

**RECORD VERSION**

**STATEMENT BY**

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL DOUGLAS F. STITT, USA  
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, G-1**

**BEFORE THE**

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**ON MERITOCRACY IN THE MILITARY SERVICES: ACCESSIONS, PROMOTIONS,  
AND COMMAND SELECTIONS**

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Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the men and women of the United States Army.

The Army's mission remains unchanged, to fight and win our Nation's wars. The Army of 2030 requires a highly trained, disciplined, and fit force across the Total Army. Army readiness and dominance on the battlefield relies on ensuring we have the right Soldier, in the right place at the right time, with the right resources. The Army conducts all promotion and special selection boards and processes in full compliance with all applicable statutes and Department of Defense (DoD) guidance. The United States Army's dominance in warfighting is sustained through meritocracy, in which qualified personnel are recruited, assigned to specialties, assigned to positions within a unit, retained, and promoted based on their demonstrated aptitude and performance in the roles they are assigned to perform. This, in essence, is at the heart of our current campaign, "Be All You Can Be".

### **Forecasting the Personnel Requirements for the Army of 2030**

The Army of 2030 will provide the Joint Force trained and ready forces, capable of combined arms maneuver in a multi-domain operating environment. Building the Army of 2030, while maintaining readiness, depends on a high-quality All-Volunteer Force. Moreover, we need quality officers to lead it. To meet this need, the Army shapes officer accessions, retention, and promotions to ensure the requisite number of officers are available to meet current and projected requirements. The majority of the Army officer inventory is a closed loop system, meaning almost all mid-career officers must be developed from junior officer ranks. The Army accesses thousands of new officers each year, with the intent of having the required number of officers today and in the future. For every 100 second lieutenants the Army accesses, approximately 50 are still serving at the tenth year of service, typically when their cohort is considered for promotion to major. The leading causes of officer attrition are resignations upon completion of active-duty service obligation, retirements, and medical separations. The Army carefully manages officer retention and promotions, in accordance with law and policy, to ensure

the necessary quality and quantity of officers exist at each grade. This effort places the right officer in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of the force. Ensuring we retain and advance the best qualified individuals is central to this effort.

### **Accessing the Best in the Nation**

Investing in the Army of 2030 requires investing in our youth and helping them realize their full potential. Our Nation stands ready to meet its global challenges because of the world-class talent resident in our ranks. Nowhere is this more evident than in our Nation's premier leadership institutes, where we train and commission the future officer leadership of our Army through the United States Military Academy (USMA), Senior Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Programs in our Nation's college and university campuses and through our Officer Candidate School (OCS). Each commissioning source offers its own unique path to training and selecting top quality future officers while ensuring that the highest ethical standards and commitment to selfless service remain the bedrock of the Army's officer corps.

### **Direct Commissioning Authorities:**

The Army has been direct commissioning officers into special branches (Army Medical (AMEDD), Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAGC), and Chaplain (CH)) for decades. In 2018, Section 502 of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) enhanced availability of constructive credit for commissioned officer original appointments opening the option to direct commission officers across the Service in all branches. This has and will continue to allow the Army to leverage the strength of the American workforce to bridge capability gaps of emerging importance to future warfare, up to the grade of colonel, to acquire the necessary talent (knowledge, skills, and behaviors) in order to maintain our human capital advantage to win our nation's wars. In September 2019, the Department of Army (DA) published Army Directive 2019-27 – Direct Appointment of Officers Up to the Grade of Colonel (Other Than Special Branches), which directs Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1 to issue implementing guidance governing selection and constructive credit boards considering direct appointment applicants for other than special branches.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic impeded the immediate traction of the program, several critical branches such as Cyber and Civil Affairs began placing emphasis on leveraging this new commissioning pathway upon inception, as has the Army published refining guidance and messaging across the enterprise to encourage enhanced marketing and execution of filling critical skills gaps by using the direct commission option. Since the direct commission program opened to all branches, active proponents have successfully completed these accessions in 12 to 18 months. The direct commission program continues to gain momentum and interest within all Army components and the civilian marketplace. Basic branch direct commissions have averaged approximately 104 accessions annually between FY19 and FY23. Additionally, based on current applications in process, we project 120 accessions in FY24. With increased program messaging and proponent utilization, the Army expects direct commission accessions to increase each year moving forward.

The Directorate of Military Personnel Management, DA G-1 manages a Direct Commission Community of Interest Group to monitor, manage, and refine the program, in coordination with multiple program stakeholders, such as the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, U.S. Army Recruiting Command, Human Resources Command and all Army basic branch and functional area proponents. Efforts are currently underway to implement program and policy refinement to further streamline the process ensuring highly qualified talent is accessed into critical vacancies in the most expedient time possible.

