

In Pursuit of Improved Officer Management

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

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The US Army continues to experience challenges in recruiting, retaining, and developing leaders to meet continually evolving operational and institutional requirements. This challenge predates the current All Volunteer Force approach to manning. Efforts to adjust the Army's personnel management policies and procedures to better manage the existing human capital, along with recurring manning shortfalls in some parts of the force, highlight the importance of refocusing personnel management policy toward effective talent management. In its simplest form, talent management is adjusting incentives to recruit, develop, retain, and assign personnel to duty assignments that (a) meet the operational and institutional requirements of the Army, (b) provide the right mix of experience and education to develop competent senior leaders to lead in either command or staff positions, and (c) effectively match the skills, knowledge, ability, and desires of individual leaders to duty assignments and career paths that are fulfilling to the soldier and simultaneously identify best qualified leaders for critical command and staff positions. This is no easy task under the best of conditions.

This monograph focuses on the Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) in an effort to identify shortfalls in talent management policies and procedures. Tracing the development of OPMS from its origins at the end of compulsory service through various adjustments to force structure and personnel management policy, this research acknowledges that no set of management policies will completely eliminate dissatisfaction or misalignment for all individual soldiers. The proposal of a dual-track career management system with the Army's basic branches offered in this research aims at improving organizational effectiveness by systemically assessing and assigning officers with the appropriate skills, experience, and desire to succeed in leading large organizations and increasing long term officer satisfaction.

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Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADSO	Active Duty Service Obligation
AIM	Assignment Interactive Module
CFD	Career Field Designation
CASAL	Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey
CGSC	Command and General Staff College
CSA	Chief of Staff of the Army
DA	Department of the Army
DOPMA	Defense Officer Personnel Management Act
HR	Human Resources
HRC	Human Resources Command
IPPS-A	Integrated Personnel and Pay System - Army
KD	Key and Developmental
OPD	Officer Personnel Directorate
OPMS	Officer Personnel Management System
PAM	Pamphlet
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
VTIP	Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program
XO	Executive Officer
YG	Year Group

Introduction

[The Army] needs to develop officers with the right skills, knowledge, and experience to meet unforeseen challenges of the 21st century. While the warfighting focus must never be obscured or diminished, the institutional Army has a simultaneous requirement for officers possessing other skills and expertise.

—OPMS XXI Task Force Report, 1997

“True military professionals are something more than warriors. They are distinguished not so much for their skill in wielding swords as for their skill in equipping, training, and leading sword-wielding warriors in combat.”¹ The mission of the US Army is to fight and win the Nation’s wars and this is accomplished by organizing, equipping, and training Army forces to ensure their readiness for combat operations.² While the main focus of the Army is combat operations, there are many other functions that the Army is required to accomplish. These functions include ensuring readiness for a wide range of missions, anticipating and adapting to technological innovation, and ensuring the continued education of soldiers and leaders. This requires both commanders at all echelons with the experience and training to command and specialists of all branches at all echelons to ensure that the proper organization, training, and equipping is planned and resourced to ensure the efficient and effective functioning of the operational and institutional force.³ The essence of talent management in Army leadership

¹ Anthony Formica, “Lost in Transmission: How the Army Has Garbled the Message about the Nature of Its Profession,” *Military Review* (March-April 2012), 45, accessed March 13, 2019, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20120430_art009.pdf

² US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1, The Army* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-8.

³ Training and Doctrine Command, *Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet (TRADOC PAM) 525-8-1, Generating Force Study: Innovation and Adaptation in Support to Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 8. Note: TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-1 published in 2010, highlights that, “[w]hile the terms institutional Army and operational Army continue to be used, HQDA identifies assets as GF [generating force] or operating force, with a range of subcategories for each.”

is identifying and developing people with the ability to lead across sustaining institutional and fielded operational organizations and optimizing that talent for today's complex world.⁴

Operational forces, fielded tactical units, and support activities are military units that are organized, trained, and equipped to conduct tactical action as part of the joint force, and must work in concert with the institutional or generating force that recruits, educates, trains, and equips individuals before their assignment to the operating force. Operating and generating forces must work together to make the Army run, and investing in strategic leadership in both areas is critical to the future success of the Army.

Operating force positions are critical positions led by commanders to execute tactical and operational tasks. Examples of these positions include commanders and staffs in numbered army units and instructors at branch schools. Generating force positions are defined as “the management and leadership positions that require deep branch-specific knowledge and experience at the company and field grade level to manage the essential organizational systems that support and sustain the operating force and the commanders that lead them.” Examples of generating force billets include staff positions at branch schools, and echelons above Corps, to include Army staff, Joint staff, and combatant commands, Forces Command Headquarters, and Army activities and field operating agencies that require operational experience not available from Army civilian or civilian defense contractor personnel.

To accomplish the critical assigned functions, the Army “manages officers by categories and groups with similar functions to facilitate the development of officer functional competencies.” These operations career field (CFD) categories are: operations, operations support, and force sustainment. The sixteen basic branches of the US Army, as well as the functional areas, align with these three categories. Officers are commissioned into one of the

⁴ US Army Combined Arms Center, *Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Center, 2015), 16.

sixteen basic branches and may not be assigned to more than one branch.⁵ In addition, there are also special branches, which include the Judge Advocate General Corps and the Health Services. For the most part, this monograph focuses on the proposed changes to the career path for basic branch officers.

Officers who do not desire to remain in their assigned branch have the opportunity to elect to transfer to another branch or to a functional area through the Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP). Functional areas are “a grouping of officers by technical specialty or skills other than an arm, Service, or branch that usually requires unique education, training, and experience. An officer may not be assigned to more than one functional area at a time.”⁶ While there are many considerations and restrictions for the transfer program, the basic premise is that an officer can apply through the VTIP process during their career to elect a different branch or functional area if so desired.

It is important to note here that the Army has already accounted for the necessity of specific technical specialties or skills outside of the basic branches. The Army has developed several functional area specialties, including strategist, strategic intelligence officer and foreign area officers; just three examples of the functional areas that the Army has developed to provide senior specialists. However, the premise of this monograph is that the basic branches also need senior, experienced, branch-specific, strategic-level leadership.

The Army trains and promotes officers based on a merit model that centers around successful successive commands. This is true for all basic branches, and to some extent, has extended to the functional areas as well. This command-centric model makes selection for command and positions that support command selection the centerpiece of an officer’s career and makes command the key position for promotion for all the basic branches. This command-centric

⁵ US Department of the Army, *DA Pamphlet 600-3, Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 9-11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

model offers successful battalion command as the single, de facto definition of career success and the gateway to Army senior leader positions or general officer rank.

While other viable career paths that recognize a broader set of skills and include other opportunities have been suggested over the years, because “advancement requires a ‘warrior’ career profile, officers avoid “non-operational” assignments.”⁷ Non-operational assignments, such as those in the institutional Army, are considered by many officers as a risk to career progression.

The term non-operational assignment is a common, often pejorative, but inaccurate phrase. It generally refers to staff assignments not specifically identified as key and developmental to the command track.⁸ In addition to the previously mentioned positions, generating force positions also include duties or “assignments that provide a developmental opportunity usually not directly related to an officer’s branch or functional area but which may develop a greater understanding of how the Army operates as an institution.” These non-operational positions can also include opportunities in academia or an internship with civilian organization that enhances an officer’s skills within their branch. The intent of these broadening opportunities is to “develop an officer’s capability to see, work, learn and contribute outside each one’s own perspective or individual level of understanding for the betterment of both the individual officer and the institution.”⁹

Unfortunately, the general perception is that these opportunities detract from the core warfighting skills. In truth, these types of assignments can often provide important experience

⁷ Michael J. Colarusso and David S. Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2014), 7.

⁸ Promotion board results indicate that these types of positions are not valued as equivalent to traditional battalion and brigade-level key and developmental positions such as operations officer or executive officer.

⁹ US Department of the Army, *DA Pamphlet 600-3, Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 12.

beyond tactical unit operations, experience essential to developing the “specialized expertise demanded by senior officer positions.”¹⁰ Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General James C. McConville, refers to these opportunities as the “wonder years.”¹¹ Many officers still believe that there is an institutional bias against nontraditional career paths that perpetuates the current command-centric model despite repeated reform efforts. Ultimately, this bias prevents the emergence of alternative models for career progression and success, and stifles innovation. The role of innovation is “to help create the strategic options that allow a company to respond to fluctuating, transformative conditions.”¹² Strategic options are exactly what the Army needs to succeed in an era of great power competition.

