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L564, Ethics Thought Paper – “Weight Control and Physical Fitness Test Chapters”

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## Weight Control and Physical Fitness Test Chapters

It is very clear that the United States Army is going through transformation to meet our country's future goals through downsizing military occupational specialties and base realignments to maintain a stable, highly versatile, mobile and lethal Army. To achieve this goal, the Army must stop the administrative requirements to remove a Soldier from the Army due to failure of progression from the weight control program and physical fitness testing. This is the ethical dilemma that faces the leadership of today's Army and the leadership of tomorrow's Army.

Army Regulations are quite clear on the importance of maintaining a fit and fighting force, but these regulations need to change. Now is the time to re-write these regulations for the future leaders of the Army and the growth of the Army under the Army's transformation policy. Currently, these regulations are geared to sustaining the force to meet its wartime mission or Mission Essential Task List (METL) for each unit in the Army and this requirement will not change.

The current policies force the commander to chapter or start to chapter their Soldiers out of the Army if they do not show progression in the Army's weight control program and or to pass consecutive individual physical fitness tests. This forces the chain of command and the current noncommissioned officer support channel into an unethical dilemma. The leadership asks themselves, "Do I chapter a Soldier out of the Army that accomplishes their military occupational specialty very well and most important: We went to war together and they were awesome in conducting their specialty in the war zone? How do I tell this regulatory requirement to the soldier, who was well enough to go to battle and fight the war in Iraq and other contingency operations, but they are overweight and or their physical fitness test does not

meet Army physical fitness standards and they will face an administrative separation post-deployment from the Army. This ethical dilemma is too hard to fathom as a leader and it is definitely too hard to deliver this news to the Soldier and most importantly to our country's civilian leadership.

The leader is caught between a "rock and hard place" and forces the commander to make unethical decisions, not to chapter the Soldier. This places the commander in a very uncomfortable position, which is: follow the regulatory guidance by the Army or demonstrate compassion, understanding and concern for the Soldier. The soldier's individual concerns and past accomplishments apply to this ethical dilemma and listening to the senior noncommissioned officer also adds to the commissioned officers ethical dilemma.

Current regulations need to change to make considerations available to the chain of command and noncommissioned officer support channel to deter from these regulatory requirements and force leaders to make unethical decisions. In fact, this administrative requirement to chapter a soldier from the Army must come solely from the first senior noncommissioned officer in the soldier's noncommissioned officer support channel, not from the commissioned officer.

The senior noncommissioned officer is entrusted to run the "day-to-day" operations of the command and it is the senior noncommissioned officer that manages, directs and evaluates the individual Soldier's performance daily, so why limit their authority over enlisted personnel actions? Who is best to maintain and provide direction of the current and future enlisted force of our Army. Here inlays another ethical dilemma for the Chief of Staff of the Army, which is limiting chapter authority over the enlisted by the commissioned officer versus the senior noncommissioned officer.

Soldier's that deployed to war had the one idea, which is: Obey their orders and perform their duties to the best of their ability under extreme duress as directed by their commander and first line leader, who is a noncommissioned officer. The soldier thought their past would not follow them after they did their duty in Iraq and other contingency operations, but current regulations require the leadership to chapter a Soldier for failure in the weight control program and physical fitness test.

As the Army down sizes and forces enlisted Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW's) out of their military occupational specialty to meet new projected military occupational specialty requirements for the Army's reorganization and transformation strategy. The Army must change its regulatory requirements for weight control, physical fitness standards and the authority to start a chapter on a Soldier to maintain our current enlisted force.

To correct this oversight, the Army must have a change in the regulatory guidance that states: "If a Soldier has gone to war within the last 24 months, no chapter proceedings will start" and "Only Senior Noncommissioned Officers may start a chapter for weight control or physical fitness test failures on Soldiers under their control. These changes will reduce the ethical dilemma currently facing our commissioned officers. Officers need to focus on strategic and tactical decisions, not operational decisions. Operational decisions are part of the enlisted force and come from the senior noncommissioned officer in-charge which managed the "day to-day" operations of the command and will provide the Army, an umbrella of security over the current enlisted force, the enlisted force of tomorrow's Army, and reduce unethical command dilemmas.