

Running head: THE ETHICAL DILEMMA OF THE AWARDS SYSTEM

The Ethical Dilemma of The Awards System

SGM Anthony Mathis

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Class #58

SGM(R) James Perdue

Abstract

The military award system is designed to recognize those Soldiers for their outstanding performance on and off duty and in combat. We as Senior Noncommissioned Officers should charge ourselves with the responsibility of ensuring that this program operates smoothly and fairly with total regard to the Soldier and his or her performance, in addition to preserving the awards value.

## The Ethical Dilemma of The Awards System 3

The purpose of the awards system is to show recognition of a job well done of any mission completion. The awards can range from Certificate of Achievement to the Medal of Honor, all of which are well deserved when received. The governing of the awards system is Army regulation 600-8-22 which incorporates various information on awards, from the designs to how they are to be worn. This manual is a great asset in assisting you in this arena. In addition to this manual, there will be other guidelines at the unit level to further assist you. This guideline can vary from unit to unit or post to post, which has the possibility to cause changes due to one's interpretation. A good example would be how well a duty must be performed to receive an Army Achievement Medal; this can vary causing distortion within the system. The distortion can cause the value of the award to decrease thus causing the Soldier to have a negative opinion towards the award. Soldiers, officers and enlisted are eligible to receive any of the awards in the awards system. It is often found that an officer will receive a much higher award for the same and even less duty performance. This is probably the highest cause of distortion within the system. It causes morale to decrease within the unit by Soldiers not performing their duty to peak performance because the reward will not be the same. An example of this would be a Sergeant First Class and a Captain in a combat unit both deployed to a combat area would get different awards at the completion of duty. The Sergeant First Class, although he performed a much more critical and deadly task, would receive a lower award than that of the Captain who had a less critical, less deadly task. It is also often that it takes a longer time of duty performance to receive an award equal to that of an officer.

A platoon sergeant, usually a Sergeant First Class, will have his platoon for 3-5 years, while the platoon leader, usually a Second or First Lieutenant, will have the platoon for 12-15 months. The two Soldiers will more that likely receive the same award; the same is found at even higher levels of responsibility. At the level of Command Sergeant Major, Battalion Sergeant Major, and Lieutenant Colonel, Battalion Commander, both serving three years, the commander would receive Legion of Merit while the sergeant major would receive a Meritorious Service Medal.

Next you will sometimes find that Soldiers both enlisted an officer would receive an award for not performing and duty to standard or not even performing the duty. This type of action is seen in a combat theater often with platoon sections performing a mission above the standard would be recognized individually. The platoon leader who was not apart of that mission would be individually recognized also, and sometimes with an even higher award.

Retiring Soldiers are not excluded from this uneven system, there are Soldiers both enlisted and officer who retire with an average of 20-25 years of service with multiple deployments. In almost all cases, the officer would retire with a much higher award than the senior enlisted Soldier. You will often find the senior enlisted Soldier has done more, endured the worst and stayed the longest to only receive the lesser award. Many would look at this as a slap in the face to the senior enlisted Soldier thus leaving him with a bitter taste about the awards system as a whole. The four most common but least understood awards are the Medal of Honor, the Purple Heart, the Silver Star and the Bronze Star. These awards are mostly awarded for great success during combat missions.

All have different criteria and you will still find that Soldiers would receive these awards for different actions, some being less than others. Officers would always receive the highest award for the lesser action and sometimes not even performing any actions. The Purple Heart is probably the most misinterpreted award during combat. The guidelines at the unit level have been revised numerous times. Prior to this, Soldiers would receive this award only if they were completely disabled during combat. Then there were Soldiers that would receive a Purple Heart for having shingled hair on their arms from heat and absolutely no external or internal injuries.

There are many Soldiers that deploy with a unit and get told by the command prematurely that they are being awarded a unit award for their actions while assigned the unit; the Soldier display the purposed award on their uniform without any orders and is later questioned about it by his or her supervisor of the new command. The Soldier is now forced to remove the award due to only having verbal proof of achieving the award from his or her old command. This causes frustration within the Soldier and the program is weakened from the lack of follow up by the old command and ensuring that all Soldiers of that command properly receive the award and orders. Then there is that germinate change of station award that the Soldier is recommended for but never receives it due not having enough time left before leaving the unit. The leadership is responsibility for ensuring that all Soldiers, if deserved, receive their award in a timely manner prior to any permanent change of station.

The award system is also subject to abuse by another service member by displaying numerous awards on their uniform without the proper authorization.

There have been situations that have surfaced concerning officers and non commissioned officers wearing Jump Wing and not having attended the school, Ranger Tabs, Silver Star Medals, Drill Sergeant Badge, Divers Badge, Jungle Expert Badge, Anarchic Badge, and the

Humanitarian Medal. All awards and badges must be accompanied with orders and annotated in the Soldiers performance fiche. In almost all abuse cases, there are no orders to show proof of the accomplishment to receive the award or badge which makes it illegal or not authorized for wear; such acts carry a stiff penalty under the uniform code of military justice.

Finally, you have the down grading of an award that is recommended for a Soldier; this process sometimes become difficult due to the different opinions of the approving authority. It is often looked at by the Soldier as double standard when an award gets downgraded today and tomorrow that same award gets approved.

### Conclusions

All in all, the award system plays a major part in a unit's morale. We as senior non commissioned officers should make our business to ensure that the awards system operates equally and fairly to that of the deserved duty performance.