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THESIS

**THE BOOMERANG SOLDIER: DOES RECRUITMENT
OF FORMER SOF OFFICERS AND ENLISTED
REQUIRE REVISION?**

by

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December 2020

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OFFICERS AND ENLISTED REQUIRE REVISION?**

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ABSTRACT

For the past five years, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) have relentlessly labored on recruiting and retention efforts to achieve both their quantitative and qualitative missions of recruiting and retaining. Currently, there is not enough research into why prior service recruitment of formerly separated Soldiers, known as boomerang Soldiers, is a cheaper and more viable recruitment option. Using an in-depth case study of civilian sector boomerang policies, this thesis shows what the Special Operations Forces (SOF) and even the Army at large can learn from a civilian sector that embraces hiring former employees. This thesis examines the value of recruiting former SOF Soldiers and why effective high-cost methods of recruitment and retention through bonuses/special and incentive pay (S&I pay) may be unsustainable in a fiscally conservative future. A future Army faces the unknown effects of the military's new Blended Retirement System (BRS), growing economic concerns, and COVID-19 aftereffects. This thesis explains why a boomerang Soldier recruitment policy is cheaper for the U.S. military and serves to reduce monetary personnel expenditures while achieving both quantity and quality in SOF recruiting and retention. The thesis recommends prescriptive steps needed for a boomerang policy to be implemented as an innovative talent recruitment solution for SOF.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Army Competitive Category
ADSO	Additional Service Obligation
AFC	Army Framework Concept
AOC	area of concern
APS	army posture statement
ARSOF	Army Special Operation Forces
BRS	Blended Retirement System
CA	Civil Affairs
CAD	Call to Active Duty
CONOP	Concept of Operations
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CPT	Captain
CSA	Chief of Staff of the Army
CW2	Chief Warrant Officer
DoD	Department of Defense
DOPMA	Defense Officer Personnel Management Act
DOTMLPF-P	Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership, Education,
FT	fort
FY	fiscal year
HQDA	Headquarters of the Department of the Army
HR	Human Resources
HRC	Human Resource Center
ILE	Intermediate Level Education
JAG	Judge Advocate General
JFCOM	Joint Forces Command
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
KSA	Knowledge, Skills Abilities
MAJ	Major

MILPER	military personnel
MISG's	Military Information Support Groups
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
MOS	Military Occupation Specialty
MSC	Major Subordinate Command
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
OPTEMPO	Operation Tempo
PSYOPS	Psychological Operations
RAND	research and development
S&I	special and incentive pay
SECARMY	Secretary of the Army
SF	Special Forces
SFAS	Special Forces Assessment and Selection
SFC	Sergeant First Class
SFQC	Special Forces Qualification Course
SMU	Special Mission Unit
SOAR	Special Operations Aviation Regiment
SOF	Special Operation Forces
SOPC	Special Operations Preparation Course
SORB	Special Operations Recruiting Battalion
TAG	The Adjutant General
TERA	Temporary Early Retirement Authority
THS	transients, holdees, and students
TOT	Total Time in Training
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
VSP	Voluntary Separation Pay
VUCA	volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous

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I. INTRODUCTION

For the past five years, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) recruiting and retention efforts have incessantly labored to achieve both their quantitative and qualitative mission of recruiting and retaining ARSOF officers.¹ Senior leaders in USAREC acknowledge the advantages of social media and various opensource outlets for effective recruitment and retention strategies for the 21st century.² Nevertheless, further revision is needed to adjust to the newer generations' changing culture. Recent research addresses how bonuses/special and incentive pay (S&I pay) is effective at increasing retention but only at great financial cost. This is a practice that may be unsustainable in a fiscally conservative future as the Army braces itself to withstand the unknown effects of the military's new Blended Retirement System (BRS), economic concerns, and COVID-19 aftereffects.

There is not enough research into why prior service recruitment of formerly separated Soldiers is a cheaper and more viable recruitment method; this study will help to fill in those gaps. Rather than expending millions of dollars on broad advertising campaigns and massive bonuses or costly S&I pay increases, the Army should take a deeper look into the often-overlooked group of prior service recruits, known in the private sector as boomerang employees. Many officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) exit the military to find that the grass is not greener on the civilian side and face many impediments to assessing back into military service.³ By focusing on psychological operations (PYSOPS), civilian affairs (CA), and special forces (SF) Soldiers, we seek to show that prudent relaxation and reformation of prior service recruiting policies would increase the ability of Special Operations Forces (SOF) recruiters to fill this manning gap with

¹ Curtis Lowry, "ARSOF Inventory Review CG, USASOC," (presentation, HRC HQ, Fort Knox, KY, June 30, 2020).

² James Long, "It's Not the Economy: Why the Army Missed Its Recruitment Goals and What to Do About It," Modern War Institute, February 14, 2019, <https://mwi.usma.edu/not-economy-army-missed-recruitment-goals/>.

³ "How Can We Leave The Military Without Regret?," Spousebuzz, March 12, 2013, <https://www.military.com/spousebuzz/blog/2013/03/how-can-we-leave-the-military-without-regret.html>.

previously separated SOF personnel. This option will not only be cheaper for the U.S. military in the long run but will also serve to reduce monetary and personnel expenditures, while achieving both quantity and quality in recruiting and retention. The critical reason for this thesis is to identify what applicable policies the SOF and even the Army at large can learn from the civilian sector about different talent management techniques that solve the problem of innovative talent recruitment. Overall, SOF can learn a lot from diverse business sector policies that show how to best tap into the overlooked pool of potential boomerang soldiers.

This thesis will focus on PYSOPS, CA and SF Soldiers, while it will exclude the Rangers from ARSOF since they are quite a different organization.⁴ To clarify as to why, the Ranger regiment and SOF have differing extraneous physical and mental selection processes of their members and have completely different mission sets. The Ranger regiment mission set is focused on conventional warfighting whereas SOF is focused on unconventional warfare and search and rescue. Becoming a member in SOF is highly selective and requires much more training than the members of the Ranger regiment. Such selective and total investment in one individual service member should be an investment that should be retained and targeted for recruitment even after they exit military service.

We argue that prudent relaxation and reformation of current directives outlined in U.S. Code Title 10 and the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) would increase the ability of recruiters within the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion (SORB) to better fill this manning gap with diversified, trained, qualified, and seasoned personnel. SORB can implement advanced targeting techniques and reformed policies to find and entice prior service members to rejoin the force. Recruiting prior service members is similar to the competitive business sector as “boomerang employees,” a desired method of talent management and diversification of an organization.⁵ Due to the total cost of training and equipping a single SOF Soldier, recruiting already qualified SOF members would not only

⁴ Eric Sof, “Tier 3 Military Units,” *Spec Ops Magazine*, October 3, 2019, <https://special-ops.org/tier-3-special-operations-forces/>.

⁵ Todd Nordstrom and David Strut, “Boomerang Employees: 3 Reasons to Rehire and 2 Reasons to Avoid Them,” *Forbes*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidsturt/2018/05/31/boomerang-employees-3-reasons-to-rehire-and-2-reasons-to-avoid-them/>.

be cheaper for the U.S. military but will also serve to reduce monetary and personnel expenditures. Moreover, this accessions methodology would also help achieve both quantity and quality service members. Using outdated recruiting and retention advertising methods, recruiting efforts have failed to implement the needed changes to connect with the rapidly changing socio demographics and constant job changes that are a developing phenomenon in America's upcoming generation.⁶ The loss of qualified and seasoned SOF officers and NCOs greatly hinders the capabilities and potential of SOF to compete in the long-term strategic competition between great power nations. Therefore, it is imperative for the Army to re-analyze its policies on recruiting prior service Soldiers. This thesis will focus on current options for officers and enlisted from SF, CA and PSYOPS to come back in as a warrant officer, NCO, or officer, as well as the need for more relaxed restrictions on prior service recruitment practices.

A. METHODOLOGY

This thesis is not designed to criticize current recruitment methods. Instead, we seek to illuminate the opportunities and benefits of boomerang Soldier recruitment in the hopes that a boomerang policy implementation would further strengthen current recruitment methods. This thesis explores ways to improve what SOF already does to target lost talent whom the authors believe will prove crucial to fiscally constrained 21st century operations. This thesis frames the problem of losing talent and offers the framework for a solution through targeting boomerang re-employment opportunities. Nevertheless, to enact boomerang re-employment as policy in SOF and possibly throughout the Army, further in-depth research on full implementation and effects will be required. To frame the problem, we will examine the current procedures and policies for prior service recruitment of SF, CA and PSYOPS SOF officers and enlisted to ascertain if current recommendations for policy are needed. The primary means of collecting qualitative data for this research project is the review of policy, regulations, manuals, interviews with ARSOF Branch managers, and extensive use of RAND research. The basis of this research is on secondary data and other officially published information that was collected from official journals, articles,

⁶ Long, "It's Not the Economy."

military doctrine policies, web resources and published Rand Corporation research. The framework for a solution is explained by comparing SOF's recruiting procedures to the business sector and other branches of the U.S. military. Another primary focus will be a comparative analysis of what it costs to create SOF Soldiers and why they are worth targeting for recruitment even after they separate from the service. Using current research data on intrinsic motivators, like belonging to an elite group versus extrinsic motivators such as monetary gain, this thesis will reveal new recommendations for how SOF can strengthen its recruiting practices with more focus on prior service recruitment of boomerang Soldiers.

A brief history of recruiting practices and their methodology to obtain recruiting quotas will be followed by a study of the U.S. Air Force and its prior service recruiting and retention practices. We will briefly analyze financial extrinsic incentives when compared to intrinsic incentives. This will be aided by published RAND research and HRC Survey data that lays out why SOF Soldiers decided to get out of military service and become civilians and why others decided to stay in. This will aid in ascertaining what intrinsic and extrinsic factors future recruiting efforts must consider. By comparing the findings from each study, we will draw recommendations for policy and procedure change for their future analysis and implementation. Within these branches of service, we will analyze new and old policies that have helped the military adjust to changing times and offer up evidence that a prior service recruitment policy would further help the military. We will also analyze the effects of a poor economy and a flourishing economy and their effects on recruitment and retention. Additionally, we will use extensive research from RAND to address how bonuses and S&I pay are effective but costly. We will conduct a brief fiscal comparison of current practices of retention and recruitment using bonuses and S&I pay versus prior service recruitment. By using case studies and previously collected research data from RAND and SF HRC, a better understanding of recruitment practices will paint a clearer picture of what changes should be recommended. Overall, we will seek to prove that prior service recruitment is a valid option when lack of funding becomes a prominent issue.

B. STRUCTURE

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter II will review the elements of U.S. Code and policies that govern manning, retention, recruiting and attrition in relation to SOF. By examining the background of these elements, we will then delve into what current policies exist in relation to prior service recruitment and what problems currently exist. Chapter III is a case study of the boomerang employee in the civilian sector and how the issues and successes faced in the civilian sector are applicable to helping solve similar military issues. Chapter IV will delve into the reasoning behind military services not embracing the hiring of boomerangs and why targeting former SOF Soldiers for recruitment is fiscally responsible. Chapter V will describe the effects of the Blended Retirement System and why re-hiring prior service Soldiers may be a solution to future recruiting challenges. Chapter VI will examine the points covered and Chapter VII and VIII will provide recommendations and direction for actions to take in the future.

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II. MANNING REGULATIONS, RETENTION AND RECRUITING POLICY BACKGROUND

A. SOF BACKGROUND

To understand if prior service recruitment of officers and enlisted in SOF needs revision to address filling manning gaps, one needs to understand the current role and function of ARSOF and how they are managed. Doing so, will shed light that ARSOF talent management is inadequately managed in comparison to that of other branches within the Army. According to the Army Human Resource Center (HRC) publication, ARSOF 2022, Senior leaders of ARSOF are focused on the human domain of the force. The difficulty in creating such a force is that, once created, it must be maintained due to the difficulty of recruiting, training, and qualifying such elite Soldiers. Moreover, the complex mission set given to ARSOF is led and executed by individuals of the highest caliber. Senior leaders in ARSOF argue that the force is not manned nor managed to keep up with the emergent threats:

The current force structure, manpower and equipment are not optimized for this dispersed operational footprint. Therefore, we must develop and validate flexible, scalable, and responsive distributed command and control structures. Humans are more important than hardware. Quality is better than quantity. Special operations forces cannot be mass produced. Competent special operations forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.⁷

United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) operates in almost 100 various countries at any given time, doing its part in protecting U.S. interests and allies abroad.⁸ The special operations community has been taking more than its fair share of the ongoing counter insurgency operations in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as they serve a critical role in combatting identified terror groups, achieving what conventional forces cannot.

⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *ARSOF 2022*. PB 80–13-SE (Fort Knox, KY, Headquarters, Department of the Army), accessed September 19, 2020, https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/DOTDP/_pdf/GRAD/ARSOF2022.pdf.

⁸ Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. RS21048 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS21048.pdf>.

Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) play a significant role in most U.S. military operations. Over the past twenty years, ARSOF have been given greater responsibility for planning and conducting counterterrorism operations on every continent. U.S. Special Operations command (USSCOM) has approximately 70,000 Active Duty, National Guard, reserve and civilian personnel (about 2,500) from all four components and sub unified commands.⁹ ARSOF currently constitutes 33,000 Soldiers of the total personnel strength of 70,000.¹⁰ Further broken down, Feickert identifies that ARSOF is organized into “Special Forces, Ranger, and special operations aviation units, along with civil affairs units, military information units”.¹¹ Five active duty Special Forces (SF) groups are strength/slated for 1,400 Soldiers each (7,000). These groups are stationed at a variety of places throughout the CONUS region, FT Bragg, FT Lewis, FT Campbell, FT Carson and Eglin Air Force Base.¹² These “Green Berets,” specialize in foreign languages and are equipped to operate in relatively small teams, independently throughout the world. Additionally, there are two Army National Guard SF groups headquartered in Utah and Alabama. Feickert argues that the most deployed SOF assets are Civil Affairs (CA). It is to be recognized that 95th CA Brigade is the only active unit that supports USSOCOM.¹³ All other CA units reside in the reserves and support general purpose forces. Formerly referred to as psychological operations, Military Information Support Operations (MISO) units disseminate information to large foreign audiences through mass media. There are currently two active duty Military Information Support Groups (MISG’s) stationed at FT Bragg, NC, providing support to geographic combatant commands.¹⁴ For the FY 2020, USSOCOM budget requested a 2.2% manpower increase from 71,612 to 73,204.¹⁵ Of this

⁹ Feickert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF)*, 2.

¹⁰ Feickert, 2.

¹¹ Feickert, 2.

¹² Feickert, 2.

¹³ Feickert, 3.

¹⁴ Feickert, 4.

¹⁵ Feickert, 7.

increase, ARSOF requests a force structure of 35,976, which is an increase of over 2,967 Soldiers for the year 2020.¹⁶

B. FOCUSING ON THE HUMAN DOMAIN OF ARSOF

ARSOF's top priority is investment into its human capital. According to a recent publication, "ARSOF 2022," ARSOF's priorities are focused on six enabling concepts which are believed to allow the force to direct and shape the future development of the force.¹⁷ Furthermore, the investment in human capital is ARSOF's top priority, arguing that the force strives to be the best educated, trained and equipped special operations formation in the world, achieving success in the 21st century battlefield.¹⁸ According to the report, ARSOF intends to focus on three areas to increase individual soldier readiness. First, ARSOF will focus on enhancing education and training in problem solving and technical skills like language and cultural expertise while simultaneously increasing advantage through human capital development. Second, senior leaders in ARSOF intend on diversifying the force so that ARSOF may be more successful in the human domain. Third, and most importantly, the preservation of the force and families by focusing on the quality of life of the family members, as both Soldiers and their families face the extraordinary demand of SF operations.¹⁹

Currently, the Army talent management system is based on the historical promotion-based system. This is known as the up or out system, you either move up or are removed out of the service. Several of the key issues allowing both prior service and enlisted personnel to re-enter the military are associated with the promotion-based system. This system of time in service and the up-or-out traditional system has left Soldiers with little options, leave the service and face denied reentry.²⁰ Understanding that qualified officers and NCOs were being forced out due to the archaic promotion system, changes

¹⁶ Feickert, 8.

