

## Chapter 1

# The Path to Becoming an Officer

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Looking into different officer occupations and opportunities
- ▶ Comparing officer ranks and compensation levels
- ▶ Choosing a path for becoming an officer
- ▶ Discovering warrant officer opportunities

**S**o you want to be an officer? Good for you!

Military service — the “Profession of Arms” — is an honorable, enjoyable, and rewarding pursuit, but it’s not without challenges. When the time comes, you’ll take an oath to

*Support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, to bear true faith and allegiance to the same, to obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, in accordance with regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice.*

Taking this oath is a significant commitment to yourself as well as to your country and to your subordinates, peers, and superiors. To fulfill your duty, you must be true to yourself and committed to serving others through leadership. Significant responsibilities and expectations accompany the position, and achieving officer status requires considerable effort and training. But don’t let the challenge stop you. If you’re dedicated to becoming an officer, this book is here to help. This chapter reveals what you can expect as an officer in the United States armed forces and shows you how to pursue your goals toward becoming one.

## Officer as leader

Wanting to be an officer presumes that you also want to be a leader. Not all leaders are officers, but all officers are called on and expected to be leaders. Prerequisites for being an officer include integrity, honesty, and ethics. Most importantly, you must be more concerned about others and fulfilling your mission than you are about yourself.

The concept of leadership focuses on two things: your mission (or job) and your people. Most of the time, you can balance the two, but if you encounter a situation that requires you to make a choice, the mission *must* come first. Making this choice is almost always difficult, but that's why you get paid the big bucks!

The old quote "You are an officer and a gentleman, by Act of Congress only," isn't quite 100 percent accurate. First, the quote needs a gender update. The military in recent decades — to its great credit — has substantially expanded opportunities for women. And second, you do indeed become an officer by Act of Congress, but whether you act as a lady or gentleman is entirely up to you!

As a final note on leadership, consider what General Colin L. Powell, former Secretary of State and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said: "Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible."

## Exploring Military Officer Occupations and Opportunities

Opportunities abound in the military, especially when you achieve officer status. Start thinking now about your areas of interest and where you feel your strengths lie. The military can help place you on a career path that leads you to success and satisfaction. The following sections provide details about various specialties in the armed forces.



Not all of the specialties in the following sections are available in all branches of the military, but most are.

### Combat specialty officers

When people hear the term "military officer," they often think of combat specialty officers. These folks plan and direct military operations, supervise missions, and lead forces in combat. They typically specialize by type of unit (for example, infantry, artillery, armor, or special operations). They may further specialize based on mission type or weapon system.

### Engineering, science, and technical officers

Engineering, science, and technical officers focus on several different areas. Here's a brief rundown:

- ✓ **Army engineer officers** may plan and supervise everything from the design and building of bridges, dams, and living quarters to the establishment of minefields in a combat environment.
- ✓ **Environmental science officers** may oversee the testing of air, water, and soil quality as well as direct environmental cleanup efforts.
- ✓ **Officers in technical fields** may design and oversee development of aircraft, ships, and weapons systems within the research and development programs of each of the services. Computer engineers, many of whom are in the communications field, often develop and implement large, complex computer systems.

## ***Executive, administrative, and managerial officers***

The military is a large, mostly self-sustaining community that must maintain a group of executives, administrators, and managers to carry out the daily business of serving the community's needs. These officers must plan, implement, and manage departments large and small in areas including finance, health administration, personnel management, purchasing and contracting, and international relations. Senior executives and administrators coordinate the activities and budgets of the various departments, including giving testimony at Congressional hearings, so the entire military organization runs like a well-oiled machine.

## ***Healthcare officers***

The military has its own healthcare system that's fully staffed with officers who serve as doctors, nurses, dentists, veterinarians, occupational and physical therapists, speech and hearing specialists, dietitians, pharmacists, psychiatrists and psychologists, optometrists, and any other healthcare specialist imaginable. These officers perform the same services as their civilian counterparts (and thus need the same credentials). The only difference between the two is that the officers serve in the armed forces and may find themselves treating patients in combat situations.

## ***Human resources officers***

If you count all the people of all the armed forces who are involved in human resources (HR), the armed forces probably have the largest HR department in the country. The armed forces employ officers who serve as recruiting specialists, career counselors, personnel managers, and education and training directors. Human resource development officers must ensure that all service members have the resources they need to achieve their full potential.

## ***Legal services officers***

Legal issues aren't limited to the civilian population. The military deals with all sorts of legal issues as well; these issues pertain to both the military itself and to military personnel and their families. Attorneys and paralegals in the Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps often advise their commanders on issues related to government contracting, international relations, administrative and environmental law, and civilