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Dec 07, 2007

Abstract

According to AR 600-8-22 the goal of the Army awards program is to foster mission accomplishment by recognizing excellence of military members of the force and motivating them to high levels of performance and service. As senior Noncommissioned Officers, one of our most important responsibilities is to ensure that Soldiers are identified for excellence with the way they performed in their jobs. Unfortunately, there are many leaders that are not following the guidance set forth in AR 600-8-22. The Army award system is broken, complete with quotas, undeserving recipients, degraded value of awards, and a negative impact on Soldier moral.

The Army Awards System is Broken

According to AR 600-8-22 the goal of the Army awards program is to foster mission accomplishment by recognizing excellence of military members of the force and motivating them to high levels of performance and service. As senior Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs'), one of the most important responsibilities we have is to ensure that Soldiers are identified for excellence in performance of their jobs. The guidance behind the award system is very simple to understand. According to AR 600-8-22, "no deserving act should go un-awarded, no decoration should be awarded that has not been earned, and where more than one person participates in an act which is to be recognized, each Soldier should be awarded in proportion to his or her participation"(AR 600-8-22, 2006). However, are Army leaders following this guidance and recognizing Soldiers fairly and ethically? I feel that the Army award system is broken, complete with quotas, undeserving recipients, degraded value of awards, and a negative impact on Soldier moral. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the purposes of the Army award program, how reality shows that the award system is broken, and finally, how we as senior NCOs' can help correct some of the problems with the Army award system.

The Purpose of Awards program according to AR 600-8-22

As I said in the introduction, according to AR 600-8-22, the goal of the Army Awards program is to foster mission accomplishment by recognizing excellence of military members of the force and motivating them to high levels of performance and service. LTG Michael Rochelle, the Deputy Chief of Staff, G1 of the United States Army states "the Army is fully committed to the responsibility to properly recognize our Soldiers for their valor, heroism, and

meritorious service through a fair and consistent decorations and awards policy and process.” As senior NCOs’ we should take these responsibilities seriously. Awards and decorations are very important to Soldiers. It is imperative that we recognize the right individuals for the proper award so that the program is credible to the Soldiers and the American people. We must ensure the integrity of the award is maintained through strict procedures and proper justifications. The criteria for all military awards are set forth in statutes, executive orders and appropriate regulations. These regulations establish the standards by which those awards are processed, approved and presented. When followed, this consistency upholds the heritage of the awards and the legacy of the heroes who have earned them.

Reality Today in the Army

Unfortunately, the reality across the Army is that many leaders are falling short of the responsibilities I just mentioned. Rather than following the guidelines set forth in AR 600-8-22 and giving awards to deserving recipients, many leaders are using quota systems and basing the awards entirely upon rank and duty position. For example, if you were a company commander or First Sergeant, you got a Bronze Star Medal, if you were a Platoon Leader or Platoon Sergeant you got a Meritorious Service Medal, if you were a Specialist or below you were lucky to receive an Army Commendation Medal. By following these methods of giving the medals out in a blanket fashion, these leaders degrade the value of the medals and the collective feelings in those who earned the awards in question. Not only are leaders not following the qualification criteria set forth in AR 600-8-22 but it also seems that awards are being given too freely. For example, during the Global War on Terrorism, the United States Military has awarded more than 47,000

Bronze Star Medals. That is substantially more than the 30,000 Bronze Star Medals that were given during the Korean War. The Korean War involved triples the amount of troops and approximately twenty times more casualties. The amount of Bronze Star Medals given in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom suggests that leaders are giving out the medals for merely performance of duty in leadership positions rather than for service well above the expected performance of duty as it states in AR 600-8-22. Another example is when members of an Air Force bomber crew were all awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for lobbing a smart bomb from 30,000 feet onto a house where Saddam was rumored to be breaking bread, even though Saddam turned out to be miles away at another hideout. Additionally, a Navy two-star admiral and six of his subordinates were awarded the Bronze Star after a Scud missile struck more than ten miles away. An Army Colonel was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for leading a team of military and civilians in delivering equipment to troops in Iraq with no incidents of enemy contact. A U.S. Army Reserve Major was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for “transporting a hospital” from Pakistan to Afghanistan with “no pilferage or incident.” In another example, a Navy Yeoman 1st Class received the Bronze Star Medal for planning the “Seabee Ball” in Baghdad. These are all clear examples of individuals being awarded the Bronze Star Medals without meeting the criteria set forth in AR 600-8-22. The regulation clearly states that to be eligible for the Bronze Star Medal the individual must demonstrate acts that are well above the expected performance of duty. These previous examples did not meet those criteria. If leaders are not awarding medals fairly it has a huge impact on Soldier moral. Additionally, due to the fact that higher awards are given out so freely, lesser awards like the Army Achievement Medal and Army Commendation Medal are

devalued. When awards are given for simple performance of duty all Soldiers start to expect higher awards. Soldiers should be able to trust their leaders to award them fairly and ethically for their hard work. We should work hard to get them the exact award that they deserve.

Correcting the Problem

As senior NCOs' it is imperative that we work hard to protect the integrity of the Army award system. We must ensure that our commanders follow the guidelines set forth in AR 600-8-22. We must fight hard and make sure that our Soldiers are appropriately recognized for their service and achievements. This will take a lot of effort and personal courage. Many commanders have strong biases about how awards should be distributed. It is important to demonstrate to them the consequences of distributing the awards in an unfair manner. We need to ensure that our commanders recognize individuals for their personal achievements and not for the rank on their collar. By remaining vigilant in our endeavors to take care of our Soldiers we can have a major impact on our commanders. This is the key to making them believe that proper use of awards and decorations is paramount to maintaining the value of the awards and having a direct impact on Soldier moral.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Army award system is broken, complete with quotas, undeserving recipients, degraded value of awards, and negative impact on Soldier moral. As senior NCOs' it is imperative that we educate ourselves with the true purpose of the Army award program in accordance with AR 600-8-22 and work hard to correct the problems that are widespread today.

Our Soldiers deserve to be recognized in a fair and equitable manner and we should ensure nothing less. Army awards are steeped in history. Each individual award has a long line of distinguished recipients who fought our Nation's wars. Recognizing deserving Soldiers in a manner that reflects the nature and degree of their achievements and courage is among the Army's most time-honored traditions. When our Soldiers receive recognition by any of these awards, it is truly heartfelt.

References

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