At the same time, recruiting and retaining talented and motivated officers has been difficult, particularly in the decades of war since 9/11. Rigid personnel management policies and high rates of unit activity including training exercises and deployments, all contribute to the magnitude of this management challenge. Junior officers separate from service at unprecedented rates, citing dissatisfaction and limited opportunity to control the direction of their careers. Similarly, field grade officers within the Operations Career Field who have strong performance files but are not selected for command have expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of an alternative career path outside troop command.¹³ The result is that the Army is bleeding the talent needed for strategic echelon leadership.

This monograph traces the evolution of the Army’s Officer Personnel Management

¹⁰ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, 7.

¹¹ Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard, “More than a Number,” Army.mil, June 26, 2018, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/206651>.

¹² Christopher P. Skroupa, “Competitive Advantage – How Innovation is Shaping the 21st Century Company,” *Forbes*, October 4, 2017, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christopherskroupa/2017/10/04/competitive-advantage-how-innovation-is-shaping-the-21st-century-company/#3d16d2906a4c>.

¹³ Tim Kane, “Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving,” *The Atlantic* (January/February 2011), accessed November 7, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/01/why-our-best-officers-are-leaving/308346/>.

System (OPMS) and proposes a straightforward remedy: bifurcating the operations career field into a command track and a branch-specific specialist track. This paper will examine the history of officer professional management from the inception of an all-volunteer force, review key initiatives in OPMS, and make recommendations for future implementation to better facilitate Army talent management. This review of officer professional development begins at the inception of the all-volunteer force because this level of officer professional management was unnecessary in prior years during conscription when the average service length for officers was approximately ten years and service was compulsory. The research for this paper is informed by more extensive studies on talent management, defined as “systematic planning for the right number and type of officers to meet the Army’s needs at all levels and at all times so that the majority of them are employed optimally.”¹⁴ The goal of this paper is to identify an alternative measure of success for basic branch officers in whom the nation has invested a tremendous amount of training, education, and trust, and to provide a viable career path to enable that success.

A Framework for Officer Personnel Management

The Army’s officer personnel management system (OPMS) has been in place for almost five decades and has gone through several major revisions. There have been three major instances of OPMS: OPMS I, OPMS II, and OPMS XXI. This management system was originally created in 1970 to address officer professionalism concerns in the all-volunteer force and was amended to accommodate the 1980 Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA), which provided rules for officer manpower. OPMS was further adjusted to comply with joint specialty officer requirements in the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. Officer personnel management is also guided by the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This authorization bill determines the agencies responsible for defense, establishes funding levels, and sets the policies

¹⁴ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, ix.

under which money will be spent.¹⁵ The current OPMS is OPMS XXI, which has been in place since 1997. These three systems, OPMS, DOPMA, and the NDAA, all work in concert to provide overarching guidance for officer management. One additional document, the Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management regulation, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 (DA PAM 600-3), defines the day-to-day officer development and career management programs for each of the Army's career branches and functional areas and is revised periodically.¹⁶

From Management to Talent Management: Gaining and Maintaining Talent

Talent management is central to recruiting, retaining, developing and employing the right mix of officers to ensure the Army has the needed “innovative and adaptive leaders and cohesive teams that thrive in conditions of complexity and uncertainty.”¹⁷ Uncertainty and complexity in the operating environment require the Army to adapt its organization and operating concept rapidly. Adaptation depends on the availability and proper employment of human capital to understand, direct, and implement change. Effective talent management is required to create a deep bench of both generalist and specialist leaders for both the operating force and the generating force. One need only look to the current unrestrained aggression of a resurgent Russia and a rising China threatening US allies in both Europe and the Pacific to understand the magnitude of the challenge.¹⁸ To approach these challenges, Army leaders “must build the next US Army—a force that balances the demands of today’s conflicts with those of future wars that

¹⁵ US Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Defense Primer: Navigating the NDAA*, by Valerie Heitshusen and Brendan W. McGarry, IF10515 (2018), 1, accessed October 24, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF10515.pdf>.

¹⁶ US Department of the Army, *DA Pamphlet 600-3, Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 11.

¹⁷ US Department of the Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, The Army Operating Concept* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 14.

¹⁸ David Barno and Nora Bensahel, *The Future of the Army: Today, Tomorrow and the Day After Tomorrow* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2016), 3, accessed March 18, 2018, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Future_of_the_Army_web_0921.pdf.

could require much more from the force and its people.”¹⁹ These significant strategic challenges set the stage for more aggressive changes to personnel management and provide the catalyst for change.

The Army must also compete with civilian employers and the other services to recruit and retain quality officers. Serving in the military is no longer considered a civic duty; fewer Americans are willing to serve today, and even fewer are qualified.²⁰ The Army missed its recruiting goal last year for the first time since 2005, falling roughly 6,500 recruits short.²¹

Compounding the accessions challenge, retaining qualified leaders remains a key problem. A 2008 survey of 100 active-duty officers indicated that 62 percent of them thought the “best and brightest” captains were leaving active-duty service.²² Additionally, *The Atlantic* reported that “an astonishing 93 percent” of active and recently active junior officers thought that most or all of the best officers were leaving the service before completing their careers.²³ An informal review of the files of officers who separated voluntarily at the end of their active duty service obligation (ADSO) indicates that top-file officers depart in disproportionate numbers, a fact shared by both the Navy and Air Force as well. According to a 2010 study of junior officers, the primary reason cited for departing the service was limited ability to control their careers.

¹⁹ Barno and Bensahel, *The Future of the Army: Today, Tomorrow and the Day After Tomorrow*, 3.

²⁰ Army Marketing Battalion “Prime Market” (slide presentation, presented at Military Intelligence Leaders Conference, Fort Huachuca, Arizona, November 28, 2017). Of the 33.4 million in the prime market of 17-24-year-olds in the United States, there are only 9.7 million qualified. After eliminating the 4 million who are enrolled in college; 5.7 million remain. Of those, 1.7 million are determined to be of high quality; of those, only 136,000 are inclined to join the military. The requirements for all four services for 2017 was 264,078; almost twice as many more needed than are disposed to join the military.

²¹ Matthew Cox, “Facing Recruiting Shortfall, Army Brass Hit Road in Search of New Warriors,” *Military.com*, November 17, 2018, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/11/17/facing-recruiting-shortfall-army-brass-hit-road-search-new-warriors.html>.

²² Jaron Wharton, “Evidence of a Hollowing Force? A Closer Look at Junior Officer Retention,” Center for a New American Security, May 2008, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep06129.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af74d5acc4ff813e3db024477a1ab02d6>.

²³ Kane, “Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving.”

Frustration with a one-size-fits-all system was by far the most common complaint.²⁴ Low career satisfaction indicates a systemic problem with OPMS that drives out many top-performing junior leaders early in their career – the very talent that should be retained and nurtured to become future executive leaders of the Army.

The All-Volunteer Force: Evolution of the Officer Personnel Management System

Compulsory military service, commonly referred to as “the draft” or conscription, has been relatively rare in the history of the US Army. According to one RAND Corporation report, conscription has been limited to a total of thirty-five years, most of which coincided with the period from World War II through the Cold War.²⁵ Despite the relative rarity of conscription in the United States, it had a profound impact on personnel management policies in the military. This section traces policy evolution in its contemporary context and highlights the persistence of the command-centric career model and its constraints on talent management, beginning with the Vietnam era transition to an all-volunteer force.

The period of US military direct combat involvement in South Vietnam, generally accepted as 1964-1973, was a period of deep social change in the United States. The youth population in the cohort subject to conscription for service in South Vietnam was far less willing to accept compulsory service than were their parents, who comprised what is now colloquially known as “The Greatest Generation,” the generation reared in the Great Depression and drafted by the millions to fight World War II in both the Pacific and European Theaters.

During the Vietnam War, objection to conscription was broad based among the age-group cohort eligible for service. Vocal and visible objections to the Vietnam draft came from college students engaged in the anti-war movement despite the fact that these students were

²⁴ Sayce Falk and Sascha Rogers, “Junior Military Officer Retention: Challenges and Opportunities” (master’s thesis, Harvard University, 2011), 3.

