

Centralized promotion boards:

boards: How do they work?

By Sgt. Maj. Deborah Seimer

Soldiers working to attain the rank of sergeant and staff sergeant come face-to-face with senior NCOs who will decide their fate before a promotion board. Those aspiring for the ranks of sergeant first class and above know there's a system that makes the selections. Meet the system.

What do the boards do?

The Centralized Enlisted Promotion Selection System has been described universally as the fairest, most comprehensive selection system in the military. A number of foreign governments have used it as a model for their own promotion systems. It is a system that has passed the test of time and been refined to the point that it is safe to say every Soldier in the zone of consideration receives equal consideration for promotion.

First, let's discuss just how a board works. There are three promotion boards held at Indianapolis annually. These are the sergeant major/command sergeant major board in June, the master sergeant board in October and the sergeant first class board in February. Each board has the same mission—to select the best qualified NCOs for promotion to the next rank.

To accomplish that mission, the Chief of Staff of the Army selects a general officer to preside over the board. The general officer board president is assisted by 12 colonels, seven lieutenant colonels and more than 45 command sergeant majors and sergeant majors who are all selected by Headquarters Department of the Army. These senior leaders are broken down by specialty into 11 or 12 panels. Each panel is charted to review promotion files of Soldiers from specific career management fields. The board members do not know the number of Soldiers they are selecting until they have reviewed (voted) all the files on Soldiers in the zone of consideration. They do this by rank order, from best qualified to least qualified for each Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).

How do the boards work?

Prior to looking at or reviewing any file, Enlisted Records Evaluation Center (EREC) provides board members with a comprehensive orientation on the board process and evaluations reports, as well as providing detailed written guidance from the Army deputy chief of staff for G-1 and the various branch propo-



ments. The G-1's Memorandum of Instruction gives them specific guidance on how to conduct themselves during the board process. The proponents provide specific guidance on the unique qualifications Soldiers should possess to be the most competitive for selection.

With this information and their own experience, the board members determine, as a group, what attributes make a Soldier best qualified for selection using a numbering system from a low of one to a high of six. Each panel member agrees to the criteria and use them to vote each file throughout the board process.

What then, exactly, do board members use to vote on the Soldier?

The most important document in the promotion file is the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF), which is stored at EREC. Within the OMPF, board members look primarily at each evaluation report, i.e., Academic Evaluation Reports and NCO Evaluation Reports (NCOERs). They generally review all reports and place emphasis on the last five issued or those issued while the Soldier held the current grade. The board also has access to another key document—the official photo—and a synopsis of the previous five assignments. They also review whatever correspondence the Soldier forwards to the board president along with the Enlisted Record Brief (ERB) verified by the Soldier.

Typically, when voting members are given a Soldier's record to vote, they first look at the photo to make sure it is recent and in the serving grade. They want to look at the Soldier's appearance and have it in their "mind's eye" as they read the narratives contained in the evaluation reports. A photograph speaks volumes. Having no photograph or one that is not in the current grade implies that a Soldier simply does not care about



his or her career. Next they review the ERB. This can be a daunting task if these records do not compare with the OMPF.

Having seen the photo, looked at the OMPF and the personnel data, the board member then votes the file based on the standards they set earlier. This is an important point: Your record is voted against the standards set by the members of your panel. That way, the first record voted is graded against the same criteria as the last record voted, and all the Soldiers whose records are reviewed by the panel receive the same consideration.

An equally important point is that even though each panel has four to eight members, only three of the eight vote each record. A computer program selects the voters randomly. They vote the record independently of each other and are not allowed to discuss the file with any other voting member of the board.

Voting members with personal knowledge of misdeeds not reflected in the record are bound to report that knowledge to appropriate officials, but may not divulge personal information about you to other members. In fact, at the beginning of each board, the members take an oath not to do so.

When all the voting is completed, then all the Soldiers are rank-ordered from the highest



U.S. Army photo

NCOs should ensure their photos are current and display the right rank and awards. A good photo, like that of Staff Sgt. Steven W. Cato, Space and Missile Defense Command, (above) helps board members to picture the Soldier as they read the narratives contained within the evaluation reports.

to the lowest score. Specific select objectives Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDDA) sets for each MOS determine who gets promoted and who does not. The panel may only select the number of NCOs for promotion by MOS that the Army projects it will need over the next 12 months. Boards cannot select every NCO found fully qualified for promotion. Because of this, competition for promotion can be tough and your record's condition can make the difference.

The board applies the select objective to the order of merit list for each MOS. The highest scoring Soldiers that fall within the designated requirement are identified as the selects. EREC then prepares a series of rosters that are authenticated and sent to HQDA.

Preparation for the board

So with that as a background, let's answer the burning question on your mind. How can I best prepare for a selection board? Based on feedback we have received from board members over the years, there are five areas you should focus on.

Career: Take the hard jobs and do them well. If you go to a TDA (Table of Distribution) *See Boards, Page 55*

Selection board myths & facts

Myth: It is recommended that you personally visit EREC to review your Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) because board members are told who came to EREC to review their records and who did not.

Fact: This is false. Board members are not told who did or did not visit EREC. They have much more critical information to review and many important tasks to accomplish.

Myth: There are quotas that each board must meet for the various ethnic categories and for females.

Fact: This is false.

The mission of each senior enlisted selection board is to select the best qualified NCOs for promotion in each MOS – period. Once the best qualified NCOs are identified based on the select objectives provided by the Department of the Army, the board results are not changed.

