

Army Opms Xxi Affects Careers

CSC 1999

Subject Area – Strategic Issues

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: ARMY OPMS XXI AFFECTS CAREERS

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Thesis: How will the Army Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) XXI enhance the quality of the professional Army officer, ensuring that it develops, promotes, and retains the most competent leaders, capable of executing national military strategy challenges of the early 21st century?

Discussion: The current environment for Army officers began to change with the implementation of three significant legislative acts: Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986; Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act; and Title XI legislation for Active Component support to the Army National Guard and Army Reserves. The drawdown that began in 1990 continued the demise of the current Army OPMS.

The Army identified a number of issues having a negative effect on career expectations of Army officers. The following is a list of issues identified: widespread anxiety about career security, considerable concern about attaining the right assignments to remain competitive, a growing “zero defects” mentality across the force tied to OER inflation, and an extremely high unit operational tempo (OPTEMPO) coupled with declining quality-of-life compensations. The most significant problem facing the Army of the 21st century is that its officers believe that successful command is the only path to promotion at the expense of the more technical skills and experience in functional specialties.

The officer management system must provide a more reasonable opportunity for success for officers concentrating on support and information operations as compared to the more traditional “command track” officers. The 21st Century Army will require more officers with a technical specialty who must spend a great deal more time in that specialty to sustain their proficiency.

Conclusion: OPMS XXI will encourage specialization over the current generalist philosophy that Army culture promotes. OPMS XXI will develop a more cohesive force, better allocate promotion opportunities, and retain the most competent leaders, capable of executing national military strategy challenges of the early 21st century?

OPMS XXI will no longer have field grade officers competing in a single competitive category, primarily evaluated on their ability to perform in the command track. Instead, they will now only compete and be compared with officers in the same career field. The four career fields are: Operations, Information Operations, Institutional Support, and Operational Support.

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The Army developed and implemented a new officer evaluation report (OER) that does not allow inflation. The Chief of Staff, Army approved implementing a new system for Command and Staff College (CSC) where every officer selected for major will attend a resident CSC, eliminating the double count process. The OPMS XXI design will afford each career field a 70% opportunity for selection to LTC, in line with Defense Officer Personnel Management Act guidance and virtually eliminating the belief that command is the only path to promotion.

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Preface

I chose to analyze specific effects that the current Army Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) has had on Army officers' careers compared to the projected impact of recommended changes proposed by the OPMS XXI Task Force.¹ This study touches on past OPMS studies for background, but the main focus is on the current organizational environment for Army officers compared to the OPMS XXI Task Force proposed system corrections. In order to narrow this topic, the study concentrates analysis on field grade officers.

With my background as a personnel management officer for the past 14 years, and my last duty assignment in the Army Personnel Command, I decided to research this topic for professional development in order to enhance my knowledge of current and emerging doctrine in the field. My goal in this research project was to understand how Army OPMS XXI will change the quality of the professional Army officer and whether it develops, promotes, and retains the most competent leaders, capable of executing national military strategy despite the yet unidentified challenges of the early 21st century? I used the case study method to analyze specific problems and proposed changes to the current officer personnel management system. These problems and proposed changes were also identified by the OPMS XXI Task Force.

¹ Based on the recommendations of a Precursor Study Group operating under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, the Chief of Staff, Army, chartered the OPMS XXI Task Force in June 1996 to study and recommend changes to the current OPMS.

I would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Paul Thornton, Ph.D., Deputy Director, OPMS XXI Implementation Office for his subject matter expertise, support, and allowing me access to the OPMS Task Force Historical Files. I would also like to thank my mentors, Colonel (Retired) Eugene Grayson and Doctor Janeen Klinger, for their professional and technical guidance in negotiating this research project resulting in successful report submission.

I. Introduction to a Field Grade Perspective of Army OPMS

It's now time to take a holistic view of OPMS processes and systems as we know them today.

--General Dennis J. Reimer,
Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), June 1996.

The current environment for Army officers began to change with the implementation of three significant legislative acts: Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986; Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act; and Title XI legislation for Active Component support to the Army National Guard and Army Reserves. The drawdown that began in 1990 continued the demise of the current Army Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS). The once ominous Iron Curtain across Europe crumbled with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. That event erased the one major global threat at the center of our grand national strategy, which in turn,

affected our national military strategy. With no major threat to US sovereignty or security interests world-wide, politicians saw little need for a large standing army with a significant portion of its personnel forward deployed. Politicians rationalized that cutting the military budget could be a cost saving measure which determined our current shortage of personnel. The unintended consequence of this fiscal savings has been a reduction in overall readiness rates across the armed services. Figure 1 below, displays a snapshot of Army evolution over the past 15 years to show how it is in 1999. Since the last OPMS study in 1984, the Army has withstood major restructuring. The Active Component force has gone from 18 to 10 divisions, implemented 3 major legislative acts increasing the demand for officers, dealt with sharply declining resources to equip, support, protect, train, and sustain soldiers deployed on an increasing operational tempo (OPTEMPO).