¹⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *ARSOF 2022*, 17.

¹⁸ Headquarters, Department of the Army, 18.

¹⁹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, 20.

²⁰ Scott Maucione, "Are Some of the Army's Best Soldiers Being Forced out?" Federal News Network, October 31, 2016. <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/army/2016/10/army-best-soldiers-forced-out/>.

were made by congress in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2018. A particularly noteworthy change was in Section 572 of the NDAA which required the Secretary of Defense, with the consultation of respective secretaries of the military departments, to provide two reports to the Senate and House Armed Services Committees on polices for both Active and Reserve component career management.²¹ The first report covered promotion list sequencing, and the second addressed fifteen elements of promotion and career management issues.²² This bill pushed more promotion decisions to the individual services to allow the creation of alternative career paths for both officer and enlisted. Rather than committing career fratricide, this new bill encourages self-development through fellowships, outside graduate degree programs, and other critical broadening assignments.²³ This bill focuses on the talent and potential of the individual for promotion rather than dates of commission. The introduction of the skills-based promotion system will compete with the private-sector competition that offers promotion based on merit and skill sets.²⁴ The changes the bill offers may help boost retention incentives whenever retention rates are in competition with a thriving economy and the blended retirement system (BRS), which offers smaller pension checks and an opportunity to exit the military midcareer with matched funds.

The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 (DOPMA) is the current system which places limits on the number of officers who can serve in certain grades, keeping the mid and high-level officers' low. Recruiters are currently faced with the difficulty of filling the increased recruiting quotas while many new recruits leave soon after their initial service obligation.²⁵ Exhausted by continuous high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) deployment cycles, officers and enlisted have few compelling reasons, other

²¹ Albert Robbert, Katherine Kidder, Caitlin Lee, Agnes Schaefer, and William Waggy, *Officer Career Management: Steps Toward Modernization in the 2018 and 2019 National Defense Authorization Acts*. RR-2875-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), iii, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2875>.

²² Robbert et al., *Officer Career Management*, iii.

²³ Robbert et al., xiv.

²⁴ Robbert et al., 5.

²⁵ Long, "It's Not the Economy."

than job security, to stay, whereas the private sector offers more lucrative careers.²⁶ SOF is not only faced with quantity issues but quality issues of its service members.²⁷ With the new National Security Strategy focusing on great power competition, the who (Russia, China, North Korea) is a mirror image of the 20th century threats but the how (Cyber, Economic, Artificial Intelligence) is much different. The lost quality and skills of separated SOF Soldiers greatly hinders the capabilities and potential of SOF to compete in the long-term strategic competition between great power nations.²⁸

The current system of recruitment and retention is propped up by expensive bonuses and S&I pay funding. During fiscal year (FY) 2000 and FY 2008, the DoD budget for enlistment and reenlistment bonuses was more than doubled. The budget for enlisted Soldier bonuses jumped from \$266 million to \$625 million and from \$891 million to \$1.4 billion for selective reenlistment bonuses.²⁹ These expensive funding increases solved the recruitment and retention issues of the time brought about by fast deployment cycles, but what was not explored was the cost value and benefits of a boomerang Soldier program. Rand research concluded that the enlistment bonus and reenlistment bonus programs aided heavily in the Army's ability to meet recruiting and retention demands over the years.³⁰ Massive amounts of money in the form of bonuses as shown in recent research can solve the retention and recruiting issues of SOF, but is ultimately unsustainable and fiscally irresponsible in a fiscally constrained future.³¹ Therefore, current prior service recruitment of SF, CA and PSYOPS officers and NCOs in SOF needs further analysis, to ultimately determine how to best fulfill current and future manning gaps.

²⁶ Maucione, "Are Some of the Army's Best Soldiers Being Forced Out?"

²⁷ John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act, Pub. L. No. H. R. 5515 (2018).
<https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr5515/BILLS-115hr5515enr.pdf>.

²⁸ Special Operations Command, *ARSOF 2022*.

²⁹ Asch and USA, *Cash Incentives and Military Enlistment, Attrition, and Reenlistment*, iii.

³⁰ Asch and USA, 108.

³¹ Beth Asch, Michael G. Mattock, James Hosek, and Shanthi Nataraj, *Assessing Retention and Special and Incentive Pays for Army and Navy Commissioned Officers in the Special Operations Forces*. RR 1796-OSD. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019.

C. ARSOF SHOULD BE MAINTAINED NOT BUILT

Part of the manning issue, particularly at the senior captain and major ranks is centered on the number of officers and or senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) required to support the unrelenting and arduous operating environment SOF finds itself in. The other part of the manning issue is focused on the ability to provide flexibility to midcareer officers and NCOs that both manages talent and improves upon their quality of life. The significant constraints that SOF faces to better manage the size of its force boils down to the NDAA, commissioning programs and available assignments to officers who are in that Army Competitive Category (ACC).

With just a little research and time, it would not take someone long to figure out the SOF community is facing significant personnel challenges with its senior company grade and junior Field Grade officers. Over the past ten years the forces have seen a steady decline of its seasoned senior Captains and junior Majors. For example, in FY 2019, the SF Regiment hit a peak of 18A captains-to-positions fill rate of 82% with a trough of 70% when measured monthly.³² Moreover, analysts and branch managers of the SF community assess that officer year groups from 09–13 will all fall significantly short in producing a healthy post intermediate level education (ILE) cohort of SF officers due to historic attrition rates.³³ With the current up-or-out promotion system, non-accession branches such as the SF find it difficult to compensate for the rise and fall in year group attrition rates.³⁴ Without significant reform to the SF talent management program, senior leaders will need to assess how to compensate for both the low recruitment rates and high attrition rates.

³² A.W. Simmons, “Special Forces Branch Update.” *Human Resources Command Special Forces*, Branch Update, 1, no. 1 (July 1, 2019): 12.

³³ Christopher Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief.” Presented at the Talent Management Brief, FT Knox, KY, HRC HQ, March 5, 2020.

³⁴ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief.”

Mark Mitchell, principal deputy assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict shared his concerns about manning the SF Force:

The current requirement for Army Special Forces is 685 officers and enlisted soldiers. I think we are going to hit 470 this year; we must find some new ways to reach into some untapped pools. The barrier to SOF entry is high and will remain high. We do not intend to drop the standards, and we are committed to that, but we really need to look at attacking those other pools. Around 30 percent of American high schoolers meet the requirements to join the service, and even fewer of them can meet the demands of the special operations community.”³⁵

As outlined in the Army publication, “How the Army Runs,” the most critical challenge Army Senior Leaders and Commanders face is managing resources in a constrained environment.³⁶ Army leaders must ensure the force is trained, equipped, and maintained to meet the demands of the National Defense Strategy (NDS). As the Army seeks ways to keep up with a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) operational environment, it must first examine how it implements policies that creates a sustainable level of readiness.³⁷ Senior leaders must create a sustainable level of readiness with a limited amount of authorized personnel, while battling the ever changing global environment, intricate approval processes, and multi-levels of bureaucratic red tape.

For the past decade, the Army’s modernization has been centered on the tradeoffs between readiness, technological advancement, capacity, and overall size of the force. The Army has chosen readiness as the top priority.³⁸ Note that readiness does not equate to large capacity, rather, it is referring to doing more with less. The decision to focus on readiness has resulted in many Army programs being restructured, with particular focus on

³⁵Matthew Cox, “Pentagon Official: Recruiting Problems Could Alter Special Ops Mission,” Military.com, February 28, 2018. <https://www.military.com/DoDbuzz/2018/02/28/pentagon-official-recruiting-problems-could-alter-special-ops-mission.html>.

³⁶ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. U.S. Army War College, 2018. <https://ssilrc.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/How-the-Army-Runs.pdf>, 1–1.

³⁷ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*, viii.

³⁸ Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard, “The Number One Priority: An Interview with Gen. Mark Milley,” U.S. Army, November 4, 2019. https://www.army.mil/article/219028/the_number_one_priority_an_interview_with_gen_mark_milley.

force restructuring.³⁹ The NDAA for the fiscal year 2020 decreased the authorized total end strength of the Army to 1,005,500, a decrease of 24,000 across the force.⁴⁰ However, even with a force increase, senior leaders in the Army will continue to operate with even fewer resources, maintaining a focus of quality over quantity.⁴¹ Though available resources are important, currently an issue that is of even greater importance is maintaining the will of those currently serving, ensuring they continue to serve past their initial service obligation.⁴² Thus, to meet the demands of the operational and institutional Army, flexibility and innovation will be of paramount importance in the years ahead.

D. DOES ARSOF HAVE A MANNING ISSUE?

The discussion of manning is not as clear cut as most would think. Those who are not well versed in the variables regarding Army personnel management may assume there is an authorized/finite number of billets for each rank in each branch. While this may be the fundamental framework in force structure, it is not the only driving factor. In fact, defining manning and readiness is rather opaque and governed by a complicated bureaucratic process.

To better understand if the ARSOF has a manning problem, one needs to understand how U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC) and Headquarters of the Department of the Army (HQDA) views the Army's strength. Each level has similar views, but at the same time very different conclusions regarding strength of the force. Simply put, HRC and its branches tend to focus more on the short-term force structure and the near-term promotion projections, while HQDA focuses on the long term, ensuring they keep in constant check with the legal authorizations outlined by Congress.

³⁹ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*, 1–3.

⁴⁰ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, S. 1790 § (2020), <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s1790/BILLS-116s1790enr.pdf>.

⁴¹ Michael O'Hanlon and James Miller, "Focusing on Quality over Quantity in the U.S. Military Budget." *Policy 2020: Brookings* (blog), December 2, 2019. <https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/bigideas/focusing-on-quality-over-quantity-in-the-us-military-budget/>.

⁴² Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*, 3–7.

Each year, prior to the publication of the yearly NDAA, the Secretary of the Army (SECARMY) and the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) go before Congress and brief the Army's Annual Posture Statement (APS) of the total Army (Active, National Guard, and Reserve). The APS is the official written testimony to congressional leaders on the assessed state and readiness of the Army. The SECARMY and the CSA explain how the Army will utilize the FY 2021 budget request to meet the mission of the Army. Simply put, the APS explains how the allocated budget to the Army will support the NDS by ensuring: readiness, modernization, and reform.⁴³ As with all the other service branches, the manning allotments are governed by U.S. Federal laws outlined in the yearly Congress-approved NDAA and U.S. Code Title-10 for Active Duty and Reserve, and U.S. Code Title 32 for the National Guard.⁴⁴ The NDAA and its subsections are used by the HQDA in determining promotions and accessions. Each year, Congress publishes the NDAA, which provides the authorized amount of Title 10 and Title 32 military Officers and Enlisted. The NDAA's authorization of total Army personnel does not specifically state the ranks or how many officers, NCOs, and enlisted there will be, just the total amount of authorized Soldiers.⁴⁵ Refer to Figure 1. The total force end strength is then used in conjunction with U.S. Code Title 10, of which governs commissioned officer end strength in ratio to that in the force.⁴⁶

⁴³ Steven Redmann, "Army Posture Statement 2020," U.S. Army, March 13, 2020. <https://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2020/03/13/index.html>.

⁴⁴ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*, 9–24.

⁴⁵ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020.

⁴⁶ Title 10, United States Code—Armed Forces, 10 C.F.R 451 § (2011). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-112HPRT67342/pdf/CPRT-112HPRT67342.pdf>.

Total number of commissioned officers (excluding officers in categories specified in subsection (b)) on active duty:	Number of officers who may be serving on active duty in grade of:		
	Major	Lieutenant Colonel	Colonel
Army:			
20,000	7,768	5,253	1,613
25,000	8,689	5,642	1,796
30,000	9,611	6,030	1,980
35,000	10,532	6,419	2,163
40,000	11,454	6,807	2,347
45,000	12,375	7,196	2,530
50,000	13,297	7,584	2,713
55,000	14,218	7,973	2,897
60,000	15,140	8,361	3,080
65,000	16,061	8,750	3,264
70,000	16,983	9,138	3,447
75,000	17,903	9,527	3,631
80,000	18,825	9,915	3,814
85,000	19,746	10,304	3,997
90,000	20,668	10,692	4,181
95,000	21,589	11,081	4,364
<hr/>			
100,000	22,511	11,469	4,548
110,000	24,354	12,246	4,915
120,000	26,197	13,023	5,281
130,000	28,040	13,800	5,648
170,000	35,412	16,908	7,116

This section establishes the limits for field grade ranks based on the overall size of the officer corps in the ACC.

Figure 1. Officer Strength & Distribution in Grade from CH. 32⁴⁷

Section 523 of U.S. Code Title 10 seen in Figure 1 depicts the authorized strengths of commissioned officers on active duty in grades of major, lieutenant colonel and colonel. To find this specified allocation, all commissioned officers are counted; those outlined in subparagraph b of section 523 (current FY) are then subtracted from the total Army officer strength.⁴⁸ In short, it is not field grade officers compared to company grade officers, it is field grades as a portion of the overall size of the officer corps that is subject to the limitations of section 523. Referring to Figure 1, if the total ACC officer corps is 20,000

⁴⁷ Source: "Title 10."

⁴⁸ "Title 10."

then there can only be 7,768 majors, 5,253 lieutenant colonels, and 1,613 colonels. Subsection b depicts officers that are excluded in computing and determining authorized strengths.

To determine which branch gets allocated what and how many, Senior leaders in the HQDA G3 and G1, use the Army's Force Management Model which assess seven functions to effectively manage the Army.⁴⁹ Moreover, the force development process uses the assessments from the Army Framework Concept (AFC). The AFC is comprised of several sub-components that assess how the Army force will perform in a particular military function in a range of military operations six to eight years in the future.⁵⁰ Through a wargaming process, AFC then produces detailed classified concept of operations (CONOPs) that provide senior leaders a capabilities assessment. This assessment captures what is needed at the operational level to achieve the desired end state of the National Security Strategy (NSS). This assessment is then used by senior leaders to determine how the force will be organized, equipped, and manned.⁵¹ Using the AFC assessments, strategic senior military leaders use the force structure model and begin the force development process. Force development begins with assessing operational capabilities that are desired of the Army as specified from the NSS and the approved NDS.

Although this is not the only step to assess the needs of the force, it is a system of systems used in the force management process and it is the first and most critical assessment. The final product of this assessment is the development of the organizational authorizations (manpower and equipment) in congruence with the authorized manning strength outlined in the NDS and U.S. Code title 10 and 32, to achieve an effective and affordable force.⁵² Moreover, this process determines the Army's Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, Facilities and Policy (DOTMLPF-P).⁵³

⁴⁹ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. 3-1.

⁵⁰ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. 3-12.

⁵¹ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. 2-2.

⁵² Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. 3-9.

⁵³ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. 3-9.

Using the approved fiscal end strength, the DoD issues the budget proposal and End Strength guidance. Using this guidance HQDA G3 and G1 work closely with HRC in determining the approved strength for each of the branches, known as authorized strength/force structure documents.⁵⁴ These strength documents, although not legally binding, outline the total number of personnel by military occupation specialty that is required to both achieve the mission as well as keep in line with the approved manpower strength authorized by Congress. From the human resource (HR) acquisition perspective, this function must consider the recruitment, attrition rates, and accessions in concert with healthy management of promotions. In conclusion, what is outlined in Title 10 section 523 and what was approved in the NDAA, must be balanced by law. Simply promoting more officers to fill vacancies is illegal.

E. OPERATING STRENGTH VS. TOTAL ARMY STRENGTH

This is where the water begins to become opaque as to the strength of the ACC branches (including SOF community) in the views of HQDA vs. HRC. The prescribed force structure documents are given to HRC, describing how branches should design the force. From the lens of HQDA, their focus is on the “Total Strength” of each branch, which is the authorizations plus Transients, Trainees Holdees, and Students (TTHS). Whereas HRC is centered on the Operational Strength, what is available for mission.⁵⁵ Of course, to keep it challenging, there is no set amount of THS provided by HQDA or Congress.⁵⁶ The THS is a calculation created by the HRC G1.