Myth: Board members only review the last five NCOERs in each file.

Fact: This is false. Board members are provided the

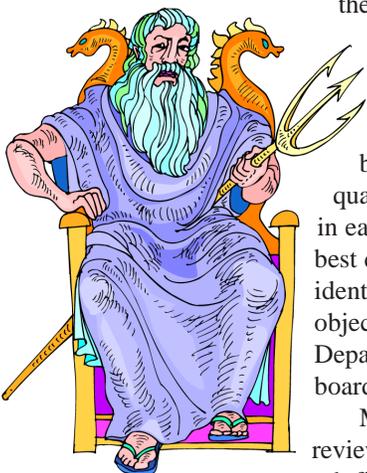
performance portion of the OMPF that contains all evaluation reports, training data, commendatory data and any disciplinary data that was directed for file in the performance section. While the last five years probably carry the most weight, board members see all reports.

Myth: Board members talk to each other about the records while they vote on them.

Fact: This is false. Board members set specific voting standards within each panel before voting begins using the "total Soldier concept." Each panel member votes each file against the standards they agreed to and no discussion of records is allowed during this process.

Myth: You will not be considered by a selection board if you have a local flag in effect.

Fact: This is false. NCOs who have a suspension of favorable personnel action (flag) in effect are still eligible for consideration by senior enlisted selection boards. NCOs who are selected who may have a flag in effect are promoted only if the flag is favorably lifted.



BOARDS *Continued from Page 57*

and Allowance) job, get back with troops as soon as possible. Regardless of what jobs you have, do them well. The NCOER is the most important document in your file and the one that, when combined with your assignment history, carries the greatest weight.

Official Military Personnel File: You have a responsibility to ensure your records are up to date and ready for review by the selection board. If they aren't right, you are to blame. With the latest tool available—OMPF Online—the task of getting a copy of your OMPF has been eliminated. Now you can go online and see your actual file, real time. All you need is an Army Knowledge Online (AKO) account and password to access the OMPF Online Web site. Go to www.hrc.army.mil and click on the OMPF Online link. Look at it and compare it to your personal paper files. If it is incomplete, then get the missing documents to EREC either through digital senders located in many PSB's or the most expeditious means possible. EREC posts the documents that they receive to the OMPF within 24 hours of receipt.

Official photograph: Since you cannot appear in person before a centralized board, your individual photograph represents you. The regulation states to have a photo taken every five years or each time your status changes. If you are serious about a promotion, however, get a new photo for the board appearance.

Having no photo in your current grade means you have a slim chance of selection. Poor-quality photos also can affect your chance of selection. Bottom line, whenever possible, get a new photo for a selection board.

Enlisted Record Brief: The ERB is the data information counterpart to the OMPF. Look carefully at each item on the ERB to ensure the data is there and accurate. If corrections are needed, see your S1 for assistance. Once you are confident that it is correct, then validate your record online.

Memorandum to the President of the Board: The golden rule – only write a letter if your file is missing something of significance, to point out a current assignment that cannot be documented in an NCOER or to explain a particular event in your career. Do not write a letter just to tell the board they should select you. Your record will speak for itself. A random memorandum seldom generates a positive outcome. If you have to write, remember to be brief and factual. Prepare your letter in memorandum format shown in AR 25-50. You should only include

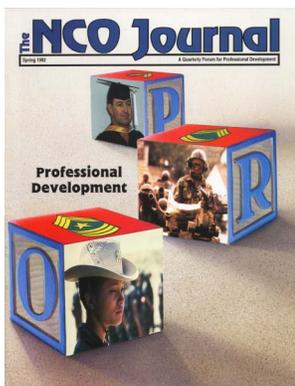
Board members get a unique digital look at a Soldier's record before voting on it.

information that is not contained in your OMPF. Memos must be addressed to the board president and they must include your Social Security Number and signature. Remember, memos to the board president should not be used to express grievances, to justify past misconduct, or to boast about yourself. Also, extraneous documents already filed on the OMPF or that are not authorized for filing should not be enclosed. Before mailing, have someone else review your memo for content, flow, format, as well as for grammatical and spelling errors.

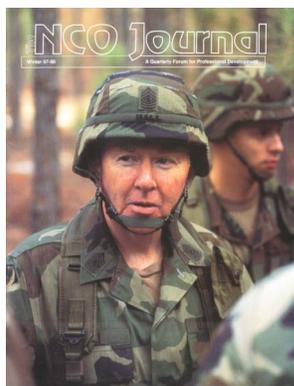
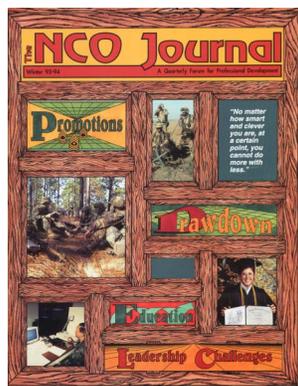
For more information concerning boards and updating your records, visit the EREC Web site at www.hrc.army.mil, then click on HRC Indianapolis (EREC), as soon as possible. Your local personnel specialist can help with questions or problems concerning your records.

Remember, the Army's Enlisted Centralized Promotion/Selection process is fair and equitable. However, the decisions made by these boards are only as good as the information provided to them.

Editor's note: Sgt. Maj. Deborah Seimer is the EREC sergeant major at HRC Indianapolis. This topic appeared in the following issues of the NCO Journal. From left to right, Spring 1992, Winter 93-94, Winter 97-98 and Summer 2002.



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