²⁵ Bernard Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), 1, Adobe PDF eBook.

eligible for, and often received, exemption from conscription.²⁶ However, this was not unique to the Vietnam era. Those in the poor or working classes were disproportionately affected by the draft because they were largely ineligible for exemption or deferment. This resulted in a disproportionate number of ground combat soldiers in Vietnam drafted from the less affluent and less educated strata of American society.²⁷

African Americans were prominent among the groups voicing concern about the disparate impact of conscription. During the 1960s, African Americans were engaged in prominent demonstrations and struggled to end discriminatory social practices and policy throughout much of the country. Broad popular support for expanded civil rights and social reforms provided the backdrop for protests against conscription policies and assertions that the draft was immoral because some were compelled to fight abroad for a nation that still denied basic human rights to domestic minorities.²⁸

The Gates Commission: Two Fundamental Questions

Anti-war sentiment was a significant factor in the 1968 US Presidential election campaign. Shortly after his 1969 inauguration, President Nixon took action to fulfill a significant campaign pledge: to end the draft. He empowered a carefully selected committee headed by former Secretary of Defense Thomas S. Gates, assisted by a group of nationally known experts, including future Nobel Laureate economist Milton Friedman, to examine the problem of ending conscription.

The Gates Commission Report, formally titled “Report of the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force,” laid the foundation for ending conscription while maintaining

²⁶ Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force*, 1.

²⁷ “The Anti-War Movement,” US History, accessed February 6, 2019, <http://www.ushistory.org/us/55d.asp>.

²⁸ “Anti-Draft Movement,” Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, accessed February 6, 2019, <https://snccdigital.org/events/anti-draft-movement/>.

adequate military manpower.²⁹ The comprehensive report answered two fundamental questions with significant rigor. The first question was, is an all-volunteer force feasible? The Gates Commission answer was a resounding “yes,” with the significant qualification that the nation maintain a stand-by form of conscription which is embodied in today’s Selective Service System. The second question addressed by the Gates Commission is equally important: is an all-volunteer force desirable from a societal perspective? Again, the answer was “yes.” The authors stated that “[t]he draft does not guarantee the quality of our armed forces, and neither will voluntarism. There are no simple solutions or shortcuts in dealing with the complex problems that must always concern us as a free people.”³⁰

The Gates Commission concluded that eliminating the draft would not have much impact on the business of the armed forces. The Gates Commission also directly addressed political and moral objections to ending the post-1948 conscription policy. Most significantly, the Gates Commission took on the social issue of equal opportunity for African Americans by concluding that higher pay may induce more African Americans to enlist, and that increased racial tensions in the military were unlikely to be significant.³¹

History has shown that the Gates Commission conclusions were generally correct. Critics will note there was a significant component of racial animosity in the Army following the end of conscription; however, this was not outside the scale of broader social unrest. Those criticisms aside, an all-volunteer force has generally met the needs of the nation since 1973.³² The

²⁹ Gates, Thomas S., *Report of the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force* (US Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, February 1970), 1-10, accessed November 13, 2018, <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/MG265/images/webS0243.pdf>.

³⁰ Gates, *Report of the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, 12.

³¹ Gates, *Report of the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, 11-20. Overall the Gates Commission report provides exceptional insight into the essential personnel factors influencing both readiness and public perception of the military as an institution. The main dimensions of the report provide an excellent starting point for evaluating any military personnel management policy: supply and demand, attrition and retention, the mix of career and non-career personnel, and personnel equity.

³² Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force*, 2.

commencement of the all-volunteer force necessitated the establishment of a comprehensive officer personnel management system.

OPMS I: The Cultural Challenge of an All-Volunteer Personnel System

The Gates Commission report was released in February 1970. In March 1970, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird received guidance to begin implementing the recommendations, starting with a moratorium on new conscription. The services began planning for and working with Congress to prepare for eventual implementation.³³ General William C. Westmoreland, 25th Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) from 1968 to 1972, led the Army transition to an all-volunteer force. General Westmoreland had previously served as commander of US forces in Vietnam and was well acquainted with the challenges of a mixed force structure consisting of conscripts and professional soldiers. He was also well acquainted with the broader challenges of manning a globally deployed force. As early as 1968, General Westmoreland established close-hold working groups under the umbrella of then-classified Project PROVIDE to assess necessary measures to transition to an all-volunteer force.³⁴

As a result of internal Army planning groups, General Westmoreland determined that “officer professionalism deserved its own specific initiative.”³⁵ General Westmoreland wanted to ensure that officer professionalism was improved. He included criteria in the planning guidance for Army personnel management that would effectively identify, motivate, and utilize officers in the new construct of an all-volunteer officer corps. General Westmoreland essentially wanted to create two distinct career paths for two types of officers: commanders and professional staff officers or technical specialists. He also saw the need for a process to designate officers who had

³³ Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force*, 90-96.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 146-151.

³⁵ William Donnelly, “Professionalism and the Officer Personnel Management System,” *Military Review* (May-June 2013): 17, accessed December 11, 2018, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20130630_art006.pdf.

both “reached their ceilings” and “had ceased to produce.”³⁶ These factors were central to efforts to create a more professional officer corps through a combination of a competitive and more transparent and disciplined leader selection process for an all-volunteer force.

General Westmoreland recognized a deep-rooted concern that some officers not selected for the command track might be adversely affected in terms of promotions, selection for advanced schooling, and career-enhancing duty positions. These potentially undesirable consequences for individual officers within some branches were in direct tension with General Westmoreland’s desire to eliminate careerism and “ticket-punching” practices where officers selfishly pursued key command billets regardless of qualification or aptitude. General Westmoreland directed the Army personnel officer to focus on field grade officer management policies, assigning officers either to a command track or a specialist staff track. This approach would require branch specialist officers to serve in specialist staff billets at battalion and above. For example, the personnel officer in an infantry battalion would be an adjutant general branch officer rather than an infantry officer waiting for command. Proponents argued that company grade officers would gain deeper and more relevant experience in the fundamentals of the combat arms branches, increasing their skills and professionalism, and specialists would gain valuable experience in the operating force.³⁷

However, field comments on this first OPMS proposal were generally negative. Separate command and staff career paths were seen as too much radical change at a time when the Army faced so many other operational and institutional challenges.³⁸ In response to critics, General Westmoreland directed a modification of OPMS that eliminated the specialist track and left only a career path that centered on successful command as a criterion for promotion.

³⁶ Donnelly, “Professionalism and the Officer Personnel Management System,” 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

³⁸ Donnelly, “Professionalism and the Officer Personnel Management System,” 19.

The Westmoreland-era OPMS created four officer management categories, called “officer personnel directorates” (OPD): combat arms, combat support arms, logistics services, and administrative services. Officers would compete for promotion and advancement within their designated OPD management category. Selection for field grade command was done by a centralized Army-wide board, despite deep objection that it effectively created a caste of commanders eligible to become the elite senior leadership and a much larger group of those not eligible. Specifically, the Army Material Command and the Corps of Engineers raised significant concerns about the arbitrary nature of what constituted recognized troop command, noting that officers in these fields would likely be disadvantaged and not eligible for promotion to general officer ranks.³⁹ Command equivalencies for these fields, including corps of engineer district commands and ammunition depot commands, were restored in response to this concern.

General Westmoreland recognized the importance of breaking the command-centric approach to officer assignment and development but he was not successful in conveying the importance of this to the staff. His experience as a commander in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam sharpened his ability to recognize the risks of officers who valued careerism over professionalism and commitment and this was the basis of his concept of assigning officers either to a command track or a specialist staff track. Ultimately, the OPMS study concluded that the dual-track initiative would contribute to a lower morale for those designated non-command-track officers and that “high morale was vital to fostering professionalism.” In an all-volunteer force, the study determined that “all officers would compete on an equal basis, and the fittest would survive.”⁴⁰

Despite his position as Army chief of staff and his personal championship of a two-track officer development and employment model, wholesale reforms were prevented by conservative,

³⁹ Ibid., 20-21.

⁴⁰ Donnelly, “Professionalism and the Officer Personnel Management System,” 18.

entrenched, and vested factions of Army leadership. OPMS failed to meet the promise of a more professional officer force tailored to better use all the human capital in the officer corps. A study of the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) class of 1972 found that the majority of students still believed that the “generalist” career pattern, with its emphasis on troop command, was the preferred route over a more specialized career path to promotion and status.⁴¹ Despite requirements for change imposed by the commander in chief in fulfillment of a key campaign promise to the American people, the scope of reforms was limited compared to the vision of the chief of staff of the Army.

OPMS II: Revising Talent Management Policies and a New Operating Concept

The 1985 OPMS II is best understood in historical context. Like its predecessor, this major revision was driven by forces beyond the Pentagon. The first of these external forces came in 1980 with the passage of DOPMA.⁴² The intent of Congress was to maintain a high-quality, numerically sufficient officer corps, provide career opportunity that would attract and retain the numbers of high caliber officers needed, and provide reasonably consistent career opportunity among the services.⁴³ DOPMA established annual limits on the number of active duty regular and reserve field grade and general officers, provisions honored more on paper than in reality due to routinely granted waivers. DOPMA revised rules for officer promotions, and for promotion board composition and procedures. Significantly, DOPMA created competitive promotion categories and codified in law an “up or out” provision that required termination of an officer not selected for promotion. Lastly, DOPMA provided both separation for non-performance and early

⁴¹ Donnelly, “Professionalism and the Officer Personnel Management System,” 21.

