

Running head: ETHICAL PROBLEMS FACING THE ARMY TODAY

Awards for Overweight/Flagged Soldiers in Combat

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Ethics is a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of ones greatest value and the standards by which our actions can be judged right or wrong. As a profession, Soldiers have always pondered with the concern of ethical dilemmas. The surfacing and perhaps possible solutions to ethical behaviors is the cornerstone to educating all Soldiers; Officers, Warrants, and Enlisted alike. I hope to ignite awareness and spark practical thought processes while addressing behaviors of ethical concerns.

We are in the best all voluntary Army in the world. We receive the best training, from Basic Training to the epitomized Sergeants Major Course on the enlisted side, Warrant Officer Basic Course to their Advance Course for the Warrant Officers, and Officers Basic Course to the War College on the Officer side of the house. Regardless of rank, we are taught the seven Army Values; Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. These values are embedded in us and should govern our behavior as Soldiers. Along with the Army Values are numerous standards, policies, and guidance we should adhere to throughout our military careers. Competence, physical fitness, military bearing and appearance, leadership, training, accountability and responsibility are components of evaluation for enlisted Soldiers. If Soldiers have deficiencies in any of the aforementioned components, they must receive additional assistance from their supervisor to be able to meet the prescribe standard. There are countless regulations and field manuals that govern or set the standard for the aforementioned components; however, for brevity and to hone in on specifics, I will refer to AR 600-9 Army Weight Control and FM 21-20 Physical Fitness. These two publications give individuals and leaders valuable guidelines on how to stay fit and pass an Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), set height and weight criteria for male and female Soldiers by age group, and are geared to promoting good health and maintaining a good military appearance.

As great Noncommissioned Officers in the Army from the Team Leader on up, we do a good job in conducting physical fitness training in our units. Often, on a regular basis, we have additional training for those that do not meet the prescribed height weight screening or fails to meet the minimum standard on the APFT. If a Soldier failed to meet the minimum standard prescribed by AR 600-9 or FM 21-20, they are flagged. Favorable actions are limited to a Soldier once flagged. After all procedures are followed, to include but not limited to remedial (special population) physical training, medical screening, and counseling, a Soldier remains flagged until standards are met. Unfortunately, we are a nation at war. We are entering into the seventh year of continuous combat against terrorism and will continue the fight in the foreseeable future. To date during Operation Iraqi freedom we have a total of 3,953 fatalities; 15,812 wounded in action and returned to duty in 72 hours; 12,817 wounded not returned to duty in 72 hours. In Operation Enduring Freedom the death toll is 494; 708 wounded in action and returned to duty in 72 hours; 1098 wounded in action not returned to duty in 72 hours. It takes a special kind of person to join the Army during these times. I call such individuals America's precious jewels. Our overall recruiting objectives were in the slums for nearly four of our six and a half years at war. Our Soldiers are our greatest asset in the military, specifically the Army. They get the job done, and in many cases they make the ultimate sacrifice without hesitation as stated previously. As true as the facts are, we still have commanders that will keep a Soldier flagged during deployment and refuse to give them an award upon redeployment due to their status. In respect to our brave warriors who paid the ultimate sacrifice on the contemporary operating environment, I will not suggest that some were flagged for APFT failure or perhaps overweight. I just want to spark thoughts of ethic amongst all leaders in our military.

All Soldiers during deployments in the combat zone operate as a team. They bust the wire together and are in harms way throughout their missions. Either an enemy bullet or an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) does not differentiate flagged Soldiers from those that are not flagged. Our Soldiers whether flagged or not are putting their lives on the line as any Warrior should. The irony is that these flagged Soldiers see some field grade officers and perhaps General Officers, Senior Noncommissioned Officers, and Warrant Officers within their organization and throughout the Army that does not maintain proper military appearance and may be out of tolerance themselves; however, they are not flagged. Unfortunately we tell our Soldiers to watch their lane. Our Soldiers are not dumb.

Why do some commanders put so much emphasis on not awarding deserving Soldiers who are under aforementioned conditions during combat? Commanders and other leaders should rethink their position on this topic. Leaders, especially commanders do not hesitate to deploy all of their Soldiers for the purpose of mission accomplishment. There seems to be an unstated mixed message in the ranks that all Soldiers are good enough to deploy and die for their country, however, only a few can be awarded for deserving contribution only if they are in compliance with AR 600-9 and FM 21-20. Leaders need to take care of their Soldiers and take a stance to award all actionable deserving Soldiers. It takes a recommendation for an award with a waiver to get the ball rolling. However, for whatever reason, some first line supervisors are afraid to do the right thing by their Soldiers. It is no secret that this goes on throughout our Army, however no one wants to step up to the plate and amend policies to effect positive change to award all deserving Soldiers serving in a combat zone. For instance, the Army established policy of leniency for personnel security clearances and access during combat, why not do something similar for awards during combat army wide so there is no doubt in supervisors and commanders

minds on what to do for their Soldiers. I do not think it is asking too much of our leaders to take care of their own.

Personally, I think that some leaders are hypocrites, specifically those that oppose awarding overweight Soldiers during combat. I say this because, God forbid, if one or more of their Soldiers in that category was wounded in action or killed in action; the situation will be different. These leaders will rush to tell how great a Soldier they were, and how they positively affected the unit and its mission. Depending on each situation or actions in combat, aforementioned leaders will unhesitatingly submit and pinned Bronze Stars with "V" device or even Silver Stars on wounded warrior; in most cases posthumously. This is not a bad thing, but, why do it only in extreme situations like that.

Our Army leadership needs to grasp the concept of Duty of all Soldiers in combat and recognize those that deserve an award during combat due to their actionable contributions regardless of flag status for being overweight. Our Soldiers are unique, brave warriors that are continuously in harms way. Let's give them their just due. Imagine the motivation and empowerment it would give them to overcome their shortcoming, if they were recognized for their contribution alongside their comrades with like or lesser contributions.

Finally, ethics is that profound actionable result of good for all. As long as we as leaders are fair and consistent across the board in regards to rewarding and awarding all Soldiers; Officers, Warrants, and Enlisted for their actual contributions, we will minimize ethical problem.