

Ethical Decision Problem #3

This is the third in the Gazette's new series of Ethical Decision Problems (EDPs). Each problem involves a situation that a Marine, Active or Reserve, encountered sometime during his or her military service—a situation that raised troubling ethical considerations. Readers are urged to reflect on the situation and decide what action they would have taken had they been involved. They can then compare their approach to those proposed by two other Marines and published elsewhere in the magazine. The published approaches are not "school solutions" or officially recommended or approved positions; they are simply the reactions of other Marines who were confronted with the EDP in the same manner as the reader.

The Gazette welcomes brief letters commenting on EDPs and on what readers consider to be the notable strengths or weakness of the alternate approaches. These will be considered for possible publication in the Letters Section of the Gazette, 3 months after the EDP appears.

'Improving' the Performance Evaluation System

Situation

You are a major assigned temporarily to a large special study group working on a project that will take 12 weeks to complete. The section you head and for which you are the reporting senior includes five captains. These officers were drawn from different commands and will return to them when the project is over.

At the beginning of the 11th week you complete fitness reports on the five officers and give them to the administrative officer. Two days later he returns them to you with the following note from the

colonel who is your reporting senior and the reviewing officer for the reports you write. The note says, "John, I want to ensure that none of the officers who have worked on our project are ranked below 1/5 (i.e., first among the five Marines marked) in the outstanding block. Please redo these reports so they have different ending dates and revise the markings accordingly. Col Z."

How do you handle this directive to adjust the markings? What are the major considerations driving your decision?

Once you have your solution in mind, you can compare it to the alternative approaches on page 77.

'Improving' the Performance Evaluation System

Alternative A

I would have a hard time with this one even though I know the textbook moral answer is to stand up and not carryout this order.

The difficulty is that our ability to judge a person accurately in such a short time, while engaged in such a specialized project, is open to question. In short, I understand what's driving the colonel. The project was no doubt a demanding one involving long hours, family separation, etc. He knows how hard the officers worked, is grateful for their service and support, and doesn't want anyone to "go away hurt" after giving him such fine support.

I would go see the colonel and let him know I was uncomfortable with his directions and that they created a moral dilemma for me. If there was a wide difference in performance among the officers, one that belonged in the excellent category or below, I would be even more uncomfortable. I would try to convince him to change his position and believe there is a good chance he would do that after hearing me out. If he was adamant and argued each point I raised, I would probably back down—particularly if I otherwise respected him and felt he was a fine, professional officer.

Alternative B

I would use *MCO 1610* for guidance in dealing with this problem. The intent of the order, of course, is to provide rankings that separate officers so that promotion quotas can be filled with those at the top of their peer group. Although I don't agree with ranking outstanding Marines (the difference between #1 and #3 may not be measurable), the MCO says to do it, and I'll comply.

I would talk to the colonel before re-submitting the reports and tell him I in-

tend to follow *MCO 1610*. As a reporting senior it is my responsibility to properly grade the officers. As reviewing officer, he can rebut or reinforce my views, but he can't dictate them. He should realize also that playing with end dates still allows only one person to be 1/5. The rest would be 1/4, 1/3, 1/2, 1/1, which in itself is a form of ranking.

I realize that my own fitrep may be jeopardized by this "refusal of orders," but then I, too, have a chance to rebut it if I think I've been wronged.

These approaches represent the immediate reactions of individual Marines and should not be construed as official solutions. Comments are welcomed.