⁴² Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980, Public Law 96-513, 96th Cong., 2d sess. (December 12, 1980), accessed September 2, 2018, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-94/pdf/STATUTE-94-Pg2835.pdf>.

⁴³ Harry Thie et al., *A Future Officer Career Management System* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 3.

retirement as force-shaping tools to enable the services to stay within prescribed force structure limits.

In 1985, General Edward C. Meyer, the 29th chief of staff of the Army, developed OPMS II to comply with DOPMA-mandated policy changes. Key features of this iteration of OPMS included separate functional areas not related to any branch, and a revised officer classification system. These policy changes met the institutional demands for the quantity of officers in specific branches by force-designating officers into specific fields. To the lament of technically oriented officers and those who preferred to work in functional area assignments, OPMS II still retained the command-centric career path to promotion and selection to career-enhancing education and developmental assignments.⁴⁴

A lesser-discussed reason for the OPMS II changes in personnel policies was a major operational failure of the joint force: OPERATION Eagle Claw on 24 April 1980. This attempt to rescue American diplomatic hostages from Iran ended in disaster at the remote airfield code-named Desert One. While weather certainly played a role in the mission failure, prominent congressional leaders used the event as a catalyst for significant reforms in joint force structure and management. The *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986* codified these changes in law.⁴⁵

Goldwater-Nichols' personnel management reforms sought to improve joint service officer effectiveness.⁴⁶ The law created joint professional military education requirements, established joint tour length guidelines, and a joint service requirement for promotion to flag rank. It also required the services to report to Congress on joint service qualified officers and their promotions.

⁴⁴ Thie, *A Future Officer Career Management System*, 32-52.

⁴⁵ Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, Public Law 99-433, 99th Cong., 2d sess. (October 1, 1986).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

OPMS II made some useful improvements. The creation of functional area career fields provided additional opportunities for those officers with needed talents and a desire to serve. Creative management within branches enabled some officers to serve in both troop-leading positions and institutional staff positions while remaining competitive for promotion, though this was commonly considered a risky career path. For example, engineer branch officers could opt to serve in Corps of Engineer assignments between company grade command and selection for CGSC. Logistics branch officers enjoyed similar opportunities to serve in experience-broadening assignments with institutional sustainment depots.

Top-performing officers were advised to stay on the troop-command track to ensure they remained competitive for promotion and key developmental assignments. The long-term effects of OPMS II policies is difficult to assess because OPMS II was soon replaced with OPMS XXI. OPMS XXI, which directly followed OPMS II, brought new management policies intended to accommodate force structure changes required by the end of the Cold War, the Clinton Era peace dividend drawdown, and full implementation of DOPMA and Goldwater-Nichols legislation.

OPMS XXI: Managing Human Capital While Reducing Manpower

...OPMS must be redesigned to give officers the greatest opportunity possible to develop the appropriate skills at each level of responsibility....OPMS XXI will fundamentally change how officers are managed and promoted, including greater promotion opportunities for officers outside of the 'command track.'

— OPMS XXI Final Report

OPMS XXI was part of a larger officer development system that attempted to integrate personnel assignments with training and education. It was phased in over fiscal years 1997 and 1998 and remains in place today.⁴⁷ It was proffered as a strategic vision that would take officer management into the 21st century. CSA General Carl Reimer charged the OPMS XXI Task Force

⁴⁷ US Department of the Army, *OPMS XXI Final Report* (Office of the Chief of Staff, Washington, DC, 1997), 8-3 – 8-7.

to ensure that the personnel management system continued to provide officers with the right skills, knowledge, and experience to fight and win wars and lead the Army in an uncertain future. General Reimer emphasized that warfighting should remain central to the officer corps, but the Army must also develop a cadre of officers expert in how the Army runs as an institution and define a new career track for that second group who would largely serve outside the troop-command track.

The OPMS XXI challenge was driven by a significant force drawdown. The Army was approximately 30% smaller in 1996 after the drawdown than it was in 1989 at the fall of the Berlin Wall or in 1991 at the end of the First Gulf War.⁴⁸ As entire divisions were deactivated along with their echelon-above-division force structure, there simply were not enough billets in the operating force to provide field grade officers with the desired 18-24 months of key and developmental experience as operations officers or executive officers, experiences needed to be considered branch qualified. Simultaneously, the army schoolhouse demand for branch-qualified field grade officers grew at a time when the overall officer corps was downsized as part of the peace dividend. According to the OPMS XXI Task Force, the Army was only able to fill about 70% of its authorized field grade officer requirements.⁴⁹ This mismatch between supply and demand warranted overhaul of OPMS because the system was not producing enough officers with appropriate skills and experience.

OPMS XXI set out to “[a]fford all officers challenging and fulfilling career options and reasonable, though not necessarily equal, opportunities for promotion.”⁵⁰ The mechanics of OPMS XXI were relatively straightforward: divide the field grade officer corps into four distinct

⁴⁸ Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force*, 32.

⁴⁹ US Department of the Army, *OPMS XXI Final Report* (Office of the Chief of Staff, Washington, DC, 1997), 4-7.

⁵⁰ US Department of the Army, *OPMS XXI Final Report* (Office of the Chief of Staff, Washington, DC, 1997), x.

career management fields that would be managed independently of one another.⁵¹ The first career management field was the operations career field, consisting of combat arms and combat support fields in the Army's sixteen basic branches that serve predominantly in the operating force comprised the bulk of officers. The remaining three career fields consisted of the information-operations career field, which was a new creation, the institutional-support career field, which was intended to group administrative-support specialists, and finally, the operational-support career field, which grouped technical specialists that supported both the operating and generating force structures.

Officers would serve in basic branch assignments for the first eight to twelve years of their career, gaining direct leadership experience and understanding of how the Army trains and fights, the "muddy boots" culture. When selected for promotion to field grade, officers would then elect to either remain in the operations career field, or transfer to one of the three functional-area career fields. This approach sought equity in promotion opportunity among officers performing similar duties. It was also intended to address the perception of bias favoring command-track officers; one of the primary concerns General Westmoreland sought, but failed, to address nearly thirty years earlier in the original OPMS design.

Like most major personnel management revisions, OPMS XXI was not without its challenges. Primarily, these centered on officer concerns about the impacts the new system and new officer evaluation system would have on them as individuals. Overall, OPMS XXI was well received.

Critics of OPMS XXI argue that the functional-area-designation system went too far in creating technical-specialist stovepipes. Officers were not sufficiently exposed to a range of broad experiences needed as colonels and general officers, the senior, strategic-leader grades that set

⁵¹ US Department of the Army, *OPMS XXI Final Report* (Office of the Chief of Staff, Washington, DC, 1997), 7-5 – 7-7.

policies for the entire Army. These critics argue that the inability to identify and develop the needed cadre of strategic leaders is a critical failure of OPMS XXI that should be remedied in the near future.⁵²

Bryant and Urben offer recommendations for improving OPMS XXI in their paper, *Reconnecting Athens and Sparta: A Review of OPMS XXI at 20 Years*. Their recommendations include: a potential dual-track model that allows broadening assignments for the operations career field, additional, centrally selected opportunities for civilian graduate school for senior captains and majors, assignments for functional area officers with operating force units, and transitioning all colonels and billets from the sixteen basic branches to 01A generalist positions (similar to the reclassification that occurs on promotion to general officer). This would make all colonels available to fill any strategic assignment, not just those specifically aligned to their branch specialty. Finally, the recommendations included incentives to attract the best-qualified officers to instructor and professor positions.⁵³ Many of these recommendations have merit and some support among those familiar with Human Resource Command management procedures.

Despite any shortcomings of the OPMS XXI approach, the foundational concepts of the approach are sound: manage officer cohorts to meet Army requirements, organize those cohorts so that a successful career path to colonel exists outside the troop-command path, and provide similar professional development and advanced education opportunities to officers in those career fields. What OPMS XXI does not address is successful career paths within the basic branches that do not include field grade command but produce effective strategic leaders within each branch.

