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14. ABSTRACT The United States Marine Corps selects officers for promotion and command effectively, however it could incentivize performance by rewarding Marine officers' through in-zone reordering. In-zone reordering is currently used by the Coast Guard to reward performance without the associated cost of below-zone selection and promotion. The Marine Corps only needs to refine its promotion process to ensure the best young officers are retained to lead the service in the future. This will be accomplished by reviewing how the Marine Corps promotion process from Second Lieutenant through Colonel works, followed by a review of U.S. Code, Title 10 promotion requirements. Then an in depth look at below-zone, 360-degree reviews, Professional Military Education (PME), In-Zone Reordering and how the other services utilize these to better recognize their best leaders. In-zone reordering is the most straightforward solution to incentivizing performance at no cost to the Marine Corps. In a time of dwindling resources and rising commitments, leadership remains a keystone in the foundation of the Marine Corps. This recommendation would send a clear message to all Marines that individual performance is recognized and every officer has the opportunity to earn the right to be advanced ahead of peers.					
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*United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**Marine Corps Promotion System:
Rewarding Merit or Seniority?**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Major Benjamin J. DeBardleben

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Rebecca Johnson

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 15 April 2013

Oral Defense Committee Member: Benjamin Jansen

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 15 April 2013

Executive Summary

Title: Marine Corps Promotion System: Rewarding Merit or Seniority?

Author: Major Benjamin J. DeBardeleben, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: The United States Marine Corps selects officers for promotion and command effectively, however it could incentivize performance by rewarding Marine officers' through in-zone reordering.

Discussion: The Marine Corps needs to reward performance by promoting officers ahead of their peers. In-zone reordering is currently used by the Coast Guard to reward performance without the associated cost of below-zone selection. In-zone reordering allows a limited percentage of the selected in-zone population to be placed above the rest of the population based on merit determined by the promotion board. In-zone reordering is the most straightforward solution to incentivizing performance at no cost to the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps is a competitive organization, and it must change to retain its most talented leadership. In a time of dwindling resources and rising commitments, leadership is a keystone in the foundation of the Marine Corps. This change would send a clear message to all Marines that individual performance is recognized and every officer has the opportunity to be advanced ahead of peers. Below-zone selection is also an option that would be easy for the Marine Corps to implement. However, it has some drawbacks with regard to value for the taxpayer and limiting experience in rank. The Marine Corps would only need to refine its promotion process to ensure the best young officers lead the service in the future. Other influencers in the selection process will be discussed including 360-degree reviews and professional military education.

Conclusion: With minimum changes to US Code Title 10 the Marine Corps could implement in-zone reordering for officer promotion boards for Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel. Another simple way to immediately reward leaders would be to promote more officers from below-zone. Utilizing either of these policies would demonstrate to the officer Corps a dedication to running a promotion system based on merit. Other process improvements include utilizing 360-degree reviews to improve and mature leadership prior to their selection. Linking resident professional military education and promotion selection boards is another way to incentivize performance. The Marine Corps must stay ahead of the coming budget cuts by retaining the best and brightest to lead Marines in the future.

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Preface

I chose the officer promotion system because it affects every Marine. Leaders at all levels make the Marine Corps a success, and I know that we will all win if the best America and the Marine Corps has to offer are in charge. Napoleon's Army during the French revolution best exemplifies a meritocracy. He promoted on performance, not title or seniority. I am not recommending anything that extreme, but I do think we can improve, by working inside the current promotion system rather than waiting for large restructuring to be done for us by Congress.

I would like to thank my wife for supporting me through this academic journey. Without her mutual support, my four daughters would have been aggressively questioning my constant use of all the computers for work. I would also like to thank Dr. Johnson for her educational edits and assistance in the development of my topic and argument. The Gray Research Center and the Leadership Communication Skills Center both deserve credit for providing outstanding support throughout my research and writing. Thanks to Command and Staff College for pushing the boundaries of military education and preparing us for future endeavors.

The United States Marine Corps selects officers for promotion and command effectively, however it could incentivize performance by rewarding Marine officers' through in-zone reordering. An added benefit of reordering would be improved retention of the best Marine Corps officers. In-zone reordering is currently used by the Coast Guard to reward performance without the associated cost of below-zone selection. As fiscal austerity begins to overshadow strategy with reality, the Marine Corps will be forced to maintain its core capabilities as a sea service with dwindling resources. Inherent within these core capabilities are the fundamentals laid out in *Leading Marines FMFM 1-0*. *Leading Marines* covers the Marine Corps Ethos, Foundations, and Challenges, but can be summarized in the four words at the end of the introduction, "It is about Marines."¹

No matter the budgetary constraints or the enemy faced, the Marine Corps is about leadership. Ensuring the best leaders lead Marines is fundamental to remaining "the most ready when the nation is least ready."² Being ready is not as simple as having all of your gear packed; it is the mindset of being a Marine. There are intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence what it means to be a Marine. Earning the title of United States Marine generally removes the worry of obtaining the extrinsically focused lower level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. These include physiological (hunger, thirst, sleep), safety (security of: employment, resources, health, family, property), and belonging (friendship, family, intimacy). As a Marine moves up the Hierarchy of Needs, new, more intrinsic motivations begin to occur along the lines of esteem (confidence, achievement, respect of others, and respect by others) and self-actualization (morality, creativity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts). This is where Marine leaders should operate. Marine officers do not join the Marine Corps worried about filling their most basic needs. They join to be part of something bigger than themselves, to serve a higher purpose.

Service is the key to understanding that while the extrinsic motivators do provide the foundation of service, it is the intrinsic motivators that make the Marine Corps and its leaders a success story.

These intrinsic motivators are what push leaders to accomplish amazing tasks without regard for selfish desires and wants. Leadership lies at the root of this ability; rewarding and shaping leaders requires the facilitation of intrinsic values. To cultivate intrinsic motivation, leaders must trust the Marine Corps to do what is right by those it asks so much from. During a time of budget cuts and reduction of personnel, the Marine Corps must not worry about the loss of monetary incentives. The Marine Corps must focus more on maintaining a just system where merit is rewarded and Marines feel that if they work hard for the system, that same system will work hard for them. The eventual goal is a leader who is self-actualized or as Maslow says, “a person who is living creatively and fully using his or her potentials.”³ A limited number of leaders will reach this summit of humanity. The Marine Corps should focus on esteem, where the individual Marine will be able to fulfill a sense of confidence, achievement, and respect.