- Total Strength = Operating Strength + TTHS
- Operating Strength = Total Strength – TTHS

In short, the HQDA focuses primarily on the physical numbers of the Total Army whereas HRC will focus on operational strength. Additionally, there is a complex variant in how HQDA will account for officers and NCOs in a promotable status. HQDA does not account for officers in a promotable status as the next higher rank, they focus on only the

⁵⁴ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. 3–13.

⁵⁵ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. 12–3.

⁵⁶ Army War College (US), *How The Army Runs*. 12–3.

current pay grade. Whereas HRC will account for those promotable officers and NCOs as the next higher grade to predict the present and short-term available personnel strength for mission sets. Often, the operational strength of a specific rank is far different than that of the total strength. This is typically seen when accounting for SF captains and junior majors when they are in a THS position. When comparing against authorized structure, branch managers compare operating strength against the total strength with those in THS.⁵⁷ The legal strength limit is often too low in a specific branch and the size of the THS population is often too high which results in a disproportionate imbalance.⁵⁸ If the strength is too low and the THS population is too high, this will result in the branch having more available positions open than HRC can fill with operating strength. When that happens, the force can pay the price and go short of both officers and enlisted.

Based off the Special Forces officer inventory reports of 2020, there is a significant disparity between what HRC sees as a “healthy” Officer pool and that of HQDA.⁵⁹ According to Branch managers at HRC, there is a considerable shortage between Operational Strength and Total Strength.⁶⁰ According to the report, both operational strength and total strength is significantly under manned.⁶¹

F. THE WAY FORWARD

Understanding what governs the total Army end strength is considerably important when discussing talent management of the force. Regarding officer force structure, there is a significant difference between officers in the ACC and officers outlined in subsection b of Section 523, which pertains to coding of material and immaterial positions. The officers in Subsection b are not counted against the total Army composition.

Material positions are those positions that are specific to those specific skills of select military occupational specialties (MOS)/area of concentrations (AOC), an example

⁵⁷ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

⁵⁸ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

⁵⁹ Lowry, “ARSOF Inventory Review CG, USASOC (30 June 2020).”

⁶⁰ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

⁶¹ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

of which is a 13A/Field Artillery Officer or 11A/Infantry Officer. Positions coded as AOC/MOS specific (material), such as a commander of a Field Artillery Unit, can only be fulfilled by the corresponding AOC/MOS officer/enlisted and no other.⁶² In other words, a Field Artillery Officer cannot fulfill positions that have been coded for a medical or Judge Advocate General (JAG) officer. Immaterial positions are positions that can be fulfilled by any officer in the ACC or with general AOC/MOS specifications.⁶³ Positions such as Recruiting command or positions on a Joint Staff are often not AOC/MOS specific and can be typically filled by any officer or soldier in the ACC.⁶⁴ Officers not listed in the ACC (subsection b) are significantly restricted in available immaterial positions, limiting them as to those AOC/MOS positions.⁶⁵ This is a key point when discerning how to classify the SOF branches. If a branch is in the ACC, it may have an officer corps that is greater than its material authorized positions. This ability allows a branch to become more diversified with the flexibility to have a greater number of field grade officers than what was allocated for the branch. However, this ability can also be a crux to a branch structured like SOF that can barely fulfill its material positions let alone its immaterial positions.

The SF CPT/MAJ inventories described previously do not capture how many officers are filling excess positions that are necessary for the SF Groups to operate. As of September 2019, there were only 23 Majors (MAJs) authorized at each of the SF groups, and every single one is manned with over 29 MAJs.⁶⁶ Those excess MAJs are used to fulfill four Global War on Terrorism Planner positions, with the Group Operations Officer (S3) and the ARSOF support cell (ASC) commander positions all being excess. Moreover, these numbers do not capture how many officers and especially CPTs are filling immaterial positions, are in school, or are in training. The special forces groups need six excess SF

⁶² “Immaterial & Personnel Special Reporting Codes,” Uniformed Services University | Center for Deployment Psychology, accessed September 12, 2020, <https://deploymentpsych.org/content/immaterial-personnel-special-reporting-codes>.

⁶³ Department of the Army, *Human Resources Support* FM 1-0 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014), <https://fas.org/irp/DoDdir/army/fm1-0.pdf>.

⁶⁴ “Immaterial & Personnel Special Reporting Codes | Center for Deployment Psychology.”

⁶⁵ “Immaterial & Personnel Special Reporting Codes | Center for Deployment Psychology.”

⁶⁶ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

majors to just make mission with their constantly deployed elements. MAJ Couch, the SF branch manager for Majors reports said: “The SF Groups are at roughly 80 percent fill on CPTs, and we are not filling any of the authorizations outside of the SF Groups. Because SOF groups do not use CPTs to fill the SF CPT positions outside of the SF Groups, they are forced to fill some of the CPT positions with MAJs.”⁶⁷ Moreover, MAJ Couch also revealed that the SF branch has to provide up to 36 excess MAJs at the SF Groups and SWC. Lastly, he pointed out that the officers in advanced schools, and the roughly 65 CPT’s positions throughout the Army, actually equate to approximately 200 positions that are not captured in HRC’s observations.⁶⁸ It is important to note that this does not include officers that serve in the Special Mission Units (SMU’s), or immaterial positions. Again, although the numbers may seem as if the SF Branch is healthy, earnestly, it is significantly undermanned.

As part of the ACC, SF branch is required to fulfill immaterial positions, positions that are not branch specific. Due to a shortage of SF senior captains and majors, SF cannot fulfill such mission requirements. If compared to other combat arms, SF just do not have the officers to spare, let alone fulfill material positions. In comparison, the infantry branch has many more officers than authorizations, so they fill a large amount of immaterial positions.⁶⁹ Infantry has 884 MAJs for 342 positions, which is considered healthy. They have 446 LTCs for 216 authorizations. And they have 1925 CPTs for 1291 authorizations.⁷⁰ Infantry branch and the other combat arms can fill a huge number of immaterial positions because they have so much excess. In theory, if the SOF branch were allocated the ability to promote more captains and majors, the branch could contribute more to immaterial missions. Therefore, the more SF MAJs allotted, the easier it is for the ARSOF branches to help contribute to the rest of the Army. If the SF Branch was put in the noncompetitive category outlined in subsection b of 523, those immaterial positions would be non-existing. In doing so this would take away the opportunity for Officers and

⁶⁷ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

⁶⁸ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

⁶⁹ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

⁷⁰ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief: Human Resources Command.”

NCOs to step away from the high OPTEMPO and develop as diversified leaders, inevitably hindering retention. Again, the SF branch is at a crossroads of personnel talent management.

G. THE SORB AND THE RECRUITING PROCESS

As any person who has been in recruiting knows, meeting the mission requirements of both quantity and quality is extremely difficult but the primary issue is not the quantity, it is the quality. Recruiting is a human domain, full of multifaceted factors that influence a person's decision to commit to joining the service. Although SOF recruiting is parallel to that of recruiting for the conventional force, SOF recruiting poses its own unique challenges and operational environment. As one can imagine, a recruit for the SOF community must possess the qualities and attributes that can withstand the austere training and hostile environments that operators must often face. For SORB recruiters, quality is more pressed upon than quantity.⁷¹

ARSOF recruiting difficulty driven by

- Size of the Army population
- Proportion of the Army qualified (currently < 20%) varies significantly due to qualification factor adjustments
- Proponent selection rate
- Cooperation of candidate's unit in coordination and ensuring prompt arrival to training⁷²

SORB's Mission statement:

- Special Operations Recruiting Battalion (Airborne) conducts *targeted*, *deliberate* and *synchronized* recruiting operations (Awareness Operations, Engagement Operations, and Activation Operations) within the U.S. Army in order to *find*, *prepare*, and *send* the highest volume of qualified and capable in-service Officer and Enlisted Soldiers to the

⁷¹ Tom Brook, "Army Trails Recruiting Goal but Insists Quality Is Top Priority." USA Today: Politics, August 20, 2018. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/04/20/army-lags-slightly-recruiting-goal-search-quality-trumps-quantity/536894002/>.

⁷² Lowry, Curtis, "Recruiting Operations Plan Back Brief: Special Operations Recruiting Battalion (Airborne)." Presented at the SORB: ROP Back Brief, FT Knox, KY, HRC HQ, July 28, 2020.

U.S. Army Special Operations force, the U.S. Army Warrant Officer cohort and the U.S. Army Explosive Ordinance Disposal branch.⁷³

Although it cannot be overstated that the mission requirements for both quantity and quality are difficult to achieve on a yearly basis, the issue of retention supersedes them. Bottom line is that the SOF community is maintained not built. The ability to find, recruit, and pass the strenuous requirements for SF is not something that can be produced quickly. For the past five years, the SORB has either met its officer and enlisted recruitment quota or come close on either side, not putting the tactical level positions at risk.⁷⁴ To accomplish this mission, the SOF community has one of three ways: 18X program (no prior service), Call to Active Duty, or through the SORB for those serving on active duty. As policy stands, there are no past or present mission quota's for prior service officers and very limited quotas for prior service enlisted to come back in for SF, CA and PSYOP. This is an impediment to accessing an available pool of talent as even SOF enlisted Soldiers only sometimes re-enter service on rare occasions. However, there are little to virtually zero ways for a previous SOF officer to re-enter active duty SOF if not already serving in the in-active ready reserve or reserve component.⁷⁵

The 18X (18 Xray) program is a pre-enlistment option for those recruited from the civilian sector. Recruits do not have prior service. This option is a guaranteed way for individuals to attend SFAS. Applicants selected for the 18X program are required to attend basic training, Infantry one Station Unit Training (OSUT), and Airborne training prior to attending the Special Operations Preparation Course (SOPC). In all, the prerequisite training lasts for over six months.⁷⁶ Based on reports from USASOC, recruits who successfully complete the SOPC program have an impressive 70% success rate when compared to those who are randomly recruited from the active component.⁷⁷ Most of the

⁷³ Lowry, "Recruiting Operations Plan Back Brief: Special Operations Recruiting Battalion (Airborne)."

⁷⁴ Lowry, "ARSOF Inventory Review CG, USASOC (30 June 2020)."

⁷⁵ Department of the Army, *Call to Active Duty Program*.

⁷⁶ "Army National Guard—Special Forces—Non-Prior Service Applicants." February 15, 2020. <https://www.nationalguard.com/special-forces-non-prior-service-applicants>.

⁷⁷ Elie Piha, "Army MOS 18X: Inside the Special Forces (SF) Enlistment Option." *Operation Military Kids* (blog), February 7, 2020. <https://www.operationmilitarykids.org/army-mos-18x/>.

Special Forces recruits are from the active duty candidate pool. This program is intended to supplement the SF entry pipeline.⁷⁸ This path does have its faults. Newly qualified SF operators from this program will enter the force young and with zero military experience aside from their training. This method is intended to fulfill the personnel pipeline at the lowest entry level enlisted positions not officers.⁷⁹

The Call to Active Duty (CAD) program is only available to Army Reserve and National Guard Officers and only approved for select MOS/Area of Specialty.⁸⁰ If the CAD program is activated, a CAD Military Personnel Message (MILPER) announces an opportunity for reservists to fulfill a vacancy position on Active Duty/Title 10.⁸¹ CAD MILPER Messages announce eligibility based upon assessed critical shortages of select military occupational specialties (MOS) from given rank and/or year group of officers. Officers that apply for the CAD program must not have any derogatory (DEROG) information in their file, not be subjected to RA Involuntary Separation, not be a two time Non-Select for promotion; in addition, they must complete 20 years of federal service by the age of 62, and maintain the potential to serve at a higher level.⁸²

- As per the CAD MILPER message 20-176, CAD applicants must possess the training and certification for select positions, to be holding the position in the reserves. CAD is not a branch transfer program and only officers associated with certain billets are approved to take advantage of the CAD program.⁸³ Each year will vary and may be revised multiple times throughout the year. This is a significant drawback for the Army Competitive Category branches, such as SF, as they are not approved for the CAD program every FY cycle. Nevertheless, those officers and warrant officers who are approved to take advantage of the CAD program will incur an additional service

⁷⁸ Rod Powers, "How to Enlist in the Army Special Forces." The Balance Careers, July 15, 2019. <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/army-enlisted-job-descriptions-and-qualification-factors-3345943>.

⁷⁹ Piha, "Army MOS 18X."

⁸⁰ *Call to Active Duty Program*. MILPER MESSAGE #20-176. FT Knox, KY, HRC HQ: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2020. <https://www.hrc.army.mil/milper/20-176>.

⁸¹ *Call to Active Duty Program*. MILPER MESSAGE #20-176.

⁸² *Call to Active Duty Program*. MILPER MESSAGE #20-176.

⁸³ *Call to Active Duty Program*. MILPER MESSAGE #20-176.

obligation (ADSO) of three to five years.⁸⁴The average amount of time it takes to process a CAD application is between 3 to 6 months.⁸⁵

This program, at first glance, appears to be a suitable, if not the preferred method of fulfillment of critical personnel shortages. Being that it is pulling from personnel who are still in the service, be it part time. However, there are three issues to this program: time of transfer to active duty, depletion of reserve component, negates prior service officers from joining the active component.

When considering the amount of time it takes for an approved CAD application and the additional time it takes for a new Soldier to arrive on station. Six to eight months of waiting is often not a viable option for branches with higher than average operational tempos and the need for quick replacements. Moreover, the 6–8-month window is assuming the reserve component has granted the conditional release. The conditional release must be approved at each echelon of command up to include the applicant’s State’s/ Component’s adjutant general (TAG).⁸⁶ This is no simple transfer process as there are more delays to the process since the review boards only happen twice a year. In total, it can sometimes take up to 18 months for an applicant to transfer from the reserve component to the active component.⁸⁷

The CAD program is not the ideal solution to fulfill critical vacant skill sets. Unlike the conventional reserve units, the SOF reserve and active components have two separate missions, particularly the Psychological and Civil Affairs components. Since November, 2006, the U.S. reserve component CA and PSYOP units were separated from the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to the U.S. Joint Forces Command

⁸⁴ Call to Active Duty Program. MILPER MESSAGE #20-176.

⁸⁵ Call to Active Duty Program. MILPER MESSAGE #20-176.

⁸⁶ Georgia Army National Guard. *Procedures for Enlisted (M-Day) Conditional Release*. SOP 3–7. Marietta, GA: Georgia Army National Guard, 2017
https://georgiag1.net/sopHub/documents/HR%20SERVICES/SOP%203-7_Conditional%20Release_FOUO%20-%2020200117.pdf.

⁸⁷ Procedures for Enlisted (M-Day) Conditional Release. SOP 3–7. 7.

(JFCOM).⁸⁸ Furthermore, these units were assigned to the U.S. Army Reserve Command (USARC). This “divorce” separated the mission set so that the Reserve component 2d and 7th PSYOP groups would support conventional forces, while the Active Component 4th PSYOP Group could concentrate on support of special operations forces.⁸⁹ If the CAD program was open to those select military specialties, then it would essentially “rob Peter to pay Paul” and thus diminish one’s capability in supporting the other, exacerbating the personnel issue.⁹⁰

The 2019 John C. McCain Act made historical changes to talent management with brevet promotions. The Army brevet program temporarily promotes officers to serve at the next higher rank with matching pay and authority.⁹¹ Title V, Section 503 of the 2019 John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act, is one of several new authorities to provide the Army the flexibility to better manage the Army Talent Management System. However, it is limited to quantity and specific skill sets (see Figure 2 for 2020 Brevet Promotion allocations). For the FY 2020, HQDA approved 770 brevet positions (120 captains, 350 majors, 200 lieutenant colonels, and 100 colonels).⁹² Overall, five were allocated to the Civil Affairs branches, no others to SF or PSYOP.⁹³ This is the first step forward in the new program of talent management.

2019 NDAA, 105–106

- “under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of the military department concerned.” The President will make the appointment “by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.” To receive such an appointment, officers must have a skill that the Army deems in shortage;

⁸⁸ Alfred Paddock, “The 2006 ‘Divorce’ of U.S. Army Reserve and Active Component Psychological Operations Units,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 2, 2012. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-2006-%E2%80%9Cdivorce%E2%80%9D-of-us-army-reserve-and-active-component-psychological-operations-units>.

⁸⁹ Paddock, “The 2006 ‘Divorce’ of U.S. Army Reserve and Active Component Psychological Operations Units.”

⁹⁰ Paddock.

⁹¹ U.S. Army Talent management Task Force. “U.S. Army Brevet Promotion Program.” STAND-TO!, February 14, 2020. <https://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2020/02/14/index.html>.

⁹² Conrad Crane, Jessica Sheets, Michael Lynch, and Shane Reilly, *Temporary Promotions of U.S. Army Officers*, Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center U.S. Army War College, 2019. https://ahec.armywarcollege.edu/documents/Temporary_Promotions_of_U.S._Army_Officers.pdf. 2.

⁹³ U.S. Army Talent management Task Force, “U.S. Army Brevet Promotion Program.”

be in a position designated for a captain, major, lieutenant colonel, or colonel; and have the skills required for the position. The Secretary of the Army determines if those three criteria are met and will convene a board to approve or disapprove the promotion.... “position on the active-duty list or the permanent, probationary, or acting status of the officer so appointed, prejudice the officer in regard to other promotions or appointments, or abridge the rights or benefits of the officer.”⁹⁴

Recommended Critical Position Allocations for Brevet Promotion (21-01 Assignment Cycle)						
	TRADOC	USASOC	ARCYBER	PSYCH OPS	Civil Affairs	USFK
CPT	4	0	1	0	0	0
MAJ	21	0	1	7	5	0
LTC	10	4	0	0	0	0
COL	3	3	0	0	0	1
Total	38	7	2	7	5	1

Shows the 2020 Allocations for Army Brevet Promotions.

Figure 2. FY 2020 Allocations for Brevet Promotion⁹⁵

A form of brevet promotions known as frocking have existed throughout the entire history of the U.S. Army. However, unlike the historical use of brevet promoting or (frocking), the promotion came without a pay increase.⁹⁶ With revision in the 2019 John McCain NDAA, officers may now receive pay along with the rank.⁹⁷ This relative new style of brevet promotions can very well give ARSOF a needed boost of both incentive programs for retention of talent as well as relief for a critical shortage of majors. Using the brevet system, senior captains that have shown potential and talent may be promoted ahead of peers, by their branch, rather than wait on board results.

In a 2017 article from the Army Times titled “Take three years off: Army extends sabbatical program” author Jim Tice explains another system in the military called the

⁹⁴ Crane et al., 1.

⁹⁵ Source: Crane et al., 4.

⁹⁶ Crane et al., 5.

⁹⁷ Crane et al., 7.

Career Intermission Program (CIP). CIP allows all service members the option to transfer out of Active duty and into the Individual Ready Reserve for up to 3 years while maintaining healthcare and on-base privileges. As specified by Congress, career intermission sabbaticals can be no longer than 3 years in length and are available to only 20 officers and 20 enlisted soldiers, while ARSOF Soldiers are prohibited from even from applying. It was thought that when properly leveraged CIP would have the potential to be an unrivaled retention tool to keep talented leaders in. However, unlike the other services the program did not get a strong response in the Army, mostly because the Army leadership was slow to promote it and approve personnel for the program. Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey said, “you don’t want to punish people for doing it, but you don’t necessarily want to sell it, either, because not everybody can do it.” CSM Dailey also said that “you’ve got to think about the morale of the people that stay and the contribution they continue to make.” In contrast the Air force leadership saw the program as a win-win where members can follow another passion until they miss the service and return to active duty with more experience and drive.⁹⁸ The Army’s lackluster support of the CIP is an example of a program that was implemented service wide but lacked the overall support of Army senior leadership to truly add value to the organization on a wide scale.

Lastly, the newest developed area for accessions is the direct appointment to Officer/Warrant. Prior to the changes of the 2019 NDAA, direct commissioning programs were only allotted to the Medical, JAG, or Chaplain corps. Now, branches can make direct commissions to qualified applicants either as a commissioned officer or warrant officer. On July 30, 2020 one of the newest direct commissioned officers was Sergeant First Class (SFC) Waldon W. Jue (now MAJ Jue).⁹⁹ Direct commissioning of NCOs allows the Army to remain competitive and keep talented enlisted personnel from leaving to the private

⁹⁸ Jim Tice, “Take Three Years off: Army Extends Sabbatical Program,” Army Times, August 7, 2017. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2015/07/06/take-three-years-off-army-extends-sabbatical-program>.

⁹⁹ Kyle Rempfer, “Direct Commissions for Army Cyber Officers Finally Gaining Steam, Two-Star Says.” Army Times, August 17, 2020. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/08/17/direct-commissions-for-army-cyber-officers-finally-gaining-steam-two-star-says/>.

sector.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, it allows the Army to bring in officers with no prior service that have desired KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, Abilities). Moreover, the revisions in the NDAA allows branches such as the SF to commission superior performing NCOs (E-7 - E-9) to the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CW2).¹⁰¹ This directive addresses the critical shortage of CW2s experienced in the Special Forces while giving some incentive for retention of those who have consistently demonstrated superior performance and skills.

In the past getting an officer back into the Active component with a break in service, was extremely hard and often approval was denied. However, with the changes made by the 2019 John McCain NDAA paving the way for all branches in the Army to directly commission officers up to the rank of O-6/Colonel, this resolves the issue of break in service of prior service officers. According to the provisions outlined in the 2019 NDAA, branches have the authority to directly commission prior service officers and place either on active duty or the reserves.¹⁰² This ability will provide great flexibility and force management for those that wish to reenter the service and has great applicability for use in a boomerang Soldier policy. Army Directive 2019–27 specifically states, “credit for prior service as a commissioned officer (except as a commissioned warrant officer) will be awarded for previous commissioned service performed in any Military Service.”¹⁰³ This program will not replace the CAD program but rather compliments it by providing a method for those who have completely removed themselves from service. This policy change has helped in paving the way for acceptance of a boomerang Soldier policy.

¹⁰⁰ Rempfer, “Direct Commissions for Army Cyber Officers Finally Gaining Steam.”

¹⁰¹ Gary Brito, “Direct Appointment of a Noncommissioned Officer to Chief Warrant Officer 2.” Stand To! The Official Focus of the U.S. Army, August 28, 2020. <https://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2020/08/28/>.

¹⁰² John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act.

¹⁰³ Ryan McCarthy, “ARN19240_AD2019-27_Web_Final.Pdf.” Official memorandum, Secretary of the Army, 2019. https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN19240_AD2019-27_Web_Final.pdf.

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III. BOOMERANG EMPLOYEE

The civilian sector has a unique term for individuals who departed a business and then returned to work in brand-new or enlarged roles. They are known as boomerang employees or boomerangs, and for this case study we use the phrase boomerang Soldiers. The term boomerang was invented to classify high performing alumni that are either deliberately targeted and re-hired, or individuals that return voluntarily following some absence from the organization. Steve Jobs from Apple and Howard Schultz of Starbucks are but a few of the most prominent individuals who were once boomerang employees that returned to their former employers and added great value to the organization.¹⁰⁴

This chapter will seek to further define and analyze Special Operation Forces (SOF) retention and recruiting strategies in respect to recruiting those Soldiers from Special Forces (SF), Psychological Operations (PO) and Civil Affairs (CA) that decide to join the civilian sector. We will analyze the benefits and limitations of this prior service recruitment strategy through the lens of comparison. By comparing and analyzing the re-hiring policies of the civilian business world in contrast to SOF, we will be able to discern applicable and non-applicable civilian sector policies. There is much that the Army can learn from the ever-adaptive policies of human resources in the business sector. The regular SOF methods of recruiting from the civilian sector for lower enlisted, from the military at the E-4 to E-6 level and O-2 level for officers is well studied. However, this relatively underutilized and often tertiary former service recruitment option needs further analysis for today's challenging recruiting environment where employee trust in the employer is ever decreasing.

The critical reason for this comparison study is to identify what applicable policies the SOF and even the Army at large can learn from the civilian sector about different talent management techniques and strategies that solve the problem of innovative talent recruitment. While the upward trend of hiring of boomerangs is growing in the civilian business sector, the U.S. Army has not focused considerable resources on this effort. The

¹⁰⁴ Caraher, *The Boomerang Principle*, xx.

prior service recruitment policies of SOF as described in Chapter II follow the same guidelines as the regular Army. Basically, Soldiers that volunteer to separate from service can join the Army National Guard (ARNG), the United States Army Reserve (USAR), Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) or the civilian/government sector.¹⁰⁵ Soldiers of good standing have about a year to rejoin SOF after they have separated. If they choose to rejoin after that time, the amount of paperwork and waivers needed is staggering. Overall, there is not enough research into why prior service recruitment is a more viable option in a more fiscally constrained future, and this case study will help to fill in those gaps. In contrast to the military's lengthy yet, standard policies, the civilian sector has a varied concoction of boomerang policies depending on where you work. This varied concoction is good because it allows their human resource managers maximum flexibility in a relatively short time so that issues in manning can be addressed instantaneously. The downside, though, is that often employees do not even know what policies their employer supports. Overall, SOF can learn a lot from diverse business sector policies that show how to best tap into the overlooked pool of potential boomerang soldiers.

The objectives for this comparison study are to identify the pros and cons of hiring former employees in the business sector and analyze how these would compare to hiring former Soldiers. Additionally, the objective of analyzing how the business sector maintains alumni networks and open-door business cultures to enable rehiring of former employees is of interest. Lastly, this study seeks to offer recommendations to SOF on how traditional methods could be revised according to future dynamic strategies in the rehiring of former Soldiers.¹⁰⁶

A. HIRING FORMER EMPLOYEES

There is much the military can learn from the business sectors changing philosophy on hiring former employees. Over the past decades the ex-employee stigma is slowly eroding with many civilian employers seeing the value added that these boomerang

¹⁰⁵ Department of the Army, *Call to Active Duty Program*.

¹⁰⁶ Kumavat, "Boomerang of Employees: 'The Strategic Way of Filling the Organizational Talent Gap,'" 15.

individuals can bring back to their business. A Workforce Institute survey conducted by Kronos Inc. in 2015 revealed that out of 1,800 human resource (HR) professionals in the civilian sector over 76 percent said they are now much more open to hiring boomerangs than in the years prior.¹⁰⁷ The report further stated that over 900 HR professionals commented that they believed their organization had actual policies against hiring boomerang employees. Additionally, the survey showed that this rising support for boomerangs was not only among civilian sector HR professionals. The acceptance of boomerangs was rising among companies and employees alike with over 40 percent of the workers surveyed saying they would possibly return to a previous employer even though only 15 percent of the workers had ever boomeranged. The boomerang trend among employees is growing not only because workers are more willing to work for prior employers but also because they are actually getting hired at a growing rate as well. Over 85 percent of HR professionals received boomerang job applications in the last year and 40 percent responded that their business hired over half of the boomerang employees who applied.¹⁰⁸ With just over 50 percent of HR professionals and managers surveyed saying that they would give good standing boomerang employees a very high or high priority for rehire explains this increase in hiring boomerangs. Overall, boomerang hiring is becoming a competitive practice for companies to achieve the competitive edge in a tight employee market in hopes of mitigating growing skills gaps.¹⁰⁹ A competitive practice the military has yet to fully recognize and implement.

In the book, *The Boomerang Principle: Inspire Lifetime Loyalty from Your Employees* from 2017, author Lee Caraher explains that many generational misunderstandings among workers and employers have developed over the years, adding further complexity to the many different viewpoints on boomerang employees. He explains further that though experiencing mixed feelings on boomerangs, most of America's older generation business leadership still believe that they as leaders deserve the loyalty of their employees. This trend is changing however as the employee and employer relationship has

¹⁰⁷ Florentine, "7 Reasons to Hire Back the Right Former Employees," 1.

¹⁰⁸ Tucker, "Why Companies Should Stay Connected with Ex-Employees," 3.

¹⁰⁹ Florentine, "7 Reasons to Hire Back the Right Former Employees," 1.

evolved to a more equal playing field. Employees in the twenty first century, and especially Millennials born between 1980–2000, no longer anticipate staying in the same job for 20 or 30 years. Most parents of Millennials are from Generation X born between 1965–1981. These parents have heavily influenced their children to understand that 20–30 year retirement jobs are not as abundant as they once were and the likelihood of lasting that long in any job is doubtful. Additionally, it has been reported that 33 percent of Generation X employees would consider returning to their old employer while Millennials reported a substantial increase at 46 percent. This has often been attributed to Millennials leaving a job too soon because they were disappointed in the mundainness of work.¹¹⁰ Caraher states that this has led many to believe that newer generations are entitled and that no one is loyal anymore. However, this damaging narrative may be inaccurate for maybe Millennials merely trust their employers less and place a lesser amount of importance on tenure.¹¹¹ This trending perspective of lessening loyalty and entitled generations has slowly permeated throughout the military as well. Making many senior leaders averse to changes in policy that accommodate a less loyal or entitled generation of Soldiers.¹¹²

Lee Caraher describes how Baby Boomers are those born between 1946–1964 and grew up in a reward system founded upon long tenure with an organization.¹¹³ He explains how over the years there has been an evolution of trust and loyalty as this system was continuously eroded. The economic tribulations of the 21st century have proven this erosion by the massive amount of job losses in the 2008 economic crash and the even more recent 2020 COVID19 outbreak. Caraher states the loss of trust in employers by employees grew substantially after 2008 and ever since there has been an evolution of loyalty. The Great Recession of 2008, where almost 9 million people were laid off, heavily influenced Baby Boomers, Generation X, and particularly Millennials to be less trusting and less averse to the risks of job hopping. Though businesses still held the control of the paycheck, employees soon realized they were a valuable resource for a company. This realization led

¹¹⁰ Caraher, *The Boomerang Principle*, xxi.

¹¹¹ Caraher, 2.

¹¹² Sicard, “4 Ways To Manage Millennials In The Military—Task & Purpose.”

¹¹³ Caraher, *The Boomerang Principle*, 17.

many Millennials to no longer view an organization as the end state in their careers but rather as a steppingstone. With this change of mindset and ever faster digital age technology, companies soon valued accomplishing tasks efficiently over anything else. This focus on efficiency has led to businesses preferring high performance over long tenure among their employees. This more transactional relationship, simultaneously saves the business money in the form of less raises and benefits.¹¹⁴ The implementation of the blended Retirement system (BRS) and the age old up and out system seems to show that the military is trending toward this more transactional approach seen in the civilian sector.

This trust and loyalty evolution has had profound impacts on the economy and on reshaping the American Dream. To obtain the good life of the American Dream, people have developed a new mindset of work hard and chart your own career path apart from only one organization, for one should not count on them to always reward one's hard work.¹¹⁵ The period of change truly started in the 1980s after businesses started to redetermine the right size of their organization and began firing huge numbers of employees in order to attain better margins and increased investor returns.¹¹⁶ Caraher goes on to clarify that this trend has only increased in the past 40 years as corporate interests focus on short term profit goals rather than the long-term care of their employees. In 2017 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that a typical employee remained at their job for 4.2 years in contrast to 4.6 years in 2014. An even lower trend was displayed in 2014 by Millennials from the 25–34 age group who had an average of only three years at any one job.¹¹⁷ Needless, to say job hopping is a growing trend and is expected to grow further with Generation Z which was born between 2001–2019. Employers and the Army should learn how to mitigate the negative aspects of job hopping and embrace the positive aspects, such as boomerang employment opportunities. The recent exponential growth of the contract economy and job hopping has been largely enabled through various internet job platforms like LinkedIn, GlassDoor and ClearanceJobs, platforms which instantaneously match the

¹¹⁴ Caraher, 15.

¹¹⁵ Caraher, 11.

¹¹⁶ Caraher, 8.

