

THREE ARTICLES ON THE POLITICS OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

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ABSTRACT

Despite its prominence and overlap with so many fields of political science, the Medal of Honor has received little scholarly attention. This dissertation contributes to our understanding with three articles that view the Medal of Honor as a political tool. The first explains that, because the president uses the Medal of Honor as a tool and the tool's effectiveness varies with its value, he has worked to reduce the number of unworthy recipients by creating several layers of independent review. Multiple layers help prevent one person's preferences from dominating, and each additional layer makes it more difficult for unworthy nominees to get through. The rules of the game allow for appeals to reverse incorrect decisions. These rules influenced two recent cases. In the first, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates avoided an Inspector General investigation into Sergeant Rafael Peralta's nomination, which would have lowered the value of the award, by retracting his endorsement. In the second, General Davis Petraeus recommended downgrading Captain William Swenson's nomination to a Distinguished Service Cross; but his administrative clerks lost the paperwork, which allowed the process to restart, and the nomination received an endorsement from Petraeus's replacement.

The second article considers the Medal of Honor as a motivational tool. Although most the-

oretical economics studies suggest that awards increase employee productivity, the little research that exists on the topic has shown that awards actually decrease overall effort (Gubler, Larkin and Pierce, 2013). In addition, those theoretical studies assume that individuals succeed or fail on their own and that employees do not affect cost functions for one another. Chapter 3 explores a game that accounts for these deficiencies in a military context, where success is determined at the group level and soldiers can make action more or less costly for other soldiers (for example, by digging trenches). The model suggests that wages and awards decrease a soldier's effort but increase other soldiers' effort. These results are more consistent with the empirical findings than most theoretical economic studies.

The final article considers the Medal of Honor as a public-opinion tool. Several studies have suggested that the president has little to no influence over public opinion (e.g. Edwards 2003), but human-interest stories presented through soft-news sources offer the possibility reaching low-awareness individuals, who can be influenced with new information, with positive information about the war through entertainment-focused media, such as late-night talk shows (Baum, 2002, 2003). This in turn may help the president protect his ability to pursue his domestic agenda (Thrall, 2000). I find that the president awards more Medals of Honor when his job approval is low, with a lag of about two months. I also find that the president is 23% more likely to hold a Medal of Honor ceremony between Monday and Thursday, when it will get more attention, than on other days.

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All errors are my own.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many people view the Medal of Honor as an apolitical award given solely to recognize heroic acts. By this view, an individual's race, sex, political affiliation, and rank should not influence whether the individual receives the award; nor should explicitly political concerns such as public support for the war or the president. Only the heroism of the act should matter (Sabga, 2013, 2014). A quick read of the statute that authorizes the Medal of Honor provides no clue that political considerations might help determine who gets the award and when he gets it:¹

The president may award, and present in the name of Congress, a medal of honor of appropriate design, with ribbons and appurtenances, to a person who, while a member of the Army, distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty (*Public Law 88-77*, 1963)—

1. while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States;
2. while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or
3. while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an

¹ This is the statutory authorization for the Army's award. There are also Navy and Air Force versions that are substantively identical.

opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.

This optimistic view conflicts with a common political-science assumption of selfishness. If politicians are selfish, then Congress and the president did not create the Medal of Honor to benefit someone else; they created it to benefit themselves. Taking this view can yield new and interesting insights into the Medal of Honor.

If the president wants to use the Medal of Honor as a political tool, the Medal needs to have value; but the more control the president (or any one person, really) has in deciding who receives the Medal, the more likely the award is to be seen as political, the less valuable the award will be, and thus the less effective it will be. To overcome this problem, the president and his appointees have created formal institutions that govern how nominations are reviewed and approved. The result is the opposite of the principal-agent problem (Miller, 2005), where the principal wants to control the agent but struggles to do so. In this case, the principal (the president) wants the agent (for simplicity, think of military officers) to make decisions that conflict with the principal's wishes at least some of the time; otherwise, we would observe the same outcome as if the president made every choice, which would lower the value of the award.

Chapter 2 describes two cases that exemplify the importance of institutional independence. In the first, Sergeant Rafael Peralta had been denied the Medal of Honor and that journalists were saying he was a one-time illegal immigrant (for example, McGarry 2009; Londoño 2014). Peralta's mother was rumored to be living in the United States illegally too (Keilman, 2014). Many marines believed that senior administration officials had quashed the nomination so they would not have to present the nation's highest military award to an illegal immigrant on behalf of a former illegal

immigrant. I draw on interviews with the Peralta family's attorney as well as documents from Peralta's nomination package to show that a senior official wanted to award Peralta the Medal of Honor but the institution prevented it.

In the second, William Swenson's nomination was receiving a rather large amount of media attention. Lots of military members knew that Swenson had been nominated and that he had been highly critical of senior officers and US military policies in Afghanistan, so there was a lot of speculation when it was discovered that his nomination had disappeared. Like many soldiers, Swenson believed that a senior officer had intentionally mishandled the nomination. I primarily use a report from an inspector general investigation to show that the institution enabled the award even though a senior official tried to block it.

One of the ways in which the Medal of Honor is a political tool is that the president uses it to motivate soldiers. The secretary of the Navy proposed the Medal for just this purpose in 1861, and Federal law recognizes its motivational purpose to this day. In Chapter 3, I survey the literature on employee awards as motivators and show that few of them analyze the role of status awards on collective action. I extend previous models that assume success is determined individually (for example, Besley and Ghatak 2008) to one that assumes success is determined collectively. The new model also allows the opposition to raise a soldier's cost of action. I show that, given relatively simple assumptions, monetary incentives and awards increase the enemy's effort, not ours.

Another way the president uses the Medal of Honor as a tool is to influence public opinion. Although it is difficult for the president to move public opinion in his favor (Edwards, 2009), the Medal of Honor may provide a way to do so because it provides a human-interest story that appeals

to audiences that typically avoid politics and lack strong beliefs. In Chapter 4, I expand this argument and show correlations between Vietnam War fatalities, presidential and war support, and Medal of Honor awards.

The Medal of Honor is supposed to be apolitical, but this dissertation suggests that it is a topic ripe for political analysis. Although the dissertation barely begins to scratch the surface of what happens when the president makes a decision related to the Medal of Honor—my theories can be refined, my analyses can be improved, and all the things I have not addressed (such as inter-service rivalries) can be considered—it can help us better understand politics in the United States.

Despite the potential benefits, political scientists have paid the Medal of Honor little attention. This is unfortunate. Not only is the Medal of Honor interesting—as this dissertation shows, there are rich and complex stories behind an award that on the surface seems simple and straightforward—but it also relates to numerous sub-disciplines. Because the Medal of Honor is a war award, it relates to international relations. Because it is an employee award, it relates to public administration. Because it is a public-opinion tool (see Chapter 4), it relates to public opinion and American politics. Because it is a military award issued by a civilian, it relates to civil-military relations. Because it typically goes through several layers of bureaucratic review, it relates to bureaucratic politics. Because Medal of Honor recipients organized a group to lobby for higher award standards (Sterner, 2014*a*), it relates to interest-group politics. Because race has been shown to determine whether a soldier receives the award, it relates to the politics of race.

Politicians have demonstrated the usefulness of Medal of Honor research by using it to make decisions. President Clinton awarded 7 Medals of Honor to African Americans based on a study by

Converse III et al. (1997) in 1997 and 22 Medals of Honor to Asian Americans based on a study by McNaughton, Edwards and Price (2002) in 2000. President Obama awarded 19 more Medals of Honor to Jewish and Hispanic veterans in 2014 based on investigations sponsored by the Army and Congress (Hudson, 2014).

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons political scientists avoid studying the Medal of Honor is the award's "sanctity[, which] it first earned in World War II. This has created a psychological aversion to deconstructing the award, potentially cheapening the experiences of those who have earned it" (Williams, 2010, 5). Another obstacle is the potential backlash a researcher might face. The recipients, who are certified heroes, may not appreciate academic investigations into the Medal of Honor that suggest less than honorable motivations are at work; and Americans, who generally hold positive attitudes about the military (Walsh, 2007), may interpret the research negatively.

Jonathan Landay has experienced backlash for questioning the Marine Corps's account of Dakota Meyer's heroics at the Battle of Ganjgal. Landay, a reporter for McClatchy, was embedded with Meyer and another Medal of Honor recipient, William Swenson (whose case I cover in Chapter 2), when the Taliban ambushed them. Although noting that Meyer deserved the Medal, Landay showed that "crucial parts that the Marine Corps publicized and Obama described [were] untrue, unsubstantiated, or exaggerated," such as the claim that Meyer saved 13 Americans when only 12 were present, 4 of whom died (Landay, 2011). Meyer suggested that Landay was using the freedom of speech the Ganjgal deceased had fought for to write "negative articles" (Lamothe, 2013e), and the Marine Corps officials attacked Landay personally. When speaking with the *Marine Corps Times*, several officers anonymously questioned Landay's objectivity, and Lieutenant Colonel Stewart Up-

ton, a public-affairs officer, took to the McClatchy comments section to say that Landay is “no Joe Galloway” (Lamothe, 2011*a*). These repercussions discourage freedom of inquiry into the Medal.

Given this example, perhaps it should come as no surprise that most systematic analyses of the Medal of Honor were conducted during the Vietnam War, when Americans were seemingly more skeptical about the military. At that time researchers found that 1) officers tended to receive the award for “war winning” actions and enlisted tended to receive it for “soldier saving” actions (Blake and Butler, 1976); 2) enlisted personnel died during their Medal-winning actions at a higher rate than officers in Vietnam but not in World War II or Korea; 3) the national media provided less coverage of the Medal of Honor after magazine editors took a negative view toward the war in 1968 (Blake, 1973).

CHAPTER 2

TWO CASE STUDIES

The typical Medal of Honor nomination must pass through several rounds of review before receiving approval. At a minimum, US Department of Defense policy requires a nomination to receive approval from the unified combatant commander, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the secretary of the military department concerned, and the secretary of Defense (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), 2006), then the president must approve. Service secretaries have established additional requirements and procedures for handling Medal of Honor nominations, and the commander at each level of review can set additional standards for his unit. Together, these formal and informal rules and procedures comprise a political institution (Hall and Taylor, 1996).

Although the formal steps a nomination must proceed through are easily identifiable, little is known about the informal rules. Part of the problem is that the process is so secretive. It is difficult to identify nominees who have not received the award, so selection on the dependent variable (Geddes, 1990) can become a problem. Department of Defense (DOD) policy prohibits even confirming or denying whether a soldier has been nominated for the award (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), 2006), let alone providing details about the nomination or an award decision. The DOD and National Archives keeps nomination records

in personnel files, but US privacy laws tightly restrict who can access those files. The veteran must provide written authorization to access his records, or his next of kin if he is deceased. Without written authorization, the public cannot access those records for 62 years following his separation from the military (US National Archives, 2014). Given how rare Medal of Honor awards are, it would probably take a huge amount of archival work to collect a set of unsuccessful nominations to compare to the successful nominations.

Fortunately, two recent and public cases can help shed light on the Medal of Honor rules. In the first, marines testified that one of their own scooped a grenade to his body and took the implosion. Sergeant Rafael Peralta was nominated for the Medal of Honor posthumously, but the doctor who performed his autopsy concluded that the medical evidence disproved claims of heroism. Despite the autopsy report, officials up through the secretary of Defense endorsed the nomination. Someone then lodged a complaint with the DOD Inspector General (IG). Because an investigation could hurt the value of the Medal significantly, Secretary Gates chose to downgrade the award rather than let the investigation continue. Representative Duncan Hunter and the Peralta family have made numerous records public in an attempt to change the award decision.

In the second case, the US Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR–A) commander, General David Petraeus, recommended that Captain William Swenson’s Medal of Honor nomination be downgraded to a Distinguished Service Cross (DSC). Given that each official in the chain of review typically accepts the recommendation of the previous reviewer, Swenson likely would have received the DSC if Petraeus’s recommendation were handled properly, but Petraeus’s staff lost the nomination. That allowed the nomination to restart (*10 U.S.C. 3744*, N.d.). By the time it reached the USFOR–A

commander again, Petraeus was gone and the nomination was approved. A DOD Inspector General (IG) investigation into the loss of the nomination has revealed many details about the handling of the case.

Why would the president and his appointees create an institution that binds his hands? Often they delegate authority to a bureaucracy to handle large-scale administrative tasks, to exploit expertise, to avoid blame for unpopular decisions, to make credible commitments to stable policy, or to deal with crises demanding swift, coordinated action” (Kernell, Jacobson and Kousser, 2003, 310) or to provide the president with objective information. But none of these reasons seem to apply to the Medal of Honor. The Medal does not impose “the huge problems of coordination and delegation raised by many forms of large-scale collective action” (Kernell, Jacobson and Kousser, 2003, 307), there are few Medal of Honor experts, awarding the Medal is not an unpopular decision, the Medal does not make a credible commitment about policy, nor does awarding the Medal require swift, coordinated action. In this chapter, I argue that the president has helped create the institution to confer legitimacy to the award.

The Medal of Honor is a political tool whose effectiveness depends on its value. US politicians would prefer to award the Medal when it is politically expedient, but the more that politics influences Medal of Honor decisions, the less valuable the Medal of Honor becomes. Congress and the president have created independent mechanisms that constrain their ability to choose who gets the Medal of Honor and when they get it. These two cases exemplify the important of formal and informal rules to Medal of Honor awards. Peralta likely would have received the Medal of Honor if not for the Inspector General, and Swenson likely would not have received the Medal of Honor if the law did

not provide exceptions to its Medal of Honor deadlines.

This logic differs from the principal-agent problem, where the principal wants to control his agents but has trouble doing so. When it comes to the Medal of Honor, the president would actually prefer his agents to act against his preferences, at least part of the time. The more influence the president exercises over the Medal of Honor process, the less valuable—and therefore the less effective—the award is.

The chapter proceeds in the following order. The next section describes the Medal of Honor literature and where this chapter fits in it. Then I explain why the president would create an independent institution to review nominations. Finally, I show that institutional rules created to produce independent reviews likely helped Captain Swenson receive the Medal of Honor but hurt Sergeant Peralta's bid for the award.

2.1 Literature Review

Most writing on the Medal of Honor has focused on recipient biographies (Mitchell and Otis, 1968; Graham, 1989; Beyer and Keydel, 1994; Schubert, 1997; Toyn, 2006; Murphy, 2010; Brokaw et al., 2011). The majority focus on the recipients' backgrounds and battlefield heroics; if they touch on the awards process at all, they generally describe the process vaguely. Other writing has looked at people who fraudulently claim to be Medal of Honor recipients (Burkett and Whitley, 1998); recipients of the Confederate Medal of Honor (Clemmer, 1996); and the hundreds of soldiers receiving the Medal of Honor during the Civil War for staying an extra day in Washington, DC (Pullen, 1997). They provide little insight into the modern Medal of Honor nomination process.

Research has found that an individual's characteristics help determine whether he receives the Medal of Honor. Race may be the best known Medal of Honor predictor. The United States has a tradition of "look[ing] to African Americans only in time of great military need and then [ignoring] them and their accomplishments when peace" resumes (Lanning, 2004, 17). Black soldiers received disproportionately few Medals of Honor before World War I (Schubert, 1997, ch. 1). The Army and Congress have sponsored at least three rounds of investigations into whether race prevented worthy soldiers from receiving the Medal. All three examined the evidence for cases culled from lists of Distinguished Service Cross (the second-highest military award) recipients. President Clinton awarded 7 Medals of Honor to African Americans based on a study by Converse III et al. (1997) in 1997 and 22 Medals of Honor to Asian Americans based on a study by McNaughton, Edwards and Price (2002) in 2000. President Obama awarded 19 more Medals of Honor to Jewish and Hispanic veterans in 2014 (Hudson, 2014).

Rank is another useful characteristic. Officers tend to receive the Medal of Honor for "war winning" actions, such as attacking the enemy against overwhelming odds, while enlisted soldiers tend to receive the Medal of Honor for "soldier saving" actions, such as jumping on grenades (Blake and Butler, 1976). The president may use the Medal of Honor as a talent-retention tool, which is why the higher the rank of the recipient, the more likely it is that he survived the Medal-winning action (Blake, 1973).

The Medal of Honor may be a motivational tool (for example, Besley and Ghatak 2008), but it might motivate the enemy more than US troops (Chapter 3). The president might also use it as a public-opinion tool (Williams, 2010; Blake, 1973). The president issues more Medals of Honor

when his public support is low, and he holds most Medal of Honor ceremonies between Monday and Thursday, when they will get the most attention (Chapter 4).

Congress and the president have created a complicated and somewhat set of rules to determine whether a soldier should receive the Medal of Honor. The existence of these rules suggests their importance, yet the literature has generally ignored them. This chapter contributes to our understanding of the Medal of Honor institution by explaining why Congress and the president have created these nomination rules and demonstrating the influence of the institution through two case studies.

2.2 Theory

The president uses the Medal of Honor to motivate soldiers (Besley and Ghatak 2008, Chapter 3);, bolster public support (Blake 1973, Chapter 4), and retain talent (Blake, 1973). In doing so, he has assumed that the Medal of Honor influences human behavior. But the only way that the Medal effects soldiers' choices is if it has value: no one will choose differently for something they do not care about.

If the Medal is valuable, it is because the Medal signals heroism; and if the Medal signals heroism, it is because heroes receive the Medal (Ainsworth, 2012). Each additional award given for something other than a heroic act lowers the value of the Medal of Honor because it reduces the strength of the signal. The Medal of Honor would not motivate, garner support, or retain talent if the president distributed it only to his cronies or other unheroic individuals.

The value of the award might suffer even if the president controlled the Medal of Honor process

and he tried to award only heroes. The first reason is political: the president is a politician, so his decisions may be seen as political. The second reason is statistical: the more people who look at the evidence and conclude that a soldier deserves the Medal of Honor, the more likely it is that he does. Thus, the president has incentive to establish and maintain a review process that has integrity (Burrelli and Torreon, 2013, 9).

To ensure the value of the award, the president has established a largely independent institution composed of a multi-layered review process.¹ The process begins at the soldier's unit.² A senior soldier nominates him for the award. Next, the award makes its way through the chain of command. If the nomination successfully navigates the chain of command, it proceeds to the Decorations Board.³ If the Decorations Board approves, the nomination goes to the service chief; if the service chief approves, it goes to the service secretary; if the service secretary approves, it proceeds to the secretary of Defense; and if the secretary of Defense approves, it reaches the final step, the president. At each step, the nomination is reviewed to ensure it meets the requirements for the Medal of Honor (US Army, 2014*b*).

Army regulations state that only the secretary of the Army, the secretary of Defense, and the president can disapprove the award (US Army, 2014*a*), but each reviewer effectively has veto power

¹ The law authorizes the president to award the Medal to soldiers who meet the written standard, but it does not specify how the president should identify the deserving individuals. The president has wide latitude in deciding how to do it.

² The president has authorized the service secretaries to establish the Medal of Honor procedures for their departments, so the specifics of the process varies from one branch to another. However, each branch process is more similar than not (Tan, 2012). I describe here the Army's Medal of Honor process, keeping in mind that the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps processes are largely the same.

³ US law requires Medal of Honor nominations and awards to be made in a timely manner. With limited exceptions, Army and Air Force nominations must be made within two years and awards within three years of the act, and Navy and Marine Corps nominations must be made within three years and awards within five years of the act. If these time requirements are not met, an act of Congress can authorize the president to award the individual a Medal of Honor, at which time the review process begins with the Decorations Board.

because a recommendation to disapprove or downgrade the award is almost always accepted. Veto power makes it less likely that a subordinate will award Medals of Honor based on a parochial interest (such as favoring marines over soldiers) and therefore increases the probability that the award is deserved (see Tsebelis 2002).

By starting the review at the soldier's unit, the president has reduced his influence over the process in a couple ways. First, the lower the unit (for example, the battalion instead of the regiment), the more layers there are between the unit and the president, so he exercises less direct influence over those decisions. Second, most soldiers who see combat (and thus meet one of the Medal's requirements) are low ranked, so they tend to belong to lower units. A recommendation that starts at a lower unit goes through more rounds of review, making it less likely that an unworthy soldier would receive the Medal.