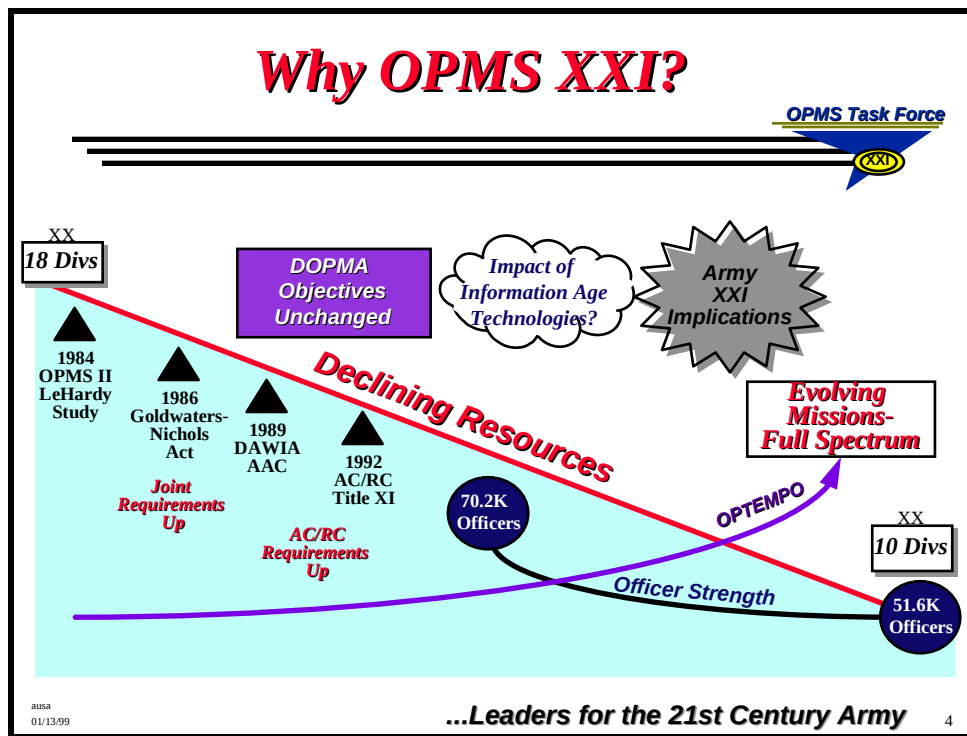


Figure 1. Why OPMS XXI

The Army, in its attempt to bring the officer corps in alignment with new force structure guidance, established voluntary early release and retirement programs (VERRP) as an alternative to the less popular involuntary selective early retirement boards (SERB). Army leaders designed these incentive programs to avoid the very unpopular involuntary separation, known as reduction in force (RIF), boards used after Vietnam. Congress authorized and forced the Army, through law, to maximize the use of voluntary incentives before involuntarily separating any officers. The separation boards of the past would select officers for involuntary release from active duty, causing ill feelings toward the service. The personnel assignment management officers responsible for managing the officers within their branch began calling the officers that were in danger of the RIF, if the voluntary programs failed to reach the required numbers. While some officers that

choose to leave where from the top of their year group, officers primarily comprising the bottom third in quality left the Army because they where not willing to gamble with the less beneficial RIF.²

Figure 2 below, displays the impact on the officers corps when one-third of peers in a year group are removed. The result is greater competition and a smaller margin of error within that year group.

IMPACT OF DOWNSIZING YG'S

TOP THIRD	TOP HALF	TOP HALF
		NEW MIDDLE
MIDDLE THIRD	BOTTOM HALF	THIRD BOTTOM HALF
BOTTOM THIRD		

Figure 2. Impact of Downsizing YG's

With this downsizing method, the high quality officers that remained, who prepared for a “successful” military career envisioning selection for Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) and battalion command, usually resulting in selection for Colonel (COL), found themselves

² OPMS XXI Precursor Study Issue Paper, “Non-Selection for Resident CGSC and its Career

reevaluating their definition of success. This raised a significant problem for the senior officers that now had to qualitatively distinguish between the high caliber officers that remained. The senior raters' problem became how to determine who should get their vote for promotion and who should not. The officers not receiving the highest marks on their evaluation reports could result in non-selection for their next promotion. The dilemma facing senior raters was to inflate, or not to inflate, their profile. Senior raters holding to the intent of the evaluation system by not inflating their evaluations had a negative effect on their officers. The officers that worked hard for the senior rater taking the tough stance, fully qualified and deserving promotion to the next grade, would be perceived as not as good as the officers that worked for senior raters who inflated their reports. When official files appeared before the next promotion board, for the most part officers with inflated reports appeared to have performed better than the officers who where senior rated by the officer who took the tough stance. After questioning and studying board results, a 2 block center of mass OER is not as strong as a 1 block center of mass OER even though the two reports are theoretically equal.³ The result was a gradual inflation to the Army Officer Evaluation System (OES), the basis used to identify those who are best qualified for promotion and schooling, those who should be retained in grade, and those who the Army should separate from service. Selection boards now had a very difficult job trying to qualitatively distinguish officers, resulting in board members seeking some other sort of criteria (discriminators) for non-selection.

Implications" Action Officer: COL Hoffman, 9 April 1996

³ OPMS XXI Precursor Study Issue Paper, "The Prisoner's Dilemma--OER Inflation and the Senior Rater" Action Officer: COL Hoffman, 12 November 1995

A. Joint Vision 2010

Joint Vision 2010 outlines the concept for how the Armed Services will more effectively utilize joint warfighting in support of US grand national strategy in the 21st century. Maintaining an all volunteer force that is leaner and at the same time more capable of defeating unknown enemies will require highly motivated people using the most advanced technologies. America's Total Armed Forces combined with corporate America's technological edge, intends to achieve full spectrum dominance by utilizing each services' unique capabilities in concert. The Army has left the Cold War and its antiquated concepts behind to adopt the digitized superiority of the future. Joint Vision 2010 ties back to the importance of the Goldwater Nichols Act that strengthen joint requirements. Title IV of this Act established the joint officer personnel policy which requires each service to fill positions identified as joint possibly within a combatant command or on the Joint Staff.

B. Army Vision 2010

Army Vision 2010 is the way the Army will make its contribution to the full spectrum dominance of the broader Joint Vision 2010. Army Vision 2010 provides the conceptual template for how the United States Army will channel the vitality and innovation of its soldiers and civilians to leverage technological opportunities and achieve new levels of effectiveness as the land component member of the joint

warfighting team.⁴ The Army's mission today is to fight and win the nation's wars and there is no plan to change that mission in the future. However, how the Army strategists envision executing that mission in 2010 will be a change from the way the Army wages war today. The Army will continue to develop new and improved doctrine and translate that for the research and development teams in order to acquire the best technology to implement the new doctrine for 2010. Weapons technology and information dominance will likely play an ever increasing role in the success of the US Army on the battlefield of the future. To support the Army vision of the future, its leaders today recognize that they also need to put an emphasis on recruiting, developing, and managing officers with the right skills, knowledge, and experience at all levels to keep the organization moving forward to meet those yet unidentified challenges.

Army Vision 2010 is the doctrinal linchpin between Force XXI today and the Army After Next (AAN), the Army's long term vision. The Chief of Staff, Army (CSA) has a team, Force XXI, that is conceptually in 2020 and trying to look back to determine how the Army as an organization creates the path to get from today to 2020. The Force XXI team utilizes the following six imperatives to guide the process- 1) quality people, 2) realistic training, 3) doctrine, 4) leadership development, 5) the right force mix, and 6) modern equipment.⁵ The study of history, recent events, and a vision of the future all validate the need for "muddy boot" soldiers on the ground to support the national military

⁴ Army Vision 2010, US Army, June 1996 pg. 1

⁵ The Army After Next, An interview with Army Chief Of Staff GEN Dennis J Reimer '62 by Tom Carhart '66, Jan/Feb 98

strategy in the AAN.⁶ The OPMS for the 21st century will have to prepare to support that strategy and those soldiers.

II. Historical Background

A. Previous Army OPMS

Prior to a formally recognized program of officer personnel management, the Army expected that a competent officer was so flexible that they could perform about any task that the Army requires of them and do it well. They should be able to perform exceptionally well in their basic branch of assignment but also do well in any other job.

The Army has gone through two revisions to its original philosophy of officer management in recent history. The first was in 1971 and the second in 1984. In 1971, OPMS I identified three tasks that officers can do well. First, to continue to perform exceptionally well in their basic branch of assignment. Second, officers should be able to perform well in branch immaterial jobs. Third, and this is where the major change in

⁶ The most recent event is Operation Desert Storm. While some students of air power believe that strategic bombing of targets will force an opponent to surrender without sending in troops on the ground, I do not agree. Air dominance is critical to supporting the ground elements, but soldiers on the ground will still have to go in to seize and occupy territory from the enemy not removed by bombing.