¹¹⁷ Caraher, 6.

skills of employees to employers. Caraher asserts that this job finding technology alone has been a major contributor to waning loyalty trends and shows that the current definition of loyalty to an organization is flawed. Caraher concludes that organizations should redefine loyalty not in terms of a long employment tenure but rather as a lifetime of allegiance irrespective of employment status. Their capability to entice, retain and gain the lifetime loyalty of the most talented workers is becoming one of the most important aspects for a sustainable business model no matter the size of the organization.¹¹⁸ The Army, like businesses should understand that establishing a culture that accepts boomerang return creates a culture to stay for and a culture of value.¹¹⁹

B. MERITS OF HIRING PREVIOUS EMPLOYEES

In the journal article “Employees on the rebound: Extending the careers literature to include boomerang employment” from 2017, author Brian Swider explains that in the past, hiring boomerang employees was restricted. Hiring boomerangs was restricted in order to address immediate needs in relatively lower skilled labor such as farm workers or retail employees with allowances made for extremely high-tech fields like aerospace engineering and corporate finance. He describes that as employee occupations have changed from linear trajectories constricted inside one business to more dynamic and boundaryless paths, there is increased competition for talented individuals. In 2017 it was estimated that up to 20 percent of new hires were boomerangs and that percentage is only expected to increase in the years to come.¹²⁰ Therefore, to truly understand the merits of hiring previous employees one must thoroughly analyze what boomerang employees have to offer an organization.

1. Five Major Reasons to Rehire Former Employees

- ***Cost-effective:*** Boomerang employees already know the ins and outs of the organization and reduce integration and training costs considerably.

¹¹⁸ Caraher, 27.

¹¹⁹ Caraher, 39.

¹²⁰ Swider et al., “Employees on the Rebound,” 890.

They have the highest returns on recruiting investment with greatly reduced costs on training and onboarding. The large professional accounting firm Deloitte reported that in one year it saved \$3.8 million in search fees when it decided to hire more boomerang employees. On average a rehired individual costs the employer only 33 percent the cost of hiring a new employee.¹²¹

- **Known quantity:** A boomerang employees fit in the organization is not a guess, it is based on past performance and interim organization performance. In the Kronos 2015 survey 38 percent of managers said that familiarity of an organization’s culture was the largest reason to hire past employees.¹²² Additionally, a 2008 study revealed that many new job applicants are not sure what a new job position integrally entails or what knowledge, skills, and abilities they will need to be a top performer.¹²³
- **New Vision:** Boomerang employees bring back fresh perspective and new ideas that can strengthen and revitalize operations that have become stagnant or inefficient. They also bring with them social capital derived from interim employment relationships that can ensure interorganizational actions are more efficient.¹²⁴
- **New Skills:** Improved since the last time they worked for the organization the Boomerang employee brings back their original human capital as well as knowledge and lessons learned from outside the organization. These new skills will help defeat ineffective stovepipe mentalities.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Kumavat, “Boomerang of Employees: ‘The Strategic Way of Filling the Organizational Talent Gap,’” 14.

¹²² Florentine, “7 Reasons to Hire Back the Right Former Employees,” 2.

¹²³ Kumavat, “Boomerang of Employees: ‘The Strategic Way of Filling the Organizational Talent Gap,’” 14.

¹²⁴ Somaya and Williamson, “Rethinking the ‘War for Talent,’” 30.

¹²⁵ Westfall, “The Pros & Cons of Rehiring Former Employees | Glassdoor for Employers,” 1.

- **Morale Boost:** Boomerang employees also serve to inform others that they have a good thing going, increasing the positive image of the organization. Bringing back alumni as employees fosters a greater sense of community that is empirically proven to increase retention rates and the positive reputation of an organization.¹²⁶ Additionally, there is often a chain reaction trend that occurs in which bringing back one alumni usually results in the return of multiple alumni. Lastly, studies have shown that returning to a different leader has no discernable effect on a boomerang's morale or performance levels.¹²⁷

In the journal article “Gone Today but here Tomorrow: Extending the Unfolding Model of Turnover to Consider Boomerang Employees” from 2017, the authors Shipp, Furst, Harris and Rosen explain that there are many merits of the boomerang philosophy. They point out that businesses can take advantage of this philosophy in their endless search for the most talented individuals to increase productivity and bring new ideas to the workplace. The war for talent has increased over the years and losing that talent is detrimental to productivity. They show that there is growing empirical evidence that confirms a company with a high turnover rate correlates to lower firm performance due to shortfalls in social capital and the high cost of restoring lost employees.¹²⁸ Thus, it is imperative to give employees a reason to not leave. Nevertheless, the fact is that there are countless reasons why someone may voluntarily or involuntarily leave their place of employment. Therefore, the best way in which an employer can mitigate negative perceptions on separation and negative impacts on organizational performance is to give an employee justification to return. Respect, trust, security, pension, pay, family benefits and opportunities to excel are but a few reasons for someone to return to their old employer.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Apy and Ryckman, “Boomerang Hiring,” 17.

¹²⁷ Swider et al., “Employees on the Rebound,” 892.

¹²⁸ Shipp et al., “Gone Today but Here Tomorrow,” 422.

¹²⁹ “The Effects of Heart Count on Employees Perception on Separation,” 250.

In a published 2015 article titled “7 reasons to hire back the right former employees,” the author Sharon Florentine explains that many businesses fall short in having an effective boomerang strategy in place. She references the 2015 Kronos survey which revealed that 80 percent of employees surveyed responded that where they work does not have a publicized strategy to incentivize returning. Another 64 percent of workers responded that there is also no strategy for maintaining communication after leaving.¹³⁰ The failure of these businesses to publicize their boomerang strategy or keep a relationship with past employees is a lost advantage in an ever-tighter market for talent.

A journal article published in 2017 titled “The effects of heart count on employees’ perception on separation,” the authors Wen, Muthuveloo and Ping challenge the philosophy of head count over heart count. Head count is concerned with numbers of employees and productivity, while heart count is concerned about employee psychological mindsets. Heart count seeks to nurture the loyalty, motivation, belonging and appreciation of employees in an effort to reframe employment as a long term investment. With an open door policy for boomerang employees the article stated that the proactive heart count philosophy can not only bring back great talent but also increases overall employee satisfaction and productivity.¹³¹

In his book, “The boomerang principle: inspire lifetime loyalty from your employees” Lee Caraher coins the term “boomerang principle.” According to Caraher in many ways like the heart count philosophy the “boomerang principle” is a mindset for organizations that believe in allowing and inspiring past employees to return. He states that the faster organizations accept the “boomerang principle” and modify their recruitment strategy for the long game of loyalty, the more strategic advantage they will gain over those that do not. Caraher also notes that an open-door policy is a business mentality that pays dividends with some assessments revealing that the typical Fortune 500 company may well save \$12 million annually if boomerang employees were readily recruited and hired.¹³² The

¹³⁰ Florentine, “7 Reasons to Hire Back the Right Former Employees,” 2.

¹³¹ “The Effects of Heart Count on Employees Perception on Separation,” 250.

¹³² Shipp et al., “Gone Today but Here Tomorrow,” 423.

boomerang principle permeates policies and an organization's culture, therefore, serving to retain great employees in businesses longer than they had planned, while simultaneously producing both efficiency and profit.¹³³ A recent study revealed that career growth among rehired employees is usually on a faster track than a career track of those who pursue an uninterrupted job at one business. Lastly, research shows that boomerangs have greater levels of trust, work ethic and retention rates than individuals that are newly hired, after all they decided to come back.¹³⁴

C. DEMERITS OF HIRING PREVIOUS EMPLOYEES

In the journal article "Employees on the rebound: Extending the careers literature to include boomerang employment," from 2017, the authors Swider, Liu, Harris and Gardner point out that though there are many perks to hiring past employee's there is a dark side to this strategy with many caveats that need exploration. First, they state that organizations must realize that not all prior employees are equal and ought to therefore develop a system that distinguishes favorable and unfavorable applicants. Second, an organization should realize that prior performance and interim performance matters. There are few cases where a mediocre performer will return as a high performer. What a past employee has done in their absence matters since it will show if their personal and professional development have improved or remained stagnant. Lastly, they explain that the reason why they left their employer in the first place matters, as almost all involuntary separations should not be pursued for rehiring.¹³⁵ Whether an employee left voluntarily due to a toxic leader, traumatic event, birth of a child, spousal relocation, divorce, competing job offer, reassignment or even due to reorganization they must each be considered different and vital to contemplate. These are all potent predictors of performance and must be analyzed to ensure the benefits of hiring a boomerang employee are going to be fruitful.¹³⁶

¹³³ Caraher, *The Boomerang Principle*, 2.

¹³⁴ Kurian, "A Study On Boomerang Employees And Talent Retention," 2143.

¹³⁵ Swider et al., "Employees on the Rebound," 900.

¹³⁶ Shipp et al., "Gone Today but Here Tomorrow," 425.

1. **Five Major Reasons NOT to Rehire Former Employees**

- ***Toxic Personality:*** Though talent comes in many forms there are individuals who are very talented but do not make good team players. In fact, these toxic individuals degrade the effectiveness of an organization and were probably never missed after they left.¹³⁷
- ***Inability to Change:*** A former employee may have been a top performer in the past, but likely existing processes, systems and procedures have changed while they were absent.¹³⁸ Therefore, the individual may be too stubborn to change and such individuals will not add to the workplace but only serve to hinder the progression of the organization.
- ***Best Candidate:*** Recruiting a boomerang is cheaper and a known quantity compared to searching the vast labor market. However, just because recruiting a boomerang is cheaper and easier does not mean they are the best candidate for the job. Additionally, employers must be aware of boomerang applicants who apply out of desperation, as this should be a warning sign they may not perform as expected.¹³⁹
- ***Entitled:*** A returning employee may feel entitled to better treatment or other perks since they are likely higher in tenure than most of their surrounding employees. This is an issue that must be considered, especially if they come back in a higher position. This may encourage others to view leaving as a great method of climbing the corporate ladder and create negative feelings or underappreciation among other employees who never left. Lastly, hiring large numbers of past employees can make an organization look desperate.

¹³⁷ Westfall, "The Pros & Cons of Rehiring Former Employees | Glassdoor for Employers," 1.

¹³⁸ Kurian, "A Study On Boomerang Employees And Talent Retention," 2143.

¹³⁹ Westfall, "The Pros & Cons of Rehiring Former Employees | Glassdoor for Employers," 1.

- **Resentments:** There is always the possibility that a rehired boomerang employee holds resentment against an old boss, past workers, or a certain policy. If there is such a history then rehiring this employee needs further analysis as grudges can tear apart an efficient workplace.¹⁴⁰

There are many reasons not to rehire boomerang employees but with mitigation and careful analysis most of these pitfalls can be avoided. Other things that must be considered however, is that many of the positive sides of hiring boomerangs have negative sides as well. A known paradoxical situation is that most boomerangs are statistically proven to be a very low turnover risk the second time around compared to new employees. However, this also means that most boomerangs and especially boomerang Soldiers expect to retire from their newly acquired job.¹⁴¹ Thus, the bad side of boomerangs is that the military would have to pay their retirement and get less service time since they will already have between 5–10 years of service. Additionally, passive talent poached from competitors in the form of a boomerang employee can hurt inter-business relationships.¹⁴² There is always the fact that boomerang employees take the position of a new hire that has never worked for the organization and thus there is lost potential talent in the form of a new innovative perspective.¹⁴³ In the journal article “A Study On Boomerang Employees And Talent Retention,” from 2020, the author Amulya Kurian explains that accepting the boomerang principle haphazardly can also lead to a revolving door where many employees quit to try new job offers only to easily return a few months later. Lastly, the author states that the question of loyalty needs to be considered. If the employee left once, they may leave again and therefore it must be noted if this potential rehire is chronically dissatisfied or has an excessive job-hopping tendency.¹⁴⁴ For Soldiers, the Army’s service obligation system for reentry would solve this issue. Overall, there are many reasons to not hire prior employees, but most concerns can be mitigated with thorough interviews and analysis that is coupled

¹⁴⁰ Westfall, 1.

¹⁴¹ Somaya and Williamson, “Rethinking the ‘War for Talent,’” 32.

¹⁴² Florentine, “7 Reasons to Hire Back the Right Former Employees,” 1.

¹⁴³ Florentine, 1.

¹⁴⁴ Kurian, “A Study On Boomerang Employees And Talent Retention,” 2143.

with a sound boomerang implementation strategy that ensures rehiring of cultural misfits does not happen.

D. VALUE OF ALUMNI NETWORKS

In a 2015 workplace trends survey, 80 percent of workers said that former employers severed all contact after they left and never reached out for them to return.¹⁴⁵ Since then there has been a greater analysis of the boomerang principle by organizations who are starting to see the value behind maintaining communication and bonds between employer and employee. In a 2018 article titled “Why Companies Should Stay Connected with Ex-Employees” the author Geri Tucker points out that legal, accounting and consulting firms like Deloitte, Citigroup and JPMorgan have led the way by creating diverse alumni networks of former employees. With over 20 percent of America’s employees changing jobs each year these businesses have showed great success at managing nurturing networks of former employees and getting them back as boomerangs.¹⁴⁶ Due to this success and the growing job hopping trend, these big business’ policies are being copied by other big businesses like Microsoft, Dell, SAP, Booz Allen Hamilton and Shell Oil Company.¹⁴⁷

The value of alumni is not well utilized in the military, as alumni are perceived as a lost asset soon as they separate from service. This negative mindset devalues alumni for just like in the civilian sector alumni from the military can also assist with brand advocacy, mentorship, development guidance and talent acquisition.¹⁴⁸ Geri Tucker’s article goes on to explain that Deloitte is a great example of what successes can be achieved with an advanced alumni program. Created in 2000 the Deloitte alumni network has over 200,000 U.S. members. In 2017 Deloitte had over 2,800 boomerang employees return to work for Deloitte which was a 32 percent increase over the past year. The company attributed this increase mostly to their advanced centralized alumni program. Though the military has

¹⁴⁵ Florentine, “7 Reasons to Hire Back the Right Former Employees,” 1.

¹⁴⁶ Tucker, “Why Companies Should Stay Connected with Ex-Employees,” 1.

¹⁴⁷ Kumavat, “Boomerang of Employees: ‘The Strategic Way of Filling the Organizational Talent Gap,’” 15.

¹⁴⁸ Tucker, “Why Companies Should Stay Connected with Ex-Employees,” 3.

numerous decentralized and informal Reddit pages, Facebook pages, Twitter pages and a many other unofficial alumni SOF networks, these are a far cry from a truly advanced formal alumni program solely formalized by the organization itself. Leveraging existing decentralized SOF alumni networks for recruitment purposes would never be as successful as a central alumni network formalized by SOF. The existing alumni networks have mostly been organized from the bottom up and serve limited purposes for informing, connecting, and finding people. However, the mere existence of these informalized online alumni networks shows there is interest and a need.

Geri Tuckers article points out that Deloitte's advanced alumni program keeps ex-employees updated on the company and job openings without overwhelming them with information. The cost of the alumni program has grown, but it started out at around \$50,000 and still found cost efficient ways to connect alumni and deliver value. Deloitte ensures the alumni program is briefed while onboarding and not just when employees leave. They keep the page updated, conduct surveys, and ensure to send out reminders with every newsletter to update alumni contact information. Just like the military, Deloitte places high priority on alumni referrals. Additionally, Deloitte modestly awards former employees when they refer new hires that get the job. They track metrics and use of the site and have alumni networking events while using the alumni website to offer gifts and rewards.¹⁴⁹ A lesson the Army can learn is that organizations with strong interconnected alumni networks have discovered that staying in touch with ex-employees creates an enormous opportunity to retain relationships and their goodwill, while, in turn, creating a vast network for potential recruiting applications.¹⁵⁰ In this digital age the Army has failed to realize that a growing number of former Soldiers are open to more involvement. The Veterans of Foreign Wars, unofficial decentralized alumni networks and informal military based social media pages are trying to fill the current gap created by the digital age but there is much more that could be done. Military alumni just like current business sector alumni will be outspoken

¹⁴⁹ Tucker, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Shipp et al., "Gone Today but Here Tomorrow," 423.

advocates, referral partners, contractors, mentors and ultimately employees for a second tour of duty.¹⁵¹

The Army recognizes that being in the military becomes part of a Soldiers lifelong identity, but they fail to see that brand advocacy is not just a business term. Speaking well of the U.S. military and its culture cannot be emphasized enough. Geri Tuckers article expands upon this when he references a recent study done by the online recruiting site, Glassdoor. The business estimated that almost 50 percent of the individuals who write on the site are former employees and tend to write more negative reviews of their former company. However, the Glassdoor study also showed that out of the millions of companies listed on their sites the businesses with formal alumni programs received far more favorable reviews from past employees than businesses without a formal alumni program.¹⁵² Employee and Soldier mobility does not have to be a win or lose battle. Just like in the civilian sector the military may lose the human capital of their former Soldiers, but they can still retain those Soldiers' social capital through an alumni network. Overall, stable communication through an advanced alumni program builds a sense of organizational recognition and constructive behaviors among the alumni that results in productive boomerang employment.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Caraher, *The Boomerang Principle*, xxiv.