The process need not be linear. First, each reviewer can establish her own layers of review. She has the authority to draw on the resources available to her, such as legal and medical experts, when making a determination. For example, the secretary of Defense commissioned a panel of outside experts to review the evidence for Peralta's nomination but not for others (details follow). Second, there is no requirement that the nomination proceed in this order. For example, Peralta's nomination made its way to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), who then sent the nomination back to the 1st Marine Division (1stMarDiv) with a request for more evidence. 1stMarDiv collected more evidence and re-submitted the nomination with I MEF, who then endorsed the nomination and sent it to the next level. As long as each level of review makes its recommendation or decision after the lower level, the award can proceed.

With cooperation and even prompting from the Executive Branch, Congress has helped ensure the integrity of the award through intentional and unintentional means. First, Congress created a Medal of Honor standard that presumes soldiers are unworthy of the award. This helps prevent undeserving individuals from receiving the Medal of Honor. Second, Congress allowed resubmissions for lost awards to reduce the arbitrariness of the process. Third, Congress created Inspectors General, who have the authority to investigate and report fraud, waste, and abuse in government programs. Although it is unlikely that Congress had the Medal of Honor process in mind when creating the Inspector General program, the DOD IG has played a critical role in Medal of Honor decisions, as this chapter will show.

The Medal of Honor “recommendation process can take in excess of 18 months with intense scrutiny every step of the way” (US Army, 2014*b*). The Medal of Honor process “is bureaucratic, but I think a lot of that bureaucracy is there to ensure we get it absolutely right,” said Army Major General Reuben Jones, who from 2006 to 2009 was responsible for processing awards nominations (Tan, 2012). It seems to have worked: Americans believe the Medal of Honor is the most prestigious award a person can receive (Moore, 2013).

2.3 Research Design

One reason the literature has overlooked the Medal of Honor’s formal and informal rules is because the process is so secretive. Not only does Department of Defense policy prohibit sharing details about pending cases; it prohibits even confirming and denying whether a soldier has been nominated (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), 2006). Nomination packages

include detailed process information, but they are difficult to access. The veteran, or his next of kin if he is deceased, must provide written authorization to access his records; without that, the public cannot access his records for 62 years following his separation from the military (US National Archives, 2014). That delay is long enough that researchers must continue to wait for some records from World War I.

There is also a statistical challenge to getting useful information. The Department of Defense does not keep a list of Medal of Honor nominees. Given that there are only about 3,500 Medal of Honor recipients but tens of millions of veterans, trying to find who has been nominated unsuccessfully is like searching for a needle in a haystack.

I chose two recent cases. In the first, the family of a Navy Cross recipient refused to accept his award because they felt he deserved the Medal of Honor. Multiple outlets had reported that Sergeant Peralta was once an illegal immigrant (for example, McGarry 2009; Campfreddie 2010; Londoño 2014), so like many marines I thought race was the decisive factor. Several members of California's Congressional delegation wrote the president to ask for clarification on the decision (Hunter et al., 2008). Defense Secretary Gates responded, letting them know that, in an "unprecedented" move, he had commissioned an independent panel to review the evidence and the panel had found enough evidence to disapprove the award (Gates, 2008).

In the second case, Captain William Swenson had been nominated for the Medal of Honor, but somewhere along the way his nomination disappeared. It was well known that Swenson had criticized senior officers and US military policy in Afghanistan in an investigation in the debacle at Ganjgal, so like Swenson (Inspector General, 2013), I believed that an officer in the chain of review

had intentionally disposed of Swenson's nomination to punish him.

I collected several original data for these cases. I obtained Peralta's Medal of Honor nomination package approved by the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, Major General Richard F. Natonski (Natonski, 2005). The package includes a case summary, endorsements from various marines in Peralta's chain of command, expert medical testimony, sworn witness interviews and re-interviews, diagrams showing the firefight that cost Peralta his life, Secretary Gates's secret-panel recommendation, and more. I also received ballistic reports (Staff Judge Advocate, I Marine Expeditionary Force, 2005) and interviewed the Peralta family's attorney, George Sabga (Sabga, 2013, 2014).

My primary source of information for the Swenson case is a report from Marguerite Garrison, the Department of Defense Inspector General (IG) (Inspector General, 2013), detailing her investigation into Swenson's case.

2.4 Sergeant Peralta's Nomination

2.4.1 Background

Rafael Peralta was born in Mexico City in April 1979. He immigrated to the United States as a teenager, and he joined the Marine Corps the day after he received his green card (Natonski, 2005, 3). He rose through the ranks and became a sergeant (rank E-5) and platoon guide (a billet). In November 2004, he deployed with 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, to Fallujah, Iraq, as part of Operation al-Fajr. Fellow marines said that Peralta cared for them and did far more for them than was required of someone with his rank and position (Kaemmerer, 2004; Staff Judge Advocate,

I Marine Expeditionary Force, 2005). Being a platoon guide, Peralta did not have to clear houses with his marines, but he did so anyway. He even stood firewatch the night of the 14th, which was rare for someone in his position (Staff Judge Advocate, I Marine Expeditionary Force, 2005, 49).

On November 15th, Peralta and his adopted squad began clearing houses. About seven houses in, they breached the front door and entered. A door toward the back, which led to the kitchen, was locked. One of the marines breached the door. Two insurgents were waiting; they started shooting, and the marines returned fire. One marine's ricochet struck Peralta in the back of the head (Staff Judge Advocate, I Marine Expeditionary Force, 2005),⁴ and Peralta collapsed on his stomach. One of the insurgents threw a grenade into the room and Peralta died (Natonski, 2005).

2.4.2 How the rules worked

Within half an hour of Peralta's death, Staff Sergeant Murdoch (Lowry, 2014) began to collect statements from the marines involved. Six testified that they had seen Peralta pull the grenade to his body, while five did not see it, some of whom were not in the house (Natonski, 2005, Enclosure 2). Most witnesses placed the grenade to Peralta's right, within arm's reach, near his shoulder or head (Natonski, 2005, Enclosure 1, 7). However, an explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) expert found part of the grenade fuse lodged in the left front side of Peralta's flak jacket (Natonski, 2005, Enclosure 1, 9), and most of the damage was on Peralta's left side. Major Scott Marconda, the battalion investigating officer, argued that the best explanation for the grenade landing to the right of Peralta but ending up under his left side was that Peralta scooped the grenade.

⁴ Although Marine Corps investigators found that Peralta was a victim of friendly fire, "the Marine Corps does not count Peralta's death as one of its six friendly fire cases from the Iraq war" (Londoño, 2014).

The battalion surgeon, Lieutenant Fuller, conducted a preliminary autopsy within 30 minutes of the injury and concluded that it was conceivable Peralta still had cognitive function for half a minute or more after his injury (Natonski, 2005, 16). On June 23, 2005, one of the marines who removed Peralta's body swore that he saw a shallow hole in the floor where Peralta's left pectoral muscle had been (Natonski, 2005, 45–47).

Problems for the case began to appear in April 2005, when Colonel Eric Berg emailed clarifications to his autopsy report (Zoroya, 2008). First, Berg said that “the head gunshot wound would have been immediately incapacitating and nearly instantly fatal. He could not have executed any meaningful motions” (Natonski, 2005, 19). An act must “have devotion behind it” to warrant the Medal of Honor (Lynn III, 2009), so incapacitation would make Peralta ineligible for the Medal of Honor. Second, Berg found that Peralta “had no significant internal injuries from blunt force trauma of the thorax and abdomen, which virtually rules out a grenade explosion beneath his body... The shrapnel injury pattern is consistent with an explosion at about knee or thigh height, and a few feet to the left of the left knee-thigh, and slightly in front of it” (Natonski, 2005, 19). This suggests that Peralta never pulled the grenade to his body.

Berg's statements contain contradictions. In the first sentence of the autopsy report, Berg said that Peralta suffered a gunshot wound to the chest⁵ and a shrapnel wound to the head, but later on the same page, Berg said that Peralta suffered a gunshot (not shrapnel) wound to the head. Berg's clarification email also contradicted the autopsy report. The report states that Peralta “died

⁵ The autopsy report's reference to a gunshot wound to the chest seems to be a mistake. It is the only place in Peralta's nomination packet that refers to a gunshot wound to the chest, and in Berg's clarification email, he says “there is not a scratch in the areas covered by the Kevlar helmet and the body armor” (Natonski, 2005, 19).

of wounds while enroute to Bravo Surgical Company” (Natonski, 2005, 17), but the email said that Peralta’s head wound “would have been ... nearly instantly fatal” (Natonski, 2005, 19). Still, Berg’s statements introduced an opposing opinion from a well-credentialed witness.

More opposing evidence came to light about a year after Peralta’s death. On November 9, 2005, Corporal Tony Gonzales told the investigating officer, Major Marconda, that marines from Peralta’s unit had argued about whether Peralta had jumped on the grenade. He also reported rumors that a sergeant in the unit was pressuring marines to say that Peralta had jumped on the grenade (Natonski, 2005, 48; Londoño, 2014). On November 14, Corporal Davi Allen testified that the platoon sergeant visited him in the hospital. Allen said he felt pressured to testify that Peralta had scooped the grenade to his body (Natonski, 2005, 51; Londoño, 2014). Marconda reinterviewed the other witnesses, and all continued to claim that Peralta had acted heroically. Marconda found no evidence to corroborate Allen’s story, and the nomination proceeded.

Peralta’s nomination received endorsements up through the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, but the commander of the First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) expressed concern about the autopsy report and returned the nomination. Major Marconda then gathered opinions from three additional medical experts, all of whom agreed that Peralta could have carried out the actions witnesses subscribed to him. The nomination restarted up the chain of command and received endorsements from the I MEF commander, commandant of the Marine Corps, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the commander of US Central Command, and secretary of the Navy.

Peralta’s nomination reached the Office of the Secretary of Defense, where it received support from the director of Officer and Enlisted Personnel Management, the deputy assistant secretary of

Defense for Military Personnel Policy, and the assistant secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy. The undersecretary for Personnel and Readiness, David Chu, dissented (Gates, 2014; Steele, 2014). The Medal of Honor requires none of these endorsements; like other decision makers in the chain of review, the secretary of Defense can draw on experts and other resources to inform him (for example, see 3-20d, US Army 2006, 44). But ultimately he holds responsibility for handling the nomination. Given dissents from Berg and Chu, Gates “personally interviewed several senior officers in Peralta’s chain of command, and in light of the unanimous support of the entire uniformed leadership involved, [he] approved the recommendation” (Seck, 2014*b*).

Gates rescinded his endorsement almost as soon as he gave it. Someone had complained to the Department of Defense Inspector General (IG) that Peralta’s injuries precluded him from intentionally carrying out the heroic act ascribed to him. Gates, a presidential appointee, worried about the effects of an investigation (Gates, 2014, chapter 7). Among other reasons, an investigation would decrease the value of the award. Rather than letting the investigation to proceed, Gates decided to handle the complaint himself. In an “unprecedented step” (Gates, 2008), he commissioned a panel consisting of a former Medal of Honor recipient, a neurosurgeon, two pathologists, and the former commander of multi-national forces in Iraq. The panel unanimously concluded that Peralta may have performed a heroic action but insufficient evidence existed to meet the Navy’s “no margin of doubt or possibility of error” standard (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008). “I had no choice but to withdraw my approval,” said Gates (Seck, 2014*b*).

Peralta did not receive the Medal of Honor, but he did receive the Navy Cross, the second highest military decoration a sailor or marine can receive. The Navy Cross has a lower standard

than the Medal of Honor: it requires less evidence, and award authority rests with the secretary of the Navy instead of the president. Peralta's Navy Cross citation credits him with reaching out and pulling the grenade to his body "without hesitation and with complete disregard for his own personal safety." Peralta, the citation reads, absorbed the brunt of the blast and shielded fellow marines. "By his undaunted courage, intrepid fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty, Sergeant Peralta reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service" (Winter, 2008). Peralta's mother has refused to accept the Navy Cross because she believes he deserves the Medal of Honor (Lamothe, 2013*d*; Londoño, 2014).

If individuals could not file complaints with the Inspector General, Peralta likely would have received the Medal of Honor. The secretary of Defense had endorsed the nomination before someone filed a complaint with the IG, so the nomination only needed approval from the president. And given that each reviewer tends to accept the previous reviewer's recommendation, the odds were in Peralta's favor that the president would have approved the award.

Many marines believe that Peralta did not receive the Medal of Honor due to racism, but racism alone cannot explain Peralta's failed nomination. Senior officials recommended Peralta for the Medal of Honor, including the secretary of Defense, Bob Gates. Gates only downgraded the award to a Navy Cross when someone filed a complaint with the Inspector General. And if racism played a role in the the autopsy's conclusions, those were not decisive in the final recommendation, as evidenced by the progress of the nomination well past the autopsy. Only when the complaint was filed did the process come to a halt. Even if racism played a role in the doctor's decision, it would

not have made a difference except for the doctor's ability to file a complaint and the IG's authority to conduct an investigation and lower the value of the award. And although it is possible that racism could have influenced the conclusions of the autopsy report, it is unlikely. The doctors on Gates's review panel were also skeptical that Peralta had the capacity to willingly pull the grenade to his body.

It has also been suggested that Peralta's status as a friendly-fire victim played a role in declining the award. Peralta was shot and killed by fellow troops about seven months after Pat Tillman; so it could be that officials did not want to create another high-profile friendly-fire incident (Sabga, 2014; Lowry, 2014). However, this explanation runs into the same problem as the racism explanation: Gates approved the award and only retracted it when someone filed a complaint with the IG.

Peralta's supporters argue that Peralta's nomination has received more scrutiny than any previous nomination (Sabga, 2014). "We've never put people under a microscope like this before. They've got the eyewitness statements of the marines. It makes absolutely no sense to me," said Doug Sterner (Harper, 2014). But forensic evidence may offer more reliable evidence than eyewitness statements. Forensics have played a role in other decisions too. Forensic evidence was critical to getting Jason Dunham (Sabga, 2014) and Kyle Carpenter (Hodge, 2014) the Medal of Honor because neither had the minimum two eyewitnesses that are typically required.

2.4.3 Where the case stands

The fight to get Peralta a Medal of Honor did not end with Gates's decision. The Peralta family started working with George Sabga, a California attorney, and Duncan Hunter, a member of the

US House of Representatives, to make the case for an upgrade. Shortly after Peralta received the Navy Cross, Hunter wrote President George W. Bush to request a review (Perry, 2008), and Gates responded, denying the request (Gates, 2008).

After Gates declined to reopen Peralta's case, Sabga hired Dr. Vincent DiMaio, a forensic pathologist, to review the evidence. DiMaio concluded that Peralta "in fact reached for the grenade and pulled it under his body" (DiMaio, 2012, 3). In addition, video taken just after Peralta died surfaced. The Department of Defense *Manual of Military Decorations and Awards* (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), 2006) authorizes reviews of disapproved Medal of Honor nominations when "new, substantive, and material information" appears. Hunter presented both to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and requested a review. Panetta declined, arguing that the evidence Hunter submitted did not meet the "new, substantive, and material information" standard (Panetta, 2012).

Hunter submitted another request for review after Chuck Hagel became secretary of Defense. In addition to the family's pathology report (DiMaio, 2012) and video taken shortly after Peralta's death, Hunter submitted new witness statements. Hagel also declined to reopen the case,⁶ noting that the video did not show Peralta's abdomen, which could have provided more evidence of where the grenade imploded in relation to Peralta; DiMaio's report failed to overturn existing medical opinion and photographic evidence that suggested the grenade exploded several feet from Peralta; photographs are consistent with a grenade explosion several feet from Peralta; and the new witness statements do not contribute "new, substantive, and material information" (Seck, 2014a).

⁶ Interestingly, Hagel announced that he would not reopen the case at 6 PM on a Friday, which is consistent with "taking out the trash." See Walsh and Austin (2013a,b).

Three of the marines who submitted statements have changed their stories. One was in the room with Peralta; he claims Peralta could not have smothered the grenade because he watched it explode. The Peralta family has noted that this dissenting marine could not have watched the grenade explode considering his back took 24 (Lowry, 2014) pieces of shrapnel (Seck, 2014c). The other two marines were not in the room with Peralta, but they said that the story of Peralta covering the grenade was concocted to honor his memory. Meanwhile, several witnesses to the incident continue to stand by their previous testimony identifying Peralta as a hero (Londoño, 2014). Peralta's mother has accused the *Washington Post* journalist who wrote an article about these new charges of "playing the race card" (Dinan, 2014).

When Hagel declined to re-open Peralta's case in February, he also seemed to try to deter the Peralta family from pursuing the case further. The statement noted the following:

The Department of Defense has taken extraordinary measures to ensure Sgt. Peralta's nomination received full consideration. Three separate secretaries of defense have now examined the case, and each independently concluded the evidence does not support award of the Medal of Honor.

Hagel has ordered a review of the awards process, which could determine whether the reliability of the current system can be improved. However, it is not clear what effect the review might have on the Peralta case. Peralta's family continues to believe that he deserved the Medal of Honor, but Representative Hunter might have chosen to focus less on the case. Here is what he told *Stars and Stripes* in June (Harper, 2014):

It's a dead horse. In 25 years when you have a president look back like President Obama just did towards Vietnam and the men and women that did not get awarded medals and did not get recognition when they should have, that's probably what we are looking at,' he said. 'It might be 25 years. Who knows? But I think if somebody [who makes these decisions] sees this objectively, I think they're going to see this in the same way that I do and most of the people that know about the case do, which is that [Peralta] should receive the Medal of Honor.

2.4.4 Conclusion

Despite dissenting medical opinion, Sergeant Peralta's nomination received all the endorsements required for the Medal of Honor except for the president's. Then someone filed a complaint with the DOD Inspector General. Rather than allow a public investigation to tarnish the value of the award, the Secretary of Defense quietly commissioned a panel to review the case. They unanimously concluded that the evidence did not meet the Medal's high standards, so Gates downgraded Peralta's award to a Navy Cross. Racism and contemporary cases of friendly fire do not explain Gates's initial endorsement, nor does rank explain why Peralta failed to receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for a soldier-saving action. If the rules did not allow someone to threaten the value of the award significantly by filing a complaint with the IG, Peralta likely would have received the Medal of Honor.

2.5 Captain Swenson’s Medal of Honor

2.5.1 *Background*

Early⁷ in the morning on September 8, 2009, a little over 100 soldiers in total—comprising the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan Border Police (ABP), and embedded US military personnel—plus an embedded American journalist, headed toward the Ganjgal Valley, in eastern Afghanistan, just a few miles from the Pakistani border. The Afghan Army had proposed the mission. The planned to sweep a local village for weapons and to meet the local elders to discuss establishing regular patrols. The elders had insisted on Afghans conducting the sweep, so US personnel were there to support the Afghan troops with advice and air strikes as necessary (Landay, 2009).

As they approached the destination, the soldiers split in three groups, one breaking north, another breaking south, and the third heading toward the center. Three US marines and a Navy corpsman—Staff Sergeant Aaron Kenefick, 1st Lieutenant Michael Johnson, Gunnery Sergeant Edwin Johnson, and Petty Officer 3rd Class James Layton—led the center column toward the village, while Army Captain William Swenson and Army First Sergeant Kenneth Westbrook brought up the rear. At 5:30 AM, between 50 (Lamothe, 2011*b*) and 150 (Ure, 2010; Martin, 2011) heavily armed Taliban (Landay, 2009) soldiers attacked from the front and sides. Swenson called senior US officers at the tactical operations center to provide smoke cover and fire support to pre-planned locations, but those officers declined, arguing that the targets were too close to the village. The

⁷ This subsection draws heavily from the Medal of Honor website the Army created for Swenson. See US Army (2013). Dakota Meyer, another Medal of Honor recipient from the Battle of Ganjgal Valley, has written a book about his experience, but the evidence suggests that Swenson’s account of the battle is more accurate. McClatchy Newspapers reporter Jonathan Landay, who was embedded with the Ganjgal unit, showed that many of the claims made about Meyer’s actions were physically impossible Landay (2011), and video surfaced that contradicted some of Meyer’s claims (Landay, 2013).

US and Afghan soldiers sought cover, including the three marines and corpsman at the front of the column, who were cut from the rest of the group as they sought cover at the edge of the village.

