

**Ethical dilemma of overweight Soldiers in the military**

**By**

**MSG Stan Johnson**

**CMDMC Jimmy Carlisle**

**Group M05**

**16 November 2005**

Overweight Soldiers fight two battles – the war on terrorism and the military. The military has a policy governing all Soldiers to meet the Army height and weight screening standards. AR 600-9 states that all Soldiers in the military will have a weigh-in at a minimum during the Army Physical Fitness Test or every six months. The ethical dilemma occurs during garrison operations versus combat operations. Overweight Soldiers are considered unfit for duty, but are more than eligible to fight the war on terrorism. I believe a soldier may be overweight but physically fit and more than able to execute their wartime mission to standard. However, most leaders will say that a Soldier must not only be able to meet the physical demands of their duties under combat conditions, but also present a neat and trim appearance. They will also argue that Soldiers who cannot maintain personal standards such as weight, cannot be relied on to maintain standards and discipline during combat operations.

The first battle these overweight Soldiers must fight is AR 600-9 that gives the Soldier and Commander a time line to meet standards. A Soldier not meeting Army height and weight standards is placed in a special program for one year. Commanders must chapter Soldiers who do not make satisfactory improvement based on this regulation. Not all Soldiers that are overweight or do not meet the Army height and weight requirement are unfit for duty. Genetics, ethnic background, and level of self-discipline play a vital role in a Soldier's body composition. Most Soldiers who are in the program can pass the Army Physical Fitness Test and basic rifle marksman qualification. These are the skills most needed to save lives on the battlefield. Regardless of how well these Soldiers

perform, they are considered for elimination from the military and deemed unfit for duty. Once an overweight Soldier is placed on chapter status, they are non-deployable and cannot receive a permanent change of station until processed out of the military. These Soldiers are singled out based on their weight and not their performance of day-to-day operations. They must maintain standards, bearing, and discipline and continue to make improvements to be removed from the program.

The second battle that these Soldiers must fight is the war on terrorism. Standards change when a battalion or unit is in the rotational cycle for Operation Iraqi Freedom or Afghanistan. The Soldiers that the military and AR 600-9 deemed unfit for the Army are now a vital asset to the fight on terrorism. As a young First Sergeant, I was told that all Soldiers would deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom except for those convicted of a crime or tested positive for drugs. I believe this puts these Soldiers into ethical situations. Soldiers are now to ponder should they fight with a military that judge them based on their size and not merit. Soldiers that were being processed out of the military are now being fitted with the new O.I.F gear regardless of size, unless there is a health concern. These Soldiers- notice I did not say overweight, unfit, not meeting standards, but Soldiers was willing and able to go to war and fight for their country. The Soldiers that we are quick to judge are capable of shooting, moving, and communicating when our nation calls. They pulled security patrol along the main support route (MSR) and built improvised P.O.W camps for captured Iraqis. They were part of the security force for the commander and myself during

numerous day and night missions. Deployed Soldiers received awards and medals for their part during the war. Soldiers that were barred from reenlistment because of AR 600-9 were not considered for any awards. My ethical dilemma is that any Soldier that crossed the line into Iraq, put their lives on the line for their country, and executed all missions to standards. Therefore, they deserve recognition for their actions during the war and for the fight on terrorism. These Soldiers stood up for the military's greatest challenge - the call of war. Now it is time for us to stand up for them and allow them to be properly rewarded. Most leaders will say the foundation of the military is built on discipline and standards. We cannot choose which standards to maintain or ignore so we must adhere to them all. However, the thought processes that overweight Soldiers are undisciplined and break down the morale of the rest of the team. They cannot maintain a high state of readiness because of poor health conditions that can hinder the mission; and that Soldiers that are overweight show a lack of self-discipline and will not be able to lead Soldiers during war is something that I do not agree with. I cannot change a leader's view on this issue, but my view changed over the years. I know what most of these Soldiers are capable of doing and their future potential.

The military has a long history of recruit, reject, and recruit in its legacy. This legacy continues to place leaders and Soldiers in ethical dilemmas concerning garrison operations versus wartime operations. Leaders are told to maintain standards and discipline and enforce that into the Soldiers. Maintaining overweight Soldiers should not be based on the mission or the needs of the Army,

overweight Soldiers should not be based on the mission or the needs of the Army, but standards. Soldiers and commanders should have some say to determine the eligibility of the Soldier. Commanders should have the authority to remove a Soldier from the program regardless of their status based on the units' wartime mission. This will allow Soldiers to receive awards and medals for their actions. The military should continue to build on its foundation of standards and discipline. Strive to maintain Soldiers based on content, character, attitude, and not appearance alone.