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ADP010347

TITLE: Policies, Procedures, and People: The
Initial Selection of U.S. Military Officers

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TITLE: Officer Selection [la Selection des
officiers]

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ADP010347 thru ADP010377

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Policies, Procedures, and People: The Initial Selection of U.S. Military Officers

(November 1999)

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United States military officers come from all walks of life so it follows that the policies and procedures for selecting and training officer candidates were designed with that in mind. There are four primary sources of commissioning. Most officers are commissioned through college Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs. ROTC is less regimented than the programs at the second type of commissioning source, the four U.S. military academies -- U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy, and U.S. Coast Guard Academy - but has the same goals. Officer Training/Candidate School is a third type of commissioning source and serves as an adjustable "valve" to augment the number of officers commissioned in each Service. Other programs, such as the Air Force's Leader Encouraging Airmen Development (LEAD), also exist and are designed to identify outstanding airmen for possible commissioning opportunities. The fourth source of officer commissioning is the direct commission, reserved for certain professionals (e.g., lawyers, physicians). Regardless of commissioning source, the U.S. military has high physical, academic, and moral character standards for individuals seeking to become a military officer. Rather than identify and select individuals for attributes, skills, and abilities needed at advanced officer grades, the U.S. military practices an "up or out" philosophy

wherein the training and selection of officers occurs throughout the course of a career.

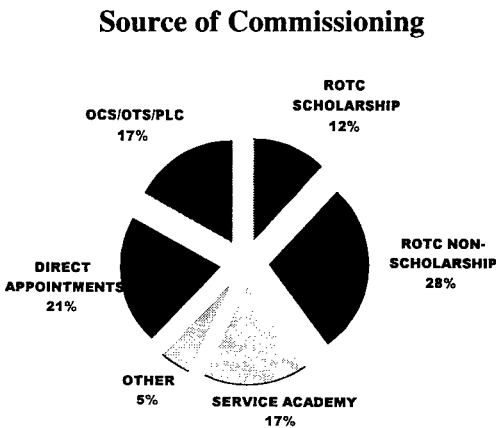
The commissioned officer corps provides the senior leadership and management of the armed forces. In Fiscal Year (FY) 1999, there were 204,909 active duty officers across the branches of the military. In terms of active duty officers, the Air Force has the highest number (70,625 officers), the Army has 66,263 officers, the Navy has 51,885 officers, while the Marine Corps has 16,136 officers.

The officer candidate programs can be separated into two basic categories: those for college students and those for college graduates. Programs for college students may provide an education or offer varying levels of financial assistance to help cover the costs of a college education. These programs include the service academies and the Reserve Office Training Corps (ROTC). ROTC programs can be divided into two types: scholarship ROTC, which offers up to four years of financial assistance, paying for college tuition, required educational fees, textbooks, supplies, equipment and a monthly stipend; and non-scholarship ROTC, which provides a stipend only.

Programs for college graduates are covered under the general heading of Officer Candidate School

(OCS). Individuals may also be commissioned by direct appointment. These commissions are granted to persons who are professionally qualified in the medical or health field, as well as lawyers and chaplains. Officers who enter under this program are given a minimum of military training and are often commissioned at a higher rank.

The largest proportion of officer accessions typically come from the ROTC programs across the branches of the Armed forces. Direct Appointments account for approximately one fifth of the new officers; the military academies and Officer Candidate/Training Schools produce comparable proportions of new officers.



A typical pattern of the percentage of officers commissioned by Service and source is provided in Table 1. The majority of Army and Air Force

Table 1. Percent of Officer Accessions by Source of Commission and Service for FY 1998.

	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
Academy	14	19	12	19
ROTC	48	18	13	42
OCS	6	37	60	10
Direct Apt.	9	15	0	19
Other	17	6	15	0
Health Pro. Schl.	6	6	0	10

officers come from ROTC programs while the majority of Navy and Marine Corps officers come from officer candidate programs. Warrant Officer programs make up the “Other” category; Army helicopter pilots, for example, are frequently warrant officers. A small percentage of officers come from the Health Professions Scholarship Program.

Description of Commissioning Sources

Service Academies

The service academies include the United States Military Academy at West Point (Army), the United States Naval Academy (Navy and Marine Corps), the Air Force Academy, and the Coast Guard Academy. The service academies give student between the ages of 17 and 22 the opportunity to develop the knowledge, character, and motivation essential to leadership, which is necessary in order to be successful in their military career. All Service academies offer four years of college education leading to a bachelor of science degree. Cadets and midshipmen receive tuition, medical care, room and board, and are paid \$600 monthly for uniforms, books and incidental expenses. Upon graduation, those commissioned are obligated for an active duty period of at least five years. The tables below depict the officer production flow from the academies.

