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Salaries of Officer-Scientists

CURRENT regulations of the military services and the U.S. Public Health Service provide physicians, dentists, and veterinarians on active duty as commissioned officers with salaries \$100 a month higher than those of nonmedical officers of equal grade. Without begrudging their medical colleagues the benefits an extra \$100 a month can bring, the differential pay scale simply does not look fair to the chemists, biologists, psychologists, and other scientists who have Ph.D. degrees and who are on duty as commissioned officers.

The differential has sometimes been defended as compensation for the long time required to earn a degree in medicine. But the ground was cut from under this argument—if it ever had validity—when the pay differential that physicians and dentists had earlier enjoyed was extended to veterinarians. If the higher pay is intended to compensate men for an additional 3 or 4 years of professional training, it should go to officers with doctor's degrees in other fields as well as to holders of doctor's degrees in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine.

Perhaps the differential should be abolished. Representative Teague has thought so and has introduced into the Congress a bill (H.R. 2442) which would, if passed, provide a salary bonus of \$100 a month for each officer "who holds a doctor's degree (or its equivalent) in mathematics, physics, chemistry, or in a comparable science . . . and who is performing duties in the field in which he holds such degree." The officer-scientists who would benefit are, of course, hoping that the bill will be passed and, insofar as their positions permit, are supporting it. Passage is doubtful, for the bill has no popular appeal and little general support. It even has some strong, although not always announced, opposition from the medical branches of the services, for some medical officers fear that public or Congressional attention to the

differential may result in abolishing their own bonus instead of providing one for their scientific colleagues. This fear is not wholly selfish; if the bonus for medical officers should be abolished, the number of resignations might make it even more difficult to maintain satisfactory military medical service.

The pay differential is part of a larger problem of the scientists who hold military or U.S. Public Health Service commissions for duty in conjunction with the medical services. For example, the Medical Service Corps of the Army—the corps that includes scientist-officers who work with members of the Medical Corps—is the only Army corps in which there is no possibility under current regulations for any officer to attain the rank of general. Even the very small Veterinary Corps is headed by a general, but the many times larger Medical Service Corps is headed by a colonel.

Some of these inequalities may in time be erased. In fact one has. Until about a year ago the Army's Medical Service Corps was authorized to have only 2 percent of its officers at the grade of colonel, whereas all other Army corps were authorized 8 percent. A year ago the officer strength of the Medical Service Corps was readjusted to permit 8 percent to hold the rank of colonel.

Depending upon their temperaments, officer-scientists have been more or less rankled by these inequalities. They have, of course, chosen their careers despite the conditions. But this does not mean that they should not seek better conditions. Now that Representative Teague's bill is before the Congress, they see a possibility of a little better monetary reward for their work. They have good arguments on their side, but custom prevents them from speaking out in an effort to influence legislation. They must sympathize with Veblen, who is reputed to have replied to a question concerning the outcome of a doubtful event with the comment: "I hope and pray that it will succeed, but I pray more than I hope."—D.W.

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