

Rewarding the Religious

by Margaret Downey

Now that my son, Matthew Schottmiller, has reached the age of 17, he is receiving calls from the military. Uncle Sam wants him. Recruitment officers from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines are attempting to persuade Matthew to enlist in active duty. They have offered information about the advantages of serving our country. Military benefits include a regular pay check, free medical care, free dental care, 30 days paid vacation each year, free legal services, free use of fitness facilities, technical training, travel, and tax-free college funding through the G.I. Bill.

The calls to our home provided the perfect opportunity to make some inquiries into the rumor that the military is giving special treatment to members of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) who have earned the rank of Eagle Scout. I made an appointment to discuss the recruitment procedures with the West Chester recruitment station. My visit to the recruitment station was extremely interesting. I identified myself as Matthew's mother, but also informed the officers that I am a freelance journalist. I told them that I was interested in learning everything about recruitment procedures because I intended to write a story about it. I patiently listened to the Army recruitment officer's enthusiastic endorsement of the Army life style. It sounded so good I almost wanted to enlist myself. When the discussion turned to pay scales and ranks I fired my arsenal of questions. "Can a young man get a higher rank if he has received an Eagle Badge from the Boy Scouts of America," I asked. "Oh, yes," replied the officer. "I would like to take that information home to share with my son." I asked, "Can I please have that in writing, sir?" The officer was more than happy to provide me with a copy of his Military Personnel Procurement Manual. The Army manual states that a higher pay grade is available to an applicant who "...has been awarded the Boy Scout Eagle certificate as a member of the Boy Scouts of America (Form 58-708)." According to the recruitment officer the pay scale is 1% to 2% higher than that of a non-Eagle Scout. The Army manual also states other ways that a person can be elevated to a higher pay scale. Also listed as a qualification are prior service, ROTC training, two or more years of a Junior Reserve Officer Training Course (JROTC), completion of the junior and senior course of the Platoon Leaders Class or the Officer Candidate Course, one full-time semester in a nationally accredited college, enlistment under the provisions of the Musician Enlistment Option Program, completion of at least 24 months in the Navy Sea Cadet Corps or completion of the Civil Air Patrol program. Nonreligious boys are unable to obtain an Eagle Badge (unless they hide that fact by signing the BSA religious affirmation). They can, of course, go about getting a higher military rank by doing some of the other things previously mentioned. BSA is the only organization on the list that does not offer equal opportunity in that only the professedly religious can participate. All the other programs on the list do not have a religious test. My son devoted over seven years to the BSA in an effort to obtain the rank of Eagle. Had he been religious or dishonest the badge would be his by now. Because he chose to be honest about being a Secular Humanist/Freethinker he was denied that opportunity. The complaint I filed with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission on behalf of my son is still not settled after three years. The incompetence or lack of concern from the Commission has future financial ramifications. A recent industry publication directed at CEOs included an article by a personnel director who disclosed that when he receives a resume indicating an applicant is an Eagle Scout that resume will always go to the top of the pile for immediate hiring consideration. The Air

Force Pamphlet 33-2 states that “Applicants who are accepted for enlistment and who provide evidence of successful completion of requirements for Eagle Scout or the Girl Scout Gold Award are entitled to be enlisted in pay grade E-2.” The Navy Recruiting Manual also claims that if an applicant is an Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts of America or a Cadet Senior Scout with Gold Palm in the Girl Scouts of America then grade upon enlistment will be pay grade E-2 (Seaman Apprentice). Is it fair for tax dollars to be used to give the religious community (i.e., Eagle Scouts) a higher rank that results in a 1% to 2% increase in pay? Nontheists also pay taxes. Our tax dollars should not be used to reward Eagle Scouts when our children are denied even the opportunity to participate in the BSA. The government is, in effect, punishing honest nonreligious boys by paying them less. Government gratuities for the religious community via the BSA include providing surplus ammunition for gun safety training/target practice. BSA also receives surplus camping equipment from the Army. BSA has use of government land for a nominal \$1 rental fee or no rental fee at all. Again, tax dollars are being used to support a group that will allow only the professedly religious community to participate. The Anti-Discrimination Support Network has sent a written complaint to James P. Turner, the Acting Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. I am pointing the finger at Uncle Sam for condoning and supporting the blatantly invidious religious discrimination of BSA.