

DRIVER'S SEAT

Sergeant First Class Selection Results Offer Lessons For All Leaders

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The CY99 Sergeant First Class Selection List will be history by the time this article is published. As I write it though, the results are fresh on the street and still undergoing formal and informal analysis. This is not a formal review and analysis of the board results. This article identifies certain important lessons that commanders, leaders, managers, and soldiers should draw from the board results as they counsel and assign their soldiers.

The selection panel stated that Armor Center guidance as to what qualified a soldier for selection to SFC was "excellent...extremely useful in enabling the Panel to fairly evaluate the files." This guidance was drawn from the newly updated *Enlisted Professional Development Guide* (May 1999). I have consciously kept board guidance consistent over these two years; with this guide, Armor soldiers can know what they must do and where they must go in order to be "best of the best." There is no secret to how to succeed in the Armor Force: understand the requirements for each grade, be excellent at whatever assignment you are given, certify in each leadership position at each grade, and develop mentally and physically to be the best leader, coach, and example for American soldiers. This guide can be accessed at the Armor Home Page, and copies can be ordered from the Office of the Chief of Armor. MG Bell has committed resources to increase the distribution to all Armor units. Call us, copies will come.

Certification remains the most important factor in selection for promotion. While NCOs who had not been rated Success or Excellence on several NCOERs during an 18- to 24-month period were not ineligible for promotion, they were least qualified for promotion. According to the panel president, no uncertified NCOs were selected. I emphasize that NCOs should not focus on the time they spend in the position; focus on the excellence of the service in the position. Boards focus on the NCOER as proof of certification, not the 2-1.

The panel understood the heavy requirements that Armor Branch has for drill sergeants, recruiters, AC/RC duty, instructors, and other specialty assignments. The

panel gave credit for achieving diversity in assignments, but penalized many NCOs who were placed in these assignments before becoming branch certified as tank commanders or scout squad leaders. Those soldiers had not proven themselves in key leadership positions. The panel took into account E-5 and E-6 service as tank commander or squad leader. No 19-series soldier will be allowed to volunteer for a specialty assignment before he is certified at the proper grade for the certifying position. PERSCOM and units should only assign NCOs to non-MOS or specialty positions after they meet requirements for MOS certification in current grade. Armor Branch is committed to following these rules; I will keep a close eye on them. Every unit must be committed to these lessons as well; do not assign the uncertified into non-MOS positions (i.e., battalion financial NCO, driver, training NCO, etc.).

The panel saw that entirely too many NCOER excellence ratings were not justified with adequate bullet comments. The panel discounted excellence ratings by raters who did not justify the rating with an achievement, penalizing the NCO who may have actually been deserving of an excellence rating.

When PERSCOM boasts of the lack of inflation in the NCOER system, I must shake my head. There are too many commissioned and noncommissioned leaders who feel that the NCOER exists to make the sergeant feel good. This is rubbish! The NCOER exists to tell other leaders and centralized promotion panels **the truth** about an NCO's service over the rating period. A good rule of thumb to use when deciding whether the bullet rates an Excellent or a Success rating is: if the NCO should have been relieved for **not** accomplishing the bullet, then it is a Success.

The panel saw some soldiers staying in TDA assignments for too many years. For instance, instructors who became drill sergeants or recruiters. In some cases, there were soldiers who had been instructors, drill sergeants, and recruiters back to back, and in some cases were away from their MOS for eight or nine years! TDA assignments do not hurt promotion opportunity. In fact, IAW the *Professional Development*

Guide, it was considered a good thing for an NCO to have some diverse assignments (especially as school instructors, drill sergeants, recruiters, AC/RC and OC positions). However, the panel considered it a good thing only if the NCO was certified and had relatively recent experience with troops (within 4 or 5 years). My guidance specifically reminded the panel that four years on Fort Knox would cause back-to-back TDA assignments, but my reassignment policy over the last two years has caused NCOs to leave the Home of Armor after 48 months of service, allowing for further certifying opportunity.

General Officer Letters of Reprimand (GOLARs) and UCMJ actions were serious discriminators against an NCO. Although it is not impossible to overcome a GOLAR, a "Values NO" on the NCOER, or UCMJ action, NCOs were only competitive for promotion after extensive, sustained, excellent performance over a very long period of time.

Finally, the panel results show the excellent overall quality of the Armor soldier, and of the soldiers chosen to instruct at the Armor School. The accelerated velocity of soldiers onto and off of Fort Knox (increasingly, three years is the standard tour at the Home of Armor) has allowed Armor Branch to identify more certified soldiers to come to Fort Knox as instructors and drill sergeants. The quality of their certifying service, combined with the quality of their specialty service, led to fully one third of the selectees coming from Fort Knox. Do not let your soldiers think that Armor Center service is a career-ender. If Fort Knox was a rest home at any time, it is not so now. We bring in excellent NCOs to produce the excellent soldiers and leaders of the future. We develop them and work the devil out of them. They are selected for their excellence and they are rewarded for their excellence.

Take these comments into account as you counsel your soldiers and make your own career decisions. To our 386 selectees: Well Done! You are excellent, and I am absolutely confident that you will continue to lead your soldiers by your superb example.

"SERGEANT, TAKE THE LEAD"