

Running head: Combined Federal Campaign an Ethical Dilemma

Undue Influence and the Combined Federal Campaign

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### Abstract

This essay examines the some of the ethical issues surrounding the implementation of the Combined Federal Campaign with the Army. It analyzes the ways that some leaders and subordinates are pressured or coerced to contribute and questions whether this is unlawful command influence or ethically right.

## Undue Influence and the Combined Federal Campaign

Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) presents many leaders with an ethical dilemma. Leaders and their subordinates are often forced to choose between perceptions of loyalty and the responsibility to do the right thing.

Here is one example of how the Combined Federal Campaign can present an ethical dilemma and why it is an issue in the U.S. Army. Its CFC time and Post sets a target amount of money they would like to receive in “voluntary” contributions from the Soldiers assigned. A platoon sergeant receives the CFC booklets and disseminates the information to his Soldiers. The Soldiers look through the CFC booklet and are not inclined to contribute. The Soldiers within the platoon have donated many hours of their personal time volunteering at the local hospital both with elderly veterans and with children. All of the platoon members had donated to Army Emergency Relief (AER) the previous month and having seen the results of cancer first hand while working with children and the hospital had given generously to cancer specific charities while helping at the hospital. Upon receiving the CFC booklets the Soldiers of the platoon decided they’d rather give back to the community by offering their free time and through monetary contributions made on their own terms and given directly to the local organizations where they could see the effects of their donations.

The platoon sergeant reported to the first sergeant that all members of his platoon had been contacted regarding CFC. The company commander wanted to be able to notify battalion that his company was 100%. That, he thought would demonstrate his unit’s willingness to help the community and their loyalty to battalion. He was however aware of the platoon’s already generous contributions to the community and was unwilling to push them to donate to CFC instead of the how they had chosen to give.

When the battalion commander, who was new to the unit and anxious to establish a name for himself, reviewed his units CFC status and realized that an entire platoon had not donated he called the company commander and demanded an explanation as to why one of his units was failing to support his battalions CFC drive. He asked the company commander how he was supposed to tell brigade that of all the battalions on post had the lowest percentage of contributions. The company commander explained that the Soldiers had been contacted but, before he could explain the contributions of the platoon to the community, the battalion commander cut him off. The battalion commander explained to him that it was his and the platoon sergeants leadership failure that caused the platoon to not contribute. The battalion commander then told the young captain to get a hold that platoon sergeant and explain to him about leadership and civic responsibility.

The company commander had a dilemma. He was eager to give the battalion commander what he wanted. He knew that the success of his command rests upon the battalion commander's opinion of his leadership abilities and the current CFC issue was not being viewed favorably. He also knew that the platoon sergeant had been proactive in supporting the community and with his platoon had provided more support to community than probably any other platoon in the brigade. How could he censure a platoon sergeant for his Soldiers not giving money to a voluntary cause? He opted to talk to the first sergeant and platoon sergeant together and see if perhaps the three of them could identify a solution. The result of the meeting was that the platoon sergeant agreed to once again remind his Soldiers about CFC and provide them with an opportunity to donate, but refused to ask them for help in achieving a command directed goal. The commander decided to try to smooth things over with battalion while realizing that the platoon sergeant was choosing an ethically sound course of action.

The platoon sergeant knew his Soldiers would give generously to support him. They were a team and had developed a high level of trust and confidence in each other. The platoon sergeant believed that asking his Soldiers for money in order to support his position was a violation of that trust. How could the platoon sergeant in good conscious use his Soldiers money to further his career? The platoon sergeant decided that he would do what he thought to be right even if it meant his career would suffer.

The battalion commander was briefed that the company commander had addressed the issue with the platoon sergeant and had not had any success in increasing the donations amounts. The battalion commander was furious that he would be unable to inform brigade that 100% of his unit had donated to CFC. The ability of subordinates to subvert his definition of success infuriated him. He had something on his desk though. He was the reviewer of the non compliant platoon sergeant's non-commissioned officer evaluation report (NCOER).

The platoon sergeant was on levy. He had his hands full with the myriad of tasks required too successfully clear an army installation and move a family stateside from an overseas assignment. He had an added source of stress however; his NCOER had not come back from battalion. He asked the S1 to try and locate it and determine its status and was told it was on the battalion commander's desk. The platoon sergeant thought that it would be signed shortly and then he could provide a copy to the out processing center and all would be well. After a few days and no sign of the NCOER time was getting short. Where was his NCOER? Would he get it back in time to clear and PCS? The platoon sergeant inquired again as to the whereabouts of his NCOER.

The battalion commander had refused to sign the NCOER. He wanted to damage the platoon sergeants career. He had been in the army long enough to realize he couldn't use CFC as

a reason to non-concur on an NCOER and submit a memorandum addressing the reason for non-concurring. The platoon sergeant had been publicly recognized by the battalion commander as exceptional just prior to this event. The inspector general would undoubtedly side with the platoon sergeant not having done anything unprofessional, unethical, or wrong. So the battalion commander just let the NCOER sit on his desk unsigned and went TDY to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana to attend the leader development training program.

The platoon sergeant could not finish clearing; he did not have a copy of his NCOER. Normally he could just delay his PCS but not in this case. He was leaving Alaska and had a specific reservation on a ferry. Reservations on the ferry must be made months in advance and if you're not aboard the one that you have reservations for you can be held financially responsible for the costs of the ferry and will likely be able to get another ticket. Winter was coming, this added to the platoon sergeant's stress. The trip from his current duty assignment to the ferry at Haines Alaska required two days of driving and the drive would become very difficult if the snow and ice got much worse endangering his family.

The battalion commander returned from his temporary duty at Fort Polk. He had received a few messages while there regarding the NCOER that needed his signature. The reply he had given to his staff was that he wasn't going to sign the NCOER until he'd had a chance to address the platoon sergeant himself and was contemplating his negative comments which would be attached to the NCOER in memorandum format.

The platoon sergeant went ahead with his clearing and at the worst possible time his final inspection of his quarters. The battalion staff notified the platoon sergeant that the battalion commander wanted to see him. He was forced to let his wife deal with the housing inspector and reported to the battalion commander as ordered. He listened to the degrading remarks of his

battalion commander while holding the coin the same battalion commander had given him a scant month before as a token of his appreciation of the platoon sergeants professionalism and hard work. He felt a sense of pride to take the verbal abuse knowing that his soldiers still had faith in him, the unit, and yes, even their battalion commander as they never knew the pressure that had been put on their leadership to further their own careers at the expense of the Soldiers meager pay.

The Combined Federal Campaign is a good cause and the funds collected have undoubtedly helped many. As a leader however, one should question why they feel pressured to meet a target number when the law and regulations do not give them the authority enforce those goals. Natural competition amongst commanders encourages the unlawful influence of subordinates to support CFC and the comparison of funds between different units. This competition changes the intended purpose of CFC from the spirit of charitable giving, to influencing Soldiers to demonstrate their loyalty to their superiors with their paychecks; at the expense of what?

## References

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