⁵² Susan Bryant and Heidi A. Urben, *Reconnecting Athens and Sparta: A Review of OPMS XXI at 20 Years, 2017* (Washington, DC, Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the United States Army, 2017), 1-3, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.ansa.org/sites/default/files/publications/LWP-114-Reconnecting-Athens-and-Sparta-A-Review-of-OPMS-XXI-at-20-Years.pdf>.

⁵³ Bryant and Urben, *Reconnecting Athens and Sparta: A Review of OPMS XXI at 20 Years*, 13-15.

Building on OPMS XXI: Inventorying Individual Talents

OPMS XXI, initially implemented in 1997, is still in use today with some minor modifications and improvements to better tailor the system to individuals. Michael J. Colorusso and David S. Lyle provide useful recommendations for improving Army talent management through a comprehensive assessment of individual officer talent utilization, and a renewed focus on tailored development and employment assessments focused on each individual officer.⁵⁴ In their book, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, Colorusso and Lyle state that the foundation of this flexible talent management framework rests on differentiation through a “comprehensive evaluation system with three major components: redesigned evaluations, comprehensive periodic assessments of each officer (Individual Development and Employment Assessments, or IDEAs); and a talent management information system that captures the results and renders them truly useful to officers, commanders, and human resource managers alike.”⁵⁵ These concepts are the foundation of ongoing OPMS XXI refinement.

As a part of OPMS XXI refinement, the Army recently fielded an interactive web-based talent management tool known as Assignment Interactive Module 2.0 (AIM 2.0). AIM 2.0 is a sub-component of the Integrated Personnel and Pay System - Army (IPPS-A), which is the Army’s future online Human Resources (HR) solution to provide integrated HR capabilities across all Army components.⁵⁶ AIM 2.0 seeks to apply private-sector human-resource-management best practices across the Army. AIM 2.0 is a mechanism for considering the individual inventory of officer talents explicitly and shaping that into assignments that meet the

⁵⁴ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, 52.

⁵⁵ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, 52.

⁵⁶ Dilanian and Howard, “More than a Number.”

officer's preference, talents, experience, and performance potential while meeting the Army requirements. With this system, each officer has the opportunity to input information not readily available in their officer record brief. AIM 2.0 allows officers to input things they are proud of such as their accomplishments and certifications.⁵⁷

AIM 2.0 seeks to address officer dissatisfaction with lack of input and choice in shaping their own career path.⁵⁸ AIM 2.0 goes a long way towards addressing officer satisfaction and providing officers with a venue to express talents and skills that might otherwise go unnoticed. However, although officers have a better view of available assignments in their cycle, they still must adhere to the prescribed career map for their specific branch.

The positive side of AIM 2.0 is that, if properly implemented, it has the potential to better meet officer satisfaction goals. From 2012-2014, only 50 percent of officers rated the Army effective at supporting the development of individuals through personnel management practices such as evaluations, promotions, and assignments.⁵⁹ Major General Evans, commander of Army Human Resources Command (HRC), stated, "AIM is a marketplace that allows both officers and units to advertise themselves, express their preferences, and interact with one another in order to shape both parties' interests to increase satisfaction and meet requirements."⁶⁰ The AIM 2.0 portal is essentially an interactive job posting board in which units advertise their requirements and officers apply for those positions. It provides an opportunity for interviews between the unit and the officers to determine best fit between available openings and available officers. Officers can submit a resume that provides prospective hiring units with relevant information not otherwise

⁵⁷ Dilanian and Howard, "More than a Number."

⁵⁸ David Vergun, "Army Moving to Talent Management Approach to Guide Career Paths," *Army.mil*, October 10, 2018, accessed February 7, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/212245/army_moving_to_talent_management_approach_to_guide_career_paths/.

⁵⁹ Center for Army Leadership, *Army Officer Satisfaction With Promotions* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Center, January 8, 2019).

⁶⁰ Vergun, "Army Moving to Talent Management Approach to Guide Career Paths."

contained within the traditional officer record brief. Hiring units with approved vacancy requirements also share information about each of the open positions, specific skill requirements, and organizational performance expectations. The intent is for this increased transparency to facilitate the best match between units and individual officers. This approach is particularly useful when units have specific technical or experience requirements that are difficult to match using legacy assignment systems.

However, as with many big data systems, the output is only as good as the input and AIM 2.0, like any human resource data system, comes with a significant training requirement.⁶¹ In addition, commanders have noted that there is a substantial time requirement to accomplish both data entry for vacancies and sifting through applicants to find a match. Lack of full transparency, or shortcutting the system in data entry, can result in poor matches between individuals and assignments, with predictable dissatisfaction on the part of the officer and the hiring unit. While AIM 2.0 has the potential to better support career development, it currently falls short of the desired outcome of being a completely automated process to facilitate assignments. Significant effort is still needed on the part of both commanders and assignment officers to make the system work well.

Moreover, current assignment cycles are not flexible enough to make best use of AIM 2.0 potential to match individual officer skill sets to potential vacancies, especially in cases of highly technical or very low-density skill sets. The way in which positions are prioritized for personnel assignment is a current limitation of the Army personnel system and civilian organizations alike. This approach can be compared to the talent-management supply chain in most organizations, where many staffing strategies use a first in, first out approach. For example, many strategic roles go unfilled while other, more tactical roles are filled first based on how an assignment is coded.

⁶¹ “6 Ways Big Data Will Change HR,” Human Capital Management, last modified August 2, 2017, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.aberdeen.com/hcm-essentials/6-ways-big-data-will-change-hr/>.

Units currently scheduled for deployment or deemed to be of a higher priority in the aggregate rightly have their needs met first; however, this often leaves key strategic billets unfilled due to shortages of personnel.

As a side note to this, some have expressed the idea that the informal system punishes some officers who are not accepted for jobs available through AIM due to perceived bias on the part of commanders who are charged with hiring through AIM 2.0. Some commanders who desire to build the strongest team that they can will select only personnel who have an assignment history that appears to “track” with future command selection. The perception is that these individuals are more talented or have more potential, even if they are not necessarily best fit for these positions.

Aware of the personnel management challenges that the Army is facing, Secretary of the Army Mark Esper said that talent management is a “top priority for 2019.”⁶² In the same interview, Secretary Esper said that he was transitioning the previous system of “up or out” to “perform or out.” “Perform or out” will offer opportunities for officers who are top-tier performers, but not selected to command. How the services will implement this currently remains to be seen.

The *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019* contains authorities to improve talent management within the services.⁶³ The law authorizes all of the services to “carve out alternate career paths for commissioned officers; modifies some ‘up or out’ provisions to spare them from mandatory retirement; and dangles the promise of spot promotions

⁶² Meghann Myers, “‘Up or Out’ Is on Its Way Out, and It’s Time for ‘Perform or Out,’ Army Secretary Says,” *Army Times*, January 24, 2019, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/01/24/up-or-out-is-on-its-way-out-and-its-time-for-perform-or-out-army-secretary-says/>.

⁶³ John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, § 5515 (August 13, 2018).

for hard charging service members willing and able to quickly move ahead.”⁶⁴ This legislation revises many aspects of DOPMA; however, none of the changes included in the final annual defense authorization provisions are mandatory.⁶⁵ The new provisions do provide the Army with important tools to manage the inventory of essential technical skills, better match grade and expertise inventories to requirements, and, as Secretary Esper alluded, provide some systemic relief for “up-or-out” DOPMA restrictions.

Concerns with OPMS Talent Management and Potential Remedies

OPMS was designed to provide a transparent framework for officer career development and has consistently provided a single definition of a successful career, which is battalion command. As previously noted, the day-to-day reference for OPMS is DA PAM 600-3. While this document “does not prescribe the path of all assignments or educational requirements that will guarantee success, but rather describes the full spectrum of development opportunities an officer can expect for a successful career,” DA PAM 600-3 stresses the importance of centralized field grade officer selection boards in a successful career.⁶⁶ It emphasizes the criticality of troop command in these career paths with statements such as: “[t]he most competitive and highly-qualified Engineer lieutenant colonels will have the opportunity to compete for Engineer battalion command selection”⁶⁷ and “[t]he pinnacle assignment for Chemical, Biological, Radiological and

⁶⁴ Mark Faram, “Congress, Navy Revolutionize Officer Promotions,” *Navy Times*, August 22, 2018, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2018/08/22/congress-navy-revolutionize-officer-promotions/>.

⁶⁵ Leo Shane, “Congress is Giving the Officer Promotion System a Massive Overhaul,” *Military Times*, July 25, 2018, accessed December 19, 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/07/25/how-officers-are-promoted-will-get-its-biggest-overhaul-in-decades-heres-what-that-means-for-the-military/>.

