

# Commandant's Note

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## Retaining Our Best Talent: *A Shared Responsibility*

We publish this edition of *Infantry* emphasizing the Army Chief of Staff's enduring guidance that people are our first (#1) priority. During his recent address during AUSA's 2020 virtual event, GEN McConville highlighted that a strategy focusing on people identifies, recognizes, cultivates, and leverages our unique skills. Over the last two years, most witnessed and many participated in the U.S. Army's approach to creating a new personnel talent management system. This reform continues to evolve as it seeks to maximize the potential and talent of our greatest resource...our people. Integrating innovative technology and fielding new equipment certainly contributes to regaining overmatch against pacing threats, however, GEN McConville made it clear that Soldiers remain the centerpiece of our unrivaled Army.

People matter most.

In addition to fundamentally changing how we select Battalion and Brigade level Commanders and Command Sergeants Major, providing transparency on assignment preferences, and adjusting how and when we promote officers, among the other outcomes of the talent management processes, includes elevating the quality and frequency of conversations about career opportunities in our Army and our Infantry Branch. All Infantrymen, from the most senior Colonels to our junior Noncommissioned Officers, prefer to make informed decisions about their career choices. The marketplace provides a logical starting point for these conversations, and I would like to offer additional context as to when raters and senior raters should personally engage in the discussion. Talent management is not solely about aligning or maximizing the right talent against the right job or duty position. It is also about building and developing talent through coaching our leaders to broaden and expand their knowledge. Most important to readiness, however, talent management is about investing in and retaining our best talent in our great Army.

Retaining talent, among our shared responsibilities, occurs when we leverage the initiative and potential of our people while also earning their trust and confidence within the profession. Our Infantry Branch remains healthy and our senior Infantry officers remain in very high demand

in the most competitive and challenging assignments. From our high selection rates for command of Battalions and Brigades, to leading formations within Security Force Assistance Brigades, supporting Joint headquarters, leading special operations efforts within our premier 75th Ranger Regiment, to serving as Division/Corps G3s and Chiefs of Staff, Infantry officers continue to set the example for others to follow. Our senior Noncommissioned Officers also continue to set the example for the Army. Our Sergeants Major mirror the excellence in our Officer corps, through their high selection rate to Command Sergeants Major and critical key billets in the force. Their invaluable service as our senior enlisted advisors strengthens our common bond to our most valued treasure, our Infantrymen. In spite of the strong performance of our Branch, in dedicating attention to engaging Officers and Noncommissioned Officers "at the right time" we can do better in retaining our very best.

Knowing when to engage is paramount for raters and senior raters. Within our officer cohorts, Infantry Majors, Lieutenant Colonels, and Colonels already navigated the traditional decision points associated with committing to a career in the Army. These officers recognize these decisions generally occur within an officer's 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 10th year of service. Our Branch hosts a large number of detailed officers fulfilling their initial service obligation and we expect to lose about 35-40% of a Year Group (YG) of these detailed officers to their Control Branch at the 4th year of service (Captain's Career Course). Between the 5th and 6th year of service we traditionally see the completion of service obligations with Infantry YG cohorts at approximately 45-50% of their initial strength. Between their 7th and 10th years of service in advance of Intermediate Level Education (ILE), cohorts trend towards 25% of their original population of basic branch Infantry Officers. This eventually results in a committed population of over 1,000 Infantry Majors, almost 900 Infantry Lieutenant Colonels, and 400 Infantry Colonels leading across the entire range of operating force (conventional and SOF), generating force (TRADOC), and broadening opportunities.

As marketplace opportunities expand across both officer and enlisted assignments, I offer this



perspective towards our shared responsibility in leveraging the conversations on the margins of the marketplace. I applaud all of the efforts of the Army Talent Management Task Force to incentivize service. **However, while incentive structures largely determine whether or when junior officers decide to leave, raters and senior raters have tremendous influence over why junior officers decide to leave.** Unfortunately, many leave because of a lack of engaged leadership. Where 50% attrition after fulfilling service obligations still sustains a healthy Infantry population, let's commit to retaining the right 50% of our officer cohorts. Never underestimate the value of communicating how much our young officers contribute to accomplishing all assigned missions. All officers appreciate the wisdom and advice from those who went before them. All officers also appreciate a "pat on the back" and productive counseling and mentorship. Knowing where your junior officers are in their professional timeline is critical to informing their perspective and corresponding decisions on service. Again, leverage the conversation on the margins, and well in advance, of the marketplace.