An hour into the operation, they had yet to receive air or artillery support. The three marines and corpsman stopped communicating, and the column began to retreat over open ground. Westbrook was hit, and Swenson stopped to administer first aid. Taliban soldiers approached and demanded Swenson and Westbrook surrender, but with the help of Fabayo, Swenson fought them off. An hour and twenty minutes after Swenson first called for air support, helicopters arrived, giving a reprieve to the troops on the ground (Landay, 2009). Swenson and Fabayo carried Westbrook 200 meters to the landing zone, where a helicopter picked him up.⁸ Westbrook died a few weeks later at Walter Reed Army Hospital in DC.

Once Westbrook was on the helicopter, Swenson and Fabayo loaded into an unarmored truck and Meyer and Staff Sergeant Juan Rodriguez-Chavez loaded into another. Both vehicles made two trips into the ambush zone, recovering Afghan and US casualties and fatalities each time. The fatalities included the three marines and corpsman who had led the center column.

The Battle of Ganjgal resulted in the deaths of four embedded US trainers—the most since 9/11 (Landay, 2009)—plus eight Afghan Army soldiers. Meyer (Meyer and West, 2013) and Landay (Landay, 2009) have publicly stated that the lack of air and artillery support played a direct role. Before the mission, senior officers had promised air support within five minutes of a call, but it took 16 times longer than that for helicopters to arrive. The Army launched an investigation into the battle. Swenson met with the investigators and criticized his chain of command: “When I’m

⁸ Army video shows Swenson kissing Westbrook on the forehead before the helicopter left. See US Army (2013).

being second-guessed by higher or somebody that's sitting in an air-conditioned [Tactical Operations Center], why [the] hell am I even out there in the first place?... Let's sit back and play Nintendo. I am the ground commander. I want that fucker, and I am willing to accept the consequences of that fucker" (Lamothe, 2013a).

"You can't say this with any certainty, but the chances are, in my opinion, that yes," the four US soldiers killed in the Ganjgal Valley would still be alive if senior officers at headquarters had provided cover fire, the head of the investigation, Colonel Richard Hooker, said (CBS News, 2011). "The two principal officers . . . failed to discharge their duties in a responsible way, in a way that the Army and the country has a right to expect them to behave" (CBS News, 2011). Major Peter Granger, executive officer for 1-32 and the highest-ranking soldier in the battalion while the commanding officer was on leave, and Captain Aaron Harting, "the battle captain in the tactical operations center" (Lamothe, 2012), received career-ending reprimands.

2.5.2 The process

Several US soldiers received individual awards for the Battle of Ganjgal within a few years. At least eight received Bronze Stars with combat Vs (Lamothe, 2013c); Westbrook received a Silver Star, the third-highest military award; Fabayo and Rodriguez-Chavez each received a Navy Cross, the second-highest military award; and Meyer received the Medal of Honor.

Swenson was the exception. It was well known that Swenson had been nominated for the Medal of Honor (Meyer and West, 2013, 194), but no one knew where the package went. It simply disappeared.

Speculation began to abound. In his book about the Battle of Ganjgal, Medal of Honor recipient Dakota Meyer noted that Combined Joint Task Force 82 was under investigation for negligence already and that the award would draw further attention to the unit's mistakes. Many soldiers (Landay, 2012; McGregor, 2013) believed that someone in the awards chain of command intentionally lost his nomination to punish him for the critical comments he made to investigators. Swenson later testified that he had displeased Major General Scaparotti, General Stanley McChrystal, and General David Petraeus. As he put it, he had "very pointed arguments against the recently issued rules of engagement by General McChrystal and supported by General Petraeus" (Inspector General, 2013, 8).

In April 2011, General George Casey, the Army Chief of Staff, learned that Swenson had not received an award for his actions at Ganjgal. Casey initiated a search for the missing nomination (Meyer and West, 2013), but it was not found. In July, US Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR–A) recreated and resubmitted the nomination. The president approved the award, but Swenson told the White House that he would refuse the award until the awards process was fixed (Inspector General, 2013, 1). The Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General (IG) launched an investigation to determine how Swenson's nomination disappeared.

The IG interviewed about three dozen people and examined numerous paper and electronic documents. They found that Swenson's battalion chief nominated him for the Medal in December 2009 and his brigade and division endorsed the nomination. The nomination then proceeded to the commander of US Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR–A).

USFOR–A commander General David Petraeus, who was aware of Swenson's critical comments

(Inspector General, 2013, 22), recommended downgrading Swenson’s nomination to a Distinguished Service Cross. This was unusual; one staff member told the IG that “he could not recall any instance when General McChrystal or General Petraeus recommended a downgrade after a subordinate commander recommended approval” (Inspector General, 2013, 17). Petraeus told the inspectors that he had handled hundreds of awards as USFOR–A (Inspector General, 2013, 15–16), so the probability that the one award he recommended downgrading happened to be for the soldier who most famously criticized him is small. The evidence suggests that Swenson was correct in thinking that Petraeus had targeted him. However, Petraeus did not break any rules or regulations: he was authorized to recommend a downgrade.

Given that senior leaders tend to accept their junior officers’ award recommendations, Petraeus’s recommendation likely would have ended Swenson’s Medal of Honor bid if not for the incompetence of his awards staff. Several witnesses testified that the USFOR–A awards section was a mess; award tracking was poor to non-existent, and the section lost nominations “all the time” (Inspector General, 2013, 20) “due to failures at multiple levels in tracking and processing the award, and that high turnover of personnel and staffs in theater contributed to the problem” (Lamothe, 2013*a*). But as long as Petraeus was the US commander in Afghanistan, the lost file is probably the best thing that could have happened to Swenson. Federal law allows a Medal of Honor nomination to be re-submitted if it is lost (10 USC §3744). Swenson’s nomination restarted. By the time it reached the USFOR–A commander again, Petraeus was gone and the nomination was endorsed. On October 15, 2013, President Obama awarded Swenson the Medal of Honor.

Existing theories do not explain the outcome of this case as well as rules and luck. For example,

the president may award the Medal of Honor to encourage “war winning” behaviors among officers and “soldier saving” behaviors among enlisted Blake and Butler (1976), but in this case Swenson, an officer received the Medal for soldier-saving behavior. If senior leaders use the Medal of Honor as a retention tool (Blake, 1973), they did not use it to retain Swenson. Petraeus recommended downgrading Swenson’s award, and when the award was finally given, Swenson had been out of the Army for two and a half years.

The Medal of Honor as a motivational tool (Chapter 3) seems less than adequate because the Medal may motivate the enemy more than US soldiers. The Medal of Honor as a public-opinion tool (Chapter 4 and Williams 2010; Blake 1973) also does not seem useful because it predicts when the president will award the Medal, not who will receive it

2.5.3 Conclusion

Many soldiers, including Swenson, believe that someone in the chain of command intentionally lost Swenson’s Medal of Honor nomination to punish him for the critical comments he made about senior officers second-guessing him from the rear and US policy on engagements in Afghanistan, but a Department of Defense Inspector General report shows that to be untrue. However, it is true that Petraeus was aware of Swenson’s comments and that he recommended a downgrade of Swenson’s award, as allowed by law. Petraeus handed the recommendation to his awards staff, who then lost it. The awards process allows a lost nomination to restart, so Swenson’s was resubmitted. By the time it reached the USFOR–A commander’s desk again, Petraeus was gone and the nomination was endorsed.

2.6 Conclusion

The Medal of Honor institution comprises a set of formal and informal rules that govern how nominations are handled and approved. Although these rules seem to play an important role in determining who receives the Medal of Honor and when he receives it, they have received little attention in the academic literature. Because the president uses the Medal of Honor as a tool and the tool's effectiveness varies with its value, the president has worked to reduce the number of unworthy recipients. He has done this by creating several layers of independent review. Multiple layers help prevent one person's preferences from dominating, and each additional layer makes it more difficult for nominees to get through.

This chapter looked at the role that these rules played in two recent and controversial cases, one where marines believe race prevented one of their own from receiving the Medal of Honor and the other where soldiers believe senior officers attempted to derail a captain's nomination because he criticized their actions or policies. Federal privacy law has been a big obstacle to obtaining detailed information about individual cases, but these two cases are exceptions to the rule: the marine's family has made lots of documents from his Medal of Honor package publicly available, and the Department of Defense Inspector General released a report documenting its findings from its investigation into the captain's case.

Although marines believe that race prevented Sergeant Peralta from receiving the Medal of Honor, there is not much evidence to support that view. Peralta suffered a friendly-fire head wound and fell to the floor while clearing houses in Fallujah in 2004, just before a majority of eyewitnesses

testified that he scooped a grenade to his body. However, the doctor who performed Peralta's autopsy concluded that Peralta's head wound would have rendered him unable to intentionally scoop the grenade. The Marine Corps consulted three more medical experts, all of whom believed that Peralta was not immediately incapacitated. The Marines sent the nomination up the chain of command, and it received all the necessary endorsements except the president's. Then someone complained to the Inspector General. An investigation would reduce the value of the award, so Gates secretly commissioned a panel to review the evidence and, based on their recommendation, downgraded the award. Gates endorsed the nomination before he downgraded it.

There is evidence suggesting Petraeus targeted Swenson's nomination, but he broke no rules when he did so because he had the authority to recommend a downgrade. Given that each level of review tends to accept the recommendations of the previous level of review, Swenson probably would have received the Distinguished Service Cross if not for an incompetent USFOR-A awards staff. After recommending a downgrade, Petraeus handed the file to his clerks, who then lost it. It was not intentional; the staff did not target Swenson. They simply lost award nominations "all the time" (Inspector General, 2013, 20). That turned out to be great luck for Swenson because the award process restarts if the nomination is lost. By the time his nomination reached the USFOR-A commander again, Petraeus had left and his replacement endorsed the nomination. Swenson received the Medal of Honor in October 2013.

The rules were critical in both cases. Gates would not have endorsed the Peralta nomination in the first place if race were the issue. Rather, an individual's ability to threaten the value of the award by lodging a complaint with the IG is what likely prevented Peralta from receiving the Medal

of Honor. And Swenson probably would have received the Distinguished Service Cross if the awards process did not restart when his nomination package disappeared.

CHAPTER 3

THE MEDAL OF HONOR AS A MOTIVATIONAL TOOL

By most modern accounts the president awards the Medal of Honor to recognize the gallantry soldiers¹ display and the sacrifices they make on the battlefield. However, the original arguments for the Medal centered on its usefulness in encouraging soldiers to fight harder.² For example, here is a quote from a *Record of Valor* (1863) op-ed published shortly after the secretary of the Navy, Gideon Wells, awarded 44 Medals of Honor for actions during the Civil War:

The encouragement and reward of acts of individual heroism is a very important part of the conduct of military and naval affairs. Napoleon knew it to be so, and appealed continually to the love of honor of his men, and our people are also easily impressible by such motives. They have not been sufficiently appealed to heretofore. We are glad to see a move in this direction, and we look upon the distribution of these medals as a guarantee of yet greater gallantry on the part of our navy.

Indeed, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles lobbied for the creation of the Medal of Honor because he thought it could inspire sailors to duty (Mikaelian and Wallace, 2003, XVIII). In the first year of the Civil War, the US military faced morale and discipline problems, and Welles saw

¹ In some contexts “soldier” would refer to a member of the US Army only, but for simplicity when I use the term I am referring to soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen.

² Not all arguments were limited to the Medal’s utility in war. *The Honors of War* (1863) argued that military awards not only encourage better performance during enlistment but also better behavior after: “The English private who has been decorated for good service is notoriously more tractable, sober, and amiable than he who has missed that honor.” And “Joe Kinney, a retired marine and author who has focused on military awards issues, said he thinks a honoring a servicemember from the current conflict” would inspire the country (Shane III, 2010).

the award as a tool to combat those problems. Even the Welles's opposition implicitly agreed with him. Few questioned whether the Medal would garner more effort; rather, they objected to the Medal of Honor because it was too "European" (Willbanks, 2011, xvii). On December 23, 1861, Congress nominally endorsed Welles's view when it authorized the Medal of Honor as one of several measures "to increase the efficiency of the Navy" (*News from Washington*, 1961; U.S. Navy Bureau of Navigation, 1917).

The average person today may not view the Medal of Honor as a motivational tool, but many of those closest to the award do. *The Marine Officer's Guide*, a widely read text among the Marine officer corps, affirms that "the fundamental purpose of awards is to inspire emulation" (Estes and Heinl, 1985, 378). The Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation has filed and 47 Medal of Honor recipients have signed an *amicus* brief to the Supreme Court that stated the following:

Public recognition for heroic acts inspires civilians to volunteer to serve in the armed forces. It inspires members of the armed forces to endure the rigors of training to instill military discipline and esprit de corps. It inspires them to prepare physically and mentally for combat, to suffer the hardships of combat duty, to arrive on the battlefield. It inspires them to engage the enemy, and to be ready to act cohesively as a unit despite the danger and chaos they will encounter. It inspires most to carry on while others are falling around them. It inspires many to lead, when their leader has fallen and others have lost their steel. And it inspires many to be prepared to act with gallantry, bravery, and heroism—by trained instinct and without thought of medals—if and when they are put in a situation requiring such action (Ainsworth, 2012, 9–10).

Indeed, the Medal of Honor as motivational tool is Federal law. According to the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, “Award of decorations, and to a lesser degree, award of the Good Conduct Medal and of service medals, provide a potent incentive to greater effort, and are instrumental in building and maintaining morale” (GPO, 2006, 17277).

Political and military leaders seem to think that the Medal of Honor inspires soldiers, and they incorporate its stories into every soldier’s training, starting in boot camp. However, there is little systematic evidence about the effect of employee awards in general or military awards in particular. Interestingly, some anecdotal evidence suggests that military awards adversely affect effort levels on the battlefield. One battalion commander at Normandy said that he did not plan to recommend awards for his soldiers because he felt they are counterproductive: “I quit in Africa. Invariably, when I put men in for decorations, the least deserving cases got them and my outstanding men were bypassed. So I gave up. It was demoralizing the battalion” (Marshall and Davidson, 1953, 14).

The best evidence we have regarding the effectiveness of employee awards comes from a recent field experiment. A commercial-laundry company introduced an attendance award at one of its five industrial plants and found that the award decreased plant productivity by 1.4%. Rather than improving the attendance rate, the award led some employees to game the system (for example, by calling in sick if they were running late) and other employees to lose their previously excellent attendance records. “Positive effects from awards are accompanied by more complex employee responses that limit program effectiveness” (Gubler, Larkin and Pierce, 2013). These unanticipated results should give us pause about whether the Medal of Honor does what political and military leaders think it does.

This chapter does not solve the empirical challenges we face in measuring the award's effectiveness. Rather, it introduces a rather simple behavioral model to see how wages and awards influence how hard a soldier chooses to work when there is a group-level winner-take-all outcome and the enemy can influence his cost of action, which few existing studies consider. The model illustrates negative effects that military compensation may have on an army's likelihood of winning. "However, since this is not a fully general model, it cannot by itself support strong general claims about" (Hanson and Oprea, 2009, 305) the Medal's effects. For example, the model assumes risk neutrality, complete information, a fixed number of awards rather than a fixed standard, a winner-take-all outcome, a linear relationship between the number of awards and the value of the award, and the lack of a time discount from the action to the award. "While we believe that these assumptions are natural ones for a first modeling effort, one should remember that some of the model's findings may not be robust to changes in some of these assumptions" (Hanson and Oprea, 2009, 305).

3.1 Literature Review

3.1.1 *Employee motivations*

Employee motivations can be intrinsic or extrinsic. An employee is intrinsically motivated if the task is the reward (Deci, 1971) and extrinsically motivated if she does the task for another reason. If a student studies because she finds the material interesting or she wants to develop a new skill, she is intrinsically motivated; and if a student studies because her parents push her or because she wants a good grade, she is extrinsically motivated (Ryan and Deci, 2000). It is typically easier for leaders to motivate employees extrinsically, although not always in the intended way. For example,

extrinsic rewards lower effort for intrinsically motivated people (Deci, 1971; Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999, 2001).

Extrinsic motivations may be negative (punishment) or positive (reward). Several studies suggest that punishment is more effective than reward. A field experiment showed that giving a bonus to teachers at the beginning of the year that they would have to return if the students did not perform sufficiently well led to significantly higher test scores than either no bonus or a bonus awarded after the test (Fryer Jr. et al., 2012), and another experiment showed that positive feedback improves child performance but negative feedback improves adult performance (Van Duijvenvoorde et al., 2008). Despite the relative effectiveness of punishment, reward is more common (Hanson, 2013).

Punishment is more common in the military than in the civilian world. Military leaders punish often and early, starting in boot camp, not only for one's own infractions but also for the misdeeds of others. One reason the military punishes at higher rates seems to be risk attitudes: Risk seekers are more likely to punish (Drouvelis and Jamison, 2012), and soldiers are more risk seeking than civilians (Bell et al., 2000), especially after they have been deployed to a combat zone (Lowther, 2010). Another possible cause is the relative ease of punishing a soldier for his bad behavior when he has few alternative job opportunities—he was either forced to join or he has signed a contract guaranteeing years of service—or when his bad behavior can lead to death.

Military leaders do not exclusively use punishment to motivate soldiers; they also use rewards. In many settings a combination of punishment and reward motivates better than either alone (Lindner et al., 2013); however, the military setting differs significantly from many others, and it is possible that those differences influence what effect the rewards have.

3.1.2 *Status incentives*

Consumption patterns define the types of extrinsic rewards that employers may use (Vatiero, 2009). A private good has limited consumption, so when it has been consumed by one person it cannot be consumed by another. Pizza is a private good because you cannot eat a slice of pizza that I have already eaten (Cowen, 2007). A public good has unlimited positive consumption, so when it has been consumed by one person it can be consumed equally by another. A fireworks show is a public good because we can both watch it (Cowen, 2007). A positional good has positive and negative consumption. When a person consumes a positive amount of a positional good, someone else must consume a negative amount (Pagano, 1999; Vatiero, 2009): the former's status increases, while the latter's status decreases. The Medal of Honor is a positional good because it increases the recipient's standing but lowers the standing of everyone else. Because consuming a positive amount of a positional good forces others to consume a negative amount, positional goods impose negative externalities and so may lead to socially suboptimal consumption patterns (Frank, 1991, 2008).³

³ I am engaging with the economic literature here, but there is plenty of evidence showing that reality is more nuanced than as presented. First, in keeping with economic thinking, it is easy to imagine that the Medal of Honor causes some positive externalities and some negative externalities. Those who are closest to the recipient also benefit from the award (Blake, 1973). For example, every marine learns in boot camp the names of the Corps' double recipients. It has been 99 years since a marine received a second Medal of Honor (Stern, 2014b), but marines continue to benefit from it.

Second, a highly productive individual can cause others around her to also become more productive (Allison and Long, 1990; Jain and Triandis, 1997). This can happen in a number of ways. Top performers can counsel, mentor, and train non-star performers (Kram, 1988); star performers can increase inputs to the non-stars (Maister, 2007); and they can efficiently aggregate outputs from non-stars (Groysberg, Polzer and Elfenbein, 2011; Eccles and Crane, 1988). However, the positive effect that stars have may be conditional: each additional star contributes less up to some point, past which each star actually decreases productivity (Groysberg, Polzer and Elfenbein, 2011). Sometimes top performers do not affect the performance of their coworkers (Aguinis and O'Boyle, 2014), but outsiders can identify the stars' critical behaviors and teach those to the non-stars (Force, 2014).

Recent research suggests that the distribution of employee performance follows a power law rather than a normal distribution. When the star leaves, the organization suffers greatly, but the organization's drop in productivity is due almost completely to the loss of the star's direct productivity, not to any positive effect she had on her coworkers' productivity. For example, the Chicago Bulls' distribution of points scored changed very little for the rest of the roster after Michael Jordan retired (Aguinis and O'Boyle, 2014). If employers want to retain their stars, they need to pay the stars proportionate to the stars' output (Trevor, Gerhart and Boudreau, 1997); but doing so tends to drive

The Medal of Honor is a specific type of positional good we will call a *status award* (Frey, 2007). Status awards are positional goods whose distribution depends on the employee's performance. That is, the probability of the employee receiving the award increases with his productivity, assuming all else remains constant. The Medal of Honor is a status award because going above and beyond the call of duty when in contact with the enemy increases a soldier's probability of receiving one.

Employers of all types face motivational problems, and many have turned to encouraging employee performance with status awards. Nearly 75% of US organizations (Garr, 2012, 9) and 55% of Canadian and 46% of Australian firms (Long and Shields, 2010) surveyed offer status incentives for employees, such as new titles and employee-of-the-month and employee-of-the-year awards. However, the typical corporate employee finds herself in a different environment than soldiers do. In the private sector, individual success often depends on individual productivity and the cost of effort typically does not depend on what rival corporations do. That is less true in war, where armies win and lose together and seek to impose costs on each other.

There are three primary strands of literature that examine the effect employer incentives have on employee productivity. (Table 3.1 identifies an article for each.) The first strand does not consider status awards, and it assumes success is determined individually—that is, a worker's success depends on his output, not the output of others. This is the typical starting point in economics textbooks, such as Mankiw (2012), where employees work for wages. Experiments have confirmed that workers produce more (but not better) goods as financial incentives increase when their output is easily measured (Mason and Watts, 2010).

other employees away (Aguinis and O'Boyle, 2014).

The second strand does not consider status awards, but unlike the first strand, success is determined at the group level. Because an individual's success partly depends on the productivity of others, she should consider what they are likely to do when deciding what to do herself. Strategic interactions may take place within the group (for example, when deciding whether to strike with fellow workers; see Olson (1965)) or between groups (see Nitzan (1991)). Failing to model these interactions often leads to the Robinson Crusoe fallacy (Tsebelis, 1989).⁴ Although Nitzan (1991) models competition between groups—which we have in war—the given solution ignores the strategic interaction that can take place between them: as one group changes its behavior, the other group can react. Nitzan (1991) and others assume that the other group's behavior is fixed, leaving those analyses vulnerable to the Robinson Crusoe fallacy.

The third strand considers status awards and assumes that success is determined individually. These models assume that status awards give employers a way to compensate employees at little to no cost (Frey, 2007; Besley and Ghatak, 2008), so when allocation of the award depends on the employee's productivity, the employee is more likely to produce more. However, employees often respond to incentive programs in unexpected ways. When one of five industrial laundry plants introduced an attendance award, employees who previously had perfect attendance started showing late, and other employees gamed the program by calling in sick if they were running late or only modifying their behavior if they were still eligible for the award. Overall plant productivity actually declined with the award program (Gubler, Larkin and Pierce, 2013).

⁴ Becker (1968) argued that increasing the punishment for crime leads to less crime, but Tsebelis (1989) showed that it reduces law enforcement, not the rate of crime, when the strategic interaction between police and criminal is taken into account.

| status award | level of success | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| | individual | group |
| yes | Besley and Ghatak (2008) | — |
| no | Bolton and Dewatripont (2005) | Nitzan (1991) |

Table 3.1: What the existing literature addresses with regard to use of a status award and whether success is determined individually or at the group level. The table provides citations to examples where work has been done. Note the lack of studies examining the role of status awards when success is determined at the group level.

The literature is missing a fourth strand: there are status awards and success is determined at the group level. This strand better reflects the military environment than the others. An individual can affect the battle, but rarely can he determine it: enemy troops and friendly troops play a role too. Wars comprise at least two sides that can fortify their positions, fight harder, or increase the number or talent of troops they use, each of which increases the cost of effort for the enemy. Even snipers, who can operate alone against a target that does not fight back (if the sniper is successful), is influenced by the enemy’s defenses and his spotter’s behavior.

Despite the dynamics present in a military context, many awards papers use military awards as a motivating example (Frey, 2007; Besley and Ghatak, 2008). Americans consider the Medal of Honor the most prestigious award a person can receive (Moore, 2013); the Medal’s value makes it a natural focal point. Several factors contribute to the Medal’s value. First, the US has generally positive attitudes toward its military and soldiers. Over 80% of Americans have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the US military (Walsh, 2007), so an award that signals that the recipient is better than most soldiers endows its owner with significant value (Abbott et al., 2012). Second, it is rare. If everyone receives one, the award is not special and so does not give the recipients higher status; but if only one of many employees receives the award, it can grant high status (Pagano, 1999;

Vatiero, 2009; Frank, 2011). Since World War I, there have been between 0.1 (Iraq and Afghanistan) and 2.9 (World War II) Medal of Honor recipients per 100,000 service members (McGarry, 2009). The world's largest private employer, Walmart, could award no more than one employee per 140 stores (see Alexander 2012 and Daniel 2012) if it wants an award as rare as the Medal of Honor. Third, the Medal of Honor gets widespread attention. The president personally bestows the award on Medal of Honor recipients in a formal ceremony at the White House whenever practical (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), 2006), and recipients have made numerous television appearances, including the Late Show with David Letterman, and The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, and Colbert Nation. Publicity significantly increases the value of employee awards; a survey experiment at IBM found that a public ceremony would increase the value of an employee award by as much as \$1,000 (Neckermann and Frey, 2013). A Medal of Honor ceremony is much more public and so is much more valuable than \$1,000.

Despite these quantitative and qualitative differences, the most important distinction between the Medal of Honor and the typical employee award for our purposes is the context in which it is awarded. The competition that takes place between armies and the (lack of) cooperation that takes place within armies, as well as the winning-group-takes-all outcome, fundamentally change the nature of the game and need to be accounted for in the analysis.

The model presented here addresses these shortcomings in a couple ways. Unlike previous works, which treat the opposition's level of effort as given, it introduces a simple model that addresses the effect status awards have in a group setting where success depends not only on colleagues but also on the opposition group. The result is a richer understanding of the limits of our knowledge when

| army | talent | | sum |
|------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | high | low | |
| A | $n_{Ah} \geq 1$ | $n_{Al} \geq 1$ | $n_A \geq 2$ |
| B | $n_{Bh} \geq 1$ | $n_{Bl} \geq 1$ | $n_B \geq 2$ |

Table 3.2: The number of soldiers in each category.

it comes to status awards.

3.2 The Model

In this section we outline the model's assumptions, show the Nash equilibrium, and discuss the results.

3.2.1 Assumptions

There are two armies, A and B , and up to two types of soldiers in each army, high talent (h) and low talent (l). Talent means a given ability to accomplish more while trying less. If a high-talent soldier and a low-talent soldier were to put forth the same level of effort on the same project, the high-talent soldier would be more effective. If a high-talent soldier and low-talent soldier were to complete the same task, the high-talent soldier would have exerted himself much less in doing so.

Table 3.2 shows how many are in each category. Within a category, soldiers have the same level of talent, put forth the same effort, enjoy the same benefits, and pay the same level of costs. Between categories (high talent and low talent) within the same army, soldiers have different levels of talent. I do not restrict relationships between the other variables.

Begin with a highly talented soldier from army A . If A wins, he receives y_{Ah} in guaranteed

benefits (for example, dollars or looted goods) and potentially an award with utility $U_{award_{Ah}}$:

$$U_{award_{Ah}}(\theta_A, \lambda_A, a_{Ah}, n_{Ah}, a_{Al}, n_{Al}) = \theta_A - \lambda_A(a_{Ah}n_{Ah} + a_{Al}n_{Al}),$$

where θ_A is the maximum utility of the award (because a positional good derives value from its scarcity, this is the utility of the award when no one receives it), λ_A is how much the value declines with each additional award, a_{Ah} is the probability that a highly talented soldier of A receives the award, and a_{Al} is the probability that a less talented soldier of A receives the award. In words, the utility of the award in army A is the award's maximum value minus the loss in value that comes with the total number of awards in A .

We consider the probabilities of receiving the award—in this example, a_{Ah} and a_{Al} —to be fixed. Modern observers might think this assumption odd: in today's military the standard for the Medal of Honor is fixed and the number of Medals is variable, so presumably any soldier who meets the standard will receive the Medal. But the original legislation that authorized the Medal of Honor set the number of awards (to 200) and left the standard variable, so presumably only the 200 most deserving soldiers would receive the award, even if many more were deserving (*News from Washington*, 1961).⁵

If everyone receives the positional good, it has no value. It follows that $\lambda_A = \frac{\theta_A}{n_A}$. Then the

⁵ “The Secretary of the Navy [has] authorized to cause 200 medals of honor to be presented with suitable emblematic devices, which shall be bestowed upon such petty officers, seamen, landsmen and marines as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other seamen-like qualities during the present war; and that the sum of \$1,000 is appropriated for the purpose of carrying this section into effect” (*News from Washington*, 1961).

award's expected utility is the probability of receiving the award times the utility of the award:

$$EU_{award_{Ahw}}(\theta_A, a_{Ah}, n_{Ah}, a_{Al}, n_{Al}) = a_{Ah} \times \frac{\theta_A}{n_A} \left[n_A - a_{Ah}n_{Ah} - a_{Al}n_{Al} \right]$$

Note that the expected utility of the award does not depend on effort but does depend on talent.

The expected utility for a highly talented soldier in army A when A wins (denoted by the subscript w) is the sum of his guaranteed compensation plus the expected utility of the award:

$$\gamma_{Ahw} = y_{Ahw} + a_{Ah} \times \frac{\theta_A}{n_A} \left[n_A - a_{Ah}n_{Ah} - a_{Al}n_{Al} \right]$$

Although we could set compensation for a loss (denoted by a subscript l) to some arbitrary constant, we follow Besley and Ghatak (2008) in setting it equal to zero: $\gamma_{Ahl} = 0$. Given the assumption of risk neutrality, this decision simplifies interpretation without changing its substantive implications. When $\gamma_{Ahl} = 0$, compensation for a win is the same as compensation for a loss plus a winner's premium. For example, if compensation for a win is x dollars more than for a loss and γ_{Ahl} equals some constant c , then compensation for a win would be $x + c$ and compensation for a loss would be c . When $c = 0$, x is the winner's premium.

Each group's contribution to the conflict depends on its size and the talent and effort of its soldiers. For example, the n_{Ah} highly talented soldiers of army A , who all have t_{Ah} talent and put forth e_{Ah} effort, contribute a total effort of $t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah}$ to the fight. This implies that the group's contribution increases as its talent, number of group members, or individual efforts increase, all else being equal.

We follow Tullock (1980) by defining A 's probability of winning as A 's total effort divided by both armies' total effort:

$$\Pr(A \text{ wins}) = \frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al} + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}}$$

We assume that the more effort a soldier exerts, the more costly it is to himself (Besley and Ghatak, 2008; Nitzan, 1991). We further assume that a high-talent soldier can exert the same effort at a lower cost than a low-talent soldier (Spence, 1973). For example, it is relatively easy for a talented soldier to breach the enemy's fortifications, so his cost of effort for doing so is lower than it is for a less talented soldier, all else being equal.

In addition to internalized costs, each soldier's contribution to group success affects every other soldier's cost of effort (for example, Enders and Sandler 2006). Larger militaries benefit from division of labor and economies of scale. Say you are a soldier in army A and you have an obstacle to breach. You could try taking a sledgehammer to it by yourself, or you and fifty of your friends could do it. It is easy to imagine that you will complete the task using less effort with their help. The cost function reflects this reality by decreasing as the number of friendly soldiers increases. In addition, it is easier for you to breach the obstacle if there is one enemy soldier reinforcing it from the other side than if there are fifty, so the cost function increases as the number of enemy soldiers increases, all else being equal.

The same logic applies to talent. Whether it is a soldier's ability to develop military strategy or to endure physical stress, talent makes it easier to win a war. All else being equal, a soldier's job gets easier as his army becomes more talented and harder as the enemy becomes more talented.

This is true whether the highly talented soldiers or the less talented soldiers gain ability. Again, the cost function reflects these relationships.

Finally, effort is more costly if the enemy tries harder and less costly if friendly soldiers try harder. More effort from enemy soldiers may mean more difficult obstacles to breach; more rounds to avoid; or faster, stronger, better prepared soldiers to fight. Guerrillas dug a vast network of tunnels in Cu Chi, South Vietnam, which took an impressive amount of effort on their part and made it more costly for American soldiers to find and kill them. The Maginot Line is another well-known example, even though the Germans defeated it far more easily than the French had expected, because it forced the German army to flank it. Going around the Maginot Line was probably more costly than it would have been to drive directly across the border if the Maginot Line were not there. More effort from his colleagues means a soldier could achieve the same success even if he free rides, all else being equal.⁶ Thus, the cost function has a positive relationship with enemy effort and a negative relationship with the other talent group in the soldier's army:

$$C_{Ah} = \frac{e_{Ah}}{t_{Ah}} \left[\frac{t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al} + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}} \right]$$

The expected-utility function for a high-talent soldier of army A is the probability that A wins

⁶ In the context of this model, where cost of effort and expected pay determine success, this is necessarily true. But in the real world, a soldier would likely face costs that could change this calculus. Militaries cultivate in-group identities and group norms—such as conscientiousness and agreeableness (Halfhill et al., 2005)—that impose psychological (for example, Sassenberg, Matschke and Scholl 2011) or even physical costs for free riding. People tend to work harder when they believe their coworkers endorse high-effort social norms (Kerr and Seok, 2011), and they punish deviations more harshly when the group shares a strong identity (Ellemers and Rink, 2005).

Group norms can be more difficult to establish in diverse groups, but norms that reduce stereotyping and increase openness can increase performance (Chatman, 2010). One study found that Swiss officer candidates develop group identities and norms within three weeks; two versions of the prisoner's dilemma game showed that the candidates cooperate more with in-group members and punish more those who defect on an in-group member (Goette, Huffman and Meier, 2006).

times the expected payoff for the soldier if A wins minus the soldier's cost of effort:

$$EU_{Ah} = \frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al} + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}} \times \gamma_{Ahw} - \frac{e_{Ah}}{t_{Ah}} \left[\frac{t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al} + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}} \right].$$

The Ah soldier maximizes this utility function at the same time the other three types of soldiers are maximizing their respective expected-utility functions.

3.2.2 Solution and Discussion

The solution to this game is a Nash equilibrium (the superscript asterisk denotes the optimal solution. See Appendix A for a step-by-step derivation and proof):

$$e_{Ah}^* = -\frac{2}{3}t_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} + \frac{1}{3t_{Ah}n_{Ah}}(t_{Al}^2n_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} + t_{Bh}^2n_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw} + t_{Bl}^2n_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw}) \quad (3.1)$$

$$e_{Al}^* = -\frac{2}{3}t_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} + \frac{1}{3t_{Al}n_{Al}}(t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} + t_{Bh}^2n_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw} + t_{Bl}^2n_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw}) \quad (3.2)$$

$$e_{Bh}^* = -\frac{2}{3}t_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw} + \frac{1}{3t_{Bh}n_{Bh}}(t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} + t_{Al}^2n_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} + t_{Bl}^2n_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw}) \quad (3.3)$$

$$e_{Bl}^* = -\frac{2}{3}t_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw} + \frac{1}{3t_{Bl}n_{Bl}}(t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} + t_{Al}^2n_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} + t_{Bh}^2n_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw}) \quad (3.4)$$

The results imply that increasing a group's size, talent, or compensation⁷ decreases individual

⁷ Most of the existing literature focuses on merit pay for individual contributions, but this chapter describes group merit pay. Unfortunately, few studies have examined the effectiveness of group-based merit pay. One meta-analysis (Perry, Engbers and Jun, 2009) only found three studies of group-based merit pay, one of which found positive effects (Heckman, Heinrich and Smith, 1997) and two of which found mixed effects Orvis, Hosek and Mattock (1993); Heinrich (2007). Another meta-analysis found that group-based merit pay improves performance, especially for complex tasks or when the reward is distributed equitably rather than equally (Garbers and Konradt, 2014).

Of the studies that look at individual merit pay, several show that it can increase performance, at least under certain conditions:

- Pay must be the employee's focus (Halachmi and Holzer, 1987) or motivation (Lovrich, 1987).
- Employees need to believe that pay is linked to merit (Lawler, 1981; Pearce, Stevenson and Perry, 1985).
- The pay must be large enough for employees to care (Lawler, 1981; Broderick and Mavor, 1991; Rynes, Gerhart

effort for members of that group but increases individual effort for members of the other three groups. For example, an Ah soldier puts forth less effort if there are more Ah soldiers, Ah soldiers are more talented, or Ah soldiers are better compensated but more effort if Al , Bh , or Bl soldiers are more populous, more talented, or better compensated.

There is an intuition to these findings. Say a soldier is going to battle enemy troops. If there are more of them, they are talented, or they are paid well for winning, the soldier might expect them to put up a good fight, so he reacts by fighting harder. But by doing so, he raises the enemy troops' cost of effort and lowers their probability of winning, thereby discouraging them from fighting harder. Similarly, a soldier with many talented, well-paid soldiers to his right and left is unlikely to try hard. Because success is determined at the group level and his group is capable of large production, the cost of effort is large relative to the effect his contribution might have on the outcome. He does not want to be a soldier who bears the cost of trying really hard while others reap the benefits.⁸

Taking a closer look at compensation, γ_{Ahw} , we find that the soldier's guaranteed wage, y_{Ahw} , and expected utility of the award, $a_{Ah} \times \frac{\theta_A}{n_A} [n_A - a_{Ah}n_{Ah} - a_{Al}n_{Al}]$, matter equally. A generous interpretation of the wage, where the wage represents monetary and non-monetary benefits, implies

and Parks, 2005).

- Employees must have opportunity to perform (Lawler, 1981).

But these results often fail to hold in the public sector (Durant et al., 2006), where one or more of these criteria often fail to hold. First, pay motivates public-sector employees less than private-sector employees (Perry and Wise, 1990; Lewis and Frank, 2002; Steijn, 2008). Second, it is more difficult to measure performance in the public sector (Broderick and Mavor, 1991), so subjectivity can be a bigger evaluation problem there. Civil-service rules have tried to reduce subjectivity in the process “by developing comprehensive lists of tasks or job elements or behavioral standards[, but those] are unlikely to produce a valid representation of the manager's job performance and may focus raters' attention on trivial criteria” (Broderick and Mavor, 1991, 54). Third, the public sector rarely provides adequate funding for merit pay (Kellough and Lu, 1993).

⁸ As mentioned earlier, this is based on the frequently unrealistic assumption that a soldier bears no cost for free riding. Militaries tend to be good at developing group identities and norms that lead to groups self policing. If a soldier deviates from the group norm, his fellow soldiers will likely punish him (Goette, Huffman and Meier, 2006).

that the more soldiers enjoy victory, the less likely they are to win.

Although this finding contradicts a large body of literature that finds pay (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1997, 2003; Bolton and Dewatripont, 2005; Besley and Ghatak, 2008; Garbers and Konradt, 2014) and other extrinsic rewards and punishments (Podsakoff et al., 2006; Balliet, Mulder and Van Lange, 2011) tend to increase productivity (at least the quantity of output, but maybe not the quality. See Jenkins Jr. et al. 1998; Cerasoli, Nicklin and Ford 2014), it is consistent with other research. Pay often fails to motivate—and may actually demotivate—when the task is interesting (Deci, 1971; Deci, Koestner and Ryan, 1999, 2001), when the employee is anxious (Maccoby, 2010), or when the employee has free time to work on it (Wiersma, 1992). At least the first two can easily correspond to the battlefield experience: soldiers are interested in staying alive, and they worry that they will die. Therefore, pay may hurt a soldier’s effectiveness in battle.

The model also tells us that a soldier’s talent hurts his effort level in two ways. First, it magnifies the negative effect that the soldier’s compensation has on his effort. That is, it is especially true for more talented soldiers that higher pay causes the soldier to put forth less effort.⁹ This seems like a strange result given the literature that shows the most productive employees tend to leave when

⁹ This result seems to contradict the many studies that have found that extrinsic rewards increase productivity (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1997, 2003) for individuals or for teams (Garbers and Konradt, 2014), even if only conditionally (for example, Benabou and Tirole 2003; Garbers and Konradt 2014; Podsakoff et al. 2006; Garbers and Konradt 2014; Balliet, Mulder and Van Lange 2011). However, several studies have also found that extrinsic rewards hurt productivity. Perhaps the most consistent negative result is the fact that pay for performance has failed to show effectiveness in the public sector (Kellough and Lu, 1993). There are several reasons for this. First, public-sector employees are not motivated as much by money as private-sector employees (Perry and Wise, 1990; Lewis and Frank, 2002; Steijn, 2008). Second, the link between pay and performance is weaker in the public sector because measuring success in the public sector is more difficult (Broderick and Mavor, 1991). Third, there is rarely enough money allocated for merit pay in the public sector to make the policy effective (Kellough and Lu, 1993).