⁶⁶ US Department of the Army, *DA Pamphlet 600-3, Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-10.

⁶⁷ US Department of the Army, *DA Pamphlet 600-3, Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 139.

Nuclear lieutenant colonels is battalion commander.”⁶⁸ This troop-command theme is repeated across all branches. It sets career expectations and shapes career decisions as Army officers define success as selection for command by the Department of the Army Field Grade Command Selection Board.

Despite the consistent branch bias in favor of troop command, DA PAM 600-3 states that lieutenant colonels “make the maximum contribution to the Army as commanders *and* senior staff officers.”⁶⁹ It is important to note that the command-selection process identifies, selects, and slates officers for future command as well as some non-command positions including, but not limited to, the senior division staff positions of assistant chief of staff, G2 (intelligence) and assistant chief of staff, G6 (signal).⁷⁰ From this, one can reason that a successful career includes selection by the command designation board for either command or one of the coveted, designated non-command positions; in practice, this does not apply to any of the non-designated staff positions. Centralized selection at the field grade command board remains the gateway to the ranks of Army senior leadership and potential general officer rank.⁷¹

The Army continues to conflate command selection with promotion or performance potential. All officers within a branch have the same career map whether or not they have the potential or the desire to command. Career maps designate specific positions and timelines for each officer by branch and indicate the period by which each assignment should be completed.

⁶⁸ US Department of the Army, *DA Pamphlet 600-3, Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 144.

⁶⁹ US Department of the Army, *DA Pamphlet 600-3, Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 15.

⁷⁰ Andrew Steadman, “Making Sense of Battalion Command Selection,” *The Military Leader*, October 30, 2015, accessed October 24, 2018, <https://www.themilitaryleader.com/battalion-command-selection/>.

⁷¹ Certain functional areas do have designated general officer positions that are independent of field grade command. These include strategists, functional area officers, chaplains, and judge advocate general. For the clear majority of officers, promotion to colonel and subsequent consideration for general officer rank depends heavily on central selection for, and successful performance in, field grade command billets.

Career maps are developed by each branch proponent and designate which positions are key and developmental (KD). Serving as a battalion operations officer (S3) or executive officer (XO) is a critical gate for battalion command. The career map of basic branch officers illustrates that these assignments are KD and the promotion and selection board read them as essential. Published board results demonstrate the criticality of these specified positions, regardless of how those positions develop the officer within their specified branch. As an example, 85 percent of year group 2003 (YG2003) military intelligence officers considered for battalion command in fiscal year 19 held the position of S3 or XO; this contrasts with only 32 percent of those officers selected who had served as a brigade or brigade combat team intelligence officer, arguably a more essential position for an intelligence specialist who aspires to serve as division or corps intelligence officer.⁷²

An officer could easily rationalize that taking an S3 or XO position is more likely to lead to selection for battalion command based on published board results. This establishes a condition where all officers of a specific cohort within a specified branch are competing for a limited number of key assignment opportunities, such as S3 or XO, at the same time. These positions, and an officer's performance while in these positions, are used by centralized command boards as the primary benchmark for success and for selection for promotion to lieutenant colonel and subsequent selection for battalion command. There are no published guidelines for selection for these key developmental positions and no centralized criteria for these positions; any criteria are subjective and established at the local operating force unit. Yet these experiences remain decisive in subsequent Army-wide selection processes. Requiring all officers within a branch to hold these positions sets conditions where the best officer, or the officer with the most command potential, may be denied the appropriate grooming opportunity for command simply by the exigencies of luck and timing, or the preferences of a senior commander.

⁷² Military Intelligence Branch, "FY19 MI LTC CSL Selection Trends" (analysis of FY19 selection trends disseminated to U Army Military Intelligence community, January 15, 2019).

AIM 2.0 also contributes to this; all officers in an assignment cycle are now using the marketplace to compete for these positions. Previously, queues and interviews were established at each unit to select officers for these positions. Through AIM 2.0, an officer must compete for an assignment through the marketplace with all their peers, not just those at a specific duty location. According to the 2016 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL), while 63% of army leaders believe that their mix of assignments and amount of time in key developmental assignments have been appropriate for their leader development, less than half agree they have had sufficient input or predictability in their series of assignments.⁷³ This was slightly lower than the 2015 CASAL results which reported 67 percent of army leaders felt that the mix between assignments and time in key developmental assignments has been appropriate for their leader development, and only half agreed that they have had sufficient input or predictability in their series of assignments.⁷⁴ This downward trend is likely to continue as a result of an over-saturated marketplace where all officers are competing for the same jobs in a single pipeline. Due to the inability to truly differentiate officer individual talents, AIM 2.0 does not improve quality of selection; it essentially places more officers in contention with each other for these already limited command-grooming opportunities.

Success as an S3 and XO is understandably critical for command selection. These positions are an important apprenticeship for future commanders as well as an opportunity for close assessment for command potential. However, they may not be the best way to develop branch specialists. As noted earlier, it is arguable that a more immersive experience for a future division intelligence or logistics officer would be to serve as an analytic control element chief for

⁷³ Center for Army Leadership. *Annual Survey of Army Leadership: Army Leader Findings* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Center, 2016), x, accessed October 24, 2018, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1056626.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Center for Army Leadership. *Annual Survey of Army Leadership: Army Leader Findings* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Center, 2015), ix, accessed October 24, 2018, <https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cal/2015CASALMilitaryLeaderFindingsReport.pdf>

an intelligence officer or for a logistics officer in a broadening opportunity to train with private industry immersed in the discipline of supply and demand.

Forcing officers along a single command track knowing there will be career-ending attrition has adverse consequences for individuals and the Army. Every officer possesses certain talents that benefit the organization. The Army should not expend all its energy on the top ten percent while the remaining ninety percent are the men and women operating the organization.⁷⁵ Using the example Colorusso and Lyle illustrated in *Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, if ten candidates are considered for central selection opportunities and only two are selected, what becomes of the eight nonselects? From the perspective of these eight officers who have worked their whole career pursuing command, the organization has denied that opportunity without redress. As Colorusso and Lyle point out, this signals to the eight nonselects a reduced institutional interest and engenders talent flight.⁷⁶ Why would these eight individuals, with their vast organizational experience and education, and in whom the Army has made an important institutional investment, remain on active duty for an organization that has indicated it no longer appreciates their service? There is little incentive for them to do so. Note that this analysis does not apply to substandard officers, who will always exist at the company and field-grade level. Those nonperformers who metaphorically “take a knee” and no longer do their jobs well are easy enough to identify. As General Westmoreland noted in his original OPMS guidance, these officers fall into a third career management path that consists primarily of rehabilitation or prompt separation.

⁷⁵ Charles L. Montgomery, “Ten Things Field Grade Officers Should Know About Career Progression,” *Army.mil*, June 26, 2018, accessed March 13, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/206865/ten_things_field_grade_officers_should_know_about_career_progression.

⁷⁶ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, 50.

This abrupt culling of skilled talent is harmful to both the Army and the individual officers. The officers could be better incentivized and their talents and experience better used by the Army at the strategic level, particularly in the generating force that supports the operating force. The current system does not provide advancement opportunities to highly qualified and motivated officers not selected for command. It stigmatizes those not selected to command, regardless of their skill or past performance, yet they are needed to lead and motivate others in senior staff specialist positions.

This is the fundamental conundrum. Officers passed over for battalion command usually remain on active duty for several years until vested for retirement. They know they are not competitive for future promotion. Peers and subordinates are aware of standardized timelines and can assess that the officer is a nonselect and may respond differently than they would to a former commander who is still competitive for promotion. This has the potential to make the nonselected officer less effective as a leader, likely through no fault of their own; the downturn in effectiveness is harmful to Army efficiency and readiness. Providing an alternative track that keeps these officers competitive for promotion in a specialist track provides a remedy and an incentive to continue performing at top capacity.

As noted previously, not all authorized billets are filled because of a mismatch between available supply and demand and published manning guidance. Many of these nonoperational or generating force positions fall lower in the priority for fill in an assignment cycle, and when available inventory is low, they are the first to be eliminated from an assignment cycle. Although 80 percent of junior officer positions are operational, the opposite is true at the senior grades where 80 percent of colonel and above billets are nonoperational.⁷⁷ These senior grade positions likely require specialists who have expertise in the specific area; however, due to the up-or-out,

⁷⁷ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, 37.

command-centric model, the talent needed for these positions is simply not there. There is no alternative career map that consistently allows a talented basic-branch officer to enter senior leader ranks without clearing the centralized command selection board. Given a second career track opportunity, “evaluative priorities could then shift away from ... ‘promotion and command’ and towards the development, credentialing and optimal employment of each officer.”⁷⁸ The current NDAA provides the needed authorities to the services. The implementation of these authorities could be designed to simultaneously retain the best features of OPMS XXI, better utilize the talents and satisfy the preferences of individual officers, and move the Army closer to a viable two-track system of operationally and institutionally-focused officers originally envisioned by General Westmoreland in the original OPMS proposal and echoed by subsequent CSAs in OPMS revision efforts.