### **Talent Based Branching:**

In the Army's People Strategy, we have come to understand how foundational our people are to the success of our mission to deploy, fight and win in multi-domain operations. It's our people that provide us with the enduring advantage to remain that ready, lethal and capable land combat force that supports the nation's warfighting efforts. Reimagining how we acquire, develop, employ and retain our talent challenged us to shift from simply distributing personnel to more deliberately managing the talents

that our Soldiers and Civilians possess. The Army has recognized that we need to capitalize on the unique knowledge, skills, and behaviors possessed by every member of our team so that we are capable of employing each member to the maximum effect to remain the world's premier combat force.

In 2020, we began to redesign how we aligned our officer branching process through a process called Talent-Based Branching; first with our West Point cadets and then later with our ROTC cadets and now our OCS candidates. Moving beyond a manual process of branching officers based on a static order of merit list, the Army integrated a market approach using a matching algorithm between the Army branches and the individuals' preferences and knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Participants are given an opportunity to communicate their qualifications through an interview process and then rank the specialties they desire to serve in. Simultaneously, Army branches rank participants by most preferred candidates and then the algorithm matches both to arrive at a selection that best fits the participant's preferences and the Army's needs. No longer is the matching solely a flat selection process of ranking files, but an agile assessment tool and alive marketplace, where competition and merit rule the progression.

Now, in its third year of practice, Talent Based Branching continues to evolve with each year using emerging technology to refine and automate each evolution, improving both officer satisfaction and organizational fit. The result is better talent alignment, higher quality fits, and increased transparency all driving towards that ready, diverse, integrated, professional force needed to lead America's Army.

The Branching market is doing what it was designed to do, put more cadets in branches where they are likely to thrive as junior officers. Since the Branching market has been in place at USMA, the 1:1 match rate has increased from 35% to 61%. At ROTC, the 1:1 match rate increased from 35% to 58%.

The Branching market has resulted in more high-quality matches and fewer cadets being placed in branches where they are least preferred, providing the branches with

the right talent to execute their missions. At USMA, the number of cadets branching into a branch where they were most preferred increased from 40% in 2019 to 84% in 2023. At ROTC, that number rose from 50% in 2020 to 85% in 2023.

### **Investing in the Enlisted Accessions**

In August of 2022, the Army introduced the Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC), first at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, then later at Fort Moore, Georgia, to better prepare young Americans physically and academically to meet the military's entry requirements. Since its inception, the Army's FSPC has graduated 95% of the over 10,000 participants. Students in the academic track have increased their Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) scores by an average of 18.5 points, and those in the fitness track lost an average of 1.7% body fat per week. These increased scores have opened more opportunities to critical specialties the Army needs for its future force structure. The participants who improved their scores have also seen increased access to bonus opportunities, paying out more than \$19.7M in bonuses to graduates of FSPC since inception. The FSPC gives the Army another accelerant to accessing America's talent by getting the right Soldier, to the right place, at the right time while keeping the quality high and better preparing future Soldiers to "Be All That They Can Be" to meet the Army's readiness priorities for today and the future.

### **Promoting the Best within the Army**

#### **Commissioned Officers**

The process for officer promotions of both Active-Duty List and Reserve Active Status List members are based on the requirements in Title 10 of the United States Code, as well as the policy guidance provided by Department of Defense Instructions and Army regulations. The Army generally evaluates officers for promotion as a group based on the year they access into the Army, which becomes their accession year group. This provides officers a similar opportunity for promotion from year to year. Promotion boards are provided selection objectives by branch and functional area that reflect a continuously updated five-year plan that takes gains, losses, career developmental

needs, and Army requirements for officers into consideration. Over the course of any given year, the Army screens close to 16,000 officers considered for promotion to grades of lieutenant through colonel for exemplary conduct. On average, fewer than 1,600 of those considered will have adverse information in their files that requires further review. Finally, less than half of one percent of the approximately 16,000-officers screened are either not promoted or asked to show cause for retention in the service. These statistics speak to the effectiveness of our promotion review processes, and the growing awareness in the force on the importance of exemplary military leadership.

Centralized promotion selection boards for officer grade O4 thru O6 (and when appropriate O3) review and vote eligible officer files from below, in, and above the zone and establish an order of merit list (OML). This OML is reviewed against the Army's branch, functional area, and specific skill selection requirements and adjusted to meet those accordingly. Finally, the board determines whether the top 20% of the final OML merits promotion ahead of their peers. If the majority of the board agrees that top group of officers is designated for earliest promotion regardless of date of rank, with the remainder of the recommended list promoted in accordance with date of rank precedence, as specified in statute. Resulting promotion nominations flow through the Secretary of the Army for vetting and to the Secretary of Defense, the President, then on to the Senate Armed Services Committee, and ultimately to the Senate for confirmation, as applicable in accordance with law and policy.