This paper will focus on these esteem needs and the Marine Corps willingness to continue refining methods of reward as progress marches forward. The harm to the Marine Corps now is slight, but over time solely focusing on extrinsic motivation weakens the Corps values of honor, courage, and commitment. Honor, courage, and commitment are intrinsic motivators for the individual that “bond our Marine family into a total force that can meet any challenge.”⁴ Without a focus on the intrinsic motivators the Marine Corps would be a group of well-trained mercenaries. The Marine Corps instead serves as military professionals ready to protect and defend America. As stated in the Marine Corps Hymn, “First to fight for right and freedom and to keep our honor clean.”⁵

Change is reality, and the Marine Corps should always look to maintain its heritage while adapting to fight the next war. If this is true, then why would the seniority ranking established as a young Second Lieutenant in The Basic School (TBS) forever anchor an officer's promotion and slating for Battalion command sixteen years later? The Marine Corps needs to constantly assess its ability to motivate performance, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. It must work inside the boundaries set by Congress and the Department of Defense (DOD). There are options available to immediately reward performance. The best option identified while researching this paper is In-Zone Reordering, currently being used by the Coast Guard. Below-zone promotion is another option that would be easy for the Marine Corps to implement. However, it has some drawbacks with regard to value and limiting experience in rank. The *2013 Marine Corps Concept and Programs* states the Marine Corps has to continuously look for ways to improve the organization while making the Marine Corps the best possible return for the defense dollar.⁶

In 2011, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, in a speech at the United States Military Academy, asked how the army could “break up the institutional concrete...bureaucratic rigidity in its assignments and promotion processes, in order to retain, challenge, and inspire its best, brightest, and most battle tested young officers to lead the service in the future?”⁷ Secretary Gates was clearly questioning if the Army could improve the bureaucracy that manages 98,000 officers. Surely, there is something the smaller Marine Corps with 21,000 officers can do to stay ahead of the manpower curve by rewarding its best performers in the face of shrinking budgets and growing missions.

The Marine Corps would only need to refine its promotion process to ensure an answer for Secretary Gates' question of how to challenge and inspire the best young officers to lead the service in the future.⁸ This will be accomplished by reviewing how the Marine Corps promotion

process from Second Lieutenant (O-1) through Colonel (O-6) works, followed by a review of U.S. Code, Title 10 promotion board legal requirements. Then, an in depth look at below-zone, 360-degree reviews, Professional Military Education (PME), In-Zone Reordering will show how the other services utilize these to better recognize their best leaders. An analysis of how well these other ideas might work to refine the Marine Corps ability to reward performance instead of seniority will be included throughout each section. This papers goal is to improve the faith every Marine officer has in the Marine Corps promotion system to reward performance and seniority.

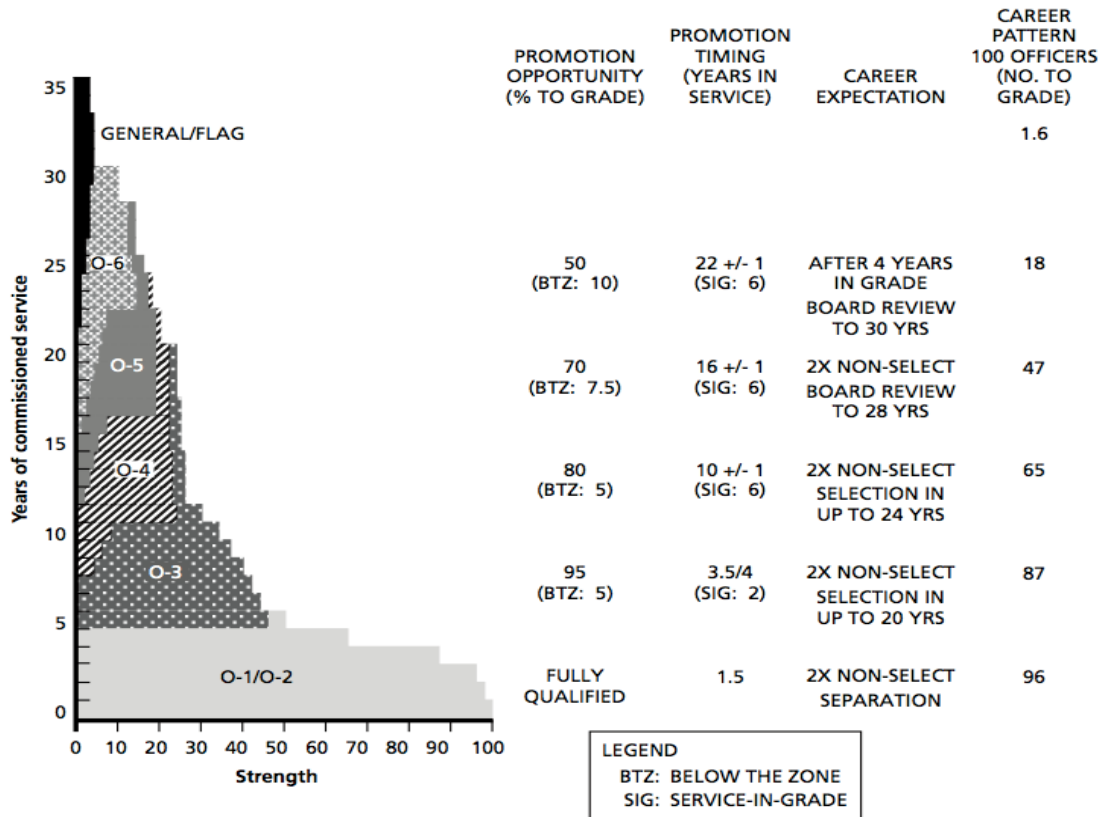
Marine Corps Background

The Marine officer promotion process begins when a young adult competes for a spot in the Marine Corps by attending Officer Candidate School (OCS) or any of the service academies. After successful completion, the new Marine officer is commissioned a Second Lieutenant and attends TBS. There the new officer competes with a class of almost three hundred other Second Lieutenants for six months to determine class ranking; this then establishes a seniority-based lineal ranking that will be used for all other promotions. At the completion of the course, the lineal ranking is used to determine Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), which are divided into thirds to ensure an even spread of talent between officers and jobs available. After two years as a Second Lieutenant the officer will be promoted, non-competitively to First Lieutenant (O-2). After four years in grade, the officer will stand their first competitive board for Captain (O-3). Captains are retained with a selection rate of 95%. During this period some officers have completed their initial obligation and leave the Marine Corps, others compete for Career Designation.