Effective Talent Management: A Dual Track Management Proposal

Previous versions of OPMS imperfectly met the needs of the Army and the individual officers. In 1997, CSA Reimer emphasized that while warfighting should remain the preeminent skill of the officer corps, it is also important to develop a contingent of officers specializing in how the Army works as an institution. Implicit in this guidance is the requirement to examine focused career paths both in the operational and institutional Army, leading to a new definition of “success” for officers outside the traditional command track.⁷⁹ It seems that, periodically, the Army returns to the question of developing a dual-track career management program within the basic branches to develop both generalists who would command as well as specialists who could “collectively provide diverse talents to meet all the Army’s requirements.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, 52.

⁷⁹ US Department of the Army, *OPMS XXI Final Report* (Office of the Chief of Staff, Washington, DC, 1997), vii.

⁸⁰ Colarusso and Lyle, *Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability*, 25.

The mix of skills, knowledge, experience, and personal attributes of effective leaders needed to perform essential organizational functions of the Army operating force and the Army generating force is necessarily different. The most talented leaders can transition between the operating force and the generating force and still succeed. Most officers can provide valuable and effective service in one of the two environments, but perhaps not both. Personnel management policies should be flexible enough to differentiate and manage career paths for both the operating and generating force. A dual-track career management system has the potential to facilitate that type of specialization without adverse consequence for readiness or individual careers. A dual-track system would provide incentives to help retain and motivate talented officers not selected for field grade command but still needed to fill a large number of senior leader positions in the generating force.

“[The Army] must break from our current command-centric leader development model to build the military’s finest senior staff officers, making strategic-level staff positions sought after and progressive assignments for the best and brightest officers.”⁸¹ Many of these validated, required positions are not filled with the desired branch specialist officers because of attrition attributed to command-centric policies. Often these positions are simply left vacant because generating force units are lower priority than operating force units.

In 1971, the initial OPMS that General Westmoreland envisioned proposed that field grade command was a position of such complexity that it should now be, in effect, a new special career program. The premise was that a centralized board would evaluate field grade officers as they entered the zone of eligibility for selection to CGSC and would designate them as best

⁸¹ Richard T. Brown, “Staff Colonels are Army’s Innovation Engines,” Association of the United States Army, November 13, 2016, accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.ausa.org/articles/staff-colonels-armys-innovation-engines/>.

qualified for either command or for staff.⁸² This monograph proposes the same idea, forty-eight years later.

The proposed dual-track model will create two distinct tracks within each basic branch and have two clear career maps delineated at the point of promotion to major. Prior to promotion to major, the career map will look much as it does today for each branch: focused on “muddy boots” experience and basic leadership and management skills. As part of their field grade selection board input, officers will have the option to choose their career path: remain in command track basic branch, select one of the existing functional areas, or opt to remain as a non-command-eligible, basic-branch specialist. Each career track will enable an officer to match individual talents and preferences to future duty assignments while retaining opportunity for promotion to colonel. This dual-track option has the potential to contribute to continued job satisfaction and higher morale, and ultimately increase the readiness of the Army by truly providing the right officer at the right time for each position. “Staff colonels and the talented teams that support them are the engines of the institutional Army and essential components of an innovation chain converting ideas to competitive advantage for our joint force. In short, staff colonels are key to Army innovation.”⁸³ As noted by others, increasing Army innovation and overall readiness is an imperative. Implementing a dual track system can contribute to this.

To best implement this change, more intensive rater and senior rater developmental counseling to inform junior officers of their opportunities and to assess their potential is needed. A useful approach was described by Michael J. Arnold in his monograph, entitled *The Future Security Environment: Why the U.S. Army Must Differentiate and Grow Millennial Talent*. Arnold highlights that “the Army should implement flexible developmental programs at the battalion and brigade levels, with specific identified outputs, that require senior officers to

⁸² Donnelly, “Professionalism and the Officer Personnel Management System,” 19.

⁸³ Brown, “Staff Colonels are Army’s Innovation Engines.”

counsel, coach, and professionally develop junior officers.”⁸⁴ This is a refocusing of the current junior officer developmental counseling process rather than a fundamental change to performance evaluations.

For the proposed branch-specialist track, the primary differentiation effort and career designation begins for each officer when their cohort is considered for promotion to major. With counseling and mentorship from senior leaders and branch managers, individual officers assess their strengths, skills, and interests, and provide career designation preferences to the major’s promotion board. Officers elect to continue serving in one of the three career field management tracks: basic branch command track, functional area officer, or the proposed basic branch specialist officer. This election process would be concurrent with the field-grade promotion board and would be managed by HRC.

Those who are selected for the branch-specialist track would have a new branch-specific revised career map that focuses them on noncommand specialist assignments across the operating force and generating force. Career maps for specialist-track officers would delineate a career path of staff specialist assignments for major through the grade of colonel, making it clear that troop command is not the sole route to success for all basic branch officers. These new career maps would also include developmental opportunities with industry, advanced civil schooling to develop necessary technical specialist skills, and other broadening opportunities, such as joint or interagency technical staff, which provide direct benefit to the Army as part of the joint force and whole-of government campaigns.

Some high-performing specialist-track officers would be eligible for selection to general officer and would serve in generating force positions aligned with their experience and education, such as branch commandant or Army service component command general staff. This would

⁸⁴ Michael Arnold, “The Future Security Environment: Why the US Army Must Differentiate and Grow Millennial Officer Talent” (master’s thesis, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2015), 6, accessed October 18, 2018, <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA622755>

enhance Army readiness by providing the opportunity to place highly skilled technical specialists in appropriate strategic leadership positions, while retaining the current alignment between the best-qualified operating force commanders and command of strategic echelon troop formations.

Creating a branch-specialist career track has the same benefits for the Army as did the OPMS XXI creation of viable career fields outside the operations career field. As with earlier efforts, this change is primarily a cultural change, and vested interests make cultural change in the Army difficult without external impetus. Because the proposal is a refinement of current processes rather than a wholesale change, it may not be rejected as was General Westmoreland's original OPMS proposal. This approach facilitates centralized personnel management efforts to match individual talent to duty position requirements, such as branch-specific staff positions at brigade, division, and corps-echelons, and across generating force organizations. The likely outcome will be reduced personnel volatility and better readiness throughout the organization.

Beyond readiness and manning impacts, this third career field for branch staff specialists could mitigate talent flight and increase officer morale. It is broadly acknowledged that the severe career truncation associated with nonselection for field grade command adversely impacts the performance and perceptions of nonselected officers. They are viewed as "also rans" in a process where there is no second-place winner; the competition for command is a gold-medal-or-nothing affair. Providing a viable career path for high-performing branch specialists outside the command track ends the stigma of nonselection and can help retain the most talented specialists for a full and productive career. Through this cultural change, these strategic positions would be elevated within the Army to the same status as command-track positions, and officers who choose this path will be more invested in the success of the organization and have the potential to gain more personal and career satisfaction. All officers will benefit from increased empowerment and control over their career. Leader morale and unit effectiveness are inextricably linked; this proposal seeks to improve both.

Way Ahead

Under OPMS XXI's single track, our focus has been making sure our combat arms officers are expert in combat operations. Yet, among our general officers, how many hold duty positions that require them to be experts in ground combat? There are ten division commanders and three corps commanders—so 13. What are the other 200-plus doing? They either run the institution or contribute to our strategies and policies. It seems as if we are carefully preparing our officers to be experts at something that will end up being a small subset of their eventual duties.

—Major General Cavoli

The need to grow talent from within places a high premium on establishing the right talent management procedures to meet current and future Army needs. OPMS exists “to access, train, develop, assign, evaluate, promote, and separate officers in a manner consistent with Army needs and to enhance the effectiveness and professionalism of the officer corps.”⁸⁵ OPMS has consistently tied advancement to a troop-command career path despite early attempts by General Westmoreland to create separate generalist (troop command) and specialist (branch-specific staff specialist) career paths for officers within the basic branches.