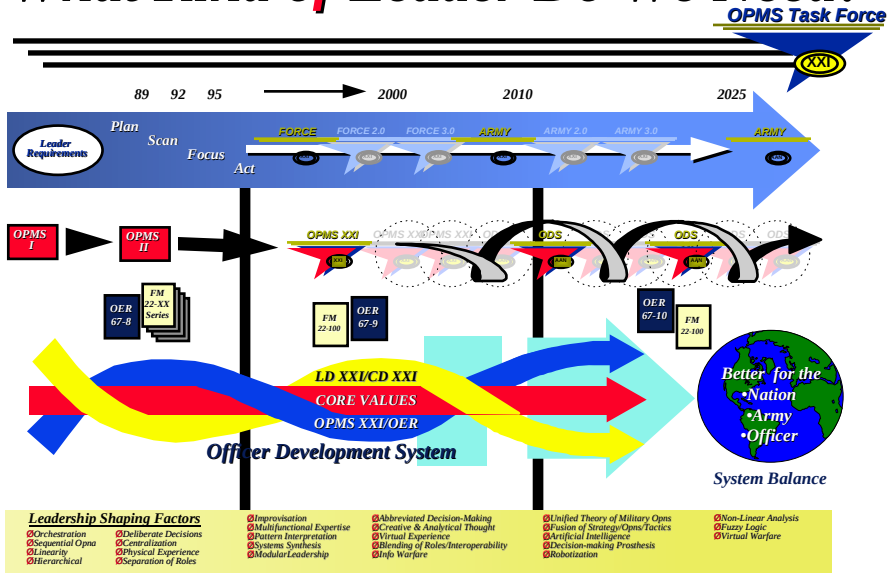
philosophy occurred, officers should be able to perform well in one additional specialty that may either be another branch or an alternate specialty.

In 1984, OPMS II again changed the philosophy of officer management. OPMS II maintained that officers should do three things well: basic branch job, branch immaterial jobs, and jobs in one other specialty. However, this time the second specialty should be a functional area rather than another branch.⁷

The following chart shows how the Army has grown from OPMS I back in 1971 through OPMS II in 1984, incorporated OPMS XXI modifications to the OER and leader development, maintained core values throughout to keep a balanced system that is better for the nation, Army, and officer.

⁷ “Growing an Officer Corps to Lead the Total Army into the 21st Century Briefing.” OPMS Task Force XXI undated.

What Kind of Leader Do We Need?



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...Leaders for the 21st Century Army

3

Figure 3. What Kind of Leader Do We Need

B. 8th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation

The 8th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation report dated 30 June 1997, determined that the armed services spend approximately 50 percent of their annual budget on personnel. However the review did not articulate a strategic vision to guide it. Better guidance for management of human resources is imperative because personnel practices affect everyone through pay, promotion, retention, and retirement. As with any other system, the system manager must have a vision of where the organization is going. A strategic vision will help to identify supporting strategies required to meet the institution's long term goals. The review developed a process for designing human

resource management systems and proposed a structure to approve these systems. The process consists of four steps:⁸

1. specifying the organization's strategic intent
2. identifying the desired outcomes and behaviors that support that strategic intent
3. making strategic choices regarding the fundamental design of the human resource management system
4. developing policies and practices consistent with those strategic choices

The structure to approve and oversee the new human resource strategic vision will be the Defense Human Resources Board, co-chaired by the Under Secretary of Defense (P&R), and the Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

A strategic approach to personnel management should improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Army. By looking into the future, personnel leaders can identify and fill core requirements to ensure they meet the future needs of the Army. This will be the strategic foundation of the new OPMS.

C. Strategic Vision for OPMS

The strategic vision that the Army personnel management leaders must use to identify requirements for the future the CSA outlined in Army Vision 2010 and the Army After Next concept. The personnel management system of the future must consider operational readiness requirements, organizational requirements, and individual officer and their family needs. Reaching a balance among these requirements will provide a formula for determining how to best utilize our nation's greatest resource, its

⁸ OPMS XXI Final Report, Prepared for the Chief of Staff, Army, 9 July 1997

people. The OPMS XXI Task Force developed and defined the following goals relating them to desired characteristics as the basis for future plans:⁹

Better for the Nation. Maintain readiness for today's warfighters, while building tomorrow's warfighting force. Adhere to sensible stewardship of resources and management of Army organizations.

Better for the Army. Remain uncompromising in supporting the tradition of values-based leadership while producing competent officers and highly trained, capable units.

Better for the Officer. Afford all officers challenging and fulfilling career options and reasonable opportunities for success. Provide them with the constructive, realistic feedback, through regular formal and informal counseling and mentoring, that they need to make informed career choices.¹⁰

OPMS XXI Goals and Their Characteristics

- * Demonstrates responsible stewardship of national resources
- * Represents the diverse society it serves
- * Returns quality citizens to the Nation

Better for the Nation

- * Develops officers who personify enduring Army values
- * Integrates the Leader Development System and OPMS
- * Fosters sustained unit excellence
- * Matches operating inventory to authorizations
- * Promotes active component and reserve component interoperability
- * Develops officers who perform effectively in a joint environment
- * Develops motivated, competent, and experienced officers

Better for the Army

- * Establishes credible officer career opportunities
- * Helps officers form realistic expectations of career outcomes

Better for the Officer

D. System Design Criteria

⁹ OPMS XXI Final Report, Prepared for the Chief of Staff, Army, 9 July 1997 pg. x

The CSA approved the below design criteria for OPMS XXI. These criteria, derived from the 12 characteristics, became the benchmarks for the design of OPMS XXI:¹¹

- Enhance the Army's warfighting capability. This criterion requires that majors spend more time in branch-qualifying assignments such as battalion executive or operations officers. Simultaneously, OPMS XXI must reduce turbulence for officers in units.
- Provide all officers with a reasonable opportunity for success. This criterion requires that officers in all career fields have a reasonable--but not necessarily equal--opportunity for promotion.
- Balance grades and skills at the field-grade level. This criterion requires better alignment of authorizations and officer inventory. The objectives are to reduce upward grade substitution, increase levels of fill, and improve the experience levels of colonels serving in branch, functional area, and immaterial-coded positions.

As with any study attempting to assess the uncertainty of the future, one begins with some assumptions. Major assumptions that this Task Force developed that are consistent with my thesis are:

- Aggregate Army force structure and officer requirements, as measured by officer authorizations, will not increase over the next three to five years. Thus, new functional areas and career fields will be created from authorizations that exist today.
- At some future time, an Army-wide realignment of officer authorizations and inventory will occur by grade and skill through initiatives such as the Management of Authorizations by Grade and Skill (MAGS), currently referred to as the Officer Restructuring Initiative (ORI).
- Recommendations for changing DOD policies and congressional laws governing officer management may not be implemented in the near term. However, they may be in the mid term to long term (i.e., 10-20 years).
- Current funding levels for officer professional development and management will continue into the foreseeable future.
- In the near term, officer career progression will continue as an up-or-out system and will comply with DOPMA promotion constraints for time-in-grade (TIG),

¹⁰ I believe that supervisors must document feedback by including in an accurate officer evaluation report (OER) to carry any weight

¹¹ OPMS XXI Final Report, Prepared for the Chief of Staff, Army, 9 July 1997 pg. xi

promotion opportunity and percentages, and career lengths governing separations and retirements.