Career Designation has varied over time, but in its most recent iteration, it is “a force shaping tool that allows for the management of the officer population by retaining the best and

most fully qualified.”⁹ In fiscal year 2013, 809 First Lieutenants and Captains with 540 days of observable fitness reports were screened with 492 being offered continued service beyond their original commitment.¹⁰ That is a 60% selection rate, which is more restrictive than being selected for Lieutenant Colonel at a rate of 70%.¹¹ Career Designation in its current form, truly rewards performance by letting Marines continue to serve beyond their initial commitment, while also improving performance by reducing the number of low performing officers. Head Quarters Marine Corps (HQMC) said this year would be the lowest rate of selection due to year group population adjustment from the required 202,000 to 182,000 Marines, and selection should return to a more normal 70% to 80% in coming years.¹²

Between nine and eleven years of commissioned service, Captains are considered for Major (O-4), with a selection rate of 80% +/- 10%. Between fifteen and seventeen years, Majors are considered for Lieutenant Colonel (O-5), with a 70% +/- 10% selection rate. Between twenty-one and twenty-three years, Lieutenant Colonels are considered for Colonel (O-6), with a 50% +/- 10% selection rate.¹³ These promotion numbers are represented in figure 1 and show what the officer population looks like over a career as managed by United States Code Title 10. Figure 1 highlights “Promotion opportunity” BTZ (below the zone) with numbers beside them, these are the percentages that can be selected from the below-zone. The promotion timeline is fairly rigid, but it does allow the services some leeway to manage and shape the force. A special request to the Secretary of Defense can always be submitted when greater than allowed deviations of Title 10 are required to manage manpower.



Congressional report 1980. DOPMA career flow chart. Figure 1

The Marine Corps promotion manual states, “Officers are selected for promotion for their potential to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the next higher grade based upon past performance as indicated in their official military personnel file. Promotions should not be considered a reward for past performance, but as incentive to excel in the next higher grade.”¹⁴ The Marine Corps does use promotion as an incentive, but it does so in a very linear fashion that selects on merit, but promotes on seniority. In the book, *Bleeding Talent* Tim Kane says, “The reason (for leaving the military) overwhelmingly cited by veterans and active-duty officers alike (was) that the military personnel system-every aspect of it-is nearly blind to merit.”¹⁵ The majority of officers are satisfied with their chosen career path; however, watching an average performer who is senior get promoted ahead of top performing peers seems to go against

everything the Marine Corps is built on. Marines are competitive by nature, as an example, every Marine takes two physical fitness tests a year. They are then awarded scores ranking them as first, second, or third class. On the rifle and pistol ranges Marines once again are awarded one of three badges depending on their performance. Competition encourages Marines to work harder for both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons.

Several methods exist within the Marine Corps to identify above average performance. The fitness report (FITREP) supports the Commandant's efforts "to evaluate a Marine's performance (and) to select the best qualified personnel for promotion, augmentation (career designation), retention, resident schooling, command, and duty assignments."¹⁶ The Marine Corps sees all of these as rewards and incentives for each Marine that earns them.

Each Marine Corps fitness report has a block to check for accelerated promotion. The Performance Evaluation System (PES) says to only check the block for the "Marine who is 'the one above' and who is eminently capable of immediately assuming the responsibilities of the next higher grade."¹⁷ During the last ten years that led up to the promotions, the accelerated promotion block was checked 144 times for Captains, 131 times for Majors, and 117 times for Lieutenant Colonels.¹⁸ In the same time frame only 5 Majors, 1 Lieutenant Colonel, and 0 Colonels were selected below-zone. This does not demonstrate acceptance of the accelerated promotion block or below-zone selection. The difference of accelerated promotion blocks used versus officers promoted below-zone (Captain 5/144, Major 1/131, Lieutenant Colonel 0/117) might be explained by the lack of the promotion board's ability to objectively use such a subjective criteria to evaluate the senior rater's use of the accelerated promotion box. Whereas, the relative value of the fitness report would seem to be a more objective comparison for the board members to make when selecting for promotion.

The PES manual states, “Leadership is the primal force that drives all military organizations. Leaders at all levels are essential to mission accomplishment. The quality of its leadership will determine the overall value of the force.”¹⁹ The Marine Corps focuses a great deal of time and resources in the development of its leaders. Leadership is what allows the Marine Corps to “do more with less” while serving as “America’s force in readiness.” Both of these mottos are backed up with creative leaders who solve problems quickly and can adapt when the situation changes. These kinds of effective leaders like to know hard work is rewarded.

The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) is an amendment to U.S. Code Title 10, passed in 1980; it standardizes the laws governing appointment, promotion, separation, and retirement. DOPMA was created for two primary reasons. First, Congress wanted more control of service manpower assets, so grade tables were created to limit the number of officers that can be maintained at each rank. This method is commonly referred to as the “up or out” policy.²⁰ Second, it was designed to provide enhanced career opportunities that would more effectively attract and retain higher caliber officers.²¹ It has been an effective amendment that has made the All Volunteer Force (AVF) very successful.

Over the last decade, each board has received similar guidance concerning selection. “In addition to the standard of best qualified, the officers recommended for promotion by the board must be fully qualified; that is, each officer’s qualifications and performance of duty must clearly demonstrate that the officer would be capable of performing the duties normally associated with the next higher grade. This standard applies to all eligible officers, including those above- and below-zone.”²² The main source of information for the board’s consideration is the “Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) which contains fitness reports, awards, (and) official photograph.”²³ The promotion boards have done an excellent job dealing with ten years of war,

manpower increases, and now manpower and budget decreases. However, with a continued manpower decrease in the future, rewarding top performers with non-monetary incentives may be the key to ensuring that a departure of combat experienced veterans does not occur.

The number of quality officers that depart prior to retirement has not been tracked and would be hard to objectively quantify since people leave for many reasons, but historically half that enter service leave and the other half retires.²⁴ A RAND study in 2006 focused solely on the outdated personnel management policies of the DOD and “claimed unequivocally that DOPMA based practices will not meet the needs of the future operational environment, even calling it a cold war era personnel system.”²⁵ Those are dire predictions about the future and should help direct a focus of effort on ensuring that merit is rewarded inside the current system.

DOPMA mandates minimum time in grade (TIG) of three years before being promoted to Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel.²⁶ Department of Defense Instruction 1320.13 Commissioned Officer Promotion Reports further mandates a number of years of commissioned service (YCS) limit of nine to eleven years before promotion to Major and fifteen to seventeen years before promotion to Lieutenant Colonel.²⁷ These limits are there to ensure military leaders continue to have the appropriate amount of experience as they lead at each rank. These time limits in no way tie the service’s hands from recognizing exceptional performers, but are instead used to help guide the flow of officers through the “up or out” system. While the time limits do help normalize career flow, the next section on below-zone selection will cover some extrinsic motivators involved in this process.

Below-Zone Selection

Below-zone selection is a costly, but effective method of rewarding performance. It is costly because it promotes officers one to two years ahead of the guidelines set by Congress.

