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Keeping Soldiers in the Army

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## Abstract

Soldiers are the main reason for the Army being the successful organization that it is today. Over the past few years, being that senior ranking enlisted Soldier, it has been hard to watch and understand the ethical thinking of many commanders and sergeants major in regards to Soldiers who no longer need to be in the Army.

### Keeping Soldiers in the Army

Many ethical situations occur daily in regards to the status of Soldiers. Doctors and therapist deal with emotionally distraught Soldiers from combat zones and even from rough childhoods. This is a never-ending process from the recruiter, drill sergeant, squad leader, and on up the chain of command. Since September 11, 2001, Soldiers have been the focal point of the global war on terror. Soldiers are the reason for the successes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many young men and women continue to serve right alongside everyone else who do not even warrant a paycheck from the government. When given the question of right and wrong the senior leaders make ethical decisions about young men and women they do not even know.

First sergeants (1SGs) and company commanders have the unbearable task of trying to convince the battalion commander (BC) and the command sergeant major (CSM) that any particular Soldier does not belong in the ranks anymore. In turn, the BC and the CSM have to convince the brigade commander and CSM that these young Americans do not belong in their brigade (BDE) or the Army. This starts the never-ending process of questions not only from BDE but also all the way up to Headquarters of the Army.

These types of situations happen more than anyone would like to think. In the winter of 2004, while in Iraq, on the last few days of patrolling, a young Soldier decided he had enough of his squad members and team leader. While moving back to the Forward Operation Base (FOB) he was in a verbal altercation with his squad member. The M2 Bradley was at a short halt picking up more Soldiers and the young man punched his squad member in the face and got out of the Bradley. When the Soldier was out, he took off all of his combat equipment and ran off into a group of buildings in Samarra, Iraq. This was a particularly bad problem due to Samarra being one of the most dangerous cities in Iraq. The Soldier was found and sent back to the FOB

and then moved to the combat stress unit at another FOB. Then three days later, he came back to the unit and the doctors said it was a combat stress problem.

This particular problem continued to be a problem in garrison. The Soldier never really adjusted well to the environment. The company commander and I continually put pressure on the doctors and the battalion command to get this Soldier out of the Army and to professional help in the Veterans Administrations hospital. BDE and higher wanted this issue to be solved at the lowest level, and thought it was a leadership issue at the squad level. The platoon and company chain of command worked with the young man and assisted in getting his wife and young child to be with him. This type of problem disturbed me being the company 1SG. The pressure was coming from someone who did not even know the real root of the problem. In addition, I had to stand in front of the platoons every day with that young man still standing right next to them. This situation and how it was being dealt with was against everything I had ever been taught growing up as a noncommissioned officer (NCO).

Finally, in the early part of 2006 during expert infantryman training the young man went crazy and pulled his bayonet on two Soldiers and an NCO. This is about the time you would point a finger in the face of the higher chain of command and say see what happens when you do not trust your leaders. Regrettably, the commander and I finally had what we needed to process this young man out of the Army.

When trying to retain a force to go to combat many things become unclear. Soldiers who are substandard or injured are kept in the Army to keep the numbers where they should be. This is particularly hard to understand when you have to consider the readiness of your Soldiers. An older Soldier in my company before deployment went to a medical board. He suffered from hearing loss. This was not due to combat, but some type of problem he had before joining the

Army. The BDE commander was the authority for the medical board. Fifteen Soldiers went before that board and 12 out of the 15 were kept in the Army. The commander and I wrote two letters and sent his counseling packet to BDE and they were not considered. The Soldier was a mechanic, and we were in short supply of mechanics; however, he never did his job as a mechanic because he did not know anything about his job. For two years the Soldier worked in the mailroom, and when he came to the Battalion, he was sent to the mailroom again. The battalion CSM wanted every Soldier to deploy, so he pressed the issue with this Soldier and I had to deploy him with the company headquarters. Every day while we were in Iraq the platoon sergeant and sometimes the commander would ask why we could not get this guy out before we came to Iraq.

The next issue with keeping Soldiers in the Army is the officers. Recently the Army has offered a bonus to captains to stay in the Army. Over the past five years, officers have been getting out because they can make more money in the civilian sector, or the commanders and NCOs that they had were so horrible it destroyed their outlook on the Army. My company had an outstanding young officer who was going to get out. He was so frustrated with the Army he claimed post-traumatic stress due to the first deployment. He was left on rear detachment, and was to begin the process of getting out. Having built a rapport with most of the senior lieutenants and junior captains, I found out he was not really suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. This was a ploy to get out of the Army early. I was heartbroken to find this out, especially about this person. I told the commander and we went to the battalion executive officer. The captain had reconsidering and was taking the bonus and staying in the Army. How can this officer even look in the face of any Soldier and be the leader that Soldier needs in combat?

The bad practice of keeping Soldiers in the Army just for a number is out of control. Many senior leaders just put this on the back burner and do not realize the impact it has on the squads and platoons they are leading into harm's way. From the Soldier who has had a rough childhood and an even worse combat experience to the person who wants to lie about a situation are allowed to stand right next to everyone else in formation. Leaders at all levels need to look at what they have in their formations. Leaders need to trust one another and listen to the recommendations of their juniors. Asking others to violate their ethical beliefs for a number should not be a part of the Army. It is the job of every leader to fight as hard as they can to keep the Army strong and not allow a number to regulate their thought process.