- Officer continuation patterns will be consistent with those of the pre-drawdown Army of 1988 and 1989.

Two additional assumptions that I would like to add are:

- National Security Strategy published in 1997 will remain valid into the early part of the 21st century. With the Cold War over, there is no rival superpower creating what some call a unipolar world. The only nation expected to rival US dominance in the foreseeable future may be China and that is not expected for 20-30 years. Regional conflicts are expected to continue as we have seen since the demise of the Soviet Union
- People currently are and will remain the Army's greatest asset. It is commonly understood that systems are developed for people to use. Also, as earlier noted, it still requires soldiers on the ground to take and occupy land. This is especially apparent in non-traditional peace keeping missions.

III. Task Force XXI Finds the Case for Change

The Task Force first found indicators that OPMS II was beginning to deteriorate came from the officer corps. Surveys conducted both inside and outside of the Army indicated a number of issues were having a negative effect on career expectations of Army officers. The following is a list of issues identified that I will elaborate on later in the paper: widespread anxiety about career security, considerable concern about attaining the right assignments to remain competitive, a growing "zero defects" mentality across the force tied to OER inflation, a lack of systematic counseling, and an extremely high unit operational tempo (OPTEMPO) coupled with declining quality-of-life compensations. Further, officers were increasingly reporting having too many career requirements and not enough time to do them all justice. High rotational turbulence was,

in their view, beginning to have an adverse affect on developing cohesive and effective units, because officers were cycling through units and other organizations at an extremely fast pace. Finally, these surveys reflected very clearly that officers increasingly believe that the “command track” is virtually the only viable and credible path today for promotion and that skills and experience in functional area specialties count for relatively little in career progression. All of these concerns reflect a growing disillusionment with OPMS and manifest themselves in declining officer commitment to the Service and a slow but steady erosion of officer professionalism.¹²

A. Command and Staff College Selection Quality Cut

After selection to the grade of major (MAJ), an officer must pass a subsequent selection that is the resident command and staff college (CSC) quality cut. To make this selection successfully, an officer must be in the top 50% of their branch and year group. To make it in the top 50% group, an officer must have at least successfully commanded a company as a captain (CPT). Under OPMS II, a successful company command usually means a top block report, or better yet, an above center of mass report since many senior raters had their top block as their center of mass. Successful company command is the initial factor determining whether an officer will have a successful career in the Army (one of the haves), or have to leave the Army before reaching retirement (one of the have nots). The current Army culture equates your ability to succeed with your ability to command. Some would argue, quite successfully, that company command, usually after

¹² OPMS XXI Final Report, Prepared for the Chief of Staff, Army, 9 July 1997 pg. 4-5 retrieved from OPMS XXI Survey.

only seven or eight years of active service, primarily determines the future of your military career. Today, selection for and completion of resident Military Education Level - 4 (MEL-4) education puts you in the command track, required for selection for battalion command, which today is the primary job requirement for selection to the grade of colonel (COL), although there are always exceptions.

Non-selection for resident CSC puts an officer on the staff track and today clearly limits their potential for promotion. These officers must now take the course by correspondence to better their competitiveness for a branch qualifying job to have even a chance for future promotion.

Table 1 below, shows that a non-resident CSC graduate's chances for promotion to LTC are less than half those for the resident graduate. Additionally, attaining the rank of LTC has marked the upper career limit for most officers in this group.

The Army does not have a formal or written personnel policy requiring an officer to attend the resident CSC in order to enter the battalion command track. However, the fact remains former battalion commanders are primarily the officers selected for COL. The selection process has evolved that way throughout generations of reinforcing the Army culture requiring command, command, command. The following table highlights selection rates to LTC, comparing the selection rates for resident CSC compared to non-resident CSC graduates. An officer that does not complete CSC is not eligible for selection to LTC.

Table 1. Selection Rates to LTC

	YG 77 PZ			YG 78 PZ			YG 79 PZ		
	# Select	Tot Pop	Promo %	# Select	Tot Pop	Promo %	# Select	Tot Pop	Promo %
CA NR-CSC	168	491	34%	72	267	27%	151	407	37%
CSA NR-CSC	77	170	45%	31	112	28%	46	140	33%
CSS NR-CSC	78	160	49%	32	138	23%	78	163	48%
Other NR-CSC	61	139	44%	50	88	57%	79	140	56%
Overall NR-CSC	384	960	40%	185	605	31%	354	850	42%
CA Res-CSC	392	418	94%	395	450	88%	283	326	87%
CSA Res-CSC	127	135	94%	112	122	92%	95	109	87%
CSS Res-CSC	135	150	90%	133	155	86%	91	101	90%
Other Res-CSC	71	75	95%	70	76	92%	72	78	92%
Overall Res-CSC	725	778	93%	710	803	88%	541	614	88%
Overall Selection	1109	1738	64%	895	1408	64%	895	1464	61%

Source: OPMS XXI PRECURSOR STUDY GROUP ISSUE PAPER Subject: Non-Selection for Resident CGSC and Its Career Implications Dated 9 Apr 96.

B. Force Structure Imbalance affects Branch Qualification

The drawdown caused a significant imbalance between the force structure authorizations and the available field grade officer population able to fill those authorizations. The Army reduced its size from 18 Active Duty Divisions and 780,000 soldiers in 1989 to only 10 Active Duty Divisions and 480,000 soldiers today.¹³ Officers in the trainee, transient, holdee, and student (TTHS) account are not available to fill authorizations, once these officers are removed from consideration the true difference between authorizations and available officers is apparent. This mostly affects positions coded at the grade of MAJ. The lack of personnel at that grade caused approximately 2,300 authorizations to go unfilled in 1997 and was reduced to just under 900 in 1998. This problem continues to affect both the Army and its officers. Units within the Army

all expect their fair share of field grade officers to fill their authorizations, in order to accomplish their mission. To help determine a unit's fair share, the Total Army Personnel Command (TA PERSCOM) uses Personnel Priority Groups (PPG). The PPG rating goes from 1-9, with PPG 1 units filled at 100 percent and PPG 9 units filled at a much lower level. To further aggravate the situation, there have been requirements placed on the Army such as Title XI Active Component/Reserve Component legislation and Joint/DOD guidance that require the Army to place these positions at PPG 1 or 2 level of fill (100%), compared to the traditional branch qualifying positions in Forces Command (FORSCOM) or Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) units which are typically PPG 3 or 4. The Army has seen a decrease in personnel strength, with an increase in unit OPTEMPO. That phenomenon has trickled down to all units who now must do more with less. At the same time mission demands increase, each individual officer is trying to balance the requirements of a successful career, with the needs of maintaining a personal and family life. The force structure imbalance affects the next quality cut in potential for upward mobility, which is to become branch qualified as a MAJ.

