

Running Head: Fast Promotions??

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With our participation in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) since 2001, the Army has had a shortage of NCO's to fill critical positions in its ranks. Many Soldiers have been deployed on several rotations since 2001 and that has begun to take its toll on having Soldiers reenlist or extend their service in the Army. Some of the more experienced Soldiers time-wise have families to support and they are starting to rethink their continued service in the military. Because of this fact, there is an increasing shortage of mid-grade Soldiers in the Army, namely NCO's. The Army has recognized the need for NCO's in the mid-grades and has recently begun to relax the criteria for promotion to these grades. More often than not, Soldiers can be promoted more quickly than we have ever seen in our recent history. Where once the Army valued experience and knowledge on promoting Soldiers to the next higher grade, the need to fill these shortages has accepted the risk of having less experienced personnel stand out in front of troops and lead them into combat. The Army is a risky business to begin with but is allowing these Soldiers to advance to the rank of Sergeant/E5 in as quickly as 18 months time in service worth the risk? How much can a Sergeant, a leader, be expected to know in 18 months? Is the Army taking too much of a risk to allow this? Is this ethical behavior?

Since 2001, Soldiers have been deploying to countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the GWOT. There are other countries involved, but these are the two main theaters of operation that Soldiers have been deployed to in the war. Because of the downsizing of the Army after the first Gulf War, there are probably not enough Soldiers to ensure equal and fair deployments for all. I have personally heard of a Soldier, a SSG in the Infantry, recently being sent on his fourth tour in theater. He is going for his 3rd Iraq rotation now and has an earlier Afghanistan rotation too. Luckily, he is not married and really doesn't mind serving over there

too much because he feels he is making good money. He is comfortable in his skills and abilities and those of his battle buddies and does not spend too much time thinking about what bad things could happen to him. In regards to the shortages in the NCO ranks, he could be the exception. Many NCO's, especially ones that are married and have children, decide that they do not want to go with the risky business of being a Soldier after only one or two deployments. They do not see continuing to risk their lives in fighting a war and risking dying and having their family without a father or a mother. Many feel that families need to have both parents available in order to have what they deem is a "successful" family. Many decide that the life of a Soldier is too risky and runs contrary to their belief of a good family. In their hearts, they do not want to put their families through the pain of a death of their loved one in combat. While many see the profession of a Soldier as a noble one, they also see being a full time parent as an equally noble profession. Because of this one example, many Soldiers decide that it is time for them to separate from the Army, mostly at the end of their obligation, and get on with the job of raising their families without having the fear of possible death hanging over them. As I had stated previously, many of these Soldiers tend to be in the mid-grades of their careers, often NCOs. When they depart the Army, this creates a shortage in those positions. These are critical positions too. It almost seems that we have no real shortage of recruits, but of NCOs to lead them. The Army has been well aware of this problem and has adjusted the way they promote junior Soldiers in order to attempt to correct this problem.

The Army had adopted a few changes in recent years in order to try to help alleviate the shortage of leaders, mainly NCOs, in the mid-grades of the enlisted ranks. One of the main changes is that in the last several years, the Army has made it possible for Specialists / Corporals (E4s) to attain the rank of Sergeant (E5) in only 18 months in the secondary zone. This was not

the case when I was coming up through the ranks and these time criteria have seemed to go up and down over the years depending on the needs of the Army at any particular given time. Because of the current criteria, a Specialist or Corporal can be wearing SGT stripes as early as 18 months in service now. The question that begs to be asked is that does 18 months allow a Soldier enough knowledge and experience to be successful as a leader of troops? In some cases, I have seen some very high-speed E4s out there that are more capable than some of the current E5s we have out there. I suppose I could say it depends on the person and the situation, but it seems that this way will be the current law of the land for the foreseeable future and we will just have to live with it. Does that make it ethically right though? We rely heavily on our leaders to know and often assume that they know what they are doing just because they are wearing the rank. Perhaps we put too much pressure on them because of their wearing of the rank and the assumptions that go with it. Is that being fair to them though? Are we doing the right thing to fully prepare them to be leaders at 18 months? Only time will tell. Another change the Army has made is to allow the possibility of eligible Soldiers to automatically be placed on the promotion standing list in the event that they reach a certain time in service and they have not been sent to the promotion board. These types of Soldiers tend to be ones that show the potential to become an NCO, but for whatever reason, they have not been sent. Often, their supervisors feel that these Soldiers might need a little more time and experience before they will recommend them, but there is nothing really negative that would cause them not to be sent. The Army has targeted these types of Soldiers for promotion. It ultimately falls now on the supervisors to stop these types of automatic inclusions to the promotion standing lists from happening. The Army feels that if they are close, but not quite there in the Soldiers supervisor's eyes, then the supervisor either documents the problem to fix it or through the supervisor's inaction, the Army