¹⁵² Tucker, "Why Companies Should Stay Connected with Ex-Employees," 5.

¹⁵³ Kurian, "A Study On Boomerang Employees And Talent Retention," 2143.

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IV. MILITARY SERVICES HIRING BOOMERANGS

A. MILITARY AVERSION TO RECRUITING BOOMERANGS

The Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force all have similarly non accommodating and rigid policies when it comes to allowing former service members to rejoin. As discussed in Chapter III, there are many demerits in hiring former employees and all of them are applicable to rehiring former Soldiers. However, there are additional underlying reasons why the military does not actively target former Soldiers for rehire. Part of the reasoning is that hiring boomerangs can be biased and political as many senior leaders in the military and business world still hold the antiquated belief that boomerangs are not loyal and do not deserve the effort to be targeted for recruitment since they themselves never left.¹⁵⁴ This is detrimental to positive change since the job realm has shifted with the dwindling number of individuals staying loyal to one organization for life. Furthermore, just because an individual does not leave does not mean they are loyal; they could simply have no other viable alternative.

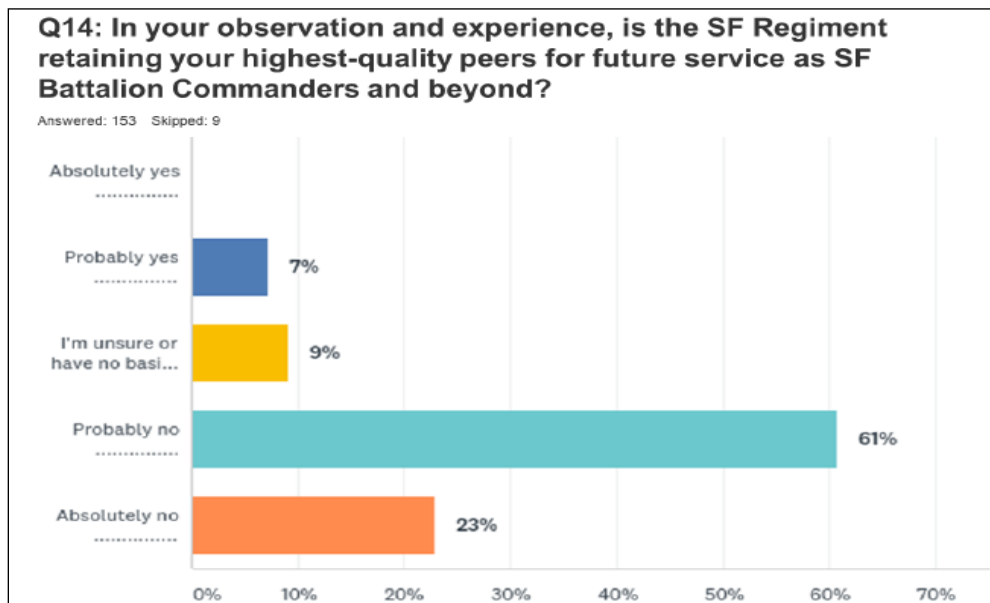
Another argument against boomerang policy enactment is that the individuals who left service are all poor performers. An HRC SF survey of 153 Special Forces Captains in 2019 indicated that the common belief that boomerangs would only be recruitment of low performers is not substantially valid. The survey indicated that 47% of them would most likely depart the military prior to serving in senior leadership positions, and 84% stated that they believed the Regiment was not retaining the highest-quality Captains for future service.¹⁵⁵ In another HRC research article, separations of SF officers was addressed by pointing out that the highest performing “Ahead of Peers” files separated more often than “Slightly Ahead of Peers files.” Additionally, low performing “With Peers and Slightly Behind Peers” files separated only slightly more often than “Ahead of Peers” personnel.”¹⁵⁶ Adding further insight into this argument is the commonly held belief among the majority

¹⁵⁴ Sicard, “4 Ways To Manage Millennials In The Military—Task & Purpose.”

¹⁵⁵ Warner et al., “The Future of U.S. Army Special Forces Talent Management,” 6.

¹⁵⁶ Simmons, “A Special Report on SF Talent Management,” 4.

of officers that often Officer Evaluation Reports and structures do not effectively measure or make use of talent. Figure 3 shows that over 84% of the 153 SF captains agree that the SF Regiment is failing to retain highest quality peers for future service.



Displays a 2019 HRC SF survey question of 153 Special Forces Captains.

Figure 3. FY 2019 HRC SF Survey¹⁵⁷

Another argument against enacting a boomerang policy for SOF is “that if it’s not broke don’t fix it.” Bonuses and other enticing measures are adequately meeting the requirements of SOF retention and recruiting but only for the time being and the fiscal cost is high.¹⁵⁸ The article “Army Talent Management Reform: The Culture Problem” from 2019, by authors Wong and Gerras explains that changing the system makes senior leaders face the issue that the system in which they prospered is flawed and needs improvement. Thus, their response is to categorize a change such as enacting a boomerang policy as merely a corporate fad which risks harming an adequate personnel system. Moreover, enacting a boomerang policy for only SOF goes against the egalitarian culture of the Army.

¹⁵⁷ Source: Simmons, 11.

¹⁵⁸ Asch and USA, *Cash Incentives and Military Enlistment, Attrition, and Reenlistment*, 113.

The Army is by its nature an inclusive culture that strives to treat all equally and is averse to policies that extend special measures for only highly talented individuals.¹⁵⁹

Another issue is the up and out system of the military that promotes talent linearly by year group and does not allow many exceptions for lateral re-entry. Furthermore, military services do not target and recruit former service members to come back in. That is, unless it is through the narrow scope of emergency mechanisms like the CAD program or the limited Prior Service Level Officer (PS LO) program offered by the Airforce. PS LO allows a select number of separated active duty Airforce officers to return by Direct Duty Accession (DDA). The Airforce has a similar Prior Service (PS) program for enlisted ranks as well and both programs require applicants to be under the age of 39, open to possible retrain or reclass and must have exited with an honorable discharge.¹⁶⁰ Limited to 50 applicants per program in 2014 the Airforce annually adjusts quota's based on needs of the Airforce from 250–50 slots a year. It takes four to six months for applicants to be processed and applicants may have to wait a year if retrain or reclass is necessary.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, as with all military services there is no targeted active recruiting measures that takes place once a service member separates.

B. COSTS OF A BOOMERANG SOF SOLDIER

The cost of producing a SOF Officer and a SOF non-commissioned officer are varied and complex. Unlike the Airforce that asked RAND to analyze the cost of a pilot for each of its airframes and came up with \$1.1 million for a C-17 pilot to \$10.9 million for an F-22 pilot there has been no in depth recent study for SOF.¹⁶² Additionally, the study looked at the relative cost-effectiveness of retaining versus accessing Air force pilots and determined that expanding the pilot training pipeline is more costly. Thus, increasing pilot retention and incurring higher special and incentive (S&I) pay costs, as well as the higher personnel cost of a more senior force are still cheaper in the long run. Proving that retaining

¹⁵⁹ Wong and Gerras, "Army Talent Management Reform."

¹⁶⁰ "U.S. Air Force." August 18, 2020. <https://www.airforce.com/how-to-join/process/prior-service>.

¹⁶¹ Stonemetz, "Prior Service Program Open but Strictly Limited."

¹⁶² Mattock et al., *The Relative Cost-Effectiveness of Retaining Versus Accessing Air Force Pilots*, 10.

pilots is more efficient than training hordes of new ones to offset attrition just goes to show that training personnel is costly and makes retention of them fiscally necessary. Unfortunately, the study failed to examine the costs of boomerang pilots and how such recruitment could alleviate the massive funds needed for retention.

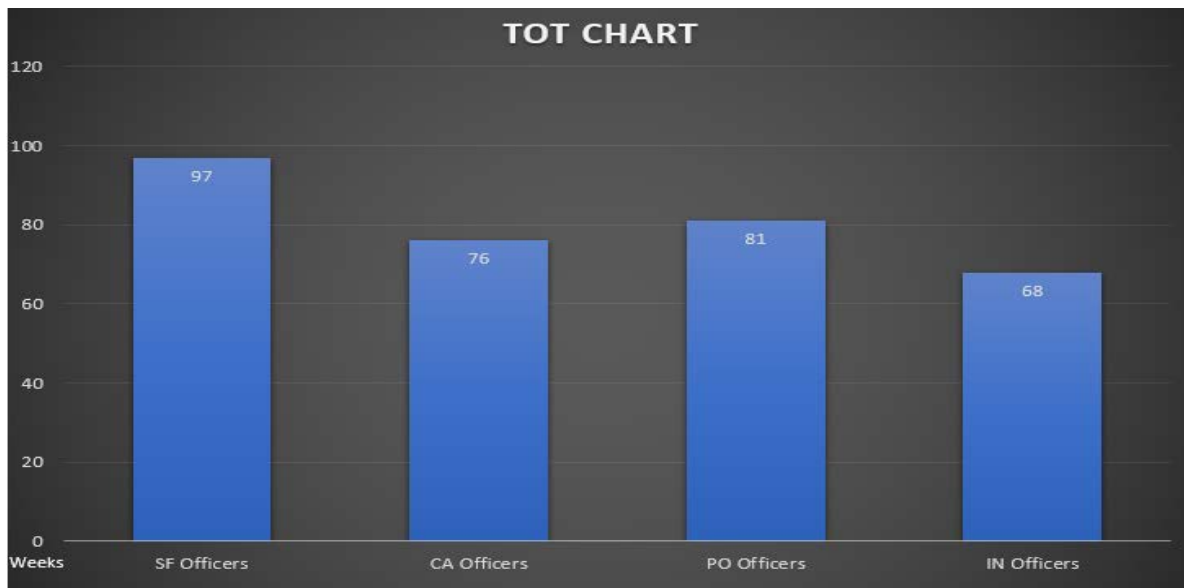
Unlike Airforce pilots that train to operate one highly complex airframe; CA, PO and SF personnel are extremely varied in their skills, specialties, and training. This is especially true for SF Green Berets who are specifically trained to be jacks of all trades. Since an SF Green Beret operator is a member of a team, they are expected to have multiple special skill sets from linguists who are explosive ordnance specialists to medics that are also satellite radio operators. With such varied mixes of training it is virtually impossible to determine the exact cost of SOF personnel and especially an SF operative. In 2017, former Special Forces officer and writer General Howard stated that it “now it costs closer to \$1.5 million” to train an SF operative and “you don’t waste that asset.”¹⁶³ Thus, what policy makers must ask themselves is whether not targeting former SOF for re-hiring is wasting that asset?

C. TOTAL TIME OF TRAINING FOR A SOF OFFICER

Using both qualitative and quantitative data provided from both Human Resources Command (HRC) and Headquarters Department Army G1 (HQDA G1) we performed a total Time of Training comparative analysis. The comparative analysis seeks to show the relationships between total Time of Training (TOT) of conventional Infantry officers and TOT of SOF officers. When total TOT of a SOF Officer is compared to that of the average TOT of a combat arms Infantry (IN) Officer, analysis indicates a higher amount of training for SOF Officers. In this analysis we are not arguing that the Army should retain SOF officers just because a lot of money was spent on their training. Instead we are arguing that the Army should retain SOF personnel through the boomerang program because it avoids the future high costs of shortening promotion timelines and the monetary increases needed for training SOF Officer replacements. Additionally, when the TOT is combined with the course attrition rates of conventional combat arms and SOF, data indicates higher selective

¹⁶³ Haberman, “Special Ops Forces.”

requirements for SOF. Moreover, attrition rates of the two groups indicate a higher attrition of SOF Officers when compared to the total conventional force. Thus, it is harder to become a SOF officer than an infantry officer due to both attrition rates and higher amounts of selective training. The TOT chart in Figure 4 indicates the resources invested in TOT is highest with SF officers at an average of 97 weeks, PO officers with 81 weeks, CA officers with 76 weeks and last is IN officers at an average of 68 weeks of training.



Shows average cost in Time of Training (TOT) compared to other officer specialties.

Figure 4. Time of Training (TOT) for Different Officer Specialties

Our results showed that SF officers have an average of 30% more training than IN Officers. Results for PO have an average of 18% and CA have 12% more TOT in comparison to IN officers. In sum the SOF community has an average of 20% more total TOT. Additionally, it must be noted that numerous schools where less than 10% of the branch population attended were not included in the TOT due their minor significance on overall results since all branches would see a similarly small increase in weeks trained. The results from the analyzed data help prove our assumptions that average SOF officers have a higher cost in TOT than that of an average IN officer. Additionally, human domain factors have unequal variances between SOF officers and an IN officer since operational tempo,

family, outside employment opportunities, education, financial stability, and career projection differ in many aspects. Lastly, the Total Officer Personnel Management Information System (TOPMIS) data pull for TOT is dependent on how accurate Officer Record Briefs (ORB) have been updated as officers who are not up for promotion usually do not update their ORB to reflect training completed

Data used for this model was pulled from the U.S. Army personnel management data base and TOPMIS data base. The sample size of SF CPTs we were able to pull data for was 954 out of 1017 SF CPT's, 587 out of 646 CA CPTs, 267 out 293 PO CPTs and 1753 out 1918 IN CPTs. The data used for the two independent variables TOT and course attrition rates reflected officer year groups, 2012–2015. This data only reflects quantifiable measurements of only two variables, further research into average time in dwell time, combat time, and number of dependents would best be used for a refined approach to this model. Measurement of the human domain for these year groups, and Captains Career Course (CCC) length was near impossible due to the lack of data available for all branches measured. Additionally, data extracted from TOPMIS may not have reflected precision measurements of each individual officer if their ORB was not updated and was therefore limited. Moreover, the branch qualification codes for courses and their lengths often changed throughout the given years which further restricted accurate data analysis.

It is assumed that those who pass the strenuous course requirements of SOF, particularly SF, have a more qualitative assumption of cost into their career. Concluding data analysis, the overall impact of TOT was corroborated by Rand Research that came up with similar SF TOT results.¹⁶⁴ Overall, the data shows conclusively that more time and therefore resources are put into the training of SOF officers than in a regular combat infantry branch officer, mostly attributable to the many required months of the three lengthy qualification courses for each branch.¹⁶⁵ Though further study and data collection are required to meet the relevance needed for legislative and policy changes in recruitment and retention of the SOF community. This data analysis shows that SOF officers are

¹⁶⁴ Asch et al., *Assessing Retention and Special and Incentive Pays for Army and Navy Commissioned Officers in the Special Operations Forces*, 2019, 47.

¹⁶⁵ Asch et al., 44.

costlier and more time intensive to create than most other officer branches. Therefore, recruiting former SOF personnel back into service has high future value and is worth pursuing.

D. BOOMERANG SELECTION AND BUILDING THE SYSTEM

To build a boomerang Soldier system that could be enacted as policy does not require congressional approval. What would be required is a decision at the upper echelons of military leadership since a boomerang policy approval would go through the same approval as programs like CAD, CIP, and Brevet. The tools and framework needed for boomerang policy implementation are already available, except for the centralized alumni network. Currently there are tools and systems the Army has in place that could help recruiters decide what boomerangs should be rehired. One tool is the Recruit Market Information System (RMIS), used by recruiters that shows a Soldiers Prior Service Military Address File (PSMAF) that identifies individuals who have separated from the Active and Reserve Components within the last three years and are considered open for recruiting. These potential boomerang Soldiers are categorized as not receiving retired pay, not currently in a Reserve Component and exited with a general or honorable discharge. With such tools and systems in place the activation of boomerang recruiting policies could begin in only a short period of time. Additionally, these tools are advancing even further in their capabilities as they become linked to other initiatives like the update to the DD Form 214. The update to DD Form 214 service member separation will ensure data is accurate and accessible by veterans and other government agencies electronically. This is an excellent step as this form is well-established and remains the authoritative document to verify veteran status.¹⁶⁶ The updating of DD Form 214 allows better information to encompass a boomerang rehire and would be absolutely crucial to creating a better system in which to rehire former soldiers. The new form will enhance the focus on the section “separation information” which is pivotal for determining whether someone should be let back in for service. Recruiters would be able to use a database of these forms to determine the actual size of the boomerang soldier recruitment pool. Furthermore, the Army has enacted the

¹⁶⁶ Schwille et al., “Service Member Separation,” x.

Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES) which focuses on retention. This more detailed survey tool not only asks service members why they leave service but also asks randomly selected service members why they continue their honorable service.¹⁶⁷ Advancements in surveying tools and DD Form 214 documentation efforts will be pivotal to ascertaining the best ways in which to target future boomerang soldiers.

¹⁶⁷ Dillard, "The Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES)."

V. EFFECTS OF THE BLENDED RETIREMENT SYSTEM

In a 2019 RAND research report titled “Setting Military Compensation to Support Recruitment, Retention, and Performance,” the author Beth Asch explains how military compensation through pay and retirement is the most straightforward way in which the country identifies and reimburses Soldiers for their military service. The report goes on to say that unlike compensation in the civilian sector, the role of military compensation and retirement is as a strategic human resource tool.¹⁶⁸ In short, military retirement pay is an earned reward as well as an incentive for Soldiers to end their service. Civilian businesses do not have lateral entry constraints like the military, which must train from the bottom up and thus is not overly concerned with older employee turnover. The military needs older employee turnover to ensure promotion opportunities for younger employees. Thus, military retirement pay is mainly a tool to manage the flow of personnel rather than the civilian sectors version of a tax-sheltered savings plan.¹⁶⁹ Realizing that military retirement pay is mainly used as a separation function is often lost on policy makers and politicians who have often recommended the military copy the civilian sector model. However, a civilian sector model of no benefits until age 60, except for those few Soldiers who finish a 30-year career, has been statistically shown to radically decrease retention rates to unsustainable levels. To counteract such a decrease active duty pay would have to substantially increase and involuntary separation would become a widespread practice so as to control personnel numbers.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, a strictly civilian modeled retirement plan for the military would prove unsuccessful in many areas and that is why the new system is a hybrid of both the old legacy system and facets of the civilian retirement model.

A. BRS BACKGROUND

The Blended Retirement System (BRS) was created in 2016 and enacted for all new accessions after January 1, 2018. Beth Asch’s report describes how BRS serves as the

¹⁶⁸ Asch, *Setting Military Compensation to Support Recruitment, Retention, and Performance*, 1.

¹⁶⁹ Asch, 27.

¹⁷⁰ Asch, 29.

replacement to the legacy retirement system that was created at the end of WWII. The BRS was created mainly due to the high costs of the legacy system even though it had continuously met the needs of the military for over 70 years. The report points out that opponents of the legacy system said that the excessive cost was unjust to taxpayers, as most active duty military personnel exit service at 45 years old. Exiting with a military retirement paycheck and usually gaining another retirement paycheck 20 years later in the government or civilian sector was an inequity since civilian taxpayers retire around 62–64 years old with only one retirement paycheck. Second, the legacy system was unfair to 87 percent of military personnel that served fewer than 20 years with no retirement check. Additionally, critics argued that the old system was inefficient while a new system like the BRS could alter compensation from the end of a career to earlier in a career which would still give the military the young recruits needed at substantially less cost. Lastly, opponents of the legacy system argued that it was inflexible and offered only one way to leave the military with any real benefits and compensation.¹⁷¹ With BRS the DoD estimated that over 80 percent of active duty military would exit the service with a retirement benefit, while under the legacy system less than 20 percent leave with retirement benefits.¹⁷²

The BRS still includes the defined benefit (DB) from the legacy system but at a 2.0 percent DB multiplier instead of the past 2.5 DB multiplier. It also adds two new elements known as a defined contribution plan (DC), which include the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) and continuation pay (CP). TSP provides a guaranteed contribution for service members and match's up to 5 percent of contributions. This retirement benefit becomes vested after two years in service to ensure service members departing the military leave with some compensation before the 20 years needed under the legacy system. CP acts as a retention incentive much like a bonus that is rewarded to midcareer members who sign an additional service obligation. The key purpose of the CP is to give a retention incentive among service members in their midcareer who will have the decreased 2.0 DB multiplier.¹⁷³ Offsetting

¹⁷¹ Asch, 29.

¹⁷² Asch, 31.

¹⁷³ Asch, Mattock, and Hosek, *The Blended Retirement System*, 1.

these costs of TSP and CP are savings to the government due to lower long-term DB payouts.¹⁷⁴

B. BRS ISSUES

The BRS hybrid system solves many issues of the legacy system with the largest being a less costly retirement system. However, there are potentially unforeseen issues with retention that the BRS has yet to experience and may be ill equipped to overcome. BRS offers current versus deferred compensation and thus the incentive to leave the service early presents a clear issue. Policy makers believe the CP at midcareer point will solve this issue and though reduced to 2.0 percent it still offers a great incentive to stay. However, BRS research fails to consider the increasing trend of job-hopping Millennials, and the expectation that Generation Z will further increase this trend in the years to come. They are mostly basing their assumptions on past Baby Boomers and Generation X since almost all individuals who created BRS fall into these generations. Additionally, there is a rising trend in costly disability pay with 41 percent of servicemembers serving after 2001 receiving disability pay in comparison to 25 percent in past eras. With the medical acceptance of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), disability payouts will continue to be a growing fiscal issue in the years ahead as combat veterans continue to exit service and retire.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, a future regional conflict like Iraq or Afghanistan could serve to increase disability payouts exponentially when coupled with BRS and the assurance that service members do not leave service with no compensation. With some type of compensation and a lower deferred retirement paycheck the newer generation will no longer leave military service early with no compensation, and therefore there is even less incentive to stay.

Recent research has shown that there is mounting evidence that younger service members fail to take advantage of the TSP to its fullest extent and struggle to fully comprehend the new retirement system; only truly realizing that their retirement paycheck at 20 years of service is now less. Additionally, the CP (which is suggested to be about one

¹⁷⁴ Asch, Mattock, and Hosek, xi.

¹⁷⁵ Sisk, "Post-9/11 Vets Have Far Higher Disability Ratings Than Prior Generations."

years' worth of an officers pay) is offered at 8–12 years of service and for many this may be too late in their career to be a large incentive.¹⁷⁶ There is the possibility that substantial amounts of service members will exit before the 8–12 year mark, especially because the TSP cannot even be claimed until they are 59.5 years old. Also, it has been shown that first term service members are more likely to end their service than careerists and that a pay increase for first term personnel will not produce extra performance. Thus, the pay for service members will continue to be low in the beginning of their career and then raise substantially by longevity as well as by rank.¹⁷⁷ This system may work but it will face difficulties with the newer generations that see the benefits of job hopping in the civilian world. In the civilian realm low pay only further incentivizes employee job hopping. Thus, for service members to get out rather than wait years to receive a good paycheck could present a significant retention issue.

This retention issue is a definite possibility if the economy is strong, as Soldiers could leave with some deferred compensation in the form of the TSP and often some form of continuous military disability payment. To compensate for this the military predicts it may have to significantly increase CP pay to meet retention numbers as well as additional S&I pay to sustain officer retention.¹⁷⁸ This enormous CP and S&I pay increases may make the BRS just as costly as the legacy system and depending on the state of the military budget and the economy such financial increases may even be infeasible. Nevertheless, the CP might be too late for many service members who get out in their 5–7 years of service timeframe when they are most marketable to the civilian sector as young talent. Due to this unresolved future issue the military and especially SOF may need to delve into the benefits of hiring boomerang Soldiers. Rehiring prior service members after 1–5 years of break in service may not only be a viable alternative to enormous CP increases but a more fiscally responsible option altogether.

¹⁷⁶ Asch, *Setting Military Compensation to Support Recruitment, Retention, and Performance*, 33.

¹⁷⁷ Asch, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Asch, Mattock, and Hosek, *The Blended Retirement System*, 46.

VI. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Due to the extreme physical and mental requirements for SFAS and SFQC, it is no doubt SF officers are of a higher caliber and are few and far between. According to a report released by Special Operations Command in 2017, the Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) in conjunction with Special Forces Qualification course (SFQC) has among the highest attrition rates in comparison to the sister services of SOF. According to the report, SFAS has 64% attrition for enlisted and 51% for officers. Those who pass SFAS must make it past SFQC which has an attrition rate of 35% for enlisted and 21% for officers. In contrast the Infantry Officer Basic Course (IOBC) had a 71% graduation rate average for the years 2012–2015.

The product produced by SFAS and SFQC (not to mention the additional training) is a unique and superior soldier with special skill sets that is incomparable to conventional forces, let alone immeasurable. Putting a monetary price on such a product is even more difficult. Estimates for a single SF qualified soldier range from a million dollars to two million dollars when only accounting for individual soldier pay, equipment, logistics, and staffing. Calculating the total sum is extremely difficult due to the varying accounts of logistics and benefits paid to each touch point. However, accounting for time of training (TOT) and specific qualifications are far simpler and comprehensible. When using this method, one can clearly visualize the separation between the conventional Soldier and the Soldiers in SOF.

Plagued with manning shortages and a high operational tempo, talent managers for SF are further restrained with the dated up-or-out system. The current shortfall for active component officers and senior enlisted is compounded with the requirement to fulfill billets in conventional headquarters with SF officers. This requirement will further constrain the regiment's talent bench for battalion commanders, substituting competitive positions with available personnel rather than quality. Adding to this predicament is that SF branch talent managers assess that there will be significant shortages of post Intermediate Level Education (ILE) for at least five years.

SOF loses human capital in the form of organizational knowledge, specialized skills and military knowhow when a service member exits the service.¹⁷⁹ Retaining Soldiers in the military is a hard and difficult war for talent that cannot always be won in the first battle. However, it can be won in the second battle if the employee can return. The boomerang principle and heart count philosophy offer a clear policy outline on how skill inventories can be increased and maintained by enticing rehiring policies for returning Soldiers. The demerits and merits of hiring past employees offer a clear correlation for military application as they primarily deal with the inner aspects of human employment that are majorly universal. The American dream is changing, and young Americans are showing increasing trends toward job hopping which will only grow in the years to come. Though Army recruits have trust and loyalty engrained in them they are in constant contact with the civilian world and even though they may not be used to job hopping, they will not be impervious to its trending cultural effects. Current programs focus on recruiting within the reserves and only weaken those elements in the long term while the boomerang policy would recruit from the civilian sector just as the business sectors recruit from the military. This policy just reverses the cycle. The Army's lack of recruitment of former Soldiers is an untapped talent pool and there is exceptional financial and organizational value for those that proactively pursue boomerang employees rather than passively waiting for them to initiate a return.

Regarding BRS effects the military could use cost effective techniques like the CP and TSP to minimize attrition rates. Yet, they may not be enticing enough for the military to meet qualitative and quantitative goals in retention or recruiting if Soldiers follow the same job-hopping trends as displayed in the civilian sector. Though economic effects on boomerang recruitment are inconclusive, research shows that prior service recruitment of Soldiers is a more viable option in a more fiscally constrained future. Overall, a heavily emphasized Army boomerang program is an innovative talent retention mechanism that creates a culture to stay for and a culture of value.¹⁸⁰ A program that the civilian sector is capitalizing on is one that the Army should capitalize on as well.

¹⁷⁹ Somaya and Williamson, "Rethinking the 'War for Talent,'" 29.

¹⁸⁰ Caraher, *The Boomerang Principle*, 39.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. SOF MANNING ISSUE

In comparison to the Army Competitive category (ACC), the SF Branch have a much more significant attrition rate from the force. Based on surveys conducted over the past five years, the attrition rates of the ACC, equate to an average officer loss rate of 8.4%, whereas the SF branch surpassed it by 12.2%. Given the extensive duration in training in conjunction with the sheer high level of selectiveness, losing an SF officer is of significant monetary and informational importance. Excluding the immeasurable human value, it is safe to say that each officer who has made it through these extensive qualifications and an average of three years SOF experience; is worth spending a significant effort to not only maintain the force but get those who get out back.

So begs the question, does ARSOF, particularly the SF branch, have a manning issue at the senior CPT and MAJ level? Again, this depends on the lens one is looking through, HRC or HQDA. The most significant issue boils down to the vast differences between HRC and HQDA regarding the strength of the force, either total strength or operational strength. HQDA is concerned with not overpopulating the force, keeping within the legal limits of the NDAA, while HRC is concerned with those on hand who are or will be in the fight. Until HRC and HQDA can bring those two lenses closer together, a definite answer cannot be given.

A recommended course of action would be to explore making the SF branch a tier 1 Special Missions Unit (SMU), which is controlled by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) of USSSOCOM.¹⁸¹ A decision that would take a congressional approval. Moreover, SOF could provide direct commissioning capability to the branch, allowing branch managers to quickly manage the size of the force and strength of its officer corps. Personnel in Tier 1 units such as the Sea, Air, and Land Forces (SEAL) are not constrained by the promotion requirements as the ARSOF. JSOC units, like special operations aviation, can go in and out of conventional units, not constrained by the limited

¹⁸¹ Happycom, "What's Wrong With SOCOM? | Small Wars Journal."

material and immaterial positions.¹⁸² Currently the ARSOF is considered a Tier 3 unit much like conventional units.¹⁸³ Like Medical, JAG, Cyber corps, and Tier 1 units, SF personnel have specialized skills that are limited to a small population. Such a resource should not be constrained to a traditional up and out system with promotional requirements and constraints of HQDA.

Another possible solution would be to govern the SF branch as a hybrid between the ACC and those restricted in subsection b. Doing so, would require a reduction of the officer force and allocate immaterial positions that specifically compliment career development. However, this does not fix the issue of limited command opportunities SF faces. In comparison, the SF MAJ population (524) is roughly the same size as that in the Armored Branch (537).¹⁸⁴ Currently, there are only 20 Battalion Command opportunities for SF officers versus over 100 for Armored.¹⁸⁵ Allocating more command opportunities or eliminating command as a requirement for career progression for ARSOF officers could possibly encourage retention of talented SF officers as many see a limited opportunity for command and promotion.

B. OFFICIAL ALUMNI PROGRAM

We highly recommend that SOF and one day the Army create an official alumni program for each of its branches so that social capital can be retained and recruiters can utilize it as another recruitment pool for future employment of boomerang Soldiers. In a 2019 Rand Research project about “Social Media and the Army Implications for Outreach and Recruiting” they were able to determine the effectiveness of several online and social media platforms used by the Army. The study focuses on GoArmy.com and the Facebook and Twitter accounts maintained by the Army Marketing and Research Group (AMRG) as these three platforms are primary means of communication and outreach. By analyzing various measures to understand how potential recruits and others are engaging with these

¹⁸² Martinez, “Shaping the IP Community’s Future Vision.”

¹⁸³ SOF, “Tier 3 Military Units.”

¹⁸⁴ Couch, “Special Forces Branch Brief.”

¹⁸⁵ Couch.

platforms they were able to ascertain that GoArmy.com is mostly just an information source. GoArmy's Twitter is a good source for building awareness of Army culture, but the platform is less effective in producing contracts while GoArmy's Facebook page has an audience made up of the general public, soldiers, veterans, military families, and potential recruits.¹⁸⁶ A similar study on building a formal SOF alumni network that could be broken down into formal subsections by group or unit would truly help in its formation and content creation. Furthermore, before creating a formal SOF focused alumni network a study of current unofficial SOF alumni networks should be conducted so that best practices and lessons learned can be incorporated into the newly centralized formal SOF alumni network.

Lastly, since senior captains denote the most- common point of officer talent loss for the SOF branch the effects of COVID-19 in 2021 may be an opportune time to fill the SF shortage of Majors.¹⁸⁷ Many left the service in years prior and may have found that the grass is not greener on the other side as the unemployment rates across the country struggle to decrease. This could serve as a limited time boomerang policy to plus up numbers and see how well the boomerang program could work in a much smaller highly targeted scale.

