

Friendly Fire

LCDR R. C. Richards
Command Chaplain

Several years ago, I was given a list of rules for armed combat. Most of them were intended to be humorous, while still reminding us of common sense realities. One of them pointed out that tracers work both ways. Another cautioned the reader to try to look unimportant when there are snipers in the area. One stated that “friendly fire isn’t.” In other words, just because it was inflicted by our own side doesn’t make it less lethal or painful.

Normally, the way friendly fire occurs is, during the confusion of battle, someone is easily confused with the enemy. The person firing the round is confused by the “fog of war,” and in the heat of the moment inflicts injury because he can’t tell who the enemy is or has a reasonable belief that the other person is hostile.

I have seen many casualties of “friendly fire” in relationships over the years. This usually happens during an argument between family members. The two parties are engaged in a disagreement and it becomes a very emotionally charged issue. The more it is discussed, the angrier the individuals become. Unfortunately, when we become very angry, it clouds our judgment and causes us to say and do things that we would not do if we thought about it first.

The problem with “friendly fire” of this sort is that it is normally not a physical injury so much as an emotional casualty. It has been my experience that hurt of this kind usually takes a great deal of time to heal. It is often left untreated and festers for many years. The problem is that the longer it is left untreated, the more difficult it is to overcome.

I have known of people who have completely severed ties with family members over words that were spoken. When someone we love or desire approval from says something that is unkind to us, it usually causes a deeper level of pain and emotional injury than if the same words were spoken by a total stranger or someone which whom we have no emotional investment. So, in reality, friendly fire wounds us more deeply.

The good news is that friendly fire doesn’t necessarily have to be fatal to a relationship. Sometimes it will be because the parties are so deeply hurt that they are not willing to try to reconcile, but normally, we feel the pain because there has been a rift in the relationship that we have a desire to heal. If both parties will acknowledge the injury they have caused to the other and ask forgiveness, the healing can begin.

Sometimes, just like with a physical injury, it requires professional help to repair the wound, but many times we can resolve it ourselves. It simply requires a willingness to put the pain behind us and restore the relationship with the other person. But the best thing to do would be, just like in combat, to reduce the number of casualties to friendly fire. The best way to do this would be to back off during the heat of an argument and give serious thought about what harm could be caused by our words. I guess it boils down to what my mother taught me—think before you speak. That way, maybe I can avoid saying something that would be hurtful to another person. Let’s all avoid friendly fire injuries.

Semper Fi in the Lord and I hope to see you in Church on Sunday.