But, the early promotion is an extrinsic motivator that increases base pay and an intrinsic motivator that moves the officer ahead of his or her peers in seniority while also rewarding performance. Another cost of early promotion is the shortened amount of in rank experience for the officer. Throughout this section numerous uses of below-zone selection and promotion will be covered from multiple viewpoints and uses throughout the services.

Enlisted Marines have the possibility to be promoted meritoriously and below-zone. Both of these methods allow for merit based selection and promotion. During the same ten-year period as the officers mentioned above, 1,761 Sergeants and 1,257 Staff Sergeants had the accelerated promotion block checked. Of those 1,761 Sergeants up for Staff Sergeant, 842 were selected from below the zone, which accounted for 3% of the total selection. A direct correlation cannot be drawn between the two sets of data because promotion board proceedings are confidential making it impossible to determine if the Marines with the accelerated promotion block checked were actually the ones selected below-zone. However, it does show that the accelerated promotion block is being used and Marines are being rewarded for their performance. It would appear that if this system is good enough for enlisted Marines, it would work for the officers leading them.

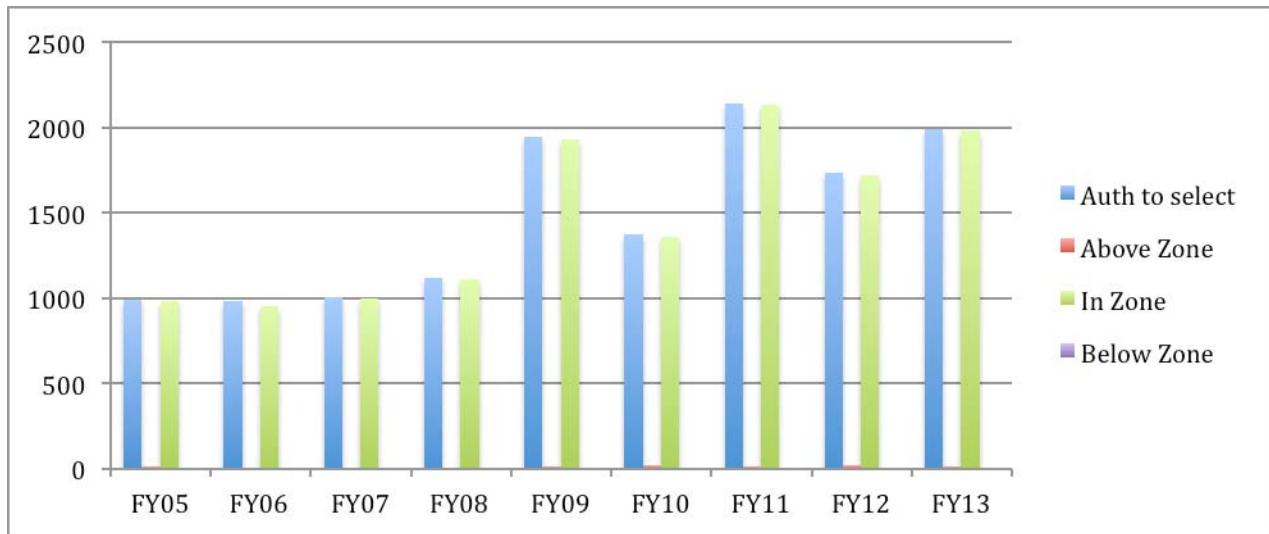
Once selected to Brigadier General (O-7), General Officers (O-7 to O-10) are selected and promoted purely on merit for their positions. One clear example of a merit-based selection is any Marine General can be selected as Commandant of the Marine Corps.²⁸ This would undoubtedly cause a lot of displeasure among the Generals, but is an option available to the President if necessary to pick the right officer for the job. Out of the 24 ranks (E-1 to O-10) in the Marine Corps only five ranks (O-2 to O-6) lack a clear and demonstrated method for merit based, instead of seniority-based promotions.

Marine Corps officer promotion boards convene annually in the fall by order of the Secretary of the Navy. All service promotion boards are guided by similar service documents under rules set by Congress. United States Code Title 10 Armed Forces authorizes and controls the operation of the Department of Defense. Section 612 promotions cover the composition of selection boards, along with the six items listed below that must be provided to accomplish their duties:

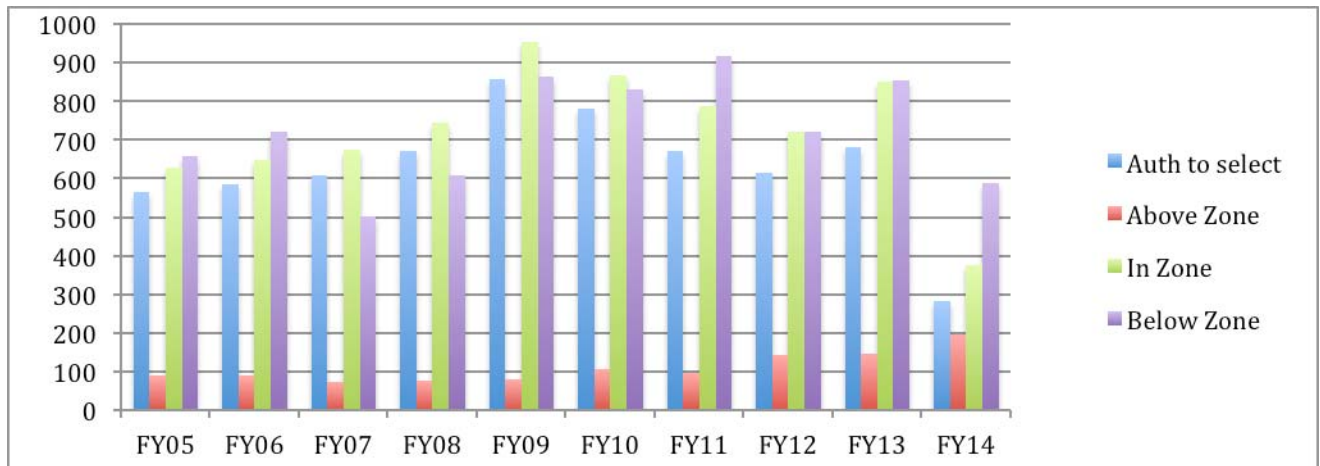
- 1) Number of personnel to be recommended for the next higher grade.
- 2) Names of all eligible officers in the below, in, and above-zone ranked by seniority.
- 3) The required military records to conduct the board, primarily the Official Military Personnel File (OMPF).
- 4) Any service needs for a particular skill.
- 5) Guidelines for joint officer qualification and promotion requirements to ensure compliance with Department of Defense guidelines.
- 6) Any other information necessary for the board to be aware of prior to convening.²⁹

The requirements listed above are what make the boards equal and ensure fairness. Across the services, promotion boards are seen as doing an exemplary job given the task they are asked to accomplish.

