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Pay Variances for Senior Leadership in the Military

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Abstract

Senior Enlisted Soldiers are more educated and normally an important figure within a unit. They advise their officer counterparts daily in war and peace. Lawmakers are the elected officials who have the ability to equal the playing field of this “World Series.” A unit is a nine-man baseball team! The Battalion Commander pitches, the Company Commanders play infield, and the Lieutenants are the outfielders. The remaining position is the catcher, and this position is held by the Command Sergeant Major. They control the outfielders and makes sure they are in position. They make sure the infielders are prepared for the bunt. Lastly, the Command Sergeant Major makes sure the pitcher throws a curve when he recognizes a weak hitter. The players are happy when they win, but when its time for pay, the Command Sergeant Major is paid as the team’s ball boy.

An ethical dilemma that faces the United States Army today is the unequal and discriminating practice of paying Officers far more than Senior Noncommissioned Officers. I have served in the Army of this great nation for just over 22 years. During my tenure in the military, the NCO Corps is the only affiliation I have ever had an interest in. My promotion to the NCO ranks with less than three years of service, and holding every leadership position for the last nineteen years, has always left an unequal impression of the officer when it comes to work and pay.

In the civilian sector, discrimination is no longer acceptable and the same should apply in the military. The law forbids discrimination based on race, creed, color, gender or national origin; on the other hand, those ethics do not apply in all aspects of the military. The nature of our profession demands some special privileges, but not any form of discrimination. Although we do not put up with this in society, the military is blind to this when it comes to the equality of pay. The Senior Noncommissioned Officers are the front line defense for this country and makes up a large percentage of all forces fighting in major conflicts abroad. NCOs are the leaders who make things happen; without us, no mission directed by Officers can be conducted in a timely manner.

Soldiers join the military for many different reasons: for college money, because a family member served, because they are patriotic, or because they want the experience. Soldiers stay in the military because they have a sense of stabilization, and they love the added responsibility you obtain as you rise in position and rank. In the words of General John Abizaid, Combatant Commander, Central Command, during a visit to USASMA on November 1, 2006, "I want you all to stay the course and have your Soldiers do the same." Those are strong words for senior leaders; we may need additional

incentives to convince these troopers to continue their service to the nation during this long war.

A Command Sergeant Major normally partners with a Lieutenant Colonel, but is paid \$2,286.00 less per month than his officer counterpart; this is equivalent to \$27,432.00 less per year at 20 years. When a CSM serves at the brigade level, they are paid \$39,434.40 less per year, and it gets worse as the billets increase. Based on Class 57's statistics, if I used 16 years time in service, since that is the average length of time for Sergeant Majors promoted thus far, the figures are excruciating. Let's take a closer look at more startling figures. Looking at the 2007 approved pay chart, the base pay for an E-9 with 20 years of service is \$4,821.60, while a Captain makes \$5,355.90, a Major makes \$6,252.30, a Lieutenant Colonel makes \$7,158.00, and a Colonel makes \$8,180.10. This also allows a Captain with eight years of service to make almost the same amount as a Sergeant Major with 20 years. Where is the equality in this? A Major with a mere six years of service will make more than a Sergeant Major with 20 years, how is this justified? A Lieutenant Colonel, also with six years of service, will make more than a Sergeant Major with 26 years. Some would argue that basic allowance for subsistence and the enlisted clothing allowance make up for the inconsistency.

This leads me to the following questions: Is the responsibility any less? Is the stress any less? Are the expectations or requirements any fewer? Where is the "team" in the partnership of the battalion or brigade leadership team? The work, the responsibility, the successes, the failures, the praises, and the reprimands are shared equally. One thing

the team does not share equally is compensation, as the CSM will generally make 40 percent less. Is this accepted because we are Noncommissioned? If so, does that make it right? Is this allowed because Officers are in a better position to control the disbursements? Does the NCO Corps have appropriate representation in place to make a difference?

A rationale does exist that justifies officers being compensated more; however, this does not merit a 40 percent difference. Due to the nature of our job, NCOs are at the forefront of battle in larger numbers than officers; subjecting us more often to injury, capture, or death. We spend more time training and mentoring Soldiers. NCOs most often have the same or more years of service; we are the subject matter experts, setting the example for Officers and Enlisted alike. In some cases, NCOs may exceed the Officers education level, or the education level may parallel. NCOs generally do not have a program that will afford us the luxury of attending college for a year while the Army picks up the check. We have the same level of responsibility, and generally, we are the "fall guy" if the unit doesn't live up to its expectations. In many units if you replace the Officers, the unit can still function and fulfill its mission, try doing that by removing the NCOs. We attend the same level of military schools, Warrior Leaders Course, Basic Noncommissioned Officers Course, Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course, First Sergeants Course, Battle Staff Course and the Sergeants Major Academy. Officers attend Officer Basic Course, Officer Advance Course, Command and General Staff and The War College.

The examples I have shown create animosity throughout the military. Plainly this is discrimination and an injustice that must be corrected. The question is what course of

action is the best solution? We can't nor would we consider any action that would resemble a strike, as the warrior ethos will not allow it. So, how do we get equal say when law makers meet to discuss pay and entitlements for the military? I don't have the answer, but I leave you with an ethical issue that plagued the Army yesterday and is not only considered offensive, but an insult to Noncommissioned Officers today.

Some may say we made the choice to become enlisted, therefore we shouldn't complain about the money. That really has no bearing at all, as that would suggest that some of us serve for the money only. I would respond by saying that I put my life on the line when I go into harms way, just as my officer partners do, so why should my compensation be far less?

That being said, I would still like to see better compensation for myself and my peers. I love the NCO Corps; it is my life and my second love next to family. As with all things we cherish, we try to make them better. One way to improve and retain quality people is to make the compensation appropriate to the contribution. We choose to be NCOs; does that mean I shouldn't expect to afford the best education for my children? Should my quality of life be less than that of my officer counterpart? If we NCOs are truly, "the backbone of the Army" as stated by Major General Bostick, USAREC Commander, during his visit just a few days ago, then those in a position to make a change must take care of the good Soldiers or many will choose to leave for the financial incentives that the civilian sector provides. I, and many of my peers, will continue to serve regardless of whether the situation improves or not, because this is our calling.

The educational degree the Officer has doesn't merit them making 60 percent more than the NCOs. Their degree is no better than mine, nor does it equate to my years

of experience. When it comes to leading troops, which will prove to be more valuable, the experience or the history degree?

To my contemporaries, I advocate only that we continue to cherish the honor of serving this great nation, and we support the officers appointed over us. I also feel that we owe it to ourselves and our families to make our voices heard and ensure elimination of this discrimination while we serve. We must know that we have the potential to evoke a change in those who dictate policy. We must not be weak in our resolve, if not for us, for those who follow. Let us make sure that the policy makers understand that we are just as valuable as anyone else, if not more so. Furthermore, we understand that there should be some difference in pay, but the disparity in no way needs to be this great. It is contentious to think this is fair and equitable for all service members. I fail to see why there is a question regarding retention. Anyone can see that the Noncommissioned Officers are not provided a compelling reason for staying in the military any longer than they have to, even though it is a life that we love; it embodies those things that make us who we are. The time for change is now as tomorrow will be too late.

References

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