The overall academic and physical preparation of a candidate is of vital importance to success at any of the academies. The three major academies have highly competitive entrance standards, each accepting approximately 1,200 new cadets and midshipmen per year, which annually produce a thousand new commissioned officers for their parent Service. To apply to the academies, a junior or senior high school student must meet the qualification standards of the College Boards Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Testing (ACT) program, they must also have received high grades in all areas of study while in high school. The student must meet the standards for the Candidate Fitness Test upon

entry. The fitness test evaluates the individual's physical fitness in terms of, for example, pull-ups, push-ups, sit-ups, a short run and the standing broad jump. To gain acceptance into an academy, the student must also receive a nomination from a member of congress, a presidential nomination, or a vice presidential nomination.. Table 2 provides application flow data for each of the academies.

Table 2. Officer Production: Academy Application Flow by Service Academy and School Year.

<i>U.S. Military Academy (Army)</i>				
Class	2000	2001	2002	2003
No. of Appl.	12,886	12,744	12,442	11,491
No. of Qual.. Appl.	2,030	2,058	2,088	2,106
No. Who Enter	1,187	1,187	1,246	1,133
<i>Naval Academy</i>				
Class	2000	2001	2002	2003
No. of Appl.	9,962	10,119	9,827	10,145
No. of Qual.. Appl.	1,920	1,728	1,774	1,814
No. Who Enter	1,212	1,175	2,231	1,232
<i>Air Force Academy</i>				
Class	2000	2001	2002	2003
No. of Appl.	9,165	9,802	10,035	8,828
No. of Qual.. Appl.	2,164	2,122	2,129	2,195
No. Who Enter	1,230	1,117	1,216	1,330

Reserve Officer Training Corps

The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) is a program composed of about 475 Army, Navy, and Air Force units at public and private colleges and

universities nationwide. ROTC is traditionally a four-year program. There are different scholarships available to the college student to help pay for expenses. These scholarships are competitive and are given to applicants who show a high level of academic ability, are physically qualified, involved in extracurricular activities, and are of good moral character. The criteria for selecting scholarship winners include: 920 points on the SAT or 19 on the ACT, academic standing in high school (class rank and class size), evaluation or letter of recommendation from three high school officials, a personal interview, and documentation of achievement in extracurricular activities and leadership positions. The scholarships are worth up to \$16,000 per year, along with a stipend of \$200 per month.

ROTC training (electives in most schools) consist of two to five hours of weekly military instruction and some summer training programs in addition to the regular college program. The first two years of the program are comprised of classroom studies in subjects such as military history, leadership development, and national defense as well as practical leadership laboratories. A student can enroll in the program for the first two years at college as an elective with no military obligation. During the next two years, the student uses skills learned in the first two years and the summer training to organize and manage new ROTC students. In addition, each of the Services has a special program which allows interested students to enroll in the last two years of ROTC. Upon graduation from college, the student will be commissioned as a second lieutenant or ensign in their respective service and incur an eight-year service obligation (generally, four years active duty and four years reserve duty).

Direct Appointments

Direct appointments are available to individuals who are professionally qualified as doctors, nurses, and other health care providers, as well as lawyers and chaplains. Military lawyers must be graduates of law schools accredited by the American Bar Association. Lawyers usually enter active duty at an advanced rank. Military chaplains must possess 120 semester hours of

undergraduate credits from a college or university and possess a Master of Divinity degree. Chaplains may also enter at an advanced rank. Direct appointments can be applied for through the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Coast Guard.

General Eligibility Requirements for Officer Commissions

The general eligibility requirements for officer commissions are codified in U.S. law. Individuals appointed as commissioned officers must be able to complete twenty years of active commissioned service before their fifty-fifth birthday; exceptions for health care professionals are allowed. To be eligible for appointment as a commissioned officer in the regular forces, U.S. citizenship is required. Education requirements are determined by each Service. Generally, a bachelors degree is required; special occupations (e.g., physician, chaplain) may require additional vocational credentials which are determined by the Secretary of the Military Department concerned. Officer candidates are screened for moral character (e.g., background check, personnel references) as well as medically screened to insure that they are generally healthy, capable of completing required training, and able to meet the rigors of military life.