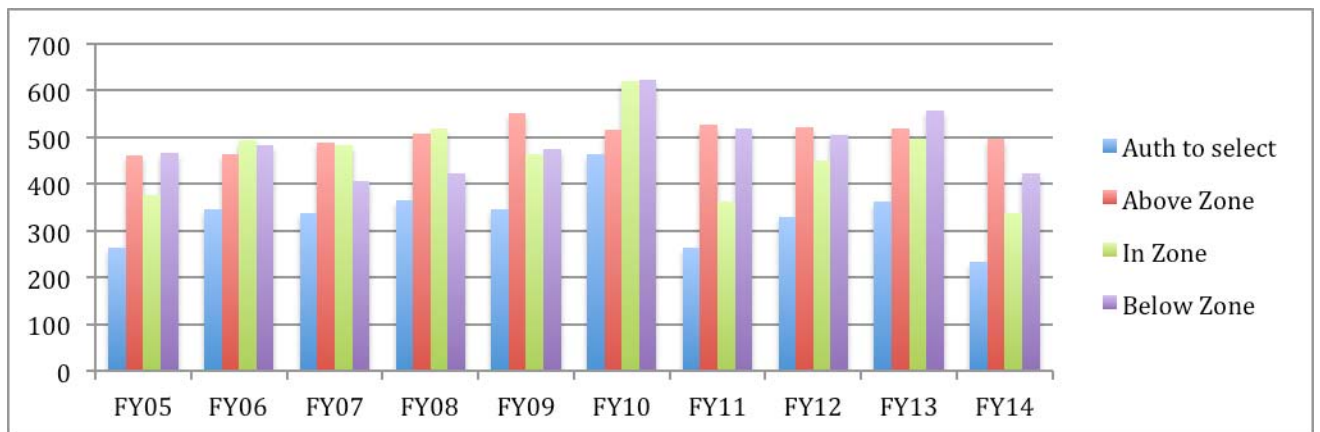
Section 616 of Title 10 covers the recommendations for promotion by selection boards and the requirement to select the best-qualified officers. It also sets the board's ability to select a limited percentage from below-zone. Each officer chosen from the above or below-zone reduces the number of in-zone officers available for selection. In section 620, the Active Duty List (ADL) is mandated for each service to maintain for all officers' seniority by rank. This list creates a lineal number for use in determining the size of the below, in, and above-zone populations based on date of rank. One of the key DoD policies for promotion boards is to provide a similar promotion opportunity for all officers within a 5-year window.³⁰ Once the board has completed selection the promotion list will be executed in the order of seniority by lineal number.



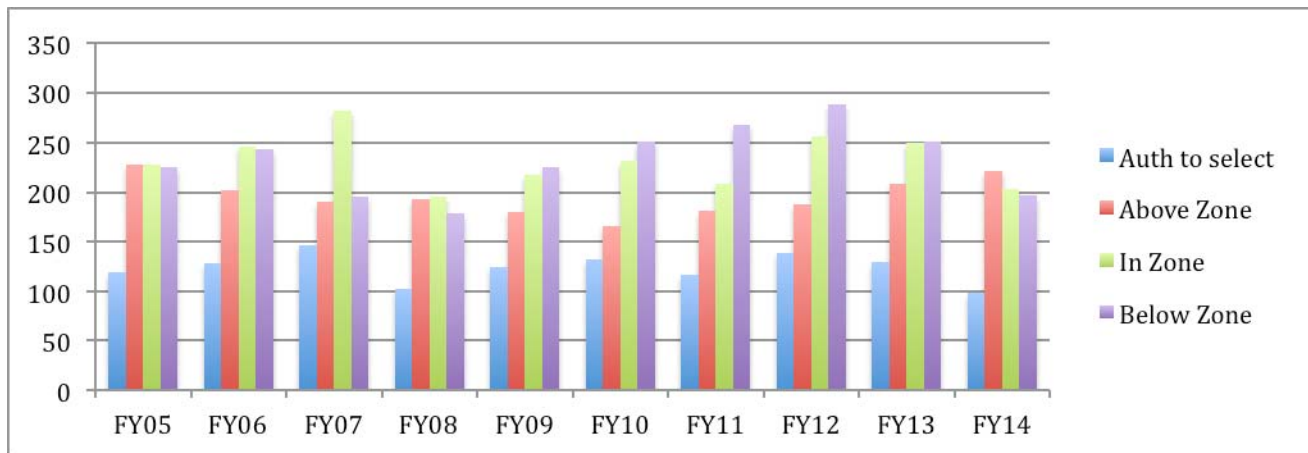
Captain-zone size FY 2005-2013. Chart 1



Major zone size FY 2005-2014. Chart 2



Lieutenant Colonel zone spread FY2005-2014. Chart 3



Colonel zone spread FY2005-2014. Chart 4

The charts depict, over a ten year period, the total number of Marine Captains (chart 1), Majors (chart 2), Lieutenant Colonel (chart 3), and Colonels (chart 4) authorized to be selected for promotion, followed by the total populations of above-zone (AZ), in-zone (IZ), and below-zone (BZ). Of the 13,086 First Lieutenants selected for Captain with a 98% selection rate, 0 were selected below-zone. Of 6,297 Captains selected for promotion to Major with an 86% selection rate, 5 were selected below-zone. Of the 3,909 Majors selected for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel with a 72% selection rate, 1 was selected below-zone. Of the 1,235 Lieutenant Colonels selected for promotion to Colonel with a 53% selection rate, 0 were selected below-zone. The data demonstrates the Marine Corps very limited use of below-zone promotions, even though it is authorized by Congress and utilized by all the other services with varying degrees of acceptance. In each promotion boards' precept, the members are told that up to ten percent of the below-zone population can be selected for promotion if they meet the standard of best and fully qualified.³¹

Not every officer in the below-zone would meet these criteria, but it seems plausible that those closest to the in-zone cutoff would have comparable experience with Marines one month ahead by date of rank. Selecting any of the below or above-zone population decreases the total

authorized in-zone selection. The Marine Corps is running a competitive organization that has to vie for talent just like any other company. Selecting and promoting on merit would reward performance and ensure the most capable officers lead Marines.