C. RECOMMENDED BOOMERANG PROGRAM

A boomerang program results in turnover not being an end state. There are boomerangs in the military, but there should be more. Rigidly linear by design the Army employment cycle would transform with a boomerang recruitment strategy into a self-feeding circle for those returning to the service.¹⁸⁸ The Army has made turnover an end state but it does not have to be this way for all Soldiers. Therefore, we highly recommend that the Army implement and maintain an aggressive boomerang program for SOF, one that resembles similar policies from the civilian sector and broken down into three broad stages of implementation.

¹⁸⁶ Wenger et al., *Social Media and the Army*.

¹⁸⁷ Simmons, "A Special Report on SF Talent Management," 3.

¹⁸⁸ Shipp et al., "Gone Today but Here Tomorrow," 426.

1. Initial Stage

In 2016 over 3 million workers left their jobs by choice to fill the record setting 5.9 million jobs that were on the open market. Numerous surveys and exit interviews by the business sector helped businesses address the reasons for the mass exodus and how to mitigate it.¹⁸⁹ To set the stage for implementing a strong boomerang strategy in recruiting and retention for SOF. The military must first focus on thorough exit interviews like DACES to obtain why they are leaving, recommended improvements and what it would take for them to come back. Additionally, the exit interview will convey the military's openness to allowing good standing Soldiers to reenter service later. These exiting Soldiers of good standing should be placed in a boomerang applicant database like the Recruit Market Information System (RMIS), as passive talent that can be harnessed by SOF recruiters. A month before the exit interview the Soldier is sent an email to join the SOF branches alumni network site and during the interview the benefits of this site will be explained.¹⁹⁰

2. Middle Stage

With the advent of behavioral, contextual and geo targeting; organizations like the military can deliver tailored tri-monthly messages that are shaped to the interests of specific individuals to build trust and influence their decision to re-enter military service. The military must not let ego get in the way, for former Soldiers are still valuable assets in the future even after they leave. Therefore, how a Soldier exits the military may be just as crucial in their overall retainment as the way in which they were onboarded. Ensure their exit is orderly and free of overt hindrance as failure to do so will burn a bridge for future recruiters. In addition to a generic tri-monthly newsletter highlighting updates and job opportunities for boomerangs back in service, emphasis will be placed on updating contact info through the alumni site. SOF recruiters should personally reach out annually by email to ask how things are going. This proactive strategy is ideal in opening windows for the

¹⁸⁹ Westfall, "The Pros & Cons of Rehiring Former Employees | Glassdoor for Employers," 2.

¹⁹⁰ Tucker, "Why Companies Should Stay Connected with Ex-Employees," 2.

recruiter to point out positive changes or outline how former soldiers would reintegrate back into the service.¹⁹¹

3. Final Stage

When boomerang Soldiers return the military must ensure that their reintegration is as thorough and painless as possible. Ease them back into the job with a clear customized onboarding workflow and leaders should track interactions to ensure they are being included as a valued member of the team.¹⁹² We highly suggest that the Army conduct a similar Workforce Institute survey similar to what Kronos Inc. performed in 2015 so as to ascertain Soldier, HR and recruiter mindset about boomerang Soldiers. Once enough boomerang soldiers have re-entered service SOF can further investigate restricting boomerang recruiting strategies to a predefined group of prior service Soldiers that proved the most effective. Exit interviews and evaluation reports would be excellent data sources to make boomerang recruitment more efficient.¹⁹³ Thus, separating the elements that differentiate boomerangs from Soldiers that will not return will help human resource analysts target their recruitment and retention efforts.¹⁹⁴

The fact is the grass is not always greener on the other side of the service. Many things can change from when a Soldier exits. Their relationship or child situation may have changed. They may have gotten a mundane civilian job or the job of their dreams but miss the camaraderie of service and feeling like they belong to something bigger than an organization that gives them a high paycheck. Whatever the reasons, setting the stage for boomerangs to know that they can return is a large part of the battle for getting great talent back in service. Lastly, Army senior leaders must support the boomerang policy and alumni program implementation fully if it is to succeed. If not, the program will end up like the CIP, an overall unsuccessful program for the Army since it never received full senior leader support.

¹⁹¹ Westfall, "The Pros & Cons of Rehiring Former Employees | Glassdoor for Employers," 3.

¹⁹² Westfall, 4.

¹⁹³ Kurian, "A Study On Boomerang Employees And Talent Retention," 2143.

¹⁹⁴ Shipp et al., "Gone Today but Here Tomorrow," 423.

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VIII. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A. LIMITATIONS

This study is one of the first military application examinations of boomerang Soldiers but has various limitations. First, our analysis and recommendations were derived from the civilian corporate business sector. Though some corporations employ over 200,000 personnel most businesses do not have the massive personnel size of the U.S. Army which may influence the comparative aspects of this study. Second, the recommended boomerang program and advanced centralized alumni program are merely an outline for such systems to be established as breaking down all the details requires much further refinement. Lastly, a limitation found in all studies is that we, like all others before us, were unable to make precise estimations regarding the actual value proposition of rehiring former employees or former Soldiers. Nevertheless, we were able to discern that in general the hiring of former Soldiers could resemble the civilian sector which averages the cost of a boomerang to be only 33% of a new hire. Overall, hiring a boomerang saves time, money and resources but we were unable to determine the exact amount of cost savings.

B. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Studies on the economic factors affecting boomerang hiring practices is ongoing as current results have proved mixed and inconclusive. There are currently two arguments that are under study. First, is that boomerang hiring is sometimes more common when the economy is slower and unemployment rates are higher because job availability is lower. Thus, boomerang employees are more likely to consider their former employer due to this lack of jobs.¹⁹⁵ The Second argument is that a strong economy with low unemployment shrinks talent pools and makes the prospect of hiring a boomerang employee more attractive.¹⁹⁶ Until conclusive data proves either of these arguments valid in the civilian

¹⁹⁵ Shipp et al., 453.

¹⁹⁶ Kurian, "A Study On Boomerang Employees And Talent Retention," 2141.

sector this issue of economic linked affects to hiring boomerangs will remain a viable point of ongoing study.

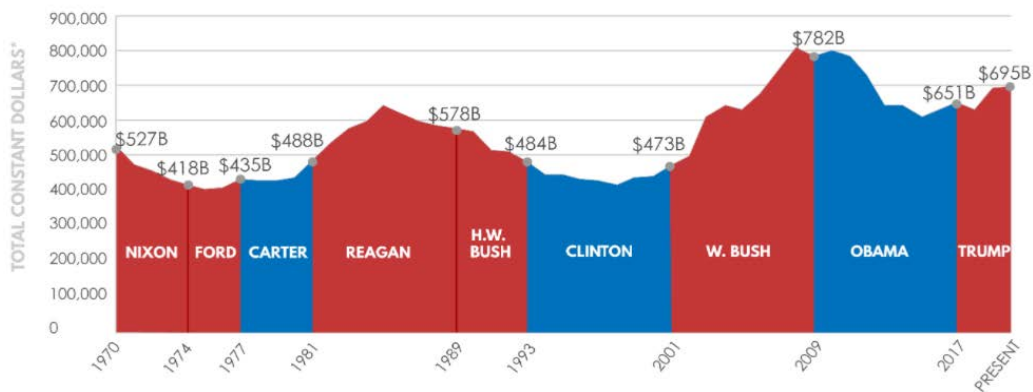
Another economic issue that has boomerang recruitment ties is the defense budget implications of the COVID-19 pandemic that is already having a negative effect on the U.S. economy. With businesses laying off enormous amounts of employees due to financial issues there are immense short- and long-term implications for the DoD budget with possible economic losses of \$11 trillion over the next 10 years. Historical analysis proves that pandemics have widespread macroeconomic effects, and this may put the DoD under increased financial pressure.¹⁹⁷ With this turn of events there are two boomerang opportunities that are slowly presenting themselves. First, is that the willingness of previously separated SOF Soldiers to re-join military service may increase dramatically as the economy struggles. In the business and government sector often, it is the newest employees that are laid off first and some of those laid off will be former SOF Soldiers that separated service for the civilian sector. Even if they end up not getting laid off, fast promotion and incentives may dry up, finding that many of the merits and bonuses of the civilian workforce are no longer available. This is the perfect time in which to target for recruitment back into SOF since the grass on the other side will indeed have turned out not to be greener. Second, the ability of SOF to pay high bonuses and S&I pays for retention may be outside DoD fiscal possibilities in a struggling economy. Thus, it may be much cheaper to recruit formerly separated Soldiers. Paying exhaustively high bonuses to keep them in service or increasing the training pipeline may prove fiscally imprudent. Further research on this would shed light on how this issue could be solved with a boomerang Soldier policy.

Another area that needs further exploration is the applicability of the boomerang program when the DoD faces significant budget cuts in the near future. Whether financial cuts are brought about by COVID-19, Chinese trade wars or the more historically proven actions of presidential elections. With reduced funding for current and future programs, the DoD would have to take preemptive action by also implementing a manpower drawdown

¹⁹⁷ Egel et al., “Defense Budget Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic | RAND.”

plan like in 2012. Such actions as the temporary early retirement authority (TERA) and voluntary separation pay (VSP) can quickly cut numbers of Soldiers but are only temporary mechanisms that are often turned off once numbers are met or a new president is elected and DoD funding is increased.¹⁹⁸ Figure 5 shows that funding rises and drops rather predictably as every presidential election year elevates uncertainty regarding the defense budget, since election outcomes often change policies for DoD funding.¹⁹⁹ Frequently, years after the Army has separated Soldiers they often need increasing numbers only a few years later. The boomerang program would be an ideal financially conservative mechanism in which to get strength numbers back on track. With very little research focusing on the effects of self-imposed attrition and force drawdowns the boomerang program could prove extremely effective in a fiscally conservative future that needs increased troop strength quickly at a reduced cost.²⁰⁰

Historical Department of Defense Budget Authority



Shows the rising and falling trends of DoD funding according to past presidents.

Figure 5. DoD Funding Trends²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Mays, “Military Retirement and Wealth Forecasting during DoD Manpower Drawdown,” 1–7.

¹⁹⁹ Egel et al., “Defense Budget Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic | RAND.”

²⁰⁰ Mays, “Military Retirement and Wealth Forecasting during DoD Manpower Drawdown,” 7.

²⁰¹ Source: DoD FY 2019 Green Book, “DoD Budget Graph 2019.”

Based on recent studies in the business sector it is still debatable whether push factors like overall dissatisfaction usually resulted in alumni while pull factors like personal life issues or job opportunities led to boomerangs. However, a correlation was found that most alumni moved to totally different lines of work or different industries while the majority of boomerangs often moved to a similar industry. Additionally, when the main reason for leaving was another job offer the study revealed that the employee's odds of returning were twice as likely than that of any other employee. The study also revealed that most future alumni left their job after three years while the majority of boomerangs left after one year. Thus, those Soldiers that leave earlier in their career are more likely to come back.²⁰² Lastly, the study showed that minorities are more likely to turn into boomerangs. This could be occurring due to minorities tendency to job hop or because businesses are targeting more prior employees that are minorities.²⁰³ All these findings deserve further study so that the Army can better pinpoint who are going to be the most likely boomerang recruits. Additionally, for boomerang Soldiers there needs to be further research on what the best mechanisms are for enticing boomerangs back to service. Whether it is a decrease in rank and a small ADSO bonus or a decrease in rank to gain more time on an ODA, the right set of incentives are needed and should be different for each individual branch of SOF.

Additional areas identified that need further study are numerous. One crucial area however is how long a possible boomerang employee should be pursued. A phenomenon referred to as the "honeymoon-hangover" effect occurs in many former employees within one year of leaving and taking another job. This effect has spurred many former employees to become boomerangs after just one year, with over 85 percent of boomerangs returning in less than three.²⁰⁴ Based off this civilian sector data it is recommended that SOF recruitment managers focus efforts in the first year after exit and then on possible second and third year boomerangs. Prior employees who returned within a year or two of departure showed few difficulties reintegrating or remembering past knowledge and skills.

²⁰² Shipp et al., "Gone Today but Here Tomorrow," 444.

²⁰³ Shipp et al., 454.

²⁰⁴ Shipp et al., 452.

Boomerangs that returned after three years needed additional training and enhanced reintegration efforts.²⁰⁵ Further research is needed to ascertain how many years a boomerang Soldier can still be pursued with profitable results.

The alumni program is a great asset and tool to enable better boomerang recruiting strategies. However, more research is needed to discern actual quantifiable recruitment numbers expected from formal Army alumni programs. Companies have experimented with networking of former employees through receptions and social network sites and have found that on average these efforts only resulted in 25 percent of all boomerangs hired. While just over 60 percent were rehired through personal contact with a prior boss or manager. This gives credence to one-on-one networking methods as a great boomerang recruiting asset that deserves further study and possible incorporation into future Army boomerang recruiting strategies.²⁰⁶ Also further research is needed in the area of recruitment efforts using behavioral, contextual and geo targeting. Targeting possible boomerang soldier recruits with emails and outreach efforts based upon their interests, current events and economic downturns in certain areas of the country may prove beneficial if further developed.

The Army expects significant recruiting challenges in the years ahead due to its recruiting goal that is double the size of the other services, with only 30 percent of young Americans able to meet service requirements.²⁰⁷ Thus, the last direction for future research is to try and better understand the economic and BRS effects on the future of recruiting and retention so as to better discern correlating effects on a boomerang recruiting program.

²⁰⁵ Swider et al., "Employees on the Rebound," 892.

²⁰⁶ Shipp et al., "Gone Today but Here Tomorrow," 423.

²⁰⁷ Asch, *Setting Military Compensation to Support Recruitment, Retention, and Performance*, 4.

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IX. CONCLUSION

The issues of talent management seem to have plagued the all-volunteer force of the U.S. Army ever since 9/11. General Milley and Army Secretary Mark Esper have argued for better talent management and development of a system that is different than any other in the world.²⁰⁸ The need to retain such quality forces such as that in the SOF branch must not be hindered by outdated policies. Archaic promotion systems, such as the up or out system, have failed to capture the totality of a Soldier's capability and value. This has resulted in high quality Soldiers being forced out without the possibility of reclassification or reassignment. The Army's predictable historical cycle of drawdowns followed by surges in recruitment often result in the wrong people being forced out. Soldiers that possess key attributes and skill sets, such as those in the SOF community, require greater flexibility in their career management. Ties sustained through a formalized alumni program and an implementation of a boomerang Soldier policy can ensure those Soldiers are recruited and ultimately retained back into service.

Companies, businesses, corporations, and firms are created for one thing, and that is to obtain profits to ensure productivity. SOF and the military in general are more complex in their creation and on many other levels, but they can still benefit from innovative talent management strategies like the boomerang philosophy and formal alumni networks being used in the business sector.

The private sector continues to outpace the Army's talent management system through higher pay and innovative recruitment methodologies. Boomerang recruitment of former SOF members would not only enhance the force capability but offer greater flexibility to the enlisted ranks and especially to the officer corps. As the Army pushes for better talent management solutions, it will be continually hindered by strict unchanging policies and perceptions set forth in the past. Until they are altered to better enhance the recruitment of former SOF members, the Army will continue to struggle at maintaining both quantity and quality among the force.

²⁰⁸ Maucione, "Are Some of the Army's Best Soldiers Being Forced out?"

Organizations across America are adopting boomerang employment as a talent management strategy to solve the problem of growing employee mobility. The strategies to communicate and maintain relationships with alumni and future rehires through a formalized alumni network are the foundations of effective boomerang employment.²⁰⁹ Utilizing the communal power of their past and present employees, many organizations are discovering that there is no need to ever say goodbye.²¹⁰ High performance Soldiers like those found in SOF create a competitive edge through specialized training, productivity, quality, innovation and sound decision making.²¹¹ They are unique talent worth pursuing, even after they depart the service.

²⁰⁹ Kurian, "A Study On Boomerang Employees And Talent Retention," 2144.

²¹⁰ Tucker, "Why Companies Should Stay Connected with Ex-Employees," 5.

²¹¹ "The Effects of Heart Count on Employees Perception on Separation," 248.

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