Fifty years of experience and multiple studies on Army personnel satisfaction suggest that an OPMS one-size-fits-all, command-centric career track is insufficient to manage the breadth and depth of required leadership talents. Experienced tactical commanders are indispensable to the Army mission. Those commanders depend upon skilled staff officers and subordinates to implement their orders. In short, both strong leaders and skilled specialists are needed to make the Army run. The personnel system currently provides the former and continues to neglect the latter.

Over the years, adjustments to the officer management system through OPMS changes have attempted to address this tension between commanders and specialists, yet the template for officer development still falls short of meeting Army readiness requirements, Army talent

⁸⁵ US Department of the Army, *OPMS XXI Final Report* (Office of the Chief of Staff, Washington, DC, 1997), v.

management goals, and officer satisfaction needs. Additional career path structures that include a dual track for the basic branches can improve effectiveness in all three of these important dimensions. A command-centric life cycle model in each branch is necessary but insufficient. There are simply not enough command opportunities to use a single career path as the primary filter for selection to senior executive leadership. Moreover, there are talented and effective officers that provide valuable service within their basic branch but simply do not have the desire to command for reasons unique to the individual. A single career track does not accommodate the need for a substantial cadre of senior officers in every branch who possess both deep branch-specific technical expertise and broader experience in the generating force that support commanders of the operating force. Managing all officers with the sole purpose of enhancing their competitiveness for promotion and command adversely affects the force and is detrimental to the long-term health of the Army and its readiness.

OPMS, as it is currently implemented, is optimized for identifying, grooming and selecting future commanders. It accomplishes that task admirably but falls short in developing the needed senior executive leaders who support commanders in strategic management of the operating force and the generating force. The recent creation of the Army's Talent Management Task Force underscores that need. The importance of the commander should not be understated, however, the Army must "elevate the position of senior staff in both policy and practice if we wish to create a real culture of innovation and institutional effectiveness."⁸⁶ Alternative career paths in DA PAM 600-3, defined and illustrated by each branch, are warranted to achieve distinguished alternative career paths that identify an alternative measure of a successful career and meet army requirements within the operations career field.

It is unclear why the Army has not seriously considered the option of a dual track for the basic branches as a way to capitalize on existing talent and to provide a framework for a second

⁸⁶ Brown, "Staff Colonels are Army's Innovation Engines."

avenue of success in the Army. Potentially, the current warrior culture of the Army prevents any opportunity for alternate measures of success. Perhaps the long-standing culture of homophily or the persistent idea that all officers should look alike is to blame. Despite suggestion by General Westmoreland in 1968, and emphasis by General Reimer in 1997, the idea has not caught on.

Anti-intellectualism may be a factor in resistance to change. In 2006, the Atlantic Council published a study on the Future of the Army and highlighted that “[s]ustained duty with troops has always been the most coveted and prized duty for Army officers and NCOs alike. But the general rejection of other assignments as unworthy for warriors has distorted the service’s culture in ways that have greatly diminished the value placed on education, thinking, and reflection.”⁸⁷ The article also highlighted that in the not-so-distant past, “early careers of many senior Army generals included a tour teaching at West Point. But that will not be true in the future, because many of the officers who chose to do so during the recent wars were almost uniformly rendered uncompetitive for advancement within the combat arms or other operational career fields.”⁸⁸ This speaks to the culture of the Army perceiving advanced education opportunities, other broadening opportunities, or anything outside of the prescribed command path as a diversion from the warrior path.

In “Six Ways to Fix the Army’s Culture,” David Barno and Nora Bensahel propose that, “Army senior leaders need to mentor the service’s rising stars to invest in and value educational and broadening pursuits, and, even more importantly, ensure that promotion boards recognize, incentivize, and reward these choices as vital contributions to the future of the service.”⁸⁹

However, given the current command-centric model, time spent in institutional learning, balanced

⁸⁷ Barno and Bensahel, *The Future of the Army: Today, Tomorrow and the Day After Tomorrow*, 38.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁹ David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “Six Ways to Fix the Army’s Culture,” *War on the Rocks*, September 6, 2016, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/09/six-ways-to-fix-the-armys-culture/>.

with operational requirements, severely limits an officer when it comes to sufficient broadening for strategic leadership. As an example, to acknowledge the need for higher education and to provide incentives for officers to continue their career in the Army, the Army has offered special incentives to specific year groups. Most recently, incentives were offered to YG 2006-2013. One of those options included fully-funded graduate school in exchange for an additional three-year ADSO.⁹⁰ This opportunity was appealing to many officers; however, this ultimately set them behind in their competitiveness because career maps and timelines for promotion did not adjust for the duration of their schooling. Due to a compressed timeline, these officers were shorted foundational experiences that their peers had. Obtaining advanced civil schooling needed by the Army resulted in some of these officers being non-selected for promotion in their first opportunity to be considered for promotion with their peers. The current NDAA addresses the ability to delay a promotion board due to compelling reason; however, it remains to be seen if officers will elect out of a promotion board and risk future promotion.

The current command-centric career path for the basic branches presents unnecessary constraints for talent management and for future Army readiness. Recent provisions in the NDAA provide an opportunity for the Army to modernize personnel management consistent with industry best practices. Regardless of what incentives are implemented, the promotion and advancement system would need to ensure that both basic branch commanders and specialists are valued equally. Creating viable career paths rewarding to officers who are not commanders commensurate with those for officers who are on the command track ensures that we guard against talent flight.⁹¹ It is the relationship and values that drive performance as much as the pay

⁹⁰ “Graduate School Option Holders,” Career Satisfaction Program, last modified January 8, 2019, accessed March 18, 2019, https://www.career-satisfaction.army.mil/departments/goh_overview.html.

⁹¹ Wardynski, et al., *Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Retaining Talent* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 18, accessed August 8, 2018, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB965.pdf>.

and accolades; being valued and respected is the dominant incentive the Army should offer officer leadership.

The proposed dual-track management system has the opportunity to ameliorate perceived imbalances in command and staff positions. Truly fixing this and breaking the historical bias will require a cultural change driven by a modification to the officer development policy that endorses a dual-track system that recognizes that the attributes of effective staff officers may differ from those of effective commanders. The new NDAA has the potential to serve as a foundation these policies and could result in improved officer satisfaction and would be the authorization basis for the proposed dual track system.

Modifying the current personnel management processes to allow field grade officers to elect a command track or a branch-specialist track can better enable Army talent management goals and support sustained readiness requirements by producing equally capable commanders and strategic support specialists for each branch. As retired Major General Robert Scales noted in his article “Ike’s Lament”: “those who rise to the top of the strategic decision-making pyramid are too often poorly qualified for the task.... The military isn’t short of strategic talent. The problem is that the military’s promotion and rewards bureaucracies too often fail to clear a path for the most talented to reach the top.”⁹² Current policies needlessly truncate the career progression of otherwise competent officers simply because they are not selected for battalion command.

This proposed dual-track model for basic branch officers builds on the success of OPMS XXI career field designation processes. It improves institutional ability to match skills with duty positions. It retains the appropriate troop-command track and likely enhances the ability to develop deep, field-grade experience for command-track officers by providing longer key and

⁹² Robert Scales, “Ike’s Lament: In Search of a Revolution in Military Education,” *War on the Rocks*, August 16, 2017, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/ikes-lament-in-search-of-a-revolution-in-military-education/>.

developmental assignments because fewer officers are competing for these positions. This dual track also provides a viable career path for officers to remain within their basic branch to fill essential branch specialist positions at senior grades. This additional flexibility in officer management policies can improve officer satisfaction, trust in the institutional career management processes, and ultimately retention; all important and worthy outcomes.

Equally important, a dual-track officer management system can improve systemic officer assignment management by removing constraints created by the need for all officers to pass through troop-command gates. Branch assignment officers would have additional latitude to assign willing officers to both operating and generating force staff positions without adversely affecting their promotion potential. Currently, assignment officers are loosely constrained by the requirement to assign officers to locations where they can reasonably expect to be selected for the necessary positions within the prescribed timelines; doing otherwise could potentially jeopardize their career. The dual-track election would remove these constraints and would better facilitate providing the right soldier at the right time, both for the Army and for the officer. Ultimately, the result will be a broader pool of deeply experienced and motivated field grade officers in every branch; the pool from which strategic echelon leaders will be drawn.

The Army now has the legislative authority to change talent management policies and create a more adaptive system of incentives to recruit, retain, and employ valuable leaders. The open question is whether senior leaders have the will and the courage to make the necessary changes or whether they will wait for Congress to impose the changes through additional legislation.

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