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Ethics Paper

Improper Relationships in the Army

MSG James S. Thomas
R11, SGM Madera
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Good morning/afternoon class, my name is MSG James S. Thomas. Today I will discuss my ethics paper on relationships between Soldiers of different ranks. I think that relationships between Soldiers of different ranks is an ethical problem facing the Army today. Although some relationships between different ranks are not improper.

For instance, if two members of the Army basketball team, (one being an enlisted Soldier and one being an Officer) went to a basketball tournament in Fort Eustis, Virginia, and they decided to go out to the restaurant, do you think this would be improper? No, this would not be improper, because Army regulations states that officers and enlisted Soldiers that are in athletics, can attend events that are associated with the athletic event. If the team decided to have a party after the basketball season was over with, this would be permitted as well.

On many different occasions Soldiers of all ranks get together for different events, both on and off duty. When Soldiers associate with each other, there is normally a rank that governs the relationship, this is the basics for maintaining good order and discipline.

If there is a relationship between two Soldiers and it has a significant impact on the authority of the senior Soldier, the relationship will be regarded as fraternization. In order for relationships between two Soldiers to be called fraternization, in accordance with the Manual for Courts-Martial (1995), the relationship must display certain elements or characteristics. Some of the elements that prohibits relationships between different gender relationships and same gender relationships of Soldiers as far as rank is concerned will be discussed briefly.

The relationships will be prohibited if it compromise, or appear to compromise the integrity of supervisory authority or the chain of command; causes actual or perceived partiality; or shows unfairness; involves or appears to involve the improper use of a Soldiers rank or

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position for personal gain; or are perceived to be exploitative or coercive in nature; and, if the relationship creates an actual or clearly predictable adverse impact on discipline, authority, morale, or the ability of the command to accomplish its mission. (AR 600-20, 2002).

In the military close personal relationships are desired and one of the requirements in order to build cohesive units within the Army. Soldiers regardless of their ranks want to feel like they belong to a team. It is good to have positive relationships with your Soldiers, but, as a leader you must be able to draw the line between what is perceived as acceptable and unacceptable. Leaders will be able to make the right decision using their experiences, and of course good and sound judgment. I will now discuss a couple of examples of how two leaders did not make the right decision and how they were involved in improper relationships.

The first example that I will talk about is a relationship between a Battalion Commander and a staff officer. LTC Jones, who is a single male and 2LT Jackson, who is single female on LTC Jones staff. The Battalion Commander feels that 2LT Jackson has a lot of potential, he always singles her out for discussions, while excluding the other officers. LTC Jones always invited 2LT Jackson to all of the meetings that he attended at the brigade and division level, but, he didn't invite any of the other Lieutenants. Some of the junior officers in the battalion, male and female, assumed that the Battalion Commander and 2LT Jackson were having a sexual relationship. This was not the case at all, but, the morale of the junior officers was low because of the perception about the relationship between LTC Jones and 2LT Jackson.

Do you think that there was an improper relationship between the Battalion Commander and his staff officer? The relationship clearly caused some perceptions of partiality or favoritism among the junior officers within the battalion. Commanders at all levels must be extremely careful when dealing with relationships with their subordinates, regardless of the subordinates gender,

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especially if their subordinates are in the same chain of command or if they supervise them.

In the example that I presented to you, LTC Jones definitely showed poor judgement by establishing the type of relationship that he had with 2LT Jackson. The Battalion Commander need to be counseled by his supervisor and directed to correct his behavior.

As a Sergeant Major or Command Sergeant Major, you may encounter a situation where one of your Platoon Sergeants is dating a lower enlisted Soldier within your command. For example, SFC Blue, a single female in C Company is dating PFC Brown, a single male in D Company. Both of the Soldiers are in the same battalion. Everybody in the battalion know that they are dating, you do not see one without the other and they are always going to lunch together, and walking around holding hands while in uniform. They have even talked about getting married, and both of their commanders know about their relationship, but, they do not want to counsel them, because the commanders feel that the relationship does not affect their units. What would you do as the Battalion Command Sergeant Major?

Both of the Soldiers should be counseled on their relationship and the perception of unequal treatment. They must also be counseled about holding hands in public while wearing their uniform, this is inappropriate. SFC Blue must not take any actions, that could suggest any special treatment towards PFC Brown.

I have briefly discussed the definition of improper relationships, gave an example of a proper relationship, and gave a couple of examples of improper relationships within the military. I think that improper relationships within the United States Army, go against the good order and discipline of an organization.