Aptitude Selection Measures for Officer Candidates

Several aptitude tests are currently used by the armed services to select officer candidates. The academies, like most undergraduate colleges, use the SAT or the American College Test (ACT) in conjunction with high school class rank. ROTC programs primarily use SAT and ACT scores to determine eligibility, but some programs require additional tests. With the exception of the Marine Corps, Officer Candidate School (OCS) programs employ tests that have been developed specifically for officer selection. The Army uses the Officer Selection Battery (OSB) and the General Technical (GT) composite of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the enlistment aptitude test; the Navy uses the

Officer Aptitude Rating (OAR), the Academic Qualification Test (AQT) and the Flight Aptitude Rating (FAR), all of which are composites form the Aviation Selection Test Battery (ASTB); and the Air Force uses the Air Force Officer Qualifying Test (AFOQT). The Marine corps requires that applicants to all of its pre-commissioning programs (except for the Naval Academy and Naval ROTC, which are administered by the Navy) obtain a qualifying score on the SAT, the ACT or the Electronics Repair (EL) composite of the ASVAB. In addition, aviation applicants in the Marine Corps are required to achieve passing scores on the AQT-FAR.

The SAT and ACT play an important role in the selection of officer candidates in college programs. These are the traditional measures of academic ability used for incoming college freshmen in the academies and scholarship ROTC programs, much the same as in undergraduate colleges throughout the country. Because these programs involve a substantial monetary investment in the candidate's post-secondary education, the foremost concern at this point is the selection of individuals who will succeed in college. The SAT, developed by the Educational Testing Service for the College Entrance Examination Board, is a college entrance examination designed to measure general verbal and mathematical reasoning ability. The ACT, developed by the American College Testing Program, is also designed as a college entrance examination, measuring general verbal and mathematical comprehension.

The tests used in selecting candidates for OCS and OTS programs are intended to assess more specific aptitudes or characteristics that predict officer performance, since virtually all of the applicants, as college graduates, have already demonstrated a level of academic success. Many ROTC non-scholarship programs, geared mainly for college juniors and seniors, likewise use tests that are aimed at predicting success in the military, since most of the upper-class students are expected to complete college. The tests used to select officer candidates for OCS, OTS, and ROTC non-scholarship programs include the

OSB, the OAR-AQT-FAR, the AFOQT, and portions of the ASVAB.

Initial Selection Process for Officer Candidates

Service Academies

All three service academies use the "whole person" system for evaluation applicants. At West Point, a "whole person score" is derived from weighting three factors: academic aptitude, which combines SAT or ACT scores with high school rank (60 percent); leadership potential, which is estimated from athletic participation in high school and high school teacher recommendations (30 percent); and physical aptitude, which is measured with the Academy's Physical Aptitude Examination (10 percent). The Naval Academy assigns each applicant a numerical score, called the "candidate multiple," calculated from the following variables; SAT or ACT scores; high school class rank; evaluations by high school teachers; participation in extracurricular activities; and specially adapted scales from the Strong-Campbell inventory, which is designed to assess areas of interest and to predict career retention. The Air Force Academy's "selection composite" is similar to West Point's "whole person score" and is derived by weighting and combining the following elements: academics, which adds together SAT or ACT scores with high school rank (60 percent); extracurricular activities (20 percent); an admissions panel rating (20 percent), and an interview and candidates fitness test (no specific weighting).

Cutoff scores at the academies, may be waived for applicants who demonstrate exceptional potential in other areas of qualification. Those who meet the minimum qualifications of the institution then have their files reviewed by an admissions board. Subjective appraisals of an applicant's qualifications may be made at this point. In fact, at the Naval Academy, the admissions board may adjust an applicant's "candidate multiple" by up to 20 percent. The rationale is that the reviewers may be able to see something important in a

candidate's background that has been omitted from the "whole person" rating.

The highly selective selection process is followed by a demanding training program in the academies. The Air Force Academy is typical. The first year at the Academy serves to develop cadets as followers, since good officers must learn to be followers first and after a cadet completes their first year, the pride in themselves and confidence they have gained is indescribable. Each succeeding year, cadets are given more responsibility, for themselves and others, while also meeting a demanding academic schedule. The Academy strives to produce officers with a life-long commitment to personal and professional growth.

ROTC Scholarship Programs

The Army employs a "whole person score" (WPS) in selecting candidates for its scholarship program. The WPS is composed of the following weighted factors: SAT or ACT score (25 percent); high school class standing (25 percent); participation in extracurricular activities and other elements that show leadership ability (40 percent); and the Physical Aptitude Examination (10 percent). The Army's WPS has a range of 1 through 999, and cutoff scores can change from one year to the next, depending upon the number and quality of applicants. Nevertheless, the scholarship program does establish specific cutoff scores for the SAT and ACT, and, if these minimums are not met, the candidate is rejected without further review.

The Navy's scholarship program uses a two-step process in selecting students: initial screening followed by final selection. SAT or ACT scores serve as the sole criterion for initial screening. Those who qualify are then reviewed by a selection board. Applicants who achieve the minimum required test scores are then evaluated on the basis of several weighted factors: SAT or ACT scores (19 percent); high school rank (56 percent); results of a structured interview by a naval officer (10 percent); results of the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, used to predict career tenure (9 percent); and scores derived from

a biographical questionnaire designed to predict retention (5 percent).