C. Branch Qualification vs. High Rotational Turbulence

The effect that the force structure imbalance has on branch qualification is that branch qualifying jobs (Battalion Executive Officer or Operations Officer) are very few,

¹³ "Developing an Officer Corps to Lead the Total Army into the 21st Century Briefing." OPMS Task Force XXI, 13 Jan 99

and the number of requirements for MAJ are very many. Branch qualification is the next requirement in order to even consider making LTC. Every MAJ, starting at the time they become a promotable CPT, does everything possible in order to position themselves for a branch qualifying job. Graduation from a resident MEL-4 school gives officers an edge because most commanders request officers that already have made that cut, believing that they will receive a higher quality officer. Most divisions have an unwritten policy that gives preference to the resident CSC graduate. Competing for and actually being selected for a branch qualifying job is further restricted for non-resident MEL-4 officers. The PERSCOM assignment policy after CSC is to send those graduates who are not already branch qualified to locations where they will have the greatest opportunity, usually a with troop assignment.

What complicates the field grade officer's competing demands is that there is approximately only a four year window to successfully get into and complete your branch qualification before consideration for LTC. The short window, in conjunction with the shortage of branch qualifying jobs compared to authorized positions available, created the ticket punching philosophy through these key jobs that exists today. The trend identified by assignment officers found that most MAJs are rotating through their branch qualifying jobs only after 12 months in the job, which just happens to be the minimum amount of time required to be considered branch qualified. My experience as the Secretary of the General Staff for the 21st Theater Army Area Command shows that senior leaders, usually the commanding general and chief of staff, monitor these positions to give as many qualified officers as possible the opportunity at branch qualifying

positions, providing them with the opportunity to succeed. This branch qualification requirement is trying to make every MAJ in the Army go through the same battalion command development track even though only 70% will make LTC and less than half of those will get to command a battalion. The fact is that too many MAJs are competing for too few branch qualifying jobs, and there are too many developmental job requirements. Bernard D. Rostker, a noted personnel expert and current [Under Secretary of the Army](#), describes this dynamic below:

High billet throughput lowers the quality of tour experiences. The “dash for the top”...has resulted in limiting opportunities for officers to fully develop needed proficiencies by trying to do too much in too little time.... In order to position top candidates for upper military leadership positions, individuals often serve for limited time in certain assignments to satisfy necessary career milestones. While high billet throughput may afford some individuals a broadened experience base, true expertise and competence can not be achieved except for only basic or elementary tasks.¹⁴

But does this ticket punching requirement have a negative impact on the combat effectiveness of the organization? If the branch qualifying job is identified as a requirement for future success, it is believed to best prepare an officer for the next promotion and equivalent position at that grade. If serving as a battalion executive officer is the best way to prepare to be the best battalion commander the Army can produce, how can serving as the executive officer for only 12 months best prepare you to be a commander for 24 months. Battalion commanders today frequently have to train and transition two or more executive and operations officers during their 24 month tour.

Adding company commander rotation and other key staff positions to this equation further degrades the battalion commander's team building efforts. If battalion commanders spend time training and developing more than one officer for each position, and typically have to spend 80 percent of their time with 20 percent of their problem people throughout the unit, how much time does that leave to develop the organization? Advances in technology will increase the speed and lethality of the future battlefield. To increase the success and survivability on this battlefield, units must train together as a cohesive team, able to execute decisions more as second nature instead of detailed explanations of expectations.¹⁵

D. Selection for Lieutenant Colonel equates to Successful Career

Successful branch qualification, and to an extent the type unit (with troops vs. without troops) that you served in, primarily determine selection or non-selection for LTC. An officer must be a LTC if they intend to continue past 20 years in the Army. Currently, the Army still considers MAJs for selective continuance in order to reach retirement eligibility. The command track under OPMS II gives today's officer the

¹⁴ OPMS XXI Final Report, Prepared for the Chief of Staff, Army, 9 July 1997 pg. 4-13

¹⁵ OPMS XXI Final Report, Prepared for the CSA, 9 July 1997, pg. 4-3 pulled from Army After Next Annual Report, "Army After Next Soldiers and Their Units." Majors Biever and Echevarria support this contention by arguing that the unprecedented speed, complexity, dispersion, and lethality of future military operations will challenge the combat effectiveness of AAN units much more than today. To meet the demands of the future battlefield, AAN units will require (1) a "safety net" of psychological resilience provided by tough, realistic training, effective leadership, and unit cohesion; (2) mature, highly experienced leaders capable of exercising superior intuitive judgment and cognitive flexibility; and (3) a learning-oriented organizational culture that promotes rapid, spontaneous adaptability. Majors Biever and Echevarria's experience and study determined that a significant way to improve unit effectiveness is to require officers to spend greater amounts of time in units, both individually and collectively. In addition, the AAN will require officers to spend a greater amount of time in units than required today.

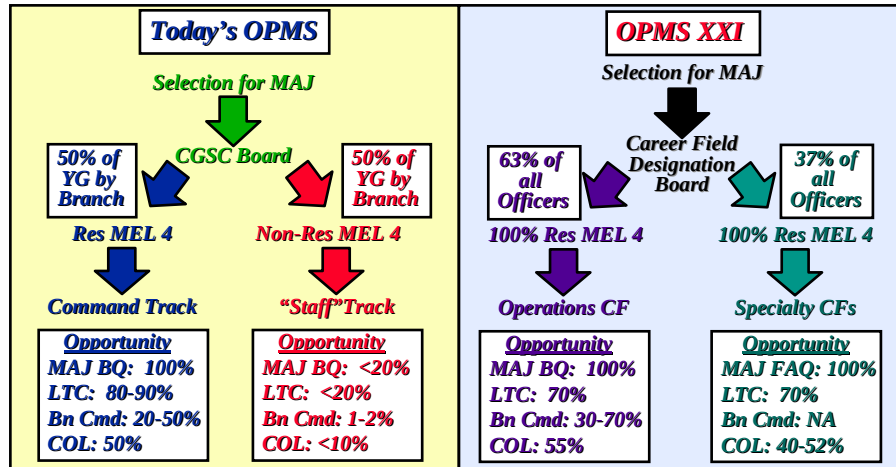
greatest opportunity for a successful career. The command track has provided MAJs 100% opportunity at branch qualifying jobs. While not every officer who gets into a branch qualifying job will succeed in that job, on average, 80-90% of those officers made the LTC selection list and 20-50% of those officers were selected for battalion command. As a general rule at the battalion level, just as the company level, successful battalion commanders are selected for the next grade.