Although these reasons for failure differ from the reasons generated by the model, both imply that rewarding employees for success does not produce the intended effect. Perhaps reinforcing good behaviors works better than rewards for success. Repeated interactions that use a combination of rewards (Luthans and Stajkovic, 1999) and punishments works better (Balliet, Mulder and Van Lange, 2011). As (Luthans and Stajkovic, 1999, 49) succinctly put it, “You get what you reinforce, but you do not necessarily get what you paid for.”

they do not receive compensation that is proportional to their productivity (Aguinis and O'Boyle, 2014), but the difference might arise from the model's assumption that everyone is in the military. Perhaps if the model allowed soldiers to choose a job in the civilian world, it would find similar results. Second, it depresses the positive effect that talent, group size, and compensation for other soldier types have. Consider a highly talented soldier of army A . The model tells us that he will exert more effort as Al , Bh , or Bl soldiers increase in number, talent, or pay; but the more talented he is, the smaller the increase.

Like talent, a soldier's own group size hurts his effort level, but only in one way: it reduces the positive effect that talent, group size, and compensation for other soldier types have. Group size does not influence the effect a soldier's pay has on his choice of effort.

A group's talent, size, and individual compensation work together to increase effort levels for other groups. An increase in group size or compensation yields a linear increase in other groups' effort levels, holding all else constant, but an increase in talent has an increasingly large effect. For example, the enemy's effort level will increase more if talent goes from .75 to .80 than if it goes from .25 to .30.

This model produces results consistent with Tsebelis (1989). Tsebelis finds that the incentives an actor faces influence the opponent, not the actor, assuming a simultaneous-move mixed-strategy game of complete information where the police prefer to enforce traffic law only when it is broken and drivers prefer to speed only when the speed limit is unenforced. That is, police behavior depends on the incentives drivers face, and driver behavior depends on the incentives police face. However, this is a one-driver, one-officer model. It does not account for the interactions that may take place

within among officers and among drivers (Weissing and Ostrom, 1991).

The model's predictions are also more consistent with experimental results than much of the economics literature on employee awards and effort, even though model's underlying assumptions might not fit the experimental conditions as well. For example, Besley and Ghatak (2008) predict that employees become more productive when an award is on the line, but Gubler, Larkin and Pierce (2013) found that introducing an attendance award at one of five industrial-laundry facilities lowered overall plant productivity. The plant employees were not engaged in battle, nor did they win and lose as a group; yet the award depressed their effort.

Obviously, there are many caveats to this analysis. The model ignores risk attitudes, incomplete and imperfect information, nonlinear utility functions, and so on. Still, the results—in conjunction with experimental evidence—bring into question the presumed causal effect of awards on productivity. Additional work could shed light on whether the results hold under looser restrictions.

3.3 Conclusion

Most of the theoretical economics literature suggests that employees produce more when they are paid more, but those studies fail to consider competition between coworkers and between workers from different companies. This chapter has explored a game that accounts for these deficiencies in a military context: soldiers care about what other soldiers (friendly and unfriendly) will do, soldiers can increase their opponent's cost of effort, and the winning army takes all. The model suggests that wages and awards decrease a soldier's effort but increase other soldiers' effort.

The model's implications contradict most of the theoretical awards literature, which tends to

find that awards are a cheap way to increase employee productivity (Besley and Ghatak, 2008), but are consistent with the results of the only awards experiment I am aware of, in which an attendance award was introduced to one of five laundry facilities. Overall plant productivity decreased (Gubler, Larkin and Pierce, 2013).

The model makes some predictions that are consistent with, and others that contradict, the public-administration literature. Numerous studies have found that merit pay increases employee productivity (Perry and Wise, 1990; Lewis and Frank, 2002; Steijn, 2008) but not in the public sector (Broderick and Mavor, 1991; Kellough and Lu, 1993). The model is consistent with the public-sector literature in its implication that merit pay is ineffective, but there is little precedent for the model's finding that the model is least useful for highly talented individuals.

This chapter is one piece in a rich literature addressing complex human motivations and interactions. It makes many qualifications that limit its generalizability. Furthermore, I have not provided empirical evidence that this model explains employee behaviors any better than existing theories. In the future, it would be helpful to extend the model in at least two ways: first, the model should take group norms more seriously by imposing a cost for defection, and second, the model should give soldiers the option to pursue a civilian career. These extensions might give insight into why the model's predictions differ so drastically from much of the public-administration literature. It is difficult to test the impact that the Medal of Honor has on battlefield efforts, but we might look at data from mixed martial arts bouts, where fighters can win purses for Knockout of the Night or Submission of the Night (Gift, 2014).

CHAPTER 4

THE MEDAL OF HONOR AS A PUBLIC-OPINION TOOL

In this chapter I argue that the president of the United States (POTUS) uses the Medal of Honor in an attempt to influence public opinion. Presidential approval is important to presidential power (Neustadt, 1990); it affects the president's ability to get legislation passed (Canes-Wrone and De Marchi, 2002; Barrett and Eshbaugh-Soha, 2007) and his party's ability to win at the polls (Jacobson, 2011; Sides and Vavreck, 2013). Given war's threat to presidential approval (Mueller, 1973), the president has incentive to control public opinion about himself and an ongoing war as best he can. Using data from the Vietnam War, I show that the president's concern for public support leads him to award more Medals of Honor when public support is lowest in an attempt to counter bad publicity and during the week, when it will get the most attention.

4.1 Literature Review

4.1.1 Presidential Approval Matters

Presidents work to increase their public support because they know that it helps them achieve their policy goals (Brace and Hinckley, 1992) and legislative strategies as well as promote their agendas (Gronke and Newman, 2003, 501). Public support helps in at least two ways. First, public support makes persuasion easier, and "presidential power is the power to persuade" (Neustadt, 1990). The

Constitution does not grant the president authority over the legislative or judicial branches, so he must bargain with them to get what he wants. Approval enables the president to convince members that he can use his office and popularity effectively (Neustadt, 1990), take positions on a wider range of issues (Rivers and Rose, 1985) and unpopular positions in particular (Canes-Wrone and Shotts, 2004), and threaten to go public (Kernell, 1997). Presidential approval increases legislative approval (Rivers and Rose, 1985) and decreases vetoes,¹ attempts to override vetoes, and success in overriding vetoes (Rohde and Simon, 1985).

The president needs to bargain even with his own branch of government. The executive branch employs too many workers for the president to monitor directly, many of those workers have opposing objectives, and civil service rules make it difficult for the president to reward or promote his preferred workers and punish or fire his least preferred workers. Public support makes bargaining with the executive branch's employees easier (Neustadt, 1990).

Second, higher approval ratings appear to help the president in elections. Presidential approval predicts whether the president will be re-elected (Sigelman, 1979; Lewis-Beck and Rice, 1984; Brody, 1991). Presidential approval also matters in Congressional races. Midterm elections may serve as a presidential referendum (Tuftes, 1975); and the higher the president's approval rating is, the more likely the Congressional candidates of his party are to win at the polls (Marra and Ostrom Jr, 1989; Newman and Ostrom, 2002; Gronke, Koch and Wilson, 2003). Presidential approval can have an especially strong impact on Congressional races involving an incumbent member of the president's party (Abramowitz, 1985).

¹ Higher public approval leads to fewer vetoes because a popular president exercises more influence over Congress, making the veto, a symptom of failure to persuade, less likely.

4.1.2 Wars Are Dangerous to Presidential Approval

Despite their best efforts, presidents have little control over many things that influence their public approval. The state of the economy is the most accurate predictor for presidential elections (for example, Rosenstone 1983, Gelman and King 1993, Erikson and Wlezien 2013), even though presidents have only a small effect on the domestic economy (Snowberg, Wolfers and Zitzewitz, 2007). The Olympics, World Cup, and other “mega events” are so big and receive so much media attention that it is difficult for politicians to prevent negative events from receiving extensive coverage (Giffard and Rivenburgh, 2000)—the Munich Massacre in 1972 being one example—but politicians are held accountable for it anyway. Senate, gubernatorial, and presidential incumbents benefit at the polls and in public opinion when local sports teams win (Healy, Malhotra and Mo, 2010).

War is another type of mega-event that threatens presidential approval. American wars attract round-the-clock coverage from a world-wide corps of journalists (Giffard and Rivenburgh, 2000). When things go badly, there are potentially many witnesses who can spread the word fast and far, and wars involve two opponents who are trying to make things go badly for each other, so it is difficult to control the outcome. Casualties pose a particular threat to presidential approval: presidential approval tends to decline the longer the war lasts and the more casualties Americans suffer (Mueller, 1973; Kernell, 1978; Eichenberg, Stoll and Lebo, 2006). Eichenberg and Stoll (2004) estimate that the war in Iraq cost George W. Bush about 10 percentage points in approval, dropping him to 47 percent and making his re-election bid much closer than it otherwise would have been. Unsurprisingly, there was a 0.95 correlation between Bush’s approval rating and public attitudes

about his handling of the war in Iraq (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 2006, footnote 31).

Despite these concerns, American public opinion does not reflexively drop with casualties; several factors condition the public's response. The objective matters. Americans tend to display more tolerance for negative war events when the US is fighting an aggressive enemy than when the US conducts an internal political change (Jentleson, 1992; Oneal, Lian and Joyner Jr., 1996). Elite consensus matters. The American public is more tolerant when domestic elites are aligned in support of a mission than when they are divided (Larson, 1996). And expectations of success matter. If Americans believe that the combat mission has the potential to be successful, they are more tolerant of casualties than civilian and military elites (Feaver and Gelpi, 1999).

4.1.3 Presidential Media Policy

Because public approval is so important, a president tries to influence it in many ways. He provides information by holding press conferences, granting interviews, delivering speeches, going on television, running advertisements, and traveling around the world (Kernell, 1997). The president can also use his staff to do these things when it might be risky for him to do it himself or when he might risk losing his influence by going public too often (Kernell, Jacobson and Kousser, 2003). Sometimes the president provides the information but only when it is most convenient for him (Muehlenbachs, Sinha and Sinha, 2011; Walsh and Austin, 2013*a,b*).

Given the particular importance war has to a president's political fortune, he has especially strong incentive to do what he can to influence public support for the war. Presidents have provided the press with favorable information about the progress of the war, some of it accurate and some of

it not (for example, Mitchell 2000). Since the Vietnam War, presidents have restricted press access to combat zones, thereby limiting the ability of the press to find and report negative war events (Thrall, 2000).

Despite these efforts, presidents have difficulty moving public opinion their way. In fact, public opinion often moves against the president's desires after he makes a public appeal (Edwards, 2003). This is true even for some of the presidents considered the best at communication—Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan—during foreign-policy crises. Despite considerable effort, Roosevelt failed to persuade the public to support entry into World War 2 and Reagan failed to muster public support for American military action in Nicaragua (Edwards, 2009). If some presidents seem to be better persuaders, it is because they tend to adopt already popular positions (Canes-Wrone, 2010) or are adept at facilitating change, not creating it (Edwards, 2009).

Moving public opinion can be difficult because of the size and composition of the president's audience. When the president speaks, few Americans listen. For example, the State of the Union draws more viewers than the typical presidential speech, but only a little over 10% of Americans watched the State of the Union 2014 (Faughnder, 2014), and those who do listen are generally better informed and less likely to be persuaded than other Americans (Price and Zaller, 1993). Low-awareness individuals, who are most easily swayed by new information (Zaller, 1992), do not follow what the president is saying.

Although they do not follow the State of the Union or more traditional news sources, many politically inattentive Americans do consume soft-news products (Baum, 2002, 2003). Soft news presents “the news (e.g., more personal and familiar and less distant or institutional), and as a

set of story characteristics, including the absence of a public policy component, sensationalized presentation, human-interest themes, and emphasis on dramatic subject matter, such as crime and disaster” (Baum, 2002, 92). Because it reaches less attentive, less informed Americans, it can have a relatively large impact on their knowledge and attitudes about policy. Given Americans’ particular lack of knowledge and attention toward foreign affairs (Baum, 2002, 92), soft news can be especially effective for foreign policy (Baum, 2002, 2004).

The Medal of Honor gives the president a soft-news tool that could influence public support for the war. Rather than focusing attention on the wisdom or conduct of the war, the Medal of Honor offers what Baum (2002, 94) calls “cheap framing”: a dramatic human-interest story “intended to appeal to an entertainment-seeking audience.” Stories of heroic acts to complete a mission or save fellow troops (Blake and Butler, 1976) not only bring awareness to foreign-policy issues (Baum, 2002) but also potentially change what people are thinking about the war.

There are many more soft-news outlets today than in the past, so the Medal of Honor may have been a less effective tool during the Vietnam War (Baum, 2003). Still, the Medal of Honor and its recipients received quite a bit of attention between 1965 and 1973. Roger Donlon, the war’s first Medal of Honor recipient, wrote an account of his heroic night (Donlon and Rogers, 1965) that was popular enough to receive a *Reader’s Digest* condensed reprint. Google Books searches show that *Life* and other soft-news magazines with large circulations printed hundreds of stories about Medal of Honor recipients during the war. *Jet* and *Ebony* were especially diligent in reporting African-American recipients, running at least 24 stories about African-American recipients between 1965 and 1973. TV.com shows that Medal of Honor recipients also made regular appearances on

national television. Ed Sullivan hosted recipients at least five times, and Johnny Carson also hosted recipients on multiple occasions. And even though there was one Medal of Honor movie made during the war, sixteen were made before then (Internet Movie Database, 2014)—possibly enough to convince the president that more would be made.

Despite these many national outlets, most Medal of Honor coverage during the Vietnam War was local (Blake, 1973). Hometown media coverage differs from national media coverage in quantity and quality. While a Medal of Honor story might last a couple days in the national media, it often lasts longer in local media. Often national coverage will end after the White House ceremony and a couple talk-show appearances, but local coverage often continues with local recognition. For example, Milton Olive received the Medal of Honor posthumously in 1966. *The Chicago Tribune* printed an average of four stories a year through 1970 about Olive, his heroism, and the city's efforts to honor him by building a statue, naming a park after him (Kling, 1966), rededicating his statue (Tribune, 2014), and so on.

Local news media tend to be softer than their national counterparts (Baum, 2003, 118), even for a generally soft topic such as the Medal of Honor. Even if the national media frame the Medal of Honor as a human-interest story, the local media can report a story that is more relatable to the local population (Blake, 1973). One Medal of Honor recipient, Harvey Barnum, came from Cheshire, Connecticut, a town with a population around 16,000 in 1965 (Groff and Reiser, 1973, 37). Barnum received the Medal of Honor in February, 1967, and the local paper put him on the front page (Morning Record, 1967*a*). When he returned home five months later, Cheshire greeted him with a parade, a dance, US savings bonds, and other benefits. The local paper reported these things but

also noted that “Barnum’s father is the town building inspector,” his “mother is also a graduate of Cheshire schools,” and Barnum greeted many parade attendees by first name (Morning Record, 1967*b*, 13). The national media cannot make those connections. This increases the probability that people who otherwise would not pay attention to the news, even if small in number, will receive and accept this positive piece of information about the war.

4.1.4 Medal of Honor Research

Most research on the Medal of Honor has focused on recipient biographies (Mitchell and Otis, 1968; Graham, 1989; Beyer and Keydel, 1994; Schubert, 1997; Murphy, 2010; Brokaw et al., 2011), but studies have also looked at people who fraudulently claim to be Medal of Honor recipients (Burkett and Whitley, 1998); recipients of the Confederate Medal of Honor (Clemmer, 1996); and the hundreds of soldiers receiving the Medal of Honor during the Civil War for staying an extra day in Washington, DC (Pullen, 1997). One study examined the type of Medal-winning action and the rank of the recipient (Blake and Butler, 1976).

Only a few studies consider whether the Medal of Honor is a public-opinion tool. Williams (2010, 45) argues that President Truman recast “the early heartbreaking days of the war as just one step in a long process that ultimately led to victory” by awarding Major General William F. Dean the Medal while he was still in North Korean custody. Although Dean had gotten himself into a position to get captured—thereby earning criticism from the officer corps—Truman felt that the award could help counter negative stories coming from the war.

Blake (1973) takes a more systematic approach in assessing whether the president tries to use

the Medal of Honor to influence public opinion: he correlates public-opinion and draft-evasion data with the frequency of Medal of Honor mentions in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. Unfortunately, a count of Medal of Honor articles is not a good measure of whether the president is awarding Medals. As Blake notes, a high count reflects not only that the president issued the award—an outcome the president has control over—but also that the national media covered it—an outcome the president does not control. If the president times the awards in an attempt to influence public opinion, we should consider an outcome that he controls.

The difference between a count of awards and a count of awards mentioned in *Reader's Guide* is significant. The president awarded hundreds of Medals during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, but only 54 Medal of Honor articles appear in the *Reader's Guide* during those wars. Moreover, the probability that the national press reports a Medal of Honor changes with the editorial position of the press. The media became less likely to report a Medal of Honor in 1968 (Blake, 1973), when five of the seven biggest magazines (which accounted for 90% of US magazine readership) shifted to an antiwar editorial position (Wright, 1972).

Another problem with the existing works is their lack of statistical analysis. Williams (2010) uses historical approaches,² and Blake (1973) presents counts but no measures of certainty, so we do not know how strong the evidence is.

The analysis in this chapter addresses these shortcomings by re-examining the relationship between war disaffection and how many Medals of Honor the president awards with statistical methods and better data, and it goes a step further by analyzing which day of the week the president chooses

² Statistics can contribute to historical studies by engaging the formal logic of probability calculus. For example, see Bennett (2008).

to hold the ceremony.

4.1.5 *Summary*

This article considers whether the president of the United States uses the Medal of Honor as a public-opinion tool. Few studies have considered the award's use as a political tool—perhaps due to “the sanctity it first earned in World War II ... [which has created a] psychological aversion to deconstructing the award, potentially cheapening the experiences of those who have earned it” (Williams, 2010, 5)—but controversies surrounding multiple recent nominations have convinced many civilians and soldiers that politics are at work.³ But as this paper attempts to show, the president may time the award to reduce the toll that negative events impose on his job approval.

I begin by covering reasons why the president might want to time Medal of Honor awards, then I examine empirical patterns in the awards data. Consistent with expectations, I find that the president awards more Medals of Honor as approval for himself and the war decreases and that he holds most of the ceremonies between Monday and Thursday, when they will get the most attention.

³ In 2004, Sergeant Rafael Peralta was leading a team of marines in clearing rooms in Fallujah when a friendly-fire ricochet hit him in the head. The marines with Peralta testified that an insurgent threw a grenade into the room and a severely injured Peralta pulled the grenade to his body and took the implosion. Peralta's Medal of Honor nomination was approved at every level until it reached the Secretary of Defense, who then in an unprecedented action commissioned a panel of forensic experts and a Medal of Honor recipient to review the case. They determined that, given Peralta's injuries, he could not have voluntarily pulled the grenade to his body, so the secretary posthumously awarded Peralta a Navy Cross. Many marines believed that Peralta's nomination was denied because he once was an illegal immigrant from Mexico (McGarry, 2009).

According to Landay (2011), Marine officials then pushed hard for another marine to get the Medal by inflating his story. Corporal Dakota Meyer was a worthy recipient of the Medal of Honor, Landay argued, but Meyer “didn't save the lives of 13 US service members, leave his vehicle to scoop up 24 Afghans on his first two rescue runs, or lead the final push to retrieve the four dead Americans.... It's unclear from the documents whether Meyer disobeyed orders when he entered the Ganjgal Valley on Sept. 8, 2009.... [And] the statements also offer no proof that the 23-year-old Kentucky native ‘personally killed at least eight Taliban insurgents,’ as the account on the Marine Corps website says. The driver of Meyer's vehicle attested to seeing ‘a single enemy go down.’”

An Army captain was with Meyer during Meyer's Medal-worthy actions. Will Swenson was also nominated for the Medal of Honor, but at some point his application was lost. Many soldiers believe his application disappeared because Swenson had been critical of senior Army officers for their failure to provide cover fire during the battle. Swenson eventually received the Medal of Honor, but the Pentagon Inspector General opened an investigation into the missing file (Lamothe, 2013*b*). Chapter 2 takes a closer look at Peralta's and Swenson's cases.