Promotion board voting members are predominantly drawn from general officer and colonel ranks, and represent the makeup of the eligible officer population under consideration to the greatest extent possible. This includes ensuring representation by competitive category, component, and joint qualification. Member requirement matrices are assessed and updated annually to adapt to changing Army demographics. The distribution of members is key to ensuring that promotions are made on merit as demonstrated by past performance across the variety of jobs held.

Officers are selected on merit by a centralized selection board. The following is a breakout of this past year's O6 (colonel), O5 (lieutenant colonel) and O4 (major) promotion selection board results.

For promotion to colonel in our Operations specialties, of 874 considered, 173 were selected for promotion for a 20% selection rate (17% for African Americans, 10% for Hispanics, and 21% for Whites). For Operations Support specialties, of 770 considered, 165 were selected for promotion for a 21% selection rate (19% for African Americans, 23% for Hispanics, and 21% for Whites). For Force Sustainment specialties, of 546 considered, 113 were selected for promotion for a 21% selection rate (20% for African Americans, 18% for Hispanics, and 23% for Whites). Finally, for Information Dominance specialties, of 55 considered, 16 were selected for promotion for a 29% selection rate (29% for African Americans, 0% for Hispanics, and 35% for Whites).

For promotion to lieutenant colonel in our Operations specialties, of 1184 considered, 468 were selected for promotion for a 40% selection rate (35% for African Americans, 35% for Hispanics, and 40% for Whites). For Operations Support specialties, of 1076 considered, 436 were selected for a 41% selection rate (40% for African Americans, 27% for Hispanics, and 44% for Whites). For Force Sustainment specialties, of 775 considered, 305 were selected for promotion for a 39% selection rate (36% for African Americans, 33% for Hispanics, and 41% for Whites). For Information Dominance specialties, of 81 considered, 35 were selected for promotion for a 43% selection rate (67% for African Americans, 44% for Hispanics, and 40% for Whites).

For promotion to major in our Operations specialties, of 1,492 considered, 975 were selected for promotion for a 65% selection rate (60% for African Americans, 63% for Hispanics, and 53% for Whites). For Operations Support specialties, of 849 considered, 442 were selected for promotion for a 52% selection rate (44% for African Americans, 56% for Hispanics, and 56% for Whites). For Force Sustainment specialties, of 891 considered, 468 were selected for promotion for a 53% selection rate (25% for African Americans, 46% for Hispanics, and 44% for Whites). For Information Dominance

specialties, of 69 considered, 30 were selected for promotion for a 43% selection rate ((0% for African Americans (none in the population), 44% for Hispanics, and 50% for Whites)).

Selection rates for minorities vary due to the smaller populations of these officers among the aggregate populations at a given grade, but our selection rates for minorities are encouraging. Because our promotions are made on merit principles and assess performance as an indicator of potential for increased responsibility, the rates for our lieutenant colonel promotions indicate that minority populations are very competitive. Our rates at colonel are improving for minorities, but they show that it is a very competitive cut for all personnel at the top of our field grade structure.

In 2020, based on guidance from then-Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, the Army began masking elements of information in officer promotion files that could induce biases based on factors other than performance, potential, and suitable mission skills. Eliminating photographs, marital status, and other potentially biasing information is expected to ensure that boards recommend those officers, who merit advancement and higher responsibilities. Since August 2020, the Army conducted 302 selection boards (including commands, schools, selective continuation, advisory boards, etc.) using the masking criteria. Out of that total, 108 were promotion selection boards.

The Army continues to employ personnel authorities granted in the FY 2019 NDAA for increased flexibility in how we manage and retain talent. This includes adjustments to promotion sequence for officers of significant merit and allowing officers to opt out of promotion consideration under certain conditions. Additionally, the Army began to employ the temporary promotion authority for officers with critically needed skills and qualifications to fill positions at higher grades temporarily when those skills were not available otherwise. Brevet promotions consist of two processes. The first process consists of determining critical positions to brevet and add to the Brevet Critical Position List. Commands identify critical positions for brevet; this recommendation goes to a General Officer Review Panel and to the Secretary of the Army for approval. The

second process includes the assignment market process, where commands nominate officers to fill approved brevet positions. Nominations approved by Secretary of the Army go forward through the normal process for Senate confirmation.

### **Noncommissioned Officers**

Organizations conduct local promotion boards for the ranks of staff sergeant, while an annual centralized board conducted by Headquarters, Department of the Army, selects Soldiers for promotion to sergeant first class and above. In 2019, the Army terminated a long-standing annual promotion selection board process and transitioned to an annual noncommissioned officer (NCO) evaluation board process to capitalize on the expanded capabilities a centralized board process offers. Each evaluation board evaluates eligible NCOs (staff sergeant and above) with the mission to produce order of merit lists informed by individual performance and potential. These order of merit lists inform multiple human merit-based decisions to include selection to attend professional military education courses, promotion for the purpose of satisfying valid vacancy requirements, selection for assignments and appointment to command sergeant major positions, and potential denial of continued service.

