



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on November 10, 2016

No Punishment Acceptable for Those Who Served in Good Faith

Ten to fifteen years ago, the U.S. military found itself in need of more personnel. In California, an overly ambitious recruiter started giving bonuses and arranging forgiveness of student loans to those who would enlist or extend their time in service. Members of the state's National Guard, upwards of 2,000 in number, accepted the payments in good faith and stayed in uniform. Many were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.



Approximately 10 years later, these individuals began receiving notices telling them the money they had been given was a mistake and they should [return it to the government](#). In 2012, the overly eager master sergeant who doled out the cash and benefits pleaded guilty to approving the more than \$15 million handed out to recipients. Our nation's military, already suffering near exhaustion from more than 15 years of combat in Afghanistan and on the verge of more missions in Iraq and elsewhere, emerged from this mess with a brand new black eye.

Former Army Captain Christopher Van Meter received one of the bonuses and then fulfilled his commitment. He even came home with a Purple Heart that he earned in battle. After being notified that he owed the government what he had received, he told a reporter: "I spent years of my life deployed, missed out on birthdays and deaths in the family, got blown up ... and now I'm told I haven't fulfilled my contract." Others caught in this foul up obviously shared his disgust, even outrage. Some were told to repay as much as \$20,000. There have been cases where wages were taken from the paychecks earned in civilian jobs after service commitments had been fulfilled. Some have even been assessed penalties over and above the amount they accepted ten or more years ago.

Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), a Marine veteran who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan, labeled the repayment demands "disgraceful and insulting." After complaints by veterans groups and some publicity appearing in the *Los Angeles Times*, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter [called off the attempts to retrieve the funds](#). There are now demands coming from veterans groups to have the military reimburse any recipients who may have been frightened into paying back what they had received. The Pentagon plans to set up a team to review each of the cases.

Mistakes in the military and elsewhere will always be made and this was an unusual one. Anyone who has served in the military knows that snafus and unnecessary mix-ups will occur. Proper handling of this one is surely called for. And it looks as though the good faith soldiers who accepted the bonuses will get to keep them.



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