The other services are dealing with similar personnel issues as the Marine Corps, but have chosen different ways to solve the problem of promoting and selecting the best officers. This is not a new problem. The 1949 edition of *The Armed Forces Officers Guide* states the principles of the day and how others should act with regards to merit. “When any reward, such as a promotion, a commendation or a particularly choice assignment, is given other than to the man who deserves it on sheer merit, some other man is robbed and the ties of the organization are weakened.”³² After World War II the military was downsizing just like today. The services had to be ready for the future by maintaining the best performing officers. There are multiple ways to shape and reward manpower, but the Air Force differs the most between all the services with its use of below-zone selection for promotion.

The United States Air Force has 64,290 officers on active duty and is a proponent of below-zone promotion. However, the Air Force got rid of below-zone selection for Majors in 1999 due to manpower management issues involving low accessions during the drawdown of the 1990’s.³³ This leaves below-zone selection open for Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel. The Air Force also shapes its zones differently, which allows for two promotion opportunities from the below-zone. From 2005 to 2012 the Air Force considered 12,525 in-zone Majors for Lieutenant Colonel and selected 9,325 of them with a 75% selection rate. Utilizing the policy of two opportunities below-zone, the Air Force considered 28,097 Majors for selection to Lieutenant Colonel and selected 1,062 of them from below-zone with a 3.8% selection rate. Covering the same time period the Air Force considered 7,210 Lieutenant Colonels in-zone and selected 3,263

for promotion to Colonel with a 45% selection rate. They then considered 19,384 Lieutenant Colonels for Colonel and selected 592 from the below-zone with a 3.0% selection rate.

Promoting from below-zone does reward the top performers, but the Air Force's use of the two below-zone method has been criticized for not allowing enough time for developing in rank experience resulting in minimized career flexibility.³⁴

To help illustrate the difference two below-zone promotions could make between the services, consider two Majors, one from the Air Force and one from the Marine Corps. Both officers were commissioned in June of 1999. They attend Marine Corps Command and Staff College during the 2012-2013 school year. The officers built a joint relationship that should help them throughout their careers. The Air Force Major was selected two zones below the in-zone during the school year and will be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in December 2013. The Marine Corps Major will not be considered for Lieutenant Colonel until summer 2015 and will not be promoted until summer 2016. This puts the two "peers" effectively two and a half years apart, which might severely affect their ability to share ideas and assist each other in their respective services. While the Air Force rewards performance, it seems to be promoting one year too early, which reduces the value and expertise received from each officer in rank.

The Marine Corps likes to be a good steward of tax dollars, and should avoid two below-zone promotions, but it should utilize below-zone selection if the officer is better qualified than the in-zone population. Promotion boards after action comments generally reflect that the in-zone population was of a high enough caliber that it does not require dipping into the below-zone. Below-zone promotions are based in an after the fact assessment of an officer, while the next section on 360-degree reviews focuses on helping each officer mature over time to get the best return on investment possible from Marines.

360-degree reviews

The United States Army has the largest officer population with 98,126 serving on active duty. The Army fitness report has been through numerous versions. Each new version has attempted to fix some form of grade inflation or provide a more objective description of the individual. With so many people to manage, and a need for understandable evaluations to serve manpower requirements, the Army continues to adapt in search of a better solution. The Army's most recent version has integrated a three-tiered system of ranking to clearly delineate the top 10%, average 80%, and the bottom 10% of any year group.³⁵ This allows Army boards to quickly assess officers that should be selected for command and school.

Along with the tier ranking, the new fitness report includes the requirement for a 360-degree evaluation to be started every two years and then confirmed, without review, on the fitness report by the officer's rater. The use of the 360-degree evaluation provides the officer with a partially anonymous review of his performance as seen from peers and subordinates. The evaluated officer has to pick the peers and subordinates who participate in the review, and the evaluated officer is the only one who sees the comments.³⁶

The Marine Corps could utilize the tier process to help break out top performers, but in general the Marine Corps fitness report's relative value of the senior rater and reviewing officer already accomplishes this task for the promotion board. The 360-degree review, on the other hand, would be a very useful tool to help develop better leaders over time. The Marine Corps uses peer evaluations in OCS and TBS with great success in developing young leaders. Adding a 360-degree review would help Marines critically assess their performance as leaders.

In a 1997 RAND study, 360-degree reviews were considered and put through a series of questions with regards to their applicability within the military.³⁷ The RAND researchers "found

more tolerance for its use as a developmental tool (helping individuals understand their strengths and weaknesses) and less tolerance for linking it to competitive processes for promotion or other performance rewards.”³⁸ One of the other draw backs found during the research was “administrative costs of soliciting, completing, collecting, and synthesizing multiple inputs would be high.”³⁹ This RAND study was conducted as the Cold War drawdown was taking effect in 1995. It remains very applicable to the current situation faced today, but hopefully with programs like Marine Online (MOL) there is a cost effective method that could be implemented to help leaders develop over time.

One example to the solution would be a program accessible to all Marines within a unit to anonymously take surveys on their leaders and peers. The Marine being evaluated could then review the results at a set interval. At some point greater than the review interval the officer would then be counseled by a trained professional, whether a uniformed or civilian career counselor on trends. As evidenced by the creation in 2006 of the Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCMP), Marines were not always being “provided with exacting one-on-one leadership by his or her direct senior.”⁴⁰ A 360-degree review would add peer and subordinate viewpoints to the mentorship program information making it easier for the officer to seek self-improvement. That would be an effective leadership tool with consistent input for leadership development throughout a Marine’s career. The combination of the Marine Corps Mentorship Program and a 360-degree review would provide a Marine leader with something similar to feedback in a planning cycle or Colonel John Boyd’s famous OODA (Observe-Orient-Decide-Act) loop.⁴¹

The United States Navy has 52,546 commissioned officers and like the Marine Corps rarely uses below-zone selection. The Navy’s promotion and command selection process is also

very similar to that of the Marine Corps. The Navy stopped using competitive boards for promotion to Lieutenant (O-3) in 2003⁴², but continues with a similar process as the Marine Corps from O-4 to O-6. From 2009 to 2013 the Navy used below-zone selection less than 1% of the time. Twenty Captains (O-6), twenty-eight Commanders (O-5), and nine Lieutenant Commanders were selected below zone during the last five years. Through limited use alone, the Navy seems to agree with the Marine Corps that below-zone is not generally required as an incentive nor does it provide much value to the service.

In 2007 the Navy's Command Leadership School started using 360-degree reviews for all commanders and executive officers as a tool for self-awareness prior to assuming command.⁴³ The Navy's Command Leadership School is similar to the Marine Corps Commanders Course, which is held twice a year in Quantico for all Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels selected for command. The Navy has twice as many officers as the Marine Corps and runs a more formal and permanent school to ensure every leader in the triad--commanding officer, executive officer, and senior enlisted--understands the responsibilities and requirements of the positions they are assuming. Very few Marines have attended this school. As the Marine Corps continues to standardize expectations across commands it might benefit the Marine Corps to further investigate the Command Leadership School and look to learn from it in the future.