This talent management effort facilitates accomplishment of the Army's strategic mission to improve readiness and sustain an All-Volunteer Force of trusted professionals by recognizing and capitalizing on the unique talents each noncommissioned officer possesses. It allows for employment of our noncommissioned officers to the maximum effect, while mitigating mismatches of our people to requirements. The expanded application of a merit-based list of talent, not only improves readiness, but supports professional development and reinforces the professionalism of our NCO corps.

Training and education of our NCOs remains an essential element of our institutional success. Recognizing the challenges with an individual's availability to attend timely professional military education courses to comply with training and education requirements to qualify for promotion, the Army will continue to utilize temporary

promotions for a select group of individuals. Temporary promotions provide continued promotion opportunity prior to graduation of a requisite course of instruction, under specific conditions. This disciplined approach better prepares our NCOs for the complexities of today's operational environment, while reinforcing the benefits of a deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive professional development strategy.

### **Talent Management and Command Selection**

The Army's decisive advantage is its Soldiers and leaders. Continuous investment in talent management innovation advances our competitive edge in an unpredictable environment. The aim of talent management is to better prepare our force for the dynamic conflicts ahead. The FY 2019 NDAA provided the Army with new authorities to modernize the officer personnel systems. The Army Talent Management Task Force (ATMTF) has implemented eight of the nine authorities granted in the FY 2019 NDAA. These authorities enhanced the retention and career management of military officers, while expanding opportunities for the Total Force to increase its talent pool and fill critical shortages. Enhancing talent management and promoting merit-based promotions creates a more efficient officer corps capable of meeting future challenges.

### **Command Assessment Program (CAP)**

The Command Assessment Program (CAP) continues to assess and select more capable leaders at the battalion and brigade levels. In November 2022, the Army completed the fourth iteration of the CAP; over 5,200 leaders at lieutenant colonel, colonel, GS-14, GS-15, and E-9 levels have assessed through CAP over the last four years. The CAP continues to conduct assessments for the Acquisition Corps leaders and Program Executives, Medical Corps commanders, brigade command sergeants major, division chaplains, and candidates from the U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard. Additionally, CAP participants are offered the opportunity to utilize executive coaching under the Army Coaching Program. This program provides professional feedback to support the development of leaders and their understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses. CAP-selected leaders continue to be more cognitively

capable, superior communicators, more physically fit, more self-aware, and less likely to exhibit counterproductive or ineffective leadership traits. The Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military recognized CAP as a promising practice for identifying leaders, who are committed to the wellbeing of those under their command, as well as screening for leaders who do not show similar commitment. We continue to monitor the performance of CAP-certified leaders as they assume commands and key billets across the Army.

**Results to date from the Command Assessment Programs are as follows:**

**Battalion Commander Assessment Program (BCAP) –**

To date, 3,030 Army Competitive Category lieutenant colonels competed for battalion-level commands and key staff positions in BCAP. Of those, 2,621 (86.5%) were found ready for command.

**Colonel Command Assessment Program (CCAP) –**

To date, 944 Army Competitive Category colonels competed for brigade-level commands and key staff positions in CCAP. Of those, 812 (86%) were found ready for command. The first cohort of CCAP candidates took command in the summer of 2022 and are currently completing their first year in commands or key billets.

**Sergeant Major Assessment Program (SMAP) –**

To date, 743 sergeants major competed for brigade-level command sergeant major (CSM) positions. Of those, 647 (87.1%) were found ready and are being slated into brigade-level CSM openings in 2023 and 2024.

Since the implementation of the CAP, 168 LTC/COL leaders have been found Not Yet Ready for Command based on Counterproductive Leadership (CPL) behaviors evaluated during the CAP process, who would have been Principal Selects under the legacy (OERs only) CSL selection system. This number of leaders would have directly impacted roughly 200,000 Soldiers with potential CPL behaviors.

## **Conclusion**

The people of the United States Army—these servicemembers who serve our Nation, both in and out of uniform, along with their families—are our strength and our legacy. Their talents, qualifications, merit, courage, and commitment make our Army the greatest in the world. These warriors embody our mantra to “Be All You Can Be”, each day, at home and away. To keep our Army strong, we must continually build our force with talented, qualified individuals who embody the best of America, and we must offer them opportunities to allow both their careers and Families to flourish. We will be relentless in our unequivocal pursuit of placing the right Soldier at the right place at the right time.

Thank you for your generous and unwavering support of our outstanding soldiers, civilian professionals, and their families.