The first key engagement point for these Officers is 6-12 months prior to the expiration of their initial ADSO (YG plus 3, 4, and 5 years for OCS, ROTC, and USMA respectively). Most officers within this window will decide whether they will PCS to a career course and ultimately command a Rifle company. Others might consider opportunities within special operations or other branches and career fields. As you counsel this population, recognize that some lieutenants enter service with an additional service obligation (ADSO) due to the Career Satisfaction Program (CSP-GRADSO/BRADSO/PADSO).

The next major engagement should occur during the career course or immediately on arrival to their unit of assignment following the career course. Both junior Officers and Raters should familiarize themselves with the Army Talent Management Task Force's Talent Based Career Alignment (TBCA) approach. TBCA seeks to identify exceptionally talented officers in any given cohort of officers, and extend them a unique opportunity to secure a career pathway to high-demand assignments and a more predictable future. TBCA will guarantee high-performing Captains at the Captain's Career Course an Assured Mid-Career Pathway (AMCP) so that, before graduating the Captain's Career Course selected officers will know not just their company-grade KD assignment, but also their follow-on assignment. This combination sets them on a clear trajectory from the Captain's Career Course to the Command and General Staff College.

While most of these talent-based initiatives started within the Officer corps, we must remain adept at developing, coaching, broadening, and enhancing our Noncommissioned Officers as well. While there are similarities in how we develop leaders in both officer and enlisted populations, leaders must understand the specific requirements associated with each group. While Officer career paths align promotion

and professional education against Year Groups, advising Noncommissioned Officers on career choices requires an understanding of appropriate billeting and development requirements for the individual based on proponent guidance. Again, among our shared responsibilities for both Officers and NCOs includes educating ourselves fully on officer and enlisted career paths and opportunities.

With respect to our Infantry Noncommissioned Officers, our most dynamic and closely managed enlisted cohort is within our Staff Sergeant population. This is the first period in an NCO's career path where we require Noncommissioned Officers to both meet key developmental requirements as well as fill special assignments and broadening opportunities in accordance with Army priorities. Commanders, and their Command Sergeants Major and First Sergeants, must ensure key development opportunities are both fulfilling and sufficient, while also subsequently providing enhancing opportunities within the generating force. This demonstrates our commitment to our NCO Corps and preserves our true source of overmatch on the battlefield ... our Noncommissioned Officers serving in the Squad and Platoon. In the near future, our Noncommissioned Officers will soon have more opportunities to participate directly in their assignment opportunities through the Assignment Satisfaction Key-Enlisted Marketplace. This transition will require additional oversight and mentoring by our leaders to enable our Noncommissioned Officers to make important career decisions and retain the continuity and effectiveness of our units.

While Noncommissioned Officers have less defined timelines associated with Year Groups, it remains equally important to understand when critical engagement points occur in an NCO's career. As with our Officers, Noncommissioned Officers require attention specific to their knowledge, skills, and behaviors to best meet operational requirements, improve Army readiness, and excel in the Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development System. Leaders must understand that Noncommissioned Officers invested in building our next generation of Infantrymen while serving in generating force billets are not disadvantaged. Understanding and implementing the Infantry Career Progression Plan will enable leaders to properly develop Noncommissioned Officers to empower our Noncommissioned Officers to have the maximum opportunity and choice in their service.

At every one of these decision points, we have a responsibility to inspire our top talent to serve. Most of our young Infantry Soldiers choose to serve out of a desire to serve their country, contribute to a greater good, work with strong teams, and to challenge themselves. Few evaluate the merits of their military service solely based on careful analysis of pay scales and benefits. Remind yourself of your own inspiration to continue your service as you engage your junior Officers and Noncommissioned Officers to both inform and inspire them.

I am the Infantry! Follow Me!