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Spec. 4?

## The most misunderstood rank in the Army

By TONY BEFFLE

Once upon a time an E-2 was a Pfc. and an E-3 was a corporal.

Then things got specialized and the Army got technical. Well, what the Army really got was Technicians—the inventors of Specialists.

It was fine for awhile. Privates were wearing the ropes, corporals were junior NCOs teaching the ropes and technicians were all somewhere making the ropes.

Then the retained grade structure of the Army expanded from seven to nine ranks. A Pfc. was an E-3, but still someone wearing the ropes. A corporal became an E-4 and received his NCO status, although he was a junior junior-NCO, and technicians became specialists, starting at the E-4 level, but retaining rope rankers.

The decline and fall of the corporal then occurred.

As a story in the Nov. 28 issue of ARMY TIMES pointed out, "There are only seven unclassified MOSs today—out of the hundreds of enlisted skills in which soldiers may become experts when promoted to E-4. In only one skill, SIG (Army Specialist), must E-4s be corporals."

So, in today's Army a promotion to E-4 is very unlikely to bring with it the status of an NCO. But even without the NCO status, the rank of E-4 is a unique level of achievement in the retained grade structure.

You obtain the rank after proving yourself as a Private, only to find yourself being tested again, this time to determine if you're capable of handling a more advanced degree of work (Spec. 3) and/or a leadership position (Spec. 4).

SEATTLE BAILEY

First of all, when an E-3 becomes an E-4 he is no longer a Private. Even adding "First Class" to the word Private doesn't mean for the Seattle Bailey lounge. As a sergeant major observed, "Who the hell wants to be a private all his life?"

However, someone can be a Private during his entire first-term military commitment. That's because the promotion to Spec. 4 isn't automatic or guaranteed. There is a waiting period, and in most companies, a waiting list.

If an E-3 isn't in the preferred facility, AWOL, or pending court-martial, he becomes eligible for promotion to E-4 when he has 21 months time-in-service (TIS) and six months time-in-grade (TIG) or, with a waiver, 12 months TIS and three months TIG.

But just keeping your nose clean and finding your time isn't enough. There are many troops who want to make the Seattle Bailey lounge and they make up the waiting list to become Spec. 4.

What kind of image are they trying to get? It should be the image of an experienced man on the job. After all, an E-4 is a specialist, whether it's

in the field of industry operations and intelligence, heavy equipment maintenance or personnel.

So being promoted to E-4 should mean being recognized as a capable individual.

If someone wearing Spec. 4 pins doesn't measure up, then it's probably because during the promotion process someone, including the man's peers, didn't speak up concerning his inexperience or looked at his past performance with less than a jaundiced eye.

As a staff section NYSIC explained, a Pfc. makes Spec. 4 when his day by day performance merits it. A man must do well in all environments, not just in his section but also in barracks and the barracks.

AFTER THE RINK

The best way to discover the difference between Pfc. and Spec. 4 is to experience the promotion. The transformation goes something like this:

One difference is obvious because it involves cash, hard cash. A Spec. 4 makes more money than a Pfc., about \$20 more.

Now to the single major living in the barracks, E-4s may not be enough to make or break him during the month, but over the long run, the pay increase adds up. D starts adding up right away for a promoted Pfc. living off post with his family.

Although the difference in pay is obvious, it's value is subject to individual financial circumstances. But E-4 is \$20 any way you look at it.

POWERLESS PRESTIGE

Then there's the new insignia which gives the wearer a new prestige, but is relatively powerless one.

Some Pfc.s are surprised to find that Spec. 4 doesn't usually get a chance to "push ropes," and for a good reason. A Spec. 4 is trained to do a certain job, not lead men. But this also presents a challenge to the man who is concerned with performing his duties with confidence and a sense of purpose.

An E-4 one day becomes an E-5 or he has his staff together and he needs training to prepare for that day. Even though corporals are fading fast, corporals (E-5s) are not and the Spec. 4 in many MOSs can expect to move from specialist to "hard-drinks." So leadership skills should be taken.

PROVED DUTY

In today's Army, are the privates who can make or break the Spec. 4's image as an experienced and competent soldier.

Imagine you're like odd, hard cash. It's value isn't really established, but is determined by the kind of man who wears it.

The Department of the Army could have called E-4s a lot of things—it chose the term specialist.

Given the opportunity, it could be a challenging task.