4.2 Theory

4.2.1 *The Medal of Honor Process*

The Medal of Honor “recommendation process can take in excess of 18 months with intense scrutiny every step of the way” (US Army, 2014*b*). US law authorizes the service secretaries to establish the Medal of Honor procedures for their departments, so the specifics of the process varies from one branch to another. However, each branch process is more similar than not. In this subsection, I describe the Army’s Medal of Honor process, keeping in mind that the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps processes are largely the same. This sheds light on how much control the president can exercise over who receives the award and when they receive it.

First, the soldier needs to perform an act worthy of recommendation. Then a senior soldier nominates him for the award. Next, the award makes its way through the chain of command, where it effectively needs approval at each level to continue. If the nomination successfully navigates the chain of command, it proceeds to the Decorations Board.⁴ If the Decorations Board approves, the nomination goes to the service chief; if the service chief approves, it goes to the service secretary; if the service secretary approves, it proceeds to the secretary of Defense; and if the secretary of Defense approves, it reaches the final step, the president. At each step, the nomination is reviewed to ensure it meets the legal requirements for the Medal of Honor (US Army, 2014*b*).⁵

⁴ US law requires Medal of Honor nominations and awards to be made in a timely manner. With limited exceptions, Army and Air Force nominations must be made within two years and awards within three years of the act, and Navy and Marine Corps nominations must be made within three years and awards within five years of the act. If these time requirements are not met, an act of Congress can authorize the president to award the individual a Medal of Honor, at which time the review process begins with the Decorations Board.

⁵ “The president may award, and present in the name of Congress, a medal of honor of appropriate design, with ribbons and appurtenances, to a person who, while a member of the Army, distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty—

The president rarely involves himself directly at the beginning of the Medal of Honor award process, so he has little control over who gets nominated or when, where, and why it happens. But because he controls the end of the of award process, he can prevent nominees from receiving the award and choose the specific timing of it.

4.2.2 Why the President Would Use the Medal of Honor as a Public-Opinion Tool

Zaller (1992) develops a three-step public-opinion model. First, individuals may receive new political information. Low-awareness people receive little new information, high-awareness people receive lots of new information, and moderately aware individuals receive an amount of information between the two. Second, individuals may accept the information. Low-awareness individuals tend to lack the well structured belief systems that would enable them to filter contradictory information, so they accept almost all political information they are exposed to. High-awareness individuals do possess well structured belief systems, so they only tend to accept information consistent with their pre-existing beliefs. Moderately aware individuals accept some of the information because they have somewhat structured belief systems that enable them to resist some new information. Finally, individuals sample from the information they have accepted to form an opinionated response. Because low-awareness individuals do not receive new information and high-awareness individuals resist accepting information that contradicts their beliefs, they have rather stable sets of information to draw on and their opinions are rather stable. In contrast, moderately aware individuals receive

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1. “while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States;
 2. “while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or
 3. “while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party”

(Public Law 88-77, 1963).

information and accept some of it even if it is contradictory, so they are more likely to change their beliefs than the other two groups.

Unfortunately, Zaller fails to account for the media consumption of the least aware individuals (Baum, 2003). They may avoid media sources that include a public-policy component even during information-rich periods (such as elections), but many of them consume human-interest stories through entertainment and gossip sections of newspapers, magazines such as *People*, and late-night shows such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. The media have turned policy news into human-interest stories packaged for an entertainment-seeking audience, thereby exposing the least aware individuals to new information about policy matters (Baum, 2002).

Because the Medal of Honor provides a dramatic human-interest story, these entertainment-focused media often feature Medal of Honor recipients and their heroic stories. Local newspapers typically run stories on area recipients, as do national magazines such as *Reader's Digest*. Medal of Honor recipients have made appearances on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *The Tonight Show*, *60 Minutes*, *The Daily Show*, and other soft-news sources. Most of the coverage focuses on the recipient's story rather than the policy aspects of the the war. The Medal of Honor therefore exposes low-awareness individuals to the war information about the war even if those individuals were not seeking information. And given their lack of structured beliefs, low-awareness individuals are likely to accept the information and draw on it when forming an opinion about the war.

The Medal of Honor's positive nature also benefits the president. Although stories about setbacks in the war or crimes the troops commit may circulate, the Medal of Honor tells stories about heroism and sacrifice for others. Medal of Honor stories provide a counter-narrative to those negative war

events. Low-awareness individuals may adopt a more positive attitude toward the ongoing conflict if they come in contact with this information.

4.2.3 Presenting the Medal of Honor When Public Support Drops

If the president thinks the Medal of Honor can boost public support for the war or for himself, we might expect him to award the Medal of Honor regularly to keep support high. But that strategy is unlikely to work. The Medal of Honor receives attention because it is valuable, and it is valuable partly because it is scarce (Pagano, 1999; Vatiero, 2009) and partly because Americans view it as apolitical. The press will not report on the Medal of Honor if it is a common award, and Americans will value it less if they believe the president awards it based on who the nominee is rather than what he did. Therefore, the president has incentive to restrict the number of Medals he awards.

If the president cannot award Medals of Honor regularly, he is better off awarding them when public support for the war is lagging. The president's job approval declines as US fatalities mount (Mueller, 1973; Kernell, 1978; Eichenberg, Stoll and Lebo, 2006), but only if Americans believe that victory is unlikely (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 2006). Positive war events help temper the effect that fatalities have on the president's approval rating, while negative war events do not. Moreover, if Americans are receiving nothing but positive information about the war, they will have nothing but positive information to draw on when forming an opinion about the war, and one more piece of positive information will not change attitudes much. But if Americans are receiving nothing but negative information about the war, then a piece of positive information can have a relatively large effect.

If the president uses the Medal of Honor to counter negative war events, it might seem like he would want to award it as quickly as possible after those events. But he has reason to wait. Political actors find it difficult to improve negative press coverage of highly visible events because any attempt to do so is “likely to be rejected, either by the media or the public, as propaganda in the most pejorative sense” (Manheim and Albritton, 1984, 645). If the president presented the Medal of Honor quickly after a negative war event, the public might see the award as a propaganda tool rather than a way to compensate soldiers for going above and beyond the call of duty and the award might lose its value and effectiveness. In high-salience, negative-valence situations, the most effective strategy may be to let the negative media coverage wane before trying to produce positive coverage (Manheim and Albritton, 1984) through military awards and other methods.

4.2.4 Choosing Which Day of the Week to Present the Medal of Honor

Whenever practical, the president of the United States awards the Medal of Honor in a formal ceremony in Washington, DC (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), 2006; Odierno, 2006), even if the award is made posthumously, in which case a living relative or friend receives the award on behalf of the deceased. This means that, in addition to choosing how long to wait after negative but highly visible coverage of the war declines before awarding the Medal of Honor, the president can also choose the day of the week that he holds the award ceremony. The Environmental Protection Agency is more likely to announce enforcement actions and regulatory changes on Fridays and before holidays to minimize attention (Muehlenbachs, Sinha and Sinha, 2011), and the Department of Defense is more likely to release positive news between Monday

and Thursday to maximize attention (Walsh and Austin, 2013*a,b*). There are several reasons why, similar to the DOD, the president strategically holds Medal of Honor ceremonies during the week.

First, the size of the news audience varies by time and day. In the United States, news readership tends to be low enough on Saturday that politicians dump bad news on Fridays (Norris, 2005; Theimer, 2009), hoping it will go relatively unnoticed, which is why Friday is sometimes called Take out the Trash Day (Sorkin, 2000). Inversely, news readership tends to be higher during the week, thereby enabling politicians to reach a bigger audience by releasing positive news during the week (DellaVigna and Pollet, 2004; Walsh and Austin, 2013*a,b*). This is especially true for soft news because few soft-news shows like Late Night with David Letterman appear on Saturday or Sunday.

Second, positive news stories like a Medal of Honor ceremony can get more attention during the week because negative news stories are being held for the weekend. Newspapers have limited inches and news shows have limited minutes; releasing many stories at once leaves each story with less space, and releasing few stories at once leaves each story with more space. By releasing negative stories on Friday or the weekend, the press has fewer stories to cover during the week. Then each positive story released between Monday and Thursday—such as Medal of Honor presentations—receives more inches and time than it otherwise would.

Third, the media has fewer resources to cover a story on weekends and holidays than on other days (Theimer, 2009). When there are fewer journalists, each story is less likely to get covered and each story that is covered gets less in-depth reporting. In addition, less capable and less motivated journalists work at these inconvenient times (Norris, 2005). The journalists who are most familiar with the beat and have proven themselves most effective have more flexibility in

choosing their assignments, and they generally prefer not working on nights, holidays, and weekends. Furthermore, the journalists who are working on a Friday or the day before a holiday may be tired and preoccupied with getting out the door (Walker, 2005). In short, the president can get more talented, more interested reporters covering the story if he holds the ceremony during the week.

Fourth, the news consumers who are most likely to change their opinions based on a piece of news are least likely to pay attention on weekends and holidays. Weekend news consumers are more sophisticated and better informed than weekday news consumers, so their opinions change less as they obtain new information. By releasing negative news on weekends and holidays, political actors not only avoid the larger weekday news audiences but also the audiences whose opinion can be influenced most by new information. Inversely, by releasing positive news during the week, political actors can reach consumers with more flexible beliefs.

Fifth, people read newspapers differently on weekdays than on weekends (Jones, 2013). During the week readers want to become informed, but during the weekend many want to be entertained. That is why weekend newspapers often come with magazines, larger cartoon and sports sections, long profiles, and more crossword puzzles. A 1987 Roper poll showed that American adults were 20% more likely to check the newspaper's TV schedule on the weekend than during the week (Bogart, 1989, 331, fn. 18).

4.3 Research Design

In this section I describe the data and methods I use to examine the correlations between public support for the president, for the war, and the timing of Medal of Honor awards.

4.3.1 Data

I use data from the Vietnam War. Although the US has engaged in two wars in the last 13 years, there have only been 16 recipients during that time. There are richer data from 1965 through 1973, when the US had combat troops in Vietnam.

Outcome Variables

My first outcome variable is a count of Medal of Honor awards per month. Blake (1973) did not use monthly Medal of Honor counts; he counted how many Medal of Honor stories appeared in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* each year. That is problematic. First, Blake's visibility measure and the number of Medals the president awards vary differently. Figure 4.3.1 shows Medal of Honor visibility peaked in 1966 with five references when there was only one award, and Medal of Honor awards peaked in 1970 with 57 awards with 0 references. Awards are a better measure of the presidential intent because the president has far more control over how many awards he gives and when he gives them than how many of them the press reports. Second, annual-level data do not provide enough observations to draw strong inferences. Even if we extend Blake's dataset through 1973, we would only have nine observations. Monthly award counts are better because they measure what the president can control, they provide more observations to test on, and they offer the possibility to test more granular hypotheses.

I use a dichotomous measure to test whether the president is more likely to award the Medal of Honor during the week than on the weekend. This variable takes a 1 if the president presents the award on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday and a 0 if he presented the award on a Friday,

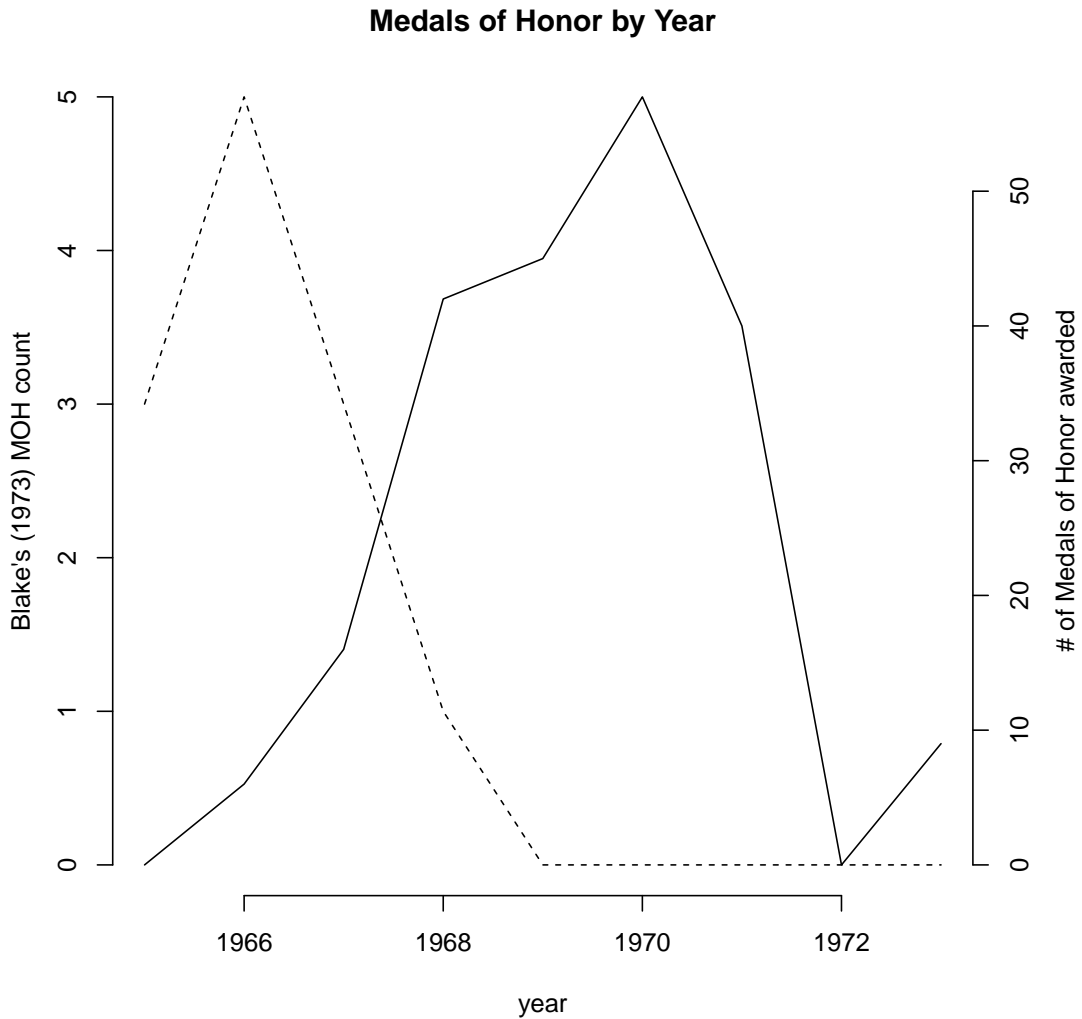


FIGURE 4.1: The dashed line shows how many Medals of Honor the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* reported that year—the measure used by Blake (1973)—and the solid line shows how many Medals of Honor the president awarded each year.

Saturday, Sunday, holiday, or day before a holiday. I use the ten Federal Government holidays: New Year's Day; Martin Luther King, Jr. Day; President's Day; Memorial Day; Independence Day; Labor Day; Columbus Day; Veteran's Day; Thanksgiving; and Christmas (Hallman, 2012).

I construct these variables using a comprehensive list of Vietnam War Medal of Honor presentations held between January 1, 1965, and December 31, 1973, from the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. I chose those dates to cover the time period in which US troops were assigned to Vietnam

for combat. All 215 Medals of Honor awarded during that time period for combat in Vietnam have a presentation date. I use the award's presentation date rather than date of announcement. Medal of Honor announcements often come weeks before the ceremonies, but the ceremonies receive more attention. For example, the White House released a statement that William Swenson would receive the Medal of Honor a month before the ceremony (White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2013), but *The New York Times* did not report it: they only ran a story after the ceremony (Shear, 2013). Because media coverage plays an important role in determining what people talk about (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), we focus on when the media actually covers the award, not when it is first announced.

The president awarded 215 Medals of Honor across 82 separate Medal of Honor presentations between February 24, 1966, and October 15, 1973. About 7% of Medals of Honor were awarded on the weekend, a holiday, or the day before a holiday. Figure 4.3.1 shows the distribution of Medal of Honor ceremonies by day of the week.⁶ The president held about three quarters of his Vietnam-era Medal of Honor ceremonies on Tuesday or Thursday.

Predictors

I have argued that the president awards Medals of Honor when public support is low to bolster public support for himself and the war. I use several measures of public support for war to test whether the results are robust to variable selection. I describe these variables here.

I use the rate of public disapproval for president's job performance (Blake, 1973). Although I have argued that the president is concerned about public attitudes toward the war, Gallup asked

⁶ Plotting Medals of Honor by day of the week reveals a similar, bi-modal pattern.

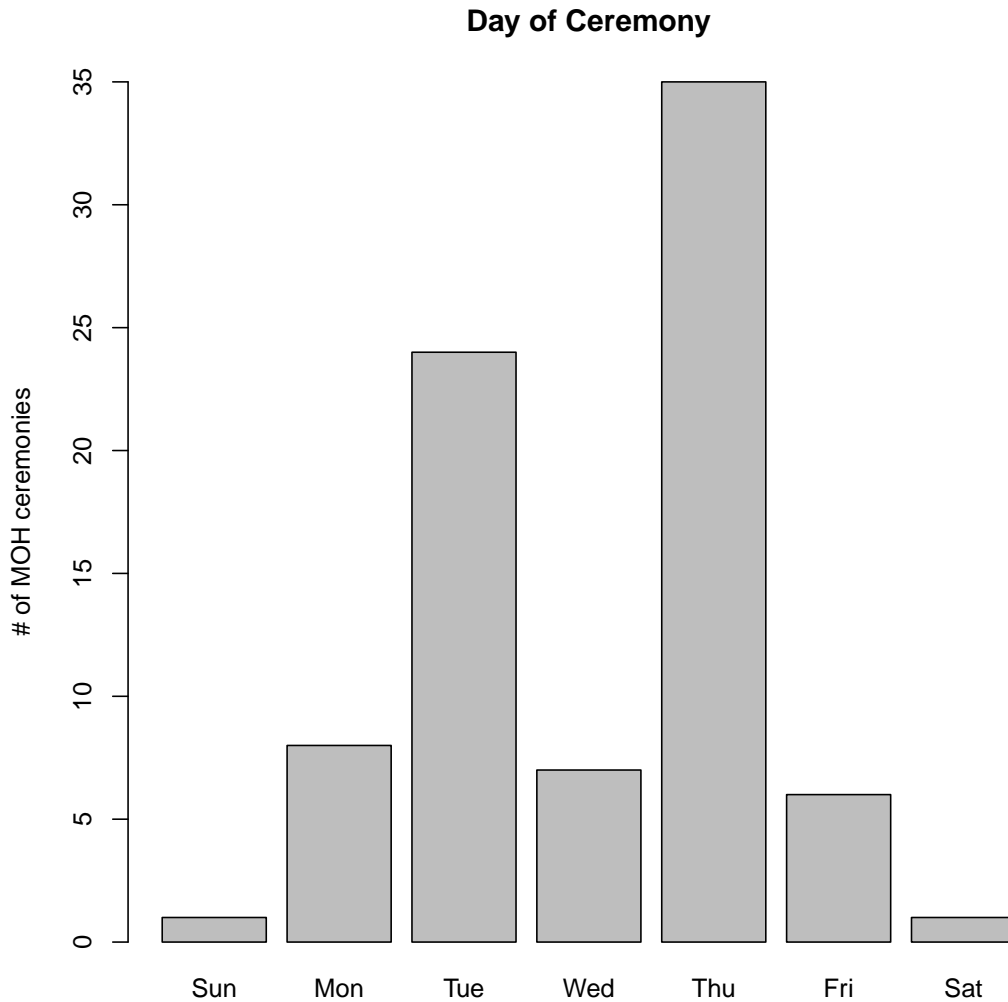


FIGURE 4.2: Most Vietnam War Medal of Honor awards were held on Tuesday or Thursday. The president only presented one Medal of Honor on Saturday and one on Sunday.

about war attitudes less frequently as the war continued, including the whole of 1972. However, there tends to be a very strong correlation between presidential support and war support (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 2006, footnote 31), so I use presidential disapproval as a proxy. Other things being equal, I expect the president to award more Medals of Honor when presidential disapproval is high. Since 1941, Gallup has asked Americans for their opinion about the president’s performance: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way [first & last name] is handling his job as President?” (Peters, 2014). Respondents have three choices: approve, disapprove, or no opinion. The presidential-disapproval

index is defined as (Smith, 1971, 227)

$$100 \times \frac{\text{Disapprove}}{\text{Approve} + \text{Disapprove} + \text{No opinion}}. \quad (4.1)$$

Gallup did not ask the presidential-approval question in 9 of the 108 months from January 1, 1965, to December 31, 1973. I imputed those missing values using the Amelia package’s quadratic time-series multiple imputation algorithm (Honaker et al., 2011).