Students who enter naval ROTC under the Marine Corps option are required to have a slightly higher SAT score than naval candidates. Applicants who are able to achieve the required minimum scores for Marine Corps programs are then evaluated under the "whole person" concept. For most of the Marine Corps programs, the following factors are considered: recommendations from professors or employers; college transcripts; physical examination results; and the individual's work or military records. These factors are not weighted in any formal manner by Marine Corps reviewers.

In the initial screening for the Air Force scholarship, applicants are required to meet the following criteria before any further consideration is given: high school grade point average; high school class standing; and SAT or ACT score. An applicant's intended major in college is also very important in awarding scholarships. Applicants who have achieved the minimum test scores and high school grades are then evaluated by a scholarship selection board. The board reviews academic records, test scores, leadership experience, extracurricular activities and work experience. A personal interview, responses to a questionnaire and evaluations by high school officials are also used by the board in awarding scholarships.

ROTC Non-scholarship Programs

Currently, the Army's non-scholarship program uses the Pre-commissioning Assessment System (PAS) for selecting candidates. Pre-commissioning selection normally occurs at the beginning of the third year of college. Applicants are evaluated on the basis of physical fitness, grades, participation in extracurricular activities, writing skills and motivation (as determined through a structured interview). Applicants must also achieve a passing score on the OSB. Candidates who do not meet the minimum may be accepted if a "whole person evaluation" finds outstanding performance in another area that is seen to compensate for the lower OSB score.

The non-scholarship portion of the Navy's ROTC program is called the College Program. College program students are selected by individual units and standards vary by unit. There are no centrally established admission criteria (selection for scholarship programs of less than four years also take place at the various units, with no uniform criteria).

The Marine Corps also has a program, Platoon Leaders Course, for college students who decide to become Marine Corps officers. They participate in two six-week summer training courses (or, camps) and are commissioned upon receipt of their baccalaureate.

The Air Force uses the AFOQT in screening applicants for its non-scholarship programs. Minimum required scores must be met on the Verbal and Quantitative composites. Pilot and navigator candidates additionally must meet minimum scores on the Pilot and Navigator-Technical composites. Applicants are then given a Quality Index score. The Quality Index score is made up of both academic and non-academic factors that weighted roughly equally. Non-academic factors include the detachment commander's overall rating; review board rating of self-confidence, human relations, extracurricular participation and communication skills (from a structured interview and written exercise); and a physical fitness test. The academic component includes cumulative grade point average and the scores of the AFOQT Verbal and Quantitative composites. An applicant must also be in "good standing" with the academic requirement of their college; if not, they must possess a high enough cumulative grade point average.

Officer Candidate School (OCS) Programs

Factors considered in the selection of candidates for Army OCS include the Physical Aptitude Examination, college grade point average, letters of recommendation from former employers and professors, college major (engineering and science are preferred), and an interview by a selection board. Scores on the OSB and GT composite of the ASVAB are also used in the

selection process. To be eligible to apply to Army OCS, an applicant must have a minimum score on the technical-managerial leadership (cognitive) subtest of the OCB and a minimum score on the GT composite. The applicant's file is then sent to a selection board. The board, in turn, assigns a numerical rating to each applicant. The highest rated applicants are selected, based on the number of available positions in OCS.

The Navy OCS and AOCS programs consider an applicant's college grade point average, extracurricular activities, employment record, and physical examination results. However, before an individual is allowed to apply he or she must achieve a qualifying score on one or more of the ASTB composites. Navy OCS uses the OAR composite as a preliminary screening device. As a part of the Navy's affirmative action program, racial and ethnic minorities who score below the cutoff on the OAR can be accepted as students at the Officer Candidate Preparatory School before being placed in OCS. The Navy's AOCS program uses the AQT-FAR composites for preliminary screening.

Persons who wish to enter the Air Force OTS program are required to first achieve a minimum

score on the AFOQT. The individual's application is then submitted to a central selection board for evaluation. The selection board considers factors such as college grade point average, AFOQT scores, college major, work or military experience and leadership potential. No weighting formula is used by the board in evaluating candidate qualifications.

Summary

Officer selection and commissioning in the U.S. is notable for the variety of programs, both within and between the Service branches. Although the initial selection process is central to the development of a volunteer, professional cadre of officers, the emphasis is more on "growing" military officers rather than on the initial selection process itself. Selection and training are continuous processes revolving around an "up or out" philosophy; in fact, the promotion system, beyond the scope of this paper, is an integral part of the system. As noted earlier, the U.S. approach to officer selection is to identify intelligent men and women of good character who can be trained to provide the leadership and management of the armed forces.