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Senior noncommissioned officers are the frontline defense for this nation. They are the leaders that make things happen, without them no operation is carried out. In the Army a Command Sergeant Major will generally hold an O5 billet, yet is paid \$2,267.10 less per month than his officer counterpart, this equates to \$27,205.20 less per year at 16 years. At the brigade level a CSM is paid \$34,804.80 less per year; it gets more egregious from there. CSM is paid the same no matter if he's the Battalion or Major Command CSM.

This begs the question why, is the responsibility any less, is the stress reduced, are the expectations or requirements any fewer? Where is the "team", in battalion or brigade leadership team? The work, the responsibility, the successes, the failures, the praises, and the scolding are shared equally. One thing the team does not share equitably is compensation, as the CSM will make 40 percent less. Is this accepted because we are noncommissioned, if so does that make it right? Does the NCO corps have proper representation where it counts? By comparing the fiscal year 2006 pay chart at 20 years an E-9's base pay is \$4,717.80 while a captain makes \$5,240.70, a major at \$6,054.30, a lieutenant colonel at \$6,630.60, and a colonel at \$7,263.90. This also allows a captain with 10 years in-service to make \$4,875.30 a month and a Sergeant Major with 20 years \$4,717.80 per month. Where is the equality in this? A major with only eight years of service will make more than a Sergeant Major with 24 years, how is this justified?

A rationale does exist that will justify officers being compensated more; It's their potential. The Army is hiring someone who has the potential to be a major (battalion XO) or lieutenant colonel (battalion commander) in 15 to 20 years. To get the 22-year old college grad with that potential you have to offer him a wage that is comparable to

what he could make, with that potential, in a civilian job. The military is competing to hire those college grads with good potential. The requirement for a bachelor's degree before commissioning is universal across all the US Armed Forces. So you are competing with industry for these folks. So a lieutenant has to be compensated. A first lieutenant over 2 years (24 years old) who is a platoon leader for 1-year in Iraq is making 46,000, of which 38,041.20 is taxable. His civilian counterpart, an entry-level manager in a moderate sized US city with 2 years of experience is making about \$48,000 a year. I know the LT does not have to pay for his health care, but he is more likely to need to use it! So you have to compensate this 24-year old for assuming this "job". But does this merit a 40 percent difference in pay? I don't think the LT is making to much enlisted Soldiers' aren't being paid enough.

Because of the nature of our job, NCOs are at the forefront of battle; subjecting us more often to death or capture. We spend more time training and mentoring soldiers. NCOs have the same or more years of service, we are the subject matter experts setting the example for officers and enlisted alike. Often we have the same education even though; we do not have a program that will afford us the luxury of attending college for a year while the Army picks up the tab. I've seen the bachelor's degrees that some officers have and I fail to see how a BA in Computer Science makes you more fit to lead infantry platoon than an SSG with 6 years of experience of OJT. That being said, I agree there are some technical fields in the army where college degree should be mandatory for job. I just don't see it in most platoon leader level job.

Now what about compensation for the responsibility? The statement an officer is responsible for everything his men do and fail to do is true. That young man or woman is responsible for the lives of 15 to 55 other soldiers...their health, welfare, mission accomplishment. They are responsible for the planning, preparation and execution of

the unit mission. So are officers overpaid? I don't think so you have to pay for good people and you have to pay to keep good people. Should enlisted folks get paid more? Absolutely. The same 24-year old who enlisted at age 19 would be an SGT or SSG with 6 years of service their compensation is from \$34,000 to \$38,500 a year. That NCO is responsible for 3 to 15 Soldiers. We have responsibility and we are the "fall guy" if the unit doesn't live up to expectations. The responsibility is high but it is not the same as for that lieutenant. However in many units if you remove officers, the unit can still function and fulfill its mission, try doing that if you remove the NCOs. We attend comparable military schools, Warrior Leadership Course, Basic Noncommissioned Course, Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course, and the Sergeants Major Academy. Officers attend Officer Basic Course, Officer Advance Course, Command and Staff and the War College. Some would argue the basic allotment for housing and basic allotment for subsistence make up for the disparity. How many NCOs take BAH and BAS with them when they retire?

The examples I have shown creates bitterness throughout the military. However NCO and Officers are only two players in the game enough one is the Warrant Officer. Well-deserved pay raises in past years often targeted the SGT- SFC rank and did not provide corresponding adjustments to the pay of warrant officers. Consequently, the pay of the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) force has drawn closer, over the years, to that of warrant officers. This creates a problem of "*pay compression*." The problem is of increasingly significant impact as it adversely affects both warrant officer recruiting and retention for the approximately 20,000 warrants. Outstanding NCOs are no longer "given a warrant" as a reward for illustrious service, as was common in the past. Over the years, *pay compression* has reduced the difference in pay at all comparison points. To the effects that fewer Noncommissioned Officers now seek to become

warrant officers. The NCO sees little near-term increase to take home pay when considering the move to warrant officer. If we are to keep the warrant officer program we will have to adjust the warrant pay chart as we adjust the enlisted with target paid grade increases.

Some may say we made the choice of being enlisted therefore we shouldn't complain about the money. While that may be an admirable it has no bearing at all, as that would imply that some of us serve for the money only, but there is a much greater calling for most of us. That being said I would still like to see better compensation for NCO corps. I love the NCO corps, it is my life and as with all things we cherish, we try to make them better. One-way to improve and keep quality people is to make the compensation commensurate to the contribution. We choose being NCOs, does that mean I shouldn't expect to send my children to the best schools? Should my quality of life be less than that of my officer counterpart? If I am the backbone the Army we must take care of the good soldiers or they will leave. The main reason a LT with no experience can be afford 18 months to learn his job is because of the NCO and level of enlisted Soldiers that we were able to recruit. I and many of my peers will continue to serve regardless of any improvement that is our calling.

That educational degree the officer has doesn't merit him making 40 percent more than the NCOs, his degree is no better than mine, nor does it equates to years of experience. When it comes to leading troops, which will prove to be more valuable, the experience or the business 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.

We must know that we have the potential to evoke a change in those who dictate policy. We must not be faint in our resolve, if not for us, for those who follow. Let us make sure the policy makers understand that we are just as valuable as anyone else, if not more so. Also, we understand there should be some difference in pay but the disparity in no way needs to be this great. I have not even addressed the difference at the nominative level as that is completely egregious or the PVT – SPC which is a total disgrace when someone is defending their country and have to apply for food stamps. It is contentious to think this is fair and equitable for all service members. I understand why there is a question about retention. Anyone can see the noncommissioned officers are not provided an amicable reason for staying in the military any longer than they have too, 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.

Reference

Military Pay Charts – January 1, 2006