will make the decision for them and put that Soldier on the promotion standing list. Is this decision to automatically include these Soldiers, possibly against their supervisor's wishes, ethically right? I mean who knows the Soldier the best? The supervisor probably, but the Army is holding the supervisor responsible here to make the right decision. When they don't, the Army will allow the Soldier the benefit of the doubt. When this happens, the supervisor will still be ultimately responsible for training this Soldier, but now this Soldier might have a new rank on their uniform and that is even more work for the boss. The Army identified the problem and they came up with a few solutions. Are they the right solutions? Are we promoting our younger and less experienced Soldiers too fast? What is the right time to develop a leader? No one knows for sure but the Army has to have some standard so that is why it made the moves it did.

Is it ethically right to promote Soldiers earlier than we might be used to? The Army seems to have made the decision that it is because of the personnel shortages on the mid-enlisted grades that have been brought on by the GWOT. These Soldiers, who will be promoted in the ranks faster than they might have been in the past, will be leading our junior troops into the battlefield. Do they know everything they need to in order to be successful? Have we trained them in such a way for them to be able to stand out in front of our junior Soldiers and lead them? What criteria do we use in order to judge whether or not we are doing the right thing in promoting Soldiers faster today? Who is to say whether or not a Soldier being promoted to the grade of E5 needs 18 months or 36 months? Who made the decision and was it the right one to make? Will you as a senior leader be able to sleep well in your foxhole knowing that possibly inexperienced leaders are out there running perimeter security? Have you as a senior leader done everything within your capabilities to make sure your Soldiers are trained in all the need to know so that one day they can replace you? Do you let your personal feelings of the Army's new

promotion system affect your decisions on whether or not to recommend people for the board at the “accelerated” times the Army deems acceptable today, even if these are not the times that were in effect while you were coming up through the ranks? These are all questions that we need to ask ourselves when we want to determine whether or not it is ethical for the Army to promote people faster than we might be used to. We need to make the best decisions based on the individual and not necessarily the policy because there are some very capable junior Soldiers out there that are ready to lead. We need to ensure that we do our job too by not allowing the ones that are not ready to be promoted before they are capable. That is our job as leaders to make the tough calls, even when they might not be popular and even when it might cause us grief from those that do not get promoted because we stepped in and stopped it. We are leaders and we need to do our jobs. That is what we get paid to do; lead and develop Soldiers.

Has the Army made the right decision in regards to promoting Soldiers early? They see the big picture that often we do not get to see. They see growing numbers of mid-level leaders getting out of the Army for various personal reasons and they are just trying to do their best in filling the gaps that these people leave. The Army is trying to fill these gaps with all available resources, but the easiest solution they have at the time is to promote Soldiers to higher grades quicker than we might be used to. The Army has decided to take the risk because they fill they have no choice. It is not like the Army can go recruit Sergeants off the street for example. They have to work with what they got and this is the best possible choice that they have made. Is it the right choice? The ethical choice? I believe that it is, but I also believe that it is up to each and every individual to decide that for themselves. We are all different as leaders and we all do not think alike. We need to do the best with what we have and in the end that is ultimately what the Army has decided to do. Instead of trying to fight this decision, let’s do our best to support it

and make it work. Our junior Soldiers are tomorrow's leaders and the ones that will be defending our country when we retire and are old. Let's do the right thing now so we can rest easy later. Let's support the decision that the Army has made and let's do our best to make it work. We owe it to our Soldiers.