Figure 4.3.1 shows the presidential-disapproval index from January 1, 1965, through December 31, 1973. This index shows significant variation, not all of which is attributable to war. Johnson’s disapproval rating was less than 20% at the beginning of 1965, but it steadily increased, and by late 1968 his disapproval rating exceeded 50%. Nixon took office with a disapproval rating below 10%; it increased to around 40%, declined a bit, then more than doubled over the course of 1973, as the Vietnam War continued and the Watergate scandal unfolded. Although presidential approval does not directly measure public attitudes toward war, it tends to strongly correlate with war approval (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 2006, footnote 31).

Control Variables

In this subsection I describe the control variables I use.

The first control variable is US fatalities. Given that a soldier must voluntarily accept “additional danger and risk of life” in battle to receive the Medal of Honor (*Public Law 88-77*, 1963; GPO, 2006, 386), he cannot receive the Medal unless there is intense fighting. US fatalities measure battle intensity and the opportunity to earn the Medal of Honor. And given that military awards such as

Presidential–Disapproval Index

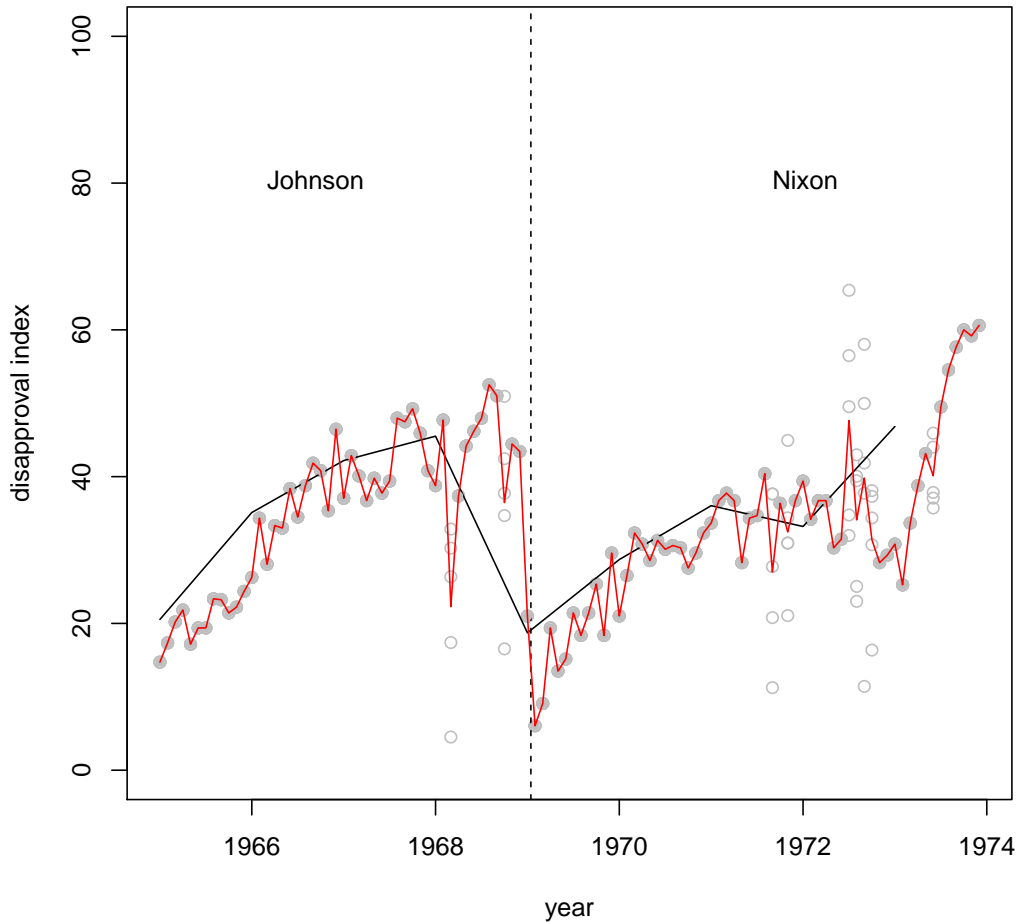


FIGURE 4.3: A plot of the presidential-disapproval index. The solid dots are Gallup results, the empty circles are imputed values for months that are missing data, the black line is the average annual presidential disapproval, and the red line is the average monthly presidential disapproval.

the Medal of Honor “are primarily intended to recognize acts, achievements, and services in time of war” (*Public Law 88–77*, 1963, 386), we should observe more Medals of Honor after intense battles even if the president does not use the Medal of Honor as a public-opinion tool.

The correlation between battle fatalities and Medals of Honor causes estimation problems because battle fatalities also correlate with public support for the president (Kernell, 1978; Eichenberg and Stoll, 2004; Eichenberg, Stoll and Lebo, 2006), especially when the public are skeptical that

the war can be won (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 2006, 2009), as was true during the Vietnam War. Therefore, we need to control for battle fatalities to satisfy the backdoor criterion (Pearl, 2000, 2009).

I use US fatalities per month. Crafted Knowledge (<http://www.craftedknowledge.com/>) provided me with a list of 58,230 US fatalities from the Vietnam War, 56,616 of whom died between January 1, 1965, and December 31, 1973. Figure 4.3.1 plots battle fatalities and Medals of Honor by month; this Medal time series also lags the fatality time series by 23 months.

The second control variable is the president’s public appearances by day of the week. We have seen that the president is more likely to award the Medal of Honor between Monday and Thursday than on the weekend, but that could be due to the slower White House press operations on the weekend. I created a control group using The American Presidency Project’s public papers from January 1, 1965, to December 31, 1973. This dataset includes dates and titles for 5,035 presidential “public messages, statements, speeches, and news-conference remarks” (Peters, 2014). This variable takes a 1 if the event is dated on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday and a 0 if it is dated on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, holiday, or day before a holiday, using the same list of holidays as our weekday-Medal of Honor variable (Hallman, 2012). This control variable slightly biases against my hypothesis because the public papers include Medal of Honor ceremonies.

4.3.2 Methods

I tried four types of models for the Medal of Honor data: least squares, Poisson, quasi-Poisson, and zero-inflated negative binomial. Least-squares regression would seem an inappropriate choice

Monthly Fatalities and MOH Awards

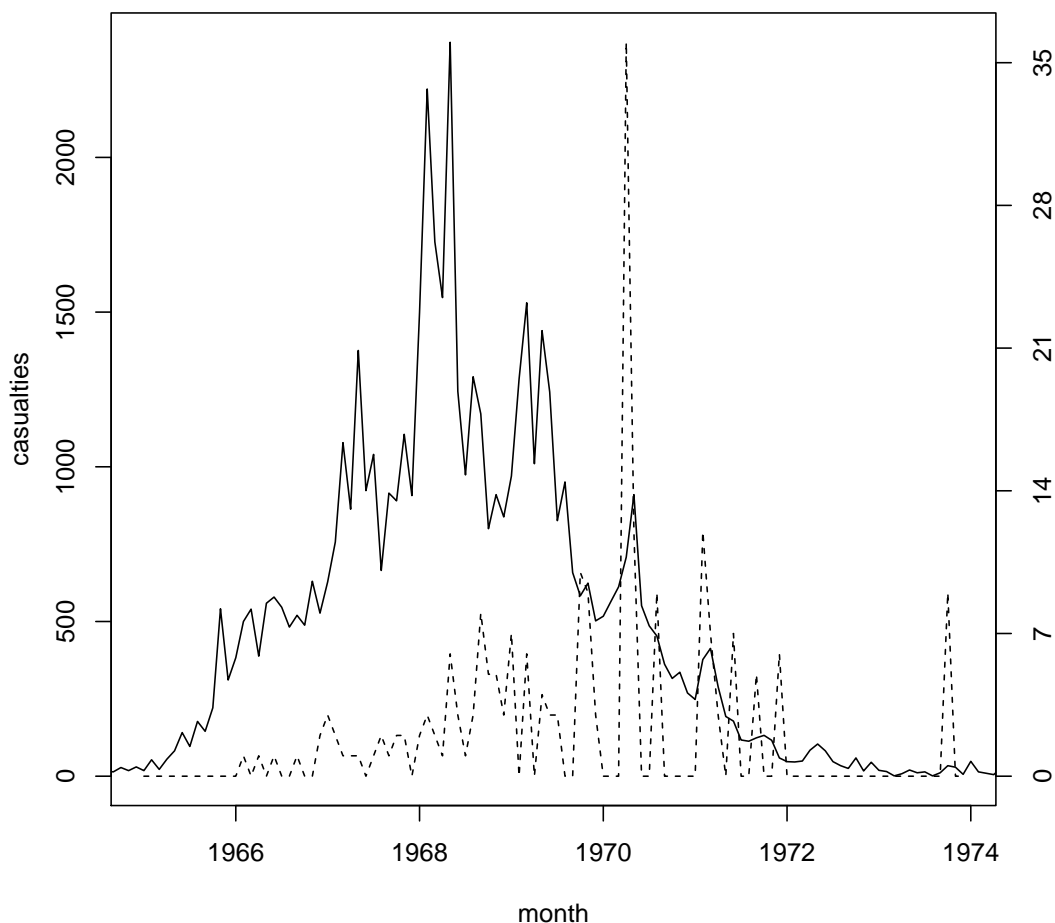


FIGURE 4.4: The solid line shows the number of US battle fatalities each month, and the dashed line shows the number of Medals of Honor the president presented each month. There is a little over a two-year lag from peak to peak.

because the outcome variables—how many Medals of Honor the president awards in a month—cannot take negative values, but it often performs relatively well even when its assumptions are violated.

Poisson regression is commonly used to model count variables such as ours, but it imposes the assumption that the conditional mean equals the conditional variance—an assumption most count data violate (Fox, 2008).⁷ The unconditional mean for the annual data is 24 and the unconditional

⁷ Says Fox (2008, 391), this violation “is so common in regression models for count data, and its consequences are

variance is 484; conditioning the estimates may narrow that huge gap, but it is unlikely to close it. Although the data appear to violate assumptions underlying the Poisson model, I give Poisson models a chance.

Quasi-Poisson regression relaxes the equal mean and variance assumption by introducing a dispersion parameter into the model. However, there are so many zeroes in the monthly outcome variable (58% of the months in the dataset saw zero Medals of Honor awarded) that a dispersion parameter might not be enough to accurately model the data.

If there are more zeroes in the outcome than Poisson and quasi-Poisson can accurately predict, zero-inflated negative-binomial regression may work. It assumes that two processes drive the results: a binary process determines whether the outcome is a zero, and if the outcome is not, then a negative-binomial process determines the count. I use a logit link for the first stage and the negative binomial for the second.

I used cross validation to choose the model. I used ten-fold cross validation and chose which of the four types of models to use and the length of the lag for each predictor based on which combination gave the lowest cross-validation error rate. The zero-inflated negative binomial model gave the smallest mean squared prediction error. As an example, Figure 4.3.2 shows the cross-validation output results for choosing which model and job approval length of lag. The graph clearly shows that zero-inflated negative binomial regression outperformed the other types of models and that a one-month lag outperformed other lag choices.

potentially so severe, that models such as the quasi-Poisson and negative-binomial GLMs ... should be employed as a matter of course.”

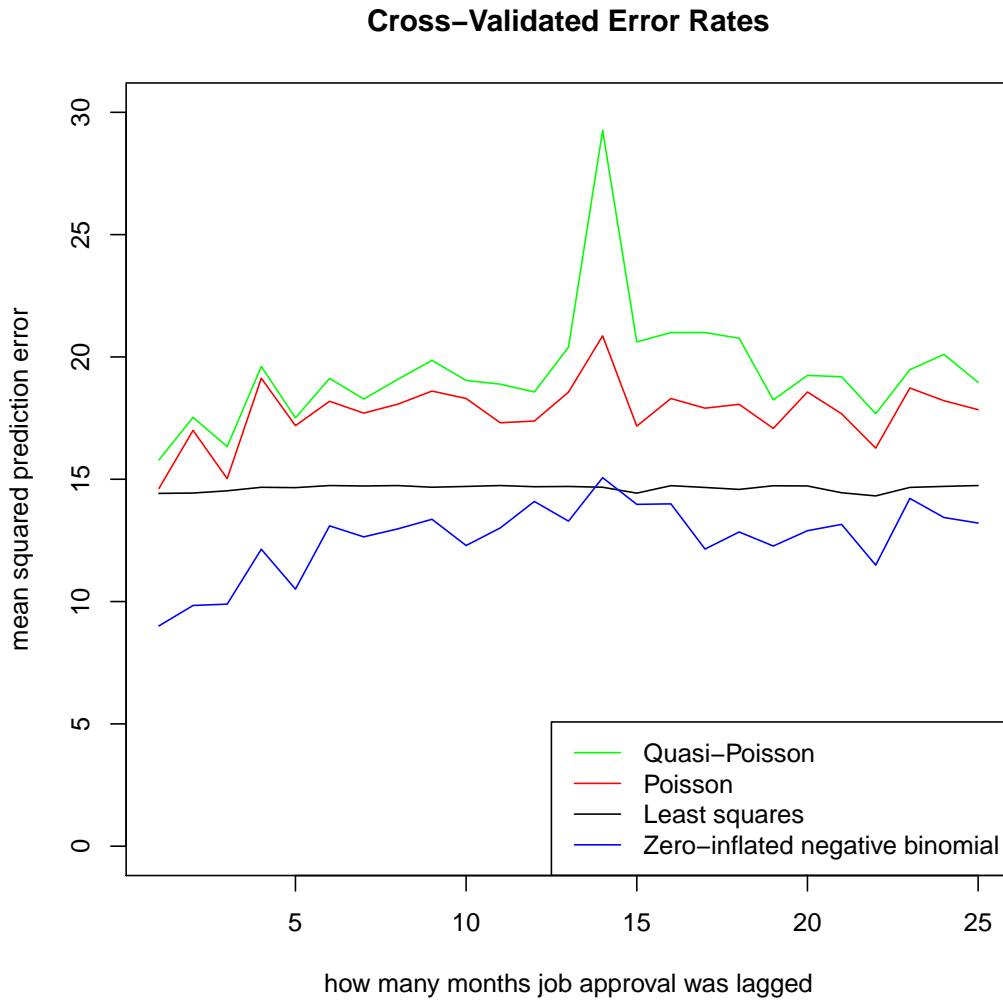


FIGURE 4.5: This graph plots out-of-sample prediction error rates for four types of models across different lag choices for presidential job approval while holding the fatalities lag constant at 23 months.

Day-of-week analysis

When it comes to which day the president chooses to hold the Medal of Honor ceremony, we are interested in the absolute risk that the president makes an appearance during the week for Medals of Honor versus other appearances (Manski, 1995):

$$\Pr(\text{weekday} \mid \text{MOH ceremony}) - \Pr(\text{weekday} \mid \text{other appearances}) \tag{4.2}$$

This quantity is straightforward to calculate from a 2x2 table.

4.4 Results and Discussion

Table 4.1 reports two fitted zero-inflated negative-binomial models. $\text{Log}(\theta)$ is statistically significant, which suggests a negative binomial model fits the data better than a Poisson model. The baseline model includes an intercept and US fatalities, and the Gallup POTUS model includes an intercept, US fatalities, and the job-disapproval index. Fatalities alone explain some of the variance in Medals of Honor, but job disapproval helps explain more. Job disapproval increases the model's predictive accuracy by 30%, as cross-validation shows. It is a useful piece of information to have.

The lags provide additional evidence that the president uses the Medal of Honor as a public-opinion tool. Earlier in this chapter I argued that the president does not have much control over lower levels of the awards process, which means that he has only partial control over the timing of awards. I further argued that the president should allow the process to unfold with little interference because the Medal of Honor is more valuable, and more effective, if the public sees it as apolitical. In light of these considerations, the 25-month lag on US fatalities makes sense. A soldier's chain of command, plus the service secretary, secretary of Defense, and president of the United States, need to approve the nomination for a soldier to receive the award. "Because of the need for accuracy the recommendation process can take in excess of 18 months with intense scrutiny every step of the way" (US Army, 2014b).

A two-month lag for job disapproval is also consistent with the theory. Political actors have a difficult time countering negative and salient media coverage when it happens; it is easier to let

Table 4.1: Predictors of Monthly Medal of Honor Awards

| | Baseline | Gallup POTUS |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Count Model | | |
| (Intercept) | 0.37 [†] (0.21) | -0.41 (0.55) |
| US fatalities L25 | 0.001*** (0.0002) | 0.002*** (0.0002) |
| Job disapproval L2 | | -0.02 (0.01) |
| Log(theta) | 1.61* (0.65) | 1.51* (0.61) |
| Zero-Inflation Model | | |
| (Intercept) | .04 (0.24) | 0.84 (0.52) |
| US fatalities L25 | -0.00004 (0.0003) | |
| Job disapproval L2 | | 0.03 [†] (0.01) |
| N | 107 | 107 |
| θ | 5.03 | 4.52 |
| Log-likelihood | -167 | -164 |
| Cross-validation MSE | 13.5 | 9.3 |

Standard errors in parentheses

[†] significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

coverage decline before trying to turn the coverage favorably (Manheim and Albritton, 1984). In addition, the president should wait for adequate separation between drops in support and Medal of Honor ceremonies. If the public recognizes that the president awards Medals of Honor when his support drops, they will view the award as political and it will lose its effectiveness. Waiting two months seems like a reasonable length of time to wait.

Job disapproval better predicts whether the president will award the Medal of Honor, and fatalities better predicts how many Medals of Honor he will award. The more the public disapproves of the president, the more likely he is to award the Medal: moving from 27% to 41% disapproval

Table 4.2: The bivariate distribution of Medal of Honor ceremonies and presidential activities recorded in the Public Papers of the Presidents archive (Peters, 2014). ($\chi_1^2 = 19.43$, $p < .0001$)

| | MOH Ceremonies | POTUS Public Papers |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Weekday | 74 | 3388 |
| Weekend | 8 | 1647 |

(the 25th and 75th quantiles) increases the expected number of Medals one third. The magnitude is small, but that is partly due to the president’s need for the award to be seen as apolitical.

4.4.1 Day-of-the-week results

Table 4.2 provides the bivariate distribution of Medal of Honor ceremonies and other public presidential appearances by weekend and weekday. The president held 90% of Medal of Honor ceremonies but only 67% of other types of public appearances between Monday and Thursday. Therefore, the president is 23% more likely to hold a Medal of Honor ceremony during the week than other public events. The probability that we would observe such a strong correlation by chance is less than 1 in 10,000. Five-fold cross validation confirms the results: the predicted absolute error rates center around the true error rates, and the largest prediction errors are much smaller than 23% (see Table 4.3). This magnitude is roughly the same as what other studies have found (Walsh and Austin, 2013a,b).

Table 4.3: A six-number summary of the cross-validated error rates when estimating absolute error.

| | | | | | |
|-------|---------|--------|------|---------|------|
| Min. | 1st Qu. | Median | Mean | 3rd Qu. | Max. |
| -0.10 | -0.03 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.08 |

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored some of the reasons that the president might strategically time Medal of Honor awards. Although presidents can have a difficult time moving public opinion in their favor (Edwards, 2009), the Medal of Honor presents an opportunity to provide low-awareness individuals with positive information about the war through entertainment-focused media. Unlike high-awareness individuals, who possess well-structured political belief systems that enable them to repel counter-information, the typical low-awareness individual's attitudes will often change given new information. This extra boost in support may help the president protect his ability to pursue his domestic agenda (Thrall, 2000).

Previous research suggests that the president uses the Medal of Honor as a public-opinion tool, but they use a flawed outcome measure (national media reports on Medals of Honor rather than the Medals of Honor themselves) and annual-level data through 1970. I aggregated Medal of Honor counts, US fatalities, and presidential disapproval polls by month. Job disapproval improved the model's accuracy. Cross-validated predictor selection found that US fatalities lead Medals of Honor by 25 months and job disapproval leads Medals of Honor by 2 months, which valid on their face and are consistent with the theory presented. I also analyzed which day of the week the president chose to present the Medal. He is 23% more likely to present a Medal of Honor than hold other public events between Monday and Thursday.

