

FEKETE ALEX

Ornagból  
Ormeister

## Baffling End to a 14-Year Army Career

### **Discharged Because He Twice Missed Promotion, Major Reenlists as Sergeant**

The mystical, magical workings of the military mind can be dazzling, even to someone inside the system.

It is especially baffling to Al Fekete, who thought of himself as a career soldier.

Al Fekete is a stocky, quiet man, 37, with seven children in his Willingboro, N.J., home.

For 14 years, the Army looked like a solid career to him — he did tours of duty in Vietnam, Germany, Korea, a period as an ROTC instructor at Penn, won three medals of commendation.

In February 1970, he became Major Alexander J. Fekete, Transportation Corps. It was a temporary promotion, but the future looked good.

Then — for reasons the Army won't disclose — Fekete was passed over twice for promotion to the permanent grade of major. The Army's next move — last October — was to throw Fekete out on his ear.

The reason is that the Army has something called Title 10. A Regular Army officer who twice misses promotion is released. Fired. Out.

In barracks jargon, Fekete was "RIF'ed." A RIF means "reduction in force." As the Vietnam war winds down, the Army is thinning out its top-heavy officer corps. The RIF makes sense. But don't tell Al Fekete you blow a 14-year career on a bureaucratic rule.

Fekete and his pert wife, Margie, are angry — and they refuse to smoulder in silence. They've written to congressmen. They've made trips to Washington. Fekete has tried to see a White House aide. He's asked to talk to the Secretary of the Army.

"I've never been a rebel, but I can't take this quietly," said Fekete. "It's the unfair way they did it — no due process, no chance to defend yourself, no reason given."

Fekete and his wife looked at the bills for those seven kids and the house mortgage and decided he had to keep going. Last month, Fekete reenlisted as a sergeant, E-5. He's had to start all over.

As a major, Fekete made a base pay of



**NEW RANK:** Sgt. Alexander Fekete.

\$1,340 a month. As a sergeant he'll make \$640. He'll probably have to moonlight to pay the bills. He's now at Ft. Dix, N.J., awaiting an assignment to Germany.

"It's such a waste of a good man," said Margie Fekete, who has a stack of letters commending her husband's Army skills. "They can't simply discard a man's life like this."

Al Fekete smiled wryly. "Security," he said. "That's one thing the Army seemed to offer."

Congressman Edwin Forsythe (R.-N.J.), has tried to unravel the red tape in Fekete's case. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D.-Mass.), also made inquiries.

The Pentagon reply was an October 5 letter to Margie Fekete from Col. Walter Hogrefe, deputy director of officer personnel. It is a nice letter but only explains what the lady already knew — her husband was out because he wasn't promoted.

"We all know a big RIF is coming, but the Army's going to lose some good people this way," said Al Fekete. "I was no fireball, but I wasn't deadwood either. Why don't they freeze all promotions? At worst, let a man drop back in grade. If there are more cases like mine, the Army's losing a helluva investment in experienced men."

Ironically, Fekete got a flowery commendation on September 6 for the great job he was doing as a major. Three weeks later, he was junked. It's not easy to see the Army's logic. In what other business do you get fired if you're not promoted?

— SANDY GRADY

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