On the other hand, the staff track had less than a 20% chance at getting the branch qualifying jobs. That small number impacts selection for LTC, also with less than a 20% selection rate. Out of the small number of staff track officers selected for LTC, 1-2% of them will be selected for battalion command, most likely off the alternate list. This will provide less than a 10% selection rate for staff track officers to COL. The following chart compares today's OPMS opportunities with OPMS XXI opportunities for promotion, schooling and command. As the reader can see, OPMS XXI provides a wider range of officers better career opportunities.

Keeping Hope Alive

OPMS Task Force

XXI



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5

Figure 4. Keeping Hope Alive

IV. Task Force XXI Recommendations Approved by CSA

A. The New Army of the 21st Century

The Task Force collected the same information presented above and provided it to the CSA. The CSA at the recommendation of his study group concluded that the

strategic direction that the Army must pursue is one of balance. The officer management system must provide a more reasonable opportunity for success for officers concentrating on strategic and information operations that support the Army as compared to the more traditional “command track” officers. The Army of the 21st century will require more officers with a technical specialty who must spend a great deal more time in that specialty to sustain their proficiency. The current system that expects all officers to jump between the command track and functional specialties, and do both better at every level, is an unrealistic expectation if the Army plans to survive the future of warfare. Field grade officers must start to focus in an area that they can best help the Army accomplish its mission in support of national strategy. If the Army sends an officer to graduate school to get an advanced degree in computer technology, that officer should be able to focus in that field for the Army to get the full use of that officer’s talent. That officer should not have to worry about competing for command track jobs for fear of non-selection for their next promotion. Providing a more focused career at this level will be better for the Army by raising the individual technical proficiency through concentration and stabilization, while also improving the organizational effectiveness with continuity and team building.

The study of the direction of future operations shows it leaning toward greater requirements for combat support and combat service support officers to acquire, maintain and sustain the more lethal and technologically advanced weapon systems of the future. The more lethal and technologically advanced weapons systems of the future will require fewer troops on the ground to operate those weapons, but more personnel to support

those weapons. While we cannot see a future without the need for combat arms soldiers, there is a trend that shows the greater the technology, the lesser the need for human operation. A simple example would be a comparison between the number of tanks required in World War II to equal the combat effectiveness of one M1A2 tank today. Or consider the number of soldiers required to operate a Blackhawk helicopter in Vietnam as compared to the Apache today. The future of Army warfare also shows a move away from a combat arms heavy fight on a linear battlefield. The future is pointing to a more mobile, fast reaction force that can move to hot spots around the world in a peacemaking (war), peacekeeping, or humanitarian relief mission. Soldiers today are deployed more frequently to more locations than during the Cold War. The post Cold War missions of the Army require a stronger, smarter, longer, and more flexible support system than ever before.

The proposal to the CSA was a recommendation for all officers to maintain the fundamental values of duty, honor, and courage. All officers will be indoctrinated and developed in the “muddy boots”, warfighting spirit through the rank of CPT. Upon selection for MAJ, the Army would determine which officers would remain in the more traditional operational command track and which officers would branch off into a career field specializing in support, informational and institutional requirements. Field grade officers would no longer compete in a single competitive category, primarily evaluated on their ability to perform in the command track for their next promotion. Instead, they would now only compete and be compared with officers in the same career field for future promotion and schooling.

B. Four Career Fields at the Field Grade Level

The CSA approved the following four career fields (CFs):

1. The Operations (OP) CF is composed of officers directly responsible for employing land forces to fight and win the ground war. This field will have officers from every branch in the Army and two functional areas, Psychological/ Civil Affair Operations and Multifunctional Logistics. They will be the pool of officers responsible for commanding the units that will execute the ground war. This field will comprise the officers that remain in the command track.

2. The Information Operations (IO) CF comprises officers that will identify and respond to the information requirements of the future. This field will have officers that focus on Network Centric Warfare, responsible for gaining and maintaining “information dominance” identified as a requirement in Army Vision 2010 and the AAN. The functional areas in this CF are Informational Systems Engineering, Information Operations, Strategic Intelligence, Space Operations, Public Affairs, Information Systems Management, and Simulations Operations.

3. The Institutional Support (IS) CF comprises officers responsible for the day to day operations required in running the Army as an organization. This field will have officers focused on management, planning, and programming Army resources through

the near, mid, and long term by projecting requirements and developing capabilities. The functional areas are Human Resource Management, Comptroller, US Military Academy Permanent Faculty, Operations Research/Systems Analysis, Force Management, Nuclear Research and Operations and Strategic Plans and Policies.

4. The Operational Support (OS) CF comprises officers responsible for ensuring that the Army maintains its dominance on the battlefield through liaison and acquisition of the most capable systems. This field will have officers assigned throughout the world, focused on coordination, research, development, and integrating systems to support the future force. The functional areas include Foreign Area Officer and the Acquisition Corps.

C. Officer Evaluation Report to Support OPMS XXI

The Army developed a new officer evaluation report (OER) that took effect 1 October 1997. After studying the shortcomings of the previous report and the goals of OPMS XXI, PERSCOM designed the new report to support OPMS XXI. The new report requires raters and senior raters of all Army Competitive Category officers to identify and recommend a career field for the evaluated officer to transition into after selection for MAJ. The rater and senior rater are advised to consider the rated officer's education, background, experience, specialty skills, and current performance when determining their recommendation. A critical component in the success of the OER, and ultimately OPMS XXI, is the required periodic counseling of the rated officer. This was also one of the identified shortcomings of the previous system. If the counseling is done correctly, the new report, along with the recommendation for the future CF, will accurately identify the future path of the rated officer, and the rated officer will have participated in the process. The other OER shortcoming identified as impacting the OPMS was the senior rater inflation of the OER. The new OER will no longer allow a senior rater to establish a dual center of mass between the top block and the second block or allow the senior rater to rate all of their officers in the top block. The OER that goes on an officer's official file will identify an officer as Above Center of Mass (ACOM), Center of Mass (COM), Below Center of Mass-Retain, or Below Center of Mass-Do Not Retain. The new OER will not allow a senior rater to put more than 49% of their officers in the ACOM box. If senior raters do not manage their profile properly by attempting to put more than 49% in the top box, the system will automatically put the rated officer in the COM block and

inform the senior rater that they MISFIRED (ACOM box checks which produced COM labels in the rated officer's official file).

The PERSCOM Senior Rater Update published in Dec 98 identified that they have received and processed 50,000 of the new reports. The new OER ACOM report rate is 29%, showing that most senior raters are aiming for placing no more than 1/3 of their officers in the ACOM box. As of this report, only three senior raters have MISFIRED out of the 5,300 senior raters throughout the Army. Additional analysis/observations of recent selection board results follows:

- All boards (Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, Major, Captain Promotions, Command and Staff College, and Lieutenant Colonel Command) selected some officers with COM reports from the new OES in their file. This is early evidence that COM is not an end to an officer's career.
- All boards non-selected some officers with ACOM reports in their file showing that their entire file was not as good as the new report.
- Perception is that senior rater accountability is restored under new OES.
- Not sufficient OERs in the system yet to prove success, but consensus is building that the new OER is a significant improvement.

