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Colonel Hoover/52064
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FACT SHEET

ACCESSION NO

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SUBJECT: The Significance of Brevet Rank

1. Purpose: To compare the present temporary rank with Brevet Rank and to show how Brevet Rank was used in the past.

2. BREVET RANK: a. Brevet rank was adopted by the British from the French in 1692 to circumvent their system of regimental appointment and promotion, to permit officer appointment and promotion in the Army at large. During the American Revolution the Continentals adopted brevet commissions.

b. The real beginnings of brevet appointment in the United States is found in the Act of 6 July 1812. This Act authorized the conferring of brevet rank for (1) gallantry, (2) meritorious conduct, and (3) service in one grade for ten years. The choice of potential candidates for brevet was limited to "officers of the Army," and persons appointed under this authority were not permitted to receive the pay and emoluments of the brevet rank unless actually in command of a separate post, district, or department. The number of appointments by brevet was small, but liberal interpretation by the War Department assured that almost all the appointees were commanding separate posts or districts and thereby entitled to receive the pay and allowances of the higher rank.

c. Congress acted to remedy this situation by the Act of 16 April 1818 to curb the trend toward too many Brevet appointments.

d. By 1848 the policy seemed to be to grant the honorary promotions with more liberality than had been the case for many years. By the time the Army had been reduced to peace strength about one officer in four held one or more brevets higher than his permanent rank. During the Mexican War the President was permitted under certain conditions, to grant commissions by brevet to a non-commissioned officer who distinguished himself in service.

e. With the coming of the Civil War, brevet appointments and promotions were to be employed in such numbers as had previously hardly been dreamed of. It was not unusual for officers with a permanent rank of Captain and Major to receive at one time successive brevets to Colonel and even Brigadier General. By 1869 the practice of awarding brevet commissions had gotten out of hand and the Congress began the enactment of a series of legislative curbs on the system-curbs that foreshadowed the end of the custom entirely.

f. Despite a few modifications in the law and custom on brevets the honorary promotion was on its way out. None were awarded for Spanish American War Service and only one for service in World War I. The brevet rank eventually passed into disuse. The Act of 9 July 1918 authorized the Distinguished Service Cross and the Distinguished Service Medal to be awarded under conditions very similar to those required previously for the award of the brevet commission. War Department Policy No. 297, approved 17 May 1922, stated in part, "... the law in reference to brevets, Sec. 1209 R.S. is now practically a dead letter, the Act of 9 July 1918 providing a more valuable and suitable form of decoration for meritorious service." Legal authority for the award of brevet commissions and promotions continued to remain in Army Regulations (AR 600-15) and in the United States Code (Title 10: Sections 521-528) until 1955 and 1956, respectively. AR 600-15 was revised 8 August 1955, and Sections 521-528 were repealed by the recodification of Title 10 U.S. Code as of 10 August 1956.

3. VOLUNTEER PROMOTION: a. The second form of promotion of officers for reasons other than seniority and merit is the so-called "Volunteer Promotion" of Regular Army Officers. Under this system Regular Army commissioned personnel were generally permitted to accept commissions in the wartime Volunteer Forces at a rank higher than their permanent grade without vacating their Regular appointments. Upon demobilization of the Volunteers the Regulars would under normal circumstances, revert to their Regular Army rank. The higher rank while in the Volunteer Forces was, in effect, a temporary promotion.

b. This method was most frequently used during the Civil War and Spanish American War, and was eliminated from military law by the National Defense Act of 1916.

4. TEMPORARY PROMOTION: a. Although not spelled out in law until 1920, today's "temporary rank" has its beginnings in the lessons learned during the Civil War and Spanish American War, and in the legislation and practices up to and during World War I. General Orders 73 of 1918 directed that all of the land military forces of the United States be merged into the "United States Army" and provided that all promotions issued therein would be on a temporary basis.

b. With the end of hostilities and demobilization the Regulars serving in temporary grades gradually reverted to their permanent ranks. Temporary promotions were terminated 30 June 1920 by the provisions of the 4 June 1920 revision of the 1916 National Defense Act. In 1940 these provisions were again amended to make them effective in time of national emergency as well as in war. This was essentially the method used for appointment and promotion during World War II.

c. The next step in the refinement of the legal basis for temporary promotions was the re-codification and revision of Title 10, United States Code on 10 August 1956. The present basis for temporary appointments and promotions is the need of the Army to provide an appropriate grade structure to perform the required tasks of an expanded force.

5. CONCLUSION: On the basis of the language contained in Congressional Acts and Army Regulations described above the following fundamental differences are noted in the purposes served by Brevet Rank and Temporary Promotions:

a. The Brevet Rank was adopted by the Army principally to provide rewards for gallantry and meritorious conduct.

b. The Act of 9 July 1918 created the Distinguished Service Cross and Distinguished Service Medal to be awarded for acts previously recognized by the award of Brevet Rank and thus eliminated the need for the Rank.

c. The temporary promotion system of today is designed to provide the Army with an appropriate grade structure to meet the requirements of an expanded force and not as a reward for past meritorious service.

A Select Bibliography on Brevet, Volunteer
and Temporary Promotion

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