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Running head: FLEECING OF OUR SOLDIERS

Fleeing of Our Soldiers

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*Abstract*

*Fleecing of Our Soldiers* address the ethical issue that Soldiers and Noncommissioned Officers face when dealing with private organization membership drives. It identifies the established policies and procedures that outline how to ethically conduct private organization membership drives. Then it transitions to six examples of coercive and unethical procedures that leaders use while conducting private organization membership drives. *Fleecing of Our Soldiers* subsequently suggests two possible corrective measures: the addition of ethics training covering private organizations into unit and NCOES training requirements, combined with a command climate that encourages leaders to choose the hard right over the easy wrong.

### Fleeing of Our Soldier

Many great private and unit organizations provide tremendous amount of support to Soldiers and families, but unfortunately because of the unethical practices of leaders, the mere mention of the organization can instill feelings of disgust in Soldiers' minds. These unethical practices violate official regulations, policies and Soldiers' rights, and pose a hindrance to the good order and discipline of a unit.

### Identified Ethical Problem

In 2002 the Secretary of the Army, the Honorable Thomas E. White issued a memorandum to the Army stating, "In spite of our best efforts, many Soldiers perceive that they are being coerced to join certain organizations and that their membership in such organizations is tracked." (White, 2002) This statement shows that leaders at the highest levels of command are aware that an ethical problem associated with private organizations membership drives exists. Additionally, most Soldiers and junior Noncommissioned Officers perceive the coercive influence originates at the Sergeant Major and First Sergeant level.

### Legal Membership Drives

The Department of Defense provides set policies and procedures for conducting membership drives in a legal and ethical way. Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *The Army Command Policy* and AR 210-22, *Private Organizations on Department of the Army Installations*, provide leaders detailed guidance on proper procedures. *The Army Command Policy, AR 600-20*

Army Regulation 600-20 provides the following guidance for private organization membership drives:

(1) Ensure membership among personnel under their jurisdiction is truly voluntary. (2) Prohibit any practice that involves or implies compulsion, coercion, influence, or reprisal in the conduct of membership campaigns. This prohibition includes repeated orientations, meetings, or similar counseling of persons who have chosen not to join after given a chance to do so. It also includes using membership statistics in support of supervisory influence.

(3) Prohibit any practice that involves or implies DA sponsorship or endorsement of the organization and its activities. (4) Prohibit the use of government property, facilities, or services, for example, golf course membership, as an inducement to join a private organization ... This policy does not prohibit commanders from informing personnel without coercion about membership in such organizations. When doing so, commanders will ensure they do not favor one organization over others. (2006, p. 26)

*Private Organizations on Department of the Army Installations, Army Regulation 210-22*

Army Regulation 210-22 provides the following guidance for private organization membership drives:

Employees may not personally solicit subordinates or prohibited sources, as defined in the JER, for PO membership or contributions during fundraising campaigns or allow their names to be used in a solicitation that targets subordinates or prohibited sources. Exceptions are allowed for Combined Federal Campaign, the Army Emergency Relief, Navy–Marine Corps Relief Society, Air Force Assistance Fund, and Emergency and Disaster appeals approved by the

Office of Personnel Management (OPM)... Employees will not coerce, influence, or compel other employees to join POs. Participation is a personal decision.

(1) Subordinates will not be appointed as points-of-contact for a PO membership drive nor may privileges be awarded, or taken away, for the participation or membership rate in a PO. (2) Subordinates will not be encouraged to participate in a particular PO either in a formation, on Army letterhead, or by any other official action. (3) Subordinates will not be asked to explain a decision not to join or participate in PO activities. (4) Subordinates are not required to attend meetings to learn about and/or join a PO. (5) Membership or non-membership lists are not maintained at any command or staff level. (2001, p. 23)

*Secretary of the Army Memo, Private Organization Membership Campaigns*

The Secretary of the Army memo dated 2 December 2002 directs the following conduct for private organization membership drives:

Any coercion, real or perceived, is unacceptable and does not befit this magnificent Army. Any practice that involves or implies compulsion, coercion, undue influence, or reprisal in the conduct of membership campaigns is strictly prohibited. This prohibition includes holding repeated orientations or meetings, or counseling those who have decided not to join after being provided information about the organization. It also includes using membership statistics when evaluating an individual's duty performance. (White, 2002)

Coercion of Soldier and Junior Leaders

For almost every year since I joined the Army in 1985, I witnessed ethical violations by leaders when soliciting private organization memberships. Senior leaders continually coerced Soldiers and junior leaders without regard for the rights of the Soldiers.

### *Examples of Ethical Violations*

The following six events are examples of ethical violations that I witnessed. Each event stuck out in my mind as obviously unethical and illegal. Example one: during a Class A in ranks inspection a Command Sergeant Major, began checking who was a 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Association member. When the CSM came across a Soldier that was not a member the CSM would ask, “you want to be right.” The CSM then began attempting to persuade the Soldier to join the association as the Soldier was standing at the position of attention during an official inspection. Example two: a First Sergeant made Soldiers show a current 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Association and Association of the United States Army (AUSA) membership card before they could sign out on block leave. Example three: At 1700 hours the First Sergeant put the whole company in the day room and said he would not release the company until everyone was an AUSA member. Example four: A First Sergeant awarded four day passes to individuals that join AUSA. Example five: A first Sergeant orally reprimanding Platoon Sergeants because the platoons failed to produce a one hundred percent membership in AUSA. Example six: A CSM telling the First Sergeant that he is not supporting the chain of command, because the company failed to produce a desired percentage of members.

During each one of these incidents, the leader lost the respect of their Soldiers because of their unethical actions. The Soldiers recognized that their leaders were willing to commit unethical and illegal actions in order to meet membership expectation set by the senior Noncommissioned Officers in the unit. In my mind, I observed what not to do and vowed to

never put my Soldiers in that situation. Each one of these leaders put his own agenda over the personal rights of their Soldiers, and broke the oath of enlistment in which they swore to support and defend the Constitution.

### Corrective Measures

Except for ethics advisors and Staff Judge Advocate member, leaders in the Army receive limited formal training on proper conduct when dealing with private organizations.

#### *Properly Train Leaders on Proper Conduct*

If leaders are expected to know how to deal with private organizations, a formal block of training needs to be added to the yearly ethics-training requirement. In addition, current NCOES courses need to include classes on ethical conduct when dealing with private organizations, in order to develop the proper conduct in future Noncommissioned Officers.

#### *Leaders Demonstrate an Ethical Backbone*

Noncommissioned Officers pride themselves on being the backbone of the Army, but it only takes one leader to display that backbone and have the personal courage to do the right thing. Senior leaders need to demonstrate a higher degree of ethical backbone to stand up and do what they know is right instead of what is convenient. In 2002, the Honorable Thomas E. White directed that “senior leaders will ensure that the chain of command implements and abides by the standards of conduct involving private organization membership campaigns so that Soldiers' rights are protected.” (White, 2002).

### Conclusion

In my opinion, if senior Noncommissioned Officers follow the Honorable Thomas E. White's guidance in which he stresses that “all of your actions must be done within the limits of the standards of conduct principles” and that “senior leaders will ensure that the chain of

command implements and abides by the standards of conduct involving private organization membership campaigns so that Soldiers' rights are protected.” (White, 2002) Leaders that follow these simple instructions help to support the efforts of private and unit organizations, their actions create a favorable experience instead of the distasteful feelings resulting from the unethical actions of leaders.



### References

Army Command Policy, Army Regulation 600-20, Headquarters Department of the Army (2006, June 7).

Private Organizations on Department of the Army Installations, Army Regulation 210-22, Headquarters Department of the Army (2001, Oct. 22).

White, Thomas E., Private Organization Membership Campaigns, Secretary of the Army (2002, Dec. 2).