

Army Told to Promote Nixon Aide

By Michael Getler

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For the past three years, Army Lt. Col. Dana G. Mead has been going to work every day at the White House as a specialist in domestic programs and, most recently, as the top White House "coordinator" for District of Columbia affairs.

It is a highly unlikely—and some Army men say inappropriate—job for an active-duty military officer. But Mead is not a typical lieutenant colonel.

At 35, the West Point graduate has moved rapidly through the ranks even though about half his 10-year military career has been spent in such nonmilitary pursuits as getting a doctorate degree in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and working for the White House, much of the time for chief domestic adviser John D. Ehrlichman, who resigned April 30.

Last December, however, Mead was not among 330 lieutenant colonels who an Army promotion board had selected for advancement to full colonel.

Sometime this spring, after word that Mead was not on the list reached the White House, President Nixon ordered that the officer be added to that list under his authority as commander-in-chief.

Though legal, the White House action has touched off concern, controversy and some bitterness among a number of officers and Army civilian officials who know of the situation.

An Army spokesman says that the service is aware of only one other instance in the last 15 years where the actions and otherwise secret deliberations of Army promotion boards have been overruled.

Plans to add Mead to the original list were challenged, the Army says, by Maj. Gen. Dewitt C. Smith, the chief of the promotion panel of eight generals and one colonel that reviewed all eligible candidates.

The wisdom of such a move was also challenged by

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the former Secretary of the Army, Robert F. Froehlke.

In general, criticism is not being directed at Mead personally, though some senior officials say privately that he should not accept a promotion made outside the Army's traditional procedures.

Mead, in a telephone interview, said he preferred not to discuss the situation. He did say he didn't have "any prior knowledge" of plans to add his name to the first list, that he eventually became aware that he would be added but "had no idea why it happened."

The promotion has touched a number of sensitive nerves at a particularly sensitive time for the military.

With the Army shrinking rapidly in size, yet still stuffed with middle-level officers, the battle for promotion spots is fierce. The list Mead was placed on was the "smallest one in years," say Army officials.

There is concern over feelings that one of the service's most closely held institutions—the promotion process—is being subjected to political tampering from the outside.

There is also rising opposition in Congress toward the trend of military men working in the White House and in other civilian agencies, and some Army men wonder how junior officers will gauge the best path to promotion in the future Army—whether in military or civilian-style assignments.

Or, as some fear, will the younger officers simply leave, discouraged over not being able to trust the integrity of the promotion process?

The Army acknowledges that after the promotion board had made its final recommendations and adjourned on Dec. 6, 1972, Mead's name was added "upon the direction of the then Secretary of the Army Robert F. Froehlke."

Defense Department spokesmen also acknowledge that Froehlke "received directions" to do this from former Secretary of Defense Elliot L. Richardson and that Richardson "was directed to do so" by the Commander-in-Chief.

Asked if Mr. Ehrlichman or his office had made the

President aware that Mead had not been promoted and initiated the recommendation to the President that such action be taken, White House spokesman Gerald R. Warren said "it was fair to say" at least, that the recommendation "came through his (Ehrlichman's) office."

In a telephone interview, ex-Army Secretary Froehlke confirmed that Gen. Smith had challenged the move to add Mead to the list. Froehlke also acknowledged that he (Froehlke) had written to Richardson indicating that he was aware of pressure to put Mead on and that he would not do so unless ordered by Richardson or by the President.

"I questioned the advisability of it," Froehlke said, "but not the right of Elliot (Richardson or the President to order me. I wouldn't do it myself."

"General Smith," he said, "is an outstanding officer. I put him in as president (of the promotion board), and when the guy I put in says it's a bad move, I listen long and hard to him."

Froehlke, who returned to the insurance business in Wisconsin in May after two years as the Army's top civilian official, said he had "assumed all along" that the initial idea to add Mead to the list came from Mr. Ehrlichman's office. He added that he could not prove that and never actually spoke to anyone in the White House about it. "It just makes all kinds of sense," he said, however.

White house officials say it is perfectly legitimate for senior officials there to try to gain recognition for their staff workers and that the President was no doubt personally aware of Mead's work as an assistant and then associate director of the Domestic Council.

But it is the feeling within Army circles that the idea for promoting Mead sprang from other than the President himself that troubles many officers.

"It's damn rare, but legal. But is it ethical," asks one officer.

"No one challenges the right of the President to do this," said a senior general. "But Mr. Ehrlichman is not the President and where does this stop?" he asked.

Froehlke agreed that was the main issue.

Again stressing that he

was not clear about the exact origins of the promotion, he said: "There are a lot of important people in this country who think various people ought to be promoted. If you listen to them,

then they will become your promotion board rather than the tried and true" Army system.

"Once you look at the total group that's eligible and say I want this crony or that crony, you've reduced the credibility of the whole process. I did not want to tamper with that process. If you do this to the Army, you are going to destroy that process and the good young guys are going to say they want no part of it," he added.

"One of the most terrible aspects of this situation," Froehlke said, "is that Dana Mead is a helluva good officer and the so-called beneficiary of this really loses because his whole promotion is under question among his associates."

Though eligible for promotion by Gen. Smith's board, Mead was about the most junior lieutenant colonel in the Army to be considered. He was part of the so-called "secondary," rather than "primary," promotion zone. Froehlke said he thought it was certain that Mead would have been selected through normal channels the next time around.

The dealing over changing the original list was also responsible, in small part says the Army, for a lengthy delay—that angered and worried a number of would-be colonels—in getting a revised list printed and approved. The promotion list of the Dec. 6, 1972, board finally appeared on May 1, 1973.