was a war where you would have to make impossible decisions.

Blue: The incident occurred on your third day with the platoon. You were selected to take over the platoon after the original platoon leader was wounded and sent to the rear. Why you?

Clint: My commander at the time told me the platoon seriously lacked discipline and that they needed someone like me to clean it up. He told me that when he sees them, they're not shaven, they don't wear their body armor when they're supposed to, they're running around in their underwear, they're calling the platoon leader by his first name ... and that is simply unacceptable.



Blue: That is unacceptable. I specialize in leadership theory. Subordinates who call their leader by their first name degrade discipline and the leader's authority. In law enforcement, that jeopardizes public safety.

Clint: And when you have soldiers that stop shaving (one of the most basic military requirements), what else are they going to give up on? Stop loading their magazines? Or stop calling in reports? That all starts with discipline.

Blue: From a leadership perspective, when a new lieutenant arrives to his or her unit for the first time, the soldiers already there will be very cautious, critical, and even uncooperative to a

certain degree simply because the lieutenant represents change and fear of the unknown. How do you feel that played a role with several of your soldiers disagreeing with your decision, even testifying against you?

Clint: They should have been skeptical; I would be skeptical too. You have a new guy who's giving you orders, making you work more, who's making you do your job compared to the last guy who, in my case, hasn't even read the book. When I walked into the guard tower and soldiers didn't have their helmet or body armor on, I told them to put it on. And they didn't like that, they didn't like taking orders like that, but I was brought in there to enforce the standard.

Blue: From the moment you were made aware of an incoming motorcycle to the moment you gave the order to fire on them, what was going through your mind? What emotions were you experiencing?

Clint: I remember my mindset at that time because I had six years (in prison) to think about it. The day before the incident, day 2, I sat down with everyone to get to know them; what their goals are, their backgrounds, and so on. When the call came in requesting to fire on the motorcycle that I couldn't even see from a soldier I knew was a police officer before the army, I said yes. During those few seconds I had to decide, I was thinking about the intelligence reports that I was very familiar with and how the Taliban would place C-4 explosives under the seat of the motorcycle in such a way you couldn't even see it. They typically didn't carry rifles or grenade launchers so it's not really obvious. I had a duty to react to that because if I didn't, I could've been sending soldiers home in a body bag. That's the thing with war; you have to know what the enemy could potentially do.

Blue: That's an extremely difficult thing for the average civilian to understand. Clint: The generals that are in charge have no clue what

the reality of combat is on the ground. The ones that served in Vietnam are all gone; the generals now are paper pushers. Those who served in Iraq are not old enough to be a general. They may have served in Desert Storm, or Panama or Kosovo, but they have no idea what it's really like.

Blue: Use of force is a critical component of law enforcement. Do you feel the Rules of Engagement for the Use of Force were appropriate for that area of operations?

Clint: No. We were at a point where if the Taliban shot at us with small arms fire, like an AK-47, we would have to radio back to higher headquarters to get permission to fire back. That's ridiculous.

Blue: Regarding the trial, was there any surprising testimony?

Clint: What did surprise me was when Deputy Brigade Commander Colonel Alstead came and took the stand on my behalf and spoke highly of my character.

Blue: How, if at all, do you feel your case and trial was politicized?

Clint: The military has been social engineering for a long time. For example, you have Senator Gillibrand, among other politicians, who tells the Pentagon, 'You have a problem with sexual assault. My voters want you to fix it.' Senators then put pressure on the Pentagon and when generals are up for promotion and it goes for Senate confirmation, senators like Gillibrand will say no unless the generals pushed their agenda to help them secure votes to get re-elected. And that's what happens with cases like mine.



Blue: What advice do you want to give law enforcement officers when it comes to facing criminal charges and going to trial?

Clint: My first advice is, don't say anything to anyone other than your PBA rep. One of the things I did right was when CID (Criminal Investigation Division) walked into the room, I said I want to talk to JAG (Judge Advocate General) and that's it.

Blue: What about your attorney?

Clint: If I could go back, I would take out a second mortgage, sell everything I own and get a better attorney. You want an attorney who actually cares and doesn't have a huge caseload. Do your homework and pick the right attorney.

Blue: What was it like at Ft. Leavenworth?

Clint: I actually told the president that the American people should be proud of how the military treats its prisoners. They (Ft. Leavenworth staff) go out of their way to make sure everything is as fair as possible.

Blue: What now, what does the future hold for you?

Clint: I want to go to law school and be a part of the solution. Too many politicians push their own agendas and justice gets moved aside and that's crap! I want to dedicate my life to helping people and pursuing justice and fairness.

Also, if I may, I have to mention UAP, United American Patriots (www.UAP.org). They are a nonprofit organization whose employees dedicate their lives to help servicemen and women fight the injustices of the military legal system. They still have several cases ongoing....

Clint and I ended the interview talking about how much has changed in six years. Although that is time he will never see again, he spent it building the conviction needed to pursue real change in the military and civilian justice system. We hope he gets there and makes the changes the justice system desperately needs so our heroes in the military and in Blue avoid becoming political puppets and, instead, get recognized for their dedicated service.

About the writer: Eddie Molina specializes in leadership theory and practice but covers everything related to the law enforcement, first responder and military community. Go to www.eddiemolina.com for more information.