The Chief of Naval Operations has taken 360-degree reviews a step farther by tasking the Surface Warfare Officer community to develop and test a program for use starting with a newly designated Ensign (O-1) throughout their career. The review will remain confidential, but will allow a counselor to look at the officer's performance over time and more clearly identify strengths and weaknesses. As mentioned earlier this kind of mentoring throughout a career could be very beneficial to growth in leadership through the stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of

Needs. The next section is focused on this same kind of growth, but through professional military education instead of self-examination.

Professional Military Education (PME)

Professional Military Education is an important part of educating officers to think instead of training them to act. It provides a broad background of knowledge to draw on throughout a career. Resident PME also helps build relationships in an academic environment that will facilitate success on future battlefields. PME is both an extrinsic and intrinsic reward. The majority of schools offer the ability to earn an advanced degree in conjunction with the completion of the required courseware for promotion. The Marine Corps has recently transitioned to a competitive board process to ensure the “best and most fully qualified officers”⁴⁴ are selected to attend resident PME. With limited seats throughout all services the board process just increased the demand for attendance, because it is now seen as another competitive process on the road to professional success.

The Air Force links promotion boards with PME in a unique way. At the conclusion of their promotion board the top 20% selected by the board will attend PME in residence sometime during their next rank. This allows for ease of planning during their career because they know ahead of time what is expected and that their performance was recognized by the Air Force. A yearly PME competitive board then chooses the remainder of seats available for officers not selected by the promotion board. However, space is limited for resident school and this could limit their future potential for promotion.

Linking selection and promotion with school selection is clearly a merit based incentive and would work well in the Marine Corps. It would provide a level of career planning that is not usually seen in the Marine Corps and guarantee top performers a slot at a resident school based

on their year group instead of all available movers during a year.⁴⁵ One example to consider utilizing the current Commandants Career-Level Education Board (CCLEB) would be a senior Lieutenant completing a first tour and a mid grade Captain completing a B-billet. Both were equally successful as Infantry officers, but the Lieutenant gets the school seat because he is leaving an operational command. The Captain, however, will now return to a Battalion without attending resident PME potentially unprepared for future responsibilities, while the Lieutenant will attend resident PME and then go to his B-billet to utilize a different set of skills, potentially forgetting what was learned prior to returning to a Battalion. Another risk is changing the normal flow of career progression and cutting out year groups as the Marine Corps transitions to education boards for resident PME. An increase in junior officers attending resident PME could also have unforeseen effects on Marines and resident schools.

The Air Force uses another option to reward performance during command selection. Once the boards have met and looked at all available officers inside their occupational fields they select those ready for command. Selected commanders then have to contact their gaining major command and find the right match for their skill set and personality.⁴⁶ This self-selection allows for freedom of choice and in turn rewards the officer's individual performance. If the officer was good enough to get promoted and selected, but was not truly a performer in his field then he would have a hard time finding a command slot, thus allowing the market of supply and demand to influence the process. The Air Force board chooses more selects than required to allow for flexibility.⁴⁷

While the Marine Corps observes resident and non-resident PME equally on promotion boards it should consider utilizing promotion rankings instead of a separate board for a portion of resident school selection. Resident school is critical to building an understanding of joint

capabilities and creating relationships for future joint operations. The on-going Marine Corps PME restructuring will hopefully allow more officers to attend some form of resident PME in the future. While many officers seem to want to avoid resident school it is the only opportunity to mentally transition between the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of warfare during a career in preparation for future responsibilities. PME is a true benefit to every Marine. The next section will focus more on the individual Marines ability to be rewarded for achievement that in the end also benefits every Marine.

In-zone Reordering

The United States Coast Guard has 8,376 commissioned officers on active duty. In 2002 the Coast Guard recognized the need to better reward performance due to decreased retention. With this realization came a program of in-zone reordering that was put into law under Title 14 U.S.C. 259.⁴⁸ The law states that “after selecting the officers to be recommended for promotion, a selection board may recommend officers of particular merit, from among those officers chosen for promotion, to be placed at the top of the list of selectees (5% Lieutenant and Lieutenant Commander, 7.5% Commander, and 10% Captain). Officers displaced from the top of the list shall retain their previous precedence immediately below those officers reordered and inserted at the top of the promotion list.”⁴⁹ This system focuses solely on the in-zone population stipulated by DOPMA, but clearly rewards performance without affecting the in-zone population’s selection rate. The affect is on the year group because the personnel who were reordered will get promoted ahead of their peers and thus be rewarded for their performance.

After querying the Coast Guard Office of Personnel Management (OPM), three years of data was made available. During fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013 in-zone reordering was used on the 10% available, of 19 selects 18 were selected for a 95% use rate for promotion to O-6.

During the same three years, in-zone reordering was used for 15 out of 31 selected O-5's for a 48% use rate. The rates climbed dramatically with 86% of selected O-4's with 31 of 36 being in-zone reordered. Usage for selection to O-3 dropped down, with 9 of 58 available being in-zone reordered with a 16% use rate. The OPM stated, "that in-zone reordering is an incentive that doesn't increase cost to the service unlike promoting from below the zone and is the only tool that allows them to reward merit."⁵⁰ In-zone reordering provides a clear reward for performance and will help get the best performing officers into jobs of greater responsibility a little quicker, but does not significantly alter any officer's career path.

During a time of budget cuts and personnel reductions the use of purely intrinsic and extrinsic motivators is key to rewarding leaders who have earned the right to be at the front of the line. In-zone reordering would allow the Marine Corps to assess each officer during promotion board selection, judge them on their performance, and allow the top performers to rise above their peers at each rank. Rewarding the top performers not only honors the leader's commitment to the Marine Corps, but also demonstrates a sensible no-cost incentive to every officer to be his or her best.

The system of in-zone reordering is the best method of honoring merit without negatively effecting the in-zone population. To implement such a change would require a request for Congress to amend US Code, Title 10. Title 10 is updated for numerous required changes and could be incorporated within a year or two according to Headquarters Marine Corps Manpower Promotion Planner (MPP-30).⁵¹ The Marine Corps promotion boards could then use the merit rankings that are already produced during promotion board selection voting to implement the in-zone reordering.