The new OES appears to be establishing the foundation for success of OPMS XXI. With credibility restored in the evaluation system, selection boards will now be better able to qualitatively distinguish officers, taking most of the guess work out of trying to interpret who senior raters really determine are best qualified for promotion and schooling, who should be retained in grade, and who should be separated from service.

D. Command and Staff College Attendance

The CSA also approved OPMS XXI recommendation to implement a new system for CSC where every officer selected for MAJ will attend a resident CSC. This will remove the second selection process that all MAJs currently go through. After selection to the grade of MAJ, all officers request and are selected for one of the four new career fields. Only the officers that remain in the command track will comprise the operations career field, with the other officers going into the three other support career fields. After the transition phase is complete, approximately 2/3 of the MAJs will be managed in the OP CF while the remaining 1/3 will be split between the IO, IS, and OS CFs. TRADOC is currently studying how to best implement sending all MAJs to a MEL-4 producing experience. TRADOC is considering whether all MAJs will attend CSC as it is currently configured as a nine month permanent change of station to Fort Leavenworth, whether they will add a correspondence course phase to shorten the resident phase, or whether they will have a different requirement for the command track (OP CF) versus the support track officers in the IO, IS, OS CFs. When the Army implements the 100 percent attendance at CSC, it will not only better level the selection opportunities for LTC, it will continue to give hope of reasonable career success to officers who would have previously given up. All of these officers will now continue to perform at their best because they are all still competitive, having not already been cast into the failure category by non-selection for resident CSC.

E. Branch Qualification in a Single Career Field

Under OPMS XXI, field grade officers will only compete against officers within their designated career field for future promotions and schooling. Only those officers

that remain in the command track will compete for the currently coveted executive officer and operations officer positions. Unlike OPMS II, officers not in the command track (OP CF) will be able to train and focus on the requirements of their new career field and not have competing demands between their basic branch and their functional area. The requirement for greater specialization will be better for the Army and better for the officer. The Army should develop a more technically proficient officer that is able to learn in greater depth, be able to handle the tougher, more complex tasks and retain the required skills demanded in the future for a greater period of time. The benefit of allowing officers to specialize should produce tremendous efficiencies when the Army tries to conceive, develop, test, and implement a major Army system or project over an extended period of time. Most large organizations have experienced the implementation of new systems by project officers, who when asked why the system functioned a certain way, could only say that they didn't know, they didn't know who designed it that way.

The greater specialization should also benefit the unit by having greater unit cohesion and lessen the turbulence of transitioning new officers every 12 to 18 months. The learning curve should not be as frequent a distracter to unit readiness. Commanders commonly understand that it takes most officers six months in a new job to get the requirements down to where they feel reasonably comfortable. In the current system, an officer routinely is just beginning to implement organizational improvements when they move to another job to start the cycle again. Added stability would likely improve the professional relationships of Army officers and the Department of the Army (DA) civilians, who are currently the only continuity in most of the Army's non-tactical

organizations. Currently, there exists a varying degree of animosity between Army personnel and DA civilians because of the Army turnover rate. At times, the officer feels disadvantaged because they are new to an organization and must go to the civilian to learn many of the job requirements not identified in their job description. At the same time, the civilian feels disgruntled because officers come and go, while the civilian work force keeps the organization running. While OPMS XXI is not designed to solve the Army officer and DA civilian ongoing integration challenges, it will help. Lastly, this will also benefit the officer by letting them know early on what the reasonable expectations are for gauging their career success. Officers will not feel as great a need to try and punch all the tickets no longer associated with their career field. Greater unit stability should allow officers and their family more time at installations, easing the stress of moving their house and family every two years. And the greater the stabilization at installations, the greater the savings to the Army permanent change of station budget.

F. Better Selection Opportunities Across Career Fields

Based upon results of the April 1997 Army Officer Survey, it is important to point out that the officer corps believes in the integrity and discipline of the current promotion system. The OPMS Task Force did not recommend changes to the current promotion process, only to expand the number of categories in which officers compete for promotion. Under OPMS II, all officers in the same year group compete against each other for the limited promotion opportunities, no matter what their basic branch or functional area. Under OPMS XXI, after selection for MAJ, officers will only compete for future promotions with officers in their own career field. Each of the four career

fields in OPMS XXI will have similar requirements for promotion. Remember that under OPMS II, if you were not in the command track, your selection potential for LTC was very limited. The OPMS XXI design will afford each career field a 70% opportunity for selection to LTC, in line with Defense Officer Personnel Management Act guidance. Battalion command is now only available to officers in the OP career field. Therefore, officers in the remaining three CFs will no longer be distracted by anticipation or expectation of command selection, or the stigma if not selected.

Everyone within the Army must still recognize that warfighting is still the reason for the Army's existence. With that in mind, the Army culture will continue to recognize and promote a greater number of its leaders from the Operational "Command Track," CF. In the OP CF, about 1/2 will have the opportunity to command a battalion and 1/2 will not. Considering that the OPMS XXI system has not had time to produce any results yet, and the numbers are just estimates that will vary based upon the needs of the Army, the officers in the non-operations CF will have a greater selection rate in the future than do non-former battalion commanders today.

V. Assessment and Conclusions

My intent was to study changes the Army OPMS XXI Task Force recommended to the CSA and assess their impact. My reason for the study was to understand how the new system would affect me professionally as an Army personnel management officer

and personally as an Army officer. After studying the specific areas of field grade officer promotion, CSC, branch qualification, and battalion command, I agree with the task force recommended changes to OPMS II. I further believe that the changes identified will develop a more cohesive force, better allocate promotion opportunities across all CFs, and retain the most competent leaders, capable of executing national military strategy challenges of the early 21st century?

My research showed that Army culture established an unwritten, yet distinct formula for success that primarily focused on command and troop leading time at the expense of operational support specialties. I propose that with a vision of what future warfare may entail, and agreeing that technology will likely play a major role in the success in that warfare, the Army must encourage specialization over the current generalist philosophy. With the current focus on technology and potential for RMA, the Army must invest in an officer corps that is more diverse at the field grade level. It must continue to develop and retain more technical oriented officers. The Army must invest in the future by affording these officers greater opportunities to obtain the successful career benchmark and not feel like a second class citizen. Implementing these changes are a step in the right direction, but it will take years to modify the “Command is the Only Way to Success” culture. While I agree that command, at every level, is the best way to develop leadership skills necessary to lead soldiers into battle, success in future wars will require a total force with a technological edge. A diversified force composed of combat leaders, supported by technically superior systems designed and managed by experts in their field.