These findings suggest that the political-science literature is missing nuance when it comes to presidential attempts to influence public opinion. He may fail to move public opinion through

the typical channels, such as speeches, interviews, and appeals to the public (Kernell, 1997), but those approaches tend to reach highly informed individuals, whose opinions are difficult to change. Soft news, which primarily focuses on entertainment and which reaches many more low-information individuals, offers the president the opportunity to influence attitudes. Medal of Honor recipients offer a positive story that appeals to soft-news crowds. The president may sway attitudes by awarding more Medals of Honor.

Although I have explained some patterns in the timing of Medals of Honor, puzzles remain. My theory implies that Medal of Honor ceremonies should equally distribute across Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, but it cannot explain why the president holds a disproportionate number of ceremonies on Tuesday and Thursday. I thought that the president might be trying to avoid weekend news dumps (Friday being for bad news and Monday being for news that happened over the weekend), but if that were true, then Wednesday would be about as common a day for ceremonies as Tuesday and Thursday. I have asked journalists and public-relations professionals for insight, but they were equally baffled. In the future, I would like to explain why.

An experiment could help show whether a Medal of Honor recipient's appearance changes attitudes toward the president or the war. The general design can be rather simple: randomly show some subjects a clip of a Medal of Honor recipient, other subjects a clip of another talk-show guest, and a third group nothing, then ask for their opinions toward the president and the war. If this mechanism works and we have a sufficiently large sample, then we should observe higher levels of support among those who watched the recipient's clip than among the other two groups.

If the president does try to hold ceremonies when they will get the most attention, then we

should not only observe ceremonial patterns by day of the week but also by time of the day. Then the president should hold the ceremony early enough that it can make the evening news deadlines (many local papers were distributed in the evening) but late enough that it would also be reported the following day.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Despite its prominence and overlap with so many fields of political science, the Medal of Honor has received little scholarly attention. This dissertation contributes to our understanding by tackling three aspects of the Medal of Honor: the creation of an institution to give the award more legitimacy, the use of the award to try to motivate soldiers on the battlefield, and the use of the award to try to sway public support for the war. In the final chapter, I recap what we learned and suggest a few extensions for the current work.

5.1 Institution

Because the president uses the Medal of Honor as a tool and the tool's effectiveness varies with its value, the president has worked to reduce the number of unworthy recipients. He has done this by creating an institution characterized by formal and informal rules and several layers of independent review. The rules bias against awards, multiple layers help prevent one person's preferences from dominating, and each additional layer makes it more difficult for unworthy nominees to get through. The rules allow for appeals to reverse incorrect decisions.

A review of the evidence suggests that this institution was a critical factor in denying Peralta the Medal of Honor. Although the Inspector General is not part of the standard award process, it

allows individuals to lodge complaints about how things are being handled. In this case, the chain of review through the secretary of Defense had endorsed Peralta's nomination, even though the doctor who performed the autopsy said that Peralta's head wounds prevented him from willingly pulling the grenade to his body. But after the IG received a complaint that the medical evidence did not support Peralta's nomination, Gates secretly commissioned a panel to review the evidence and to avoid an IG investigation, which would have hurt the value of the award, and then retracted his endorsement.

Swenson received the Medal of Honor through a combination of rules and luck. There is evidence suggesting Petraeus targeted Swenson's nomination, but he was unsuccessful because his clerks lost the nomination package (which happened "all the time" due to incompetence and bad award-tracking systems Inspector General 2013, 20). Medal of Honor rules allow a lost nomination to restart, so by the time it reached Petraeus's desk again, Petraeus had left. His replacement endorsed the Medal of Honor nomination, and Swenson received the award in the fall.

The rules of the game were critical in both cases. Gates would not have endorsed the Peralta nomination in the first place if race were the issue. Rather, an individual's ability to threaten the value of the award by lodging a complaint with the IG is what likely prevented Peralta from receiving the Medal of Honor. And Swenson probably would have received the Distinguished Service Cross if the awards process did not restart when his nomination package disappeared.

5.2 Motivation

Although most theoretical economics studies suggest that awards increase employee productivity, the little research that exists on the topic has shown that awards actually decrease overall effort (Gubler, Larkin and Pierce, 2013). In addition, those theoretical studies assume that individuals succeed or fail on their own and that employees do not affect cost functions for one another. Chapter 3 explored a game that accounts for these deficiencies in a military context: success is determined at the group level, and soldiers can make action more or less costly for other soldiers (for example, by digging trenches). In contrast to most theoretical findings, the model suggests that wages and awards decrease a soldier's effort but increase other soldiers' effort. These results are more consistent with the empirical findings than most theoretical studies.

5.3 Public Opinion

The final chapter argued that the Medal of Honor presents an opportunity to provide low-awareness individuals with positive information about the war through entertainment-focused media, such as late-night talk shows. This in turn may help the president protect his ability to pursue his domestic agenda (Thrall, 2000). This chapter showed that the president awards more Medals of Honor about 25 months after spikes in battle fatalities, as would be expected if he were solely awarding the Medal for heroic acts in battle, but it also showed that the president awards more Medals of Honor when his job approval is low, with a lag of about two months. A two-month lag is consistent with Manheim and Albritton (1984), who argue that trying to propagandize immediately after negative events backfires because it makes plain the political purposes behind the propaganda. The chapter

also argues that the president prefers to award the Medal of Honor between Monday and Thursday, when it will get more attention, than between Friday and Sunday. The data show that the president is 23% more likely on those four days than on a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday.

5.4 Future Extensions

Questions about the Medal of Honor remain, and some of those puzzles relate directly to the work presented in this dissertation.

Chapter 2 showed that the rules governing the allocation of Medal of Honor awards played a critical role in two nomination cases. I would like to develop more specific theories about the rules themselves and to test the resulting hypotheses using a more systematic approach. A soldier's rank and unit determine how many levels of review his nomination will receive; the lower the rank and the lower the unit, the more rounds of review the nomination will undergo. This should make it more difficult for low-rank, low-unit soldiers to obtain the Medal of Honor. I could test this by removing identifying information and having people rate the heroism of the remaining text. This approach should bias against my hypothesis because high-rank, high-unit soldiers will have higher-ranking (and therefore more competent) writers nominating them for the award.

Chapter 3 provides a theoretical argument about how the Medal of Honor may not affect our soldiers but may lead to greater effort from enemy soldiers. I made several strong assumptions to obtain this result. The first assumption I would like to relax is to give soldiers the option to choose civilian life. I would also like to test these theories, but I have not figured out a way to do it yet that conforms closely to the structure of the model.

Chapter 4 explained why the president would hold most Medal of Honor ceremonies during the week and showed that Medal of Honor ceremonies are far more likely to be held between Monday and Thursday than between Friday and Sunday. However, plotting Medals of Honor by day of the week makes plain that the president holds about 75% of the ceremonies on Tuesdays or Thursdays. I cannot explain this pattern, and neither can the journalists and public-relations professionals I have spoken with. I would like to figure out why those two days are so much more popular.

APPENDIX A

DERIVATION AND PROOF OF NASH EQUILIBRIUM

In this appendix I obtain the solution for the model presented in Chapter 3 and prove that it is a Nash equilibrium.

There are two armies, A and B , and two types of soldiers in each army, high talent (h) and low talent (l). Each soldier is endowed with a positive amount of talent, and a high-talent soldier is more talented than a low-talent ally ($t_{Ah} > t_{Al} > 0$ and $t_{Bh} > t_{Bl} > 0$). However, a high-talent soldier is not necessarily more talented than a low-talent enemy ($t_{Ah} \not\geq t_{Bl}$ and $t_{Bh} \not\geq t_{Al}$). Table A.1 shows how many soldiers are in each category. Each soldier weighs the costs and benefits of effort and chooses a positive level of effort ($e_{Ah}, e_{Al}, e_{Bh}, e_{Bl} > 0$) that maximizes his expected utility. Within a category, soldiers have the same level of talent (t_{Ah} for all Ah soldiers, t_{Al} for all Al soldiers, t_{Bh} for all Bh soldiers, and t_{Bl} for all Bl soldiers), put forth the same effort (e_{Ah} for all Ah soldiers, e_{Al} for all Al soldiers, e_{Bh} for all Bh soldiers, and e_{Bl} for all Bl soldiers), enjoy the same level of benefits ($\gamma_{Ah} = y_{Ahw} + a_{Ah} \times \frac{\theta_A}{n_A} [n_A - a_{Ah}n_{Ah} - a_{Al}n_{Al}]$ for all Ah soldiers, $\gamma_{Al} = y_{Alw} + a_{Al} \times \frac{\theta_A}{n_A} [n_A - a_{Ah}n_{Ah} - a_{Al}n_{Al}]$ for all Al soldiers, $\gamma_{Bh} = y_{Bhw} + a_{Bh} \times \frac{\theta_B}{n_B} [n_B - a_{Bh}n_{Bh} - a_{Bl}n_{Bl}]$ for all Bh soldiers, and $\gamma_{Bl} = y_{Blw} + a_{Bl} \times \frac{\theta_B}{n_B} [n_B - a_{Bh}n_{Bh} - a_{Bl}n_{Bl}]$ for all Bl soldiers), and pay the same level of costs (C_{Ah} for all Ah soldiers, C_{Al} for all Al soldiers, C_{Bh} for all Bh soldiers, and C_{Bl}

| army | talent | | sum |
|------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | high | low | |
| A | $n_{Ah} \geq 1$ | $n_{Al} \geq 1$ | $n_A \geq 2$ |
| B | $n_{Bh} \geq 1$ | $n_{Bl} \geq 1$ | $n_B \geq 2$ |

Table A.1: The number of soldiers of each type.

for all Bl soldiers). There are no restrictions on effort, benefit, or cost levels between high-talent and low-talent soldiers; soldiers of either group may work harder, reap more benefits, or pay higher costs.

We follow Tullock (1980) by defining A 's probability of winning as A 's total effort divided by both armies' total effort:

$$\Pr(A \text{ wins}) = \frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al} + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}}$$

Begin with a highly talented member of army A . If A wins, he receives y_{Ahw} in monetary compensation and potentially an award with utility $U_{award_{Ah}}$:

$$U_{award_{Ah}}(\theta_A, \lambda_A, a_{Ah}, n_{Ah}, a_{Al}, n_{Al}) = \theta_A - \lambda_A(a_{Ah}n_{Ah} + a_{Al}n_{Al}),$$

where θ_A is the maximum utility of the award (the utility of the award when no one receives it), λ_A is how much the value declines with each additional award, $a_{Ah} \in [0, 1]$ is the probability that a highly talented member of A receives the award, and $a_{Al} \in [0, 1]$ is the probability that a less talented member of A receives the award. $\theta_A \in (1, \infty)$ represents how much country A values the award. Simply stated, this equation is the value of the award when no one receives it minus the loss in value that comes with the total number of awards in army A .

Because a positional good derives its value from its scarcity, assume that it is worthless if everyone receives one; that is,

$$a_{Ah} = 1$$

$$a_{Al} = 1$$

$$U_{award_{Ah}}(\theta_A, \lambda_A, a_{Ah}, n_{Ah}, a_{Al}, n_{Al}) = 0$$

Then

$$\theta_A - \lambda_A(n_{Ah} + n_{Al}) = 0$$

$$\lambda_A = \frac{\theta_A}{n_A}$$

After substitution, the expected utility of the award given victory becomes

$$\begin{aligned} EU_{award_{Ah}}(\theta_A, a_{Ah}, n_{Ah}, a_{Al}, n_{Al} | A \text{ wins}) &= (\text{probability of award for } Ah) \times U_{award_{Ah}} \\ &= a_{Ah} \times \left[\theta_A - \frac{\theta_A}{n_A} (a_{Ah}n_{Ah} + a_{Al}n_{Al}) \right] \\ &= a_{Ah} \times \frac{\theta_A}{n_A} \left[n_A - a_{Ah}n_{Ah} - a_{Al}n_{Al} \right] \end{aligned}$$

Here is the cost function for a highly talented soldier in army A :

$$C_{Ah} = \frac{e_{Ah}}{t_{Ah}} \left[\frac{t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al} + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}} \right]$$

A high-talent soldier of army A maximizes the following expected-utility function:

$$\begin{aligned}
EU_{Ah} &= \Pr(A \text{ wins}) \times E(\text{payoff for high-talent soldier in } A \text{ when } A \text{ wins}) - \\
&\quad (\text{cost of effort for high-talent soldier in } A) \\
&= \frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al} + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}} \times \gamma_{Ahw} - \\
&\quad \frac{e_{Ah}}{t_{Ah}} \left[\frac{t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al} + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh} + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}} \right].
\end{aligned}$$

To find the maximum, we take the derivative of the expected-utility function with respect to effort for a high-talent soldier of army A :

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{\partial EU_{Ah}}{\partial e_{Ah}} &= \frac{t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} [t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}]}{t_{Ah} (t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl})^2} - \\
&\quad \frac{t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} [t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al}]}{t_{Ah} (t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl})^2} - \\
&\quad \frac{[t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}] [t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}]}{t_{Ah} (t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl})^2} + \\
&\quad \frac{t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} [t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}]}{t_{Ah} (t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl})^2}
\end{aligned}$$

Some of these terms cancel out, leaving us with the following:

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{\partial EU_{Ah}}{\partial e_{Ah}} &= \frac{t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} [t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}]}{t_{Ah} (t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl})^2} - \\
&\quad \frac{[t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}] [t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}]}{t_{Ah} (t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl})^2} \\
&= \frac{[t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} - t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} - t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} - t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}] [t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}]}{t_{Ah} (t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl})^2}
\end{aligned}$$

We set this derivative to zero. Because t , n , and e are greater than zero, $[t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}]$

and the denominator must be greater than zero. Therefore,

$$t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} - t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} - t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} - t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl} = 0$$

$$t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} = t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}$$

We repeat these steps for the other three types of soldiers— A low talent, B high talent, and B low talent—to obtain the following system of equations:

$$t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} = t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}$$

$$t_{Al}^2 n_{Al} \gamma_{Alw} = t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}$$

$$t_{Bh}^2 n_{Bh} \gamma_{Bhw} = t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl}$$

$$t_{Bl}^2 n_{Bl} \gamma_{Blw} = t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} + t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} + t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh}$$

We can write this system in matrix form:

$$\begin{bmatrix} t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} \\ t_{Al}^2 n_{Al} \gamma_{Alw} \\ t_{Bh}^2 n_{Bh} \gamma_{Bhw} \\ t_{Bl}^2 n_{Bl} \gamma_{Blw} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} t_{Ah} n_{Ah} e_{Ah} \\ t_{Al} n_{Al} e_{Al} \\ t_{Bh} n_{Bh} e_{Bh} \\ t_{Bl} n_{Bl} e_{Bl} \end{bmatrix}$$

We obtain the reduced-form equation of each type of soldier's optimal (which we denote with a * superscript) effort level by multiplying each side by the inverse of the square matrix and dividing

each row by the variables that precede that row's effort level:

$$\begin{bmatrix} e_{Ah}^* \\ e_{Al}^* \\ e_{Bh}^* \\ e_{Bl}^* \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} -\frac{2}{3t_{Ah}n_{Ah}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Ah}n_{Ah}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Ah}n_{Ah}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Ah}n_{Ah}} \\ \frac{1}{3t_{Al}n_{Al}} & -\frac{1}{3t_{Al}n_{Al}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Al}n_{Al}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Al}n_{Al}} \\ \frac{1}{3t_{Bh}n_{Bh}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Bh}n_{Bh}} & -\frac{1}{3t_{Bh}n_{Bh}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Bh}n_{Bh}} \\ \frac{1}{3t_{Bl}n_{Bl}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Bl}n_{Bl}} & \frac{1}{3t_{Bl}n_{Bl}} & -\frac{1}{3t_{Bl}n_{Bl}} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} \\ t_{Al}^2 n_{Al} \gamma_{Alw} \\ t_{Bh}^2 n_{Bh} \gamma_{Bhw} \\ t_{Bl}^2 n_{Bl} \gamma_{Blw} \end{bmatrix}$$

We turn to proving that this solution is a Nash equilibrium. Given n players and a set of their strategies, $\mathbf{S} = (s_1^*, s_2^*, \dots, s_n^*)$, \mathbf{S} is a Nash equilibrium if, for each player i (Gibbons, 1992, 8),

$$U_i(s_1^*, s_2^*, \dots, s_{i-1}^*, s_i^*, s_{i+1}^*, \dots, s_n^*) \geq U_i(s_1^*, s_2^*, \dots, s_{i-1}^*, s_i, s_{i+1}^*, \dots, s_n^*) \quad (\text{A.1})$$

for every feasible strategy s_i . A Nash equilibrium exists if no player can improve her outcome by choosing a different strategy, holding the other players' strategies constant.

To verify that our solution is a Nash equilibrium, we check whether a highly talented soldier in army A can improve his payoff given e_{Al}^* , e_{Bh}^* , and e_{Bl}^* , the other players' optimal strategies. Insert the other players' optimal strategies into the utility function for an Ah soldier:

$$\begin{aligned} EU_{Ah} &= \frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al}^*}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al}^* + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh}^* + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}^*} \times \gamma_{Ahw} - \\ &\frac{e_{Ah}}{t_{Ah}} \left[\frac{t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh}^* + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}^*}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Al}n_{Al}e_{Al}^* + t_{Bh}n_{Bh}e_{Bh}^* + t_{Bl}n_{Bl}e_{Bl}^*} \right] \\ &= \frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + \frac{1}{3}(t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} - 2t_{Al}^2 n_{Al} \gamma_{Alw} + t_{Bh}^2 n_{Bh} \gamma_{Bhw} + t_{Bl}^2 n_{Bl} \gamma_{Blw})}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw}} \times \gamma_{Ahw} - \\ &\frac{e_{Ah}}{3t_{Ah}} \left[\frac{2t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw} + 2t_{Al}^2 n_{Al} \gamma_{Alw} - t_{Bh}^2 n_{Bh} \gamma_{Bhw} - t_{Bl}^2 n_{Bl} \gamma_{Blw}}{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}^2 n_{Ah} \gamma_{Ahw}} \right] \end{aligned}$$

Take the derivative of this function with respect to e_{Ah} :

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial EU_{Ah}}{\partial e_{Ah}} &= \frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw}(t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw})}{(t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw})^2} - \\ &\frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + \frac{1}{3}(t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} - 2t_{Al}^2n_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} + t_{Bh}^2n_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw} + t_{Bl}^2n_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw})}{(t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw})^2} \times t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} - \\ &\frac{(2t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} + 2t_{Al}^2n_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} - t_{Bh}^2n_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw} - t_{Bl}^2n_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw})(t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw})}{3t_{Ah}(t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw})^2} + \\ &\frac{t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah}(2t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} + 2t_{Al}^2n_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} - t_{Bh}^2n_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw} - t_{Bl}^2n_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw})}{3t_{Ah}(t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw})^2} \end{aligned}$$

After canceling terms, we get the following:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial EU_{Ah}}{\partial e_{Ah}} &= \frac{t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw}(2t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} + 2t_{Al}^2n_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} - t_{Bh}^2n_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw} - t_{Bl}^2n_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw})}{3t_{Ah}(t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw})^2} - \\ &\frac{t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw}(2t_{Ah}^2n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw} + 2t_{Al}^2n_{Al}\gamma_{Alw} - t_{Bh}^2n_{Bh}\gamma_{Bhw} - t_{Bl}^2n_{Bl}\gamma_{Blw})}{3t_{Ah}(t_{Ah}n_{Ah}e_{Ah} + t_{Ah}n_{Ah}\gamma_{Ahw})^2} \\ &= 0 \end{aligned}$$

Next, find the second derivative:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial}{\partial e_{Ah}} \left[\frac{\partial EU_{Ah}}{\partial e_{Ah}} \right] &= \frac{\partial}{\partial e_{Ah}} [0] \\ &= 0 \end{aligned}$$

We get a symmetric result for each type of soldier (Ah , Al , Bh , and Bl). Because no soldier can improve his outcome given the best response of every other soldier, $\{e_{Ah}^*, e_{Bl}^*, e_{Bh}^*, e_{Bl}^*\}$ satisfies Equation A.1 and thus is a Nash equilibrium.

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