Conclusion

This material shared demonstrates the need for the Marine Corps to reward performance by promoting officers ahead of their peers. In a time of dwindling resources and rising commitments, leadership remains a keystone in the foundation of the Marine Corps. The simplest way to immediately reward leaders is by promoting more from the below-zone. However, this may cut too much at the Marine Corps preference of experience and does not return as much value for the taxpayer dollar. The next recommendation with the least impact on the status quo is to mirror the Coast Guard's lead and implement in-zone reordering for officer promotion boards for Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel. Utilizing either of these policies would demonstrate the Marine Corps dedication to running a promotion system based on merit and seniority. In-zone reordering is the most straightforward solution to incentivizing performance at no cost to the Marine Corps. This recommendation would require a change to U.S. Code, Title 10, but does not otherwise conflict with any part of the directives that affect officer promotion and would send a straight forward message to all Marines. Individual officer performance is recognized and every officer has the opportunity to earn the right to be advanced ahead of peers.

¹ Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Leading Marines*, FMFM 1-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, 1995), 5.

² Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Concepts and Programs*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, 2013), 7.

³ G Diffe, "Increased Officer Retention Through Improved Career Motivation and Management," (Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1969), Appendix 2.

⁴ *Leading Marines*, 101.

⁵ Kenneth Estes, *The Marine Officer's Guide Sixth Edition*, (Naval Institute Press, 1996), Appendix 1.

⁶ Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Concepts and Programs*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, 2013), 7.

⁷ T Kane, *Bleeding Talent: How the US Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why it's Time for a Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 27.

⁸ Kane, 27.

⁹ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Fiscal Year 2013 Career Designation, MARADMIN 094/13, February 25, 2013, <http://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/MessagesDisplay/tabid/13286/Article/138637/fiscal-year-2013-fy-13-officer-retention-board-number-1-results.aspx>.

¹⁰ MARADMIN 094/13.

¹¹ Title 10: Armed Forces, U.S. code, section, 523

¹² Capt USMC (MP) in discussion with the author, March 2013.

¹³ MARADMIN 094/13.

¹⁴ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Promotion Manual, Volume 1, Officer Promotions, MCO P1400.31C, August 09, 2006, 2, <http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/135/MCO%20P1400.31C.pdf>

¹⁵ Kane, 47.

¹⁶ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Performance Evaluation System, MCO P1610.7F, November 19, 2010, 2, <http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/MCO%20P1610.7F%20W%20CH%201-2.pdf>

¹⁷ MCO P1610.7F, 4-12

¹⁸ Doreen Marucci (Program Analyst, Marine Corps Performance Evaluation System), in excel chart emailed to the author, February 2013.

¹⁹ MCO P1610.7F, 4-30

²⁰ Bernard Rostker, *The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 / a retrospective assessment*, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1992), 18.

²¹ KW Fanchef, "The Impact of Grade Table Relief on Officer Career Progression," *Marine Corps Gazette*, August 1998, 19-20.

²² The Secretary of the Navy, Precept Convening the FY13 USMC Lieutenant Colonel Promotion Selection Guidance, August 17, 2011, https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/portal/page/portal/M_RA_HOME/MM/PR/MMPR1/MMPR1_PROMOTION_BOARDS/FY13%20Promotion%20Boards/ACTIVE_FY13_MMPR1_PROMOTION_BOARDS/FY13%20-%20ACTIVE%20-%20LTCOL/13_Precept_LtCol.PDF

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- ²³ MCO P1400.31C, 3-3.
- ²⁴ Secretary of Defense, *Tenth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation Volume II Deferred and Noncash Compensation* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2008), Ch 2-12
- ²⁵ Kane, 195.
- ²⁶ C McHugh et. al., *Analyses of the Marine Corps Officer Manpower System: Final Report*, (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2006), 119.
- ²⁷ Title 10: Armed Forces, U.S. code, section, 612.
- ²⁸ Title 10: Armed Forces, U.S. code, section, 5043.
- ²⁹ Title 10: Armed Forces, U.S. code, section, 612.
- ³⁰ C McHugh et. al., 123.
- ³¹ The Secretary of the Navy, Precept Convening the FY13 USMC Lieutenant Colonel Promotion Selection Guidance, August 17, 2011, https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/portal/page/portal/M_RA_HOME/MM/PR/MMPR1/MMPR1_PROMOTION_BOARDS/FY13%20Promotion%20Boards/ACTIVE_FY13_MMPR1_PROMOTION_BOARDS/FY13%20-%20ACTIVE%20-%20LTCOL/13_Precept_LtCol.PDF
- ³² Department of Defense, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, DC: Armed Forces Information Service, 1975), 243.
- ³³ Maj USAF (CSC) in discussion with the author, January 2013.
- ³⁴ Maj USAF (CSC) in discussion with the author, January 2013.
- ³⁵ Matthew Ryan, "New Evaluation System Helping Leaders keep their best," Army News Service, January 2013, <http://www.army.mil/article/94936> new evaluation system
- ³⁶ John McHugh, Human Resources Command, U.S. Army, Army Directive 2011-16 (Changes to the Army Evaluation Reporting System) September 15, 2011.
- ³⁷ Albert A Robbert et. al., *Differentiation in Military Human Resource Management*, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1997), 42.
- ³⁸ Albert A Robbert et. al., 42.
- ³⁹ Albert A Robbert et. al., 42.
- ⁴⁰ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Mentoring Program, MCO 1500.58, February 13, 2006, <http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/MCO%201500.58.pdf>
- ⁴¹ R Coram, *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot who Changed the Art of War* (Little Brown, 2002), 344.
- ⁴² Secretary of the Navy, Cancellation of the FY-03 Lieutenant Selection Boards, ALNAV 033/02, April 22, 2002, <http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/reference/messages/Documents/ALNAVS/ALN2002/aln02033.txt>
- ⁴³ CDR John Pucciarelli (Command Leadership School) in discussion with the author, March 2013.
- ⁴⁴ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Fiscal Year 13 Commandant's Intermediate-Level Education Board, MARADMIN 421/12, August 2, 2012, <http://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/MessagesDisplay/tabid/13286/Article/110445/fy13-commandants-professional-intermediate-level-education-board.aspx>
- ⁴⁵ Commandant of the Marine Corps, Fiscal Year 13 Commandant's Career-Level Education Board, MARADMIN 047/13, January 24, 2013, <http://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/MessagesDisplay/tabid/13286/Article/137118/fiscal-year-fy-13-commandants-career-level-education-board-cclb-slating-results.aspx>

⁴⁶ Debbie Gildea, “400-plus selected for squadron, group command,” Air Force Personnel Center Public Affairs, January 24, 2013, <http://www.afpc.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123333717>

⁴⁷ Gildea.

⁴⁸ Title 14: Coast Guard, U.S. code, section, 251.

⁴⁹ Title 14: Coast Guard, U.S. code, section, 259.

⁵⁰ LCDR Moyer (US Coast Guard OPM) in discussion with the author, March 2013.

⁵¹ Capt USMC (MP) in discussion with the author, March 2013.

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