Success on the future battlefields will require both warrior and technological dominance. The Army must modify its doctrine and force structure from a World War I, II, Desert Storm model that allowed time to build and flow a heavy force. Instead, the Army of the future must be one that will facilitate dominance in the smaller, rapidly developing models of Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Successfully executing (winning) the nation's taskings (wars) in the 21st century will be a lighter, rapidly deployable force that is respected on the battlefield due to its dominance in information and systems warfare and absolute lethality when required. The Army must remain a "muddy boots, troop leading, warrior" led organization, however, it cannot afford to at the exclusion of the functional expert who is able to conceive, acquire and utilize emerging technologies. As the world becomes more technical, so must the Army. Leaders of the digitized army cannot expect its officers to outperform each other in the command and staff track along with their basic branch and functional specialty. The technology changes too fast today for an officer that the Army already spent two years training to learn robotics, to break away for two years for battalion command. The technical proficiency and knowledge that officer had before command is long gone and possibly obsolete after command.

The drawdown, subsequent budget cuts and a National Command Authority willing to send its shrinking defense forces on more and more missions around the world has made each of the armed services get more serious about joint operations. No longer can nor should any one service expect to go to war alone. Joint training and interoperable services that take advantage of the strength and unique functions and capabilities of each service are the way to success in the future.

Rather than emphasize a single formula for upward career mobility, this new system expands opportunity to a much wider range of career paths... the 21st Century Army will require senior officers who possess a wide range of skills and experiences... OPMS XXI will ensure that officers who have specialized... will have a reasonable opportunity for promotion to rank of colonel.

The Honorable Louis Caldera
The Secretary of the Army
23 Oct 98

Glossary

Active Component/Reserve Component (AC/RC)--Active component officers working in reserve component units as trainers and evaluators. Most commonly used for those positions, which must be filled under either Title VII or Title XI.

Army Acquisition Corps (AAC)--A dedicated corps of acquisition specialists. Complies with Public Law 99-145, the National Defense Authorization Act of 1991, and Public Law 101-50: The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA).

Army Competitive Category (ACC)--Under OPMS, all officers 2LT through COL who are either in one of the 16 basic branches or single-tracked in one of the functional areas, including the Army Acquisition Corps.

Branch--A grouping of officers that comprises an arm or service of the Army in which an officers is commissioned, transferred, trained, developed, and promoted. Most ACC officers hold a single branch designation and may serve repetitive and progressive assignments associated with that branch. (DA PAM 600-3, 8 June 1995; AR 310-25, 21 May 1986). Officers may request a branch transfer at any time in their careers. Special Forces is a unique branch, since officers are not commissioned in it but must volunteer for and successfully complete rigorous additional training prior to entering the branch.

Branch Qualification (BQ)--AR 600-3 outlines for each branch and rank what qualifies an officer for the next grade within that branch. Certain jobs within each branch are considered branch-qualifying jobs, starting at the rank of CPT. Officers must hold these jobs for a specified minimum period (currently 12 months) in order to be considered branch-qualified within their respective branches. Under OPMS XXI/ODS, branch-qualifying jobs are in the Operations Career Field. (OPMS XXI TF)

Branch-Qualified (BQ) Officer--An officer possessing the following qualifications: (1) is technically qualified for a variety, but not necessarily all of the assignments in his branch; (2) is physically qualified to meet the demands of many, but necessarily all, assignments normally expected of officers of his grade and branch; (3) has demonstrated either the ability or the potential to command at an echelon appropriate to his present grade, with the indicated ability to command at the next higher echelon (if a specialist, has demonstrated in his specialty the ability or potential to perform at the next higher echelon); (4) possesses an ability to work for and/or with others; (5) evidences a desire for or has exhibited self-improvement; (6) has the ability to lead; (7) and has successfully completed, or has had sufficient branch assignments to

receive equivalent credit for, branch schools commensurate with grade and years of service. (AR 310-25, 21 May 1986)

Career Field (CF)--A grouping of interrelated branches and functional areas into management categories. (CFDB instructions; OPMS XXI TF)

Career Field Designation Board (CFDB)--A Department of the Army centralized advisory board that selects the best qualified officers for the appropriate career fields to serve their field-grade years of service. Board results are approved by the Chief of Staff of the Army. This board is conducted after the MAJs board, with the results published together.

Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA)--Provides for a single active duty promotion system for all officers(RA and other than RA), thus eliminating the previous dual (AUS/RA or AUS/USAR) system of promotions. The intent is for promotions to be made with fairly uniform promotion timing and opportunity goals, as vacancies occur. It also determines allowable inventory by grade.

Dual Track (under OPMS II)--Describes an officer who is developed and serves in branch and functional area skills during the period of his/her career from the functional area designation until leaving the service. The officer serves in assignments of increasing responsibility in both of these skills. All officers were occasionally assigned to branch-immaterial or combat-arms-immaterial (as appropriate) positions as required to satisfy the needs of the Army.

Officer Development System (ODS)--A human resource management system for officers that is holistic, integrated, and forward-looking in approach. It integrates the separate programs of Leader Development, Character Development, Personnel Management, and Performance Evaluation systems. It is designed to support Army Vision 2010 and continues to change over time as the strategic environment changes. It incorporates a feedback loop and a cyclic review and update process. (OPMS XXI TF)

Officer Distribution Plan (ODP)--A planned level of support to each MACOM dictating the number of officers, by skill, that the command is expected to have at the end of the fiscal year. The annual plan is developed by the Programs Branch, Distribution Division, Officer Personnel Management Directorate, PERSCOM. The plan incorporates the expected number of officers on active duty, the portion in TTHS, projected board results, the stabilized population, and the Army's priorities.

Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) XXI--One of four components of the Officer Development System (ODS) in the 21st century. The future purpose is to continue the evolution of enhancing warfighting with increased "career" focus, giving reasonable opportunity for success while balancing grades and skills within the field-grade level and adapting to meet the needs of a changing strategic

environment. Officers serve in their basic branch and branch-immaterial positions, but not in both. (OPMS XXI TF)

Selective Early Retirement Board (SERB)--A centralized board convened to select officers to be retired from active duty involuntarily.

Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA)--A document prescribing the organizational structure for a unit having a support mission for which a TOE does not exist; it may include civilian positions.

Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE)--A document prescribing the required structure, manpower, and equipment for several levels of organization options for a particular type of unit.

Trainees, Transients, Holdees, and Students (TTHS)--The Army's personnel "overhead" account. It includes those soldiers in training, hospitals, or confinement and those undertaking PCS moves or separating from the Army. TTHS personnel are not counted against operating strength, since they are not in units or organizations.

Voluntary Early Release and Retirement Program (VERRP)--A personnel management program under which, in order to increase the losses for the fiscal year, officers are released from active duty before completing all their commitments. LTs and junior CPTs are usually allowed to waiver one or more years of their initial active duty obligation. Officers eligible for retirement are usually granted waivers for PCS "paybacks" or time-in-grade waivers. Generally speaking, these officers would be leaving the Army of their own volition within a year anyway, but this program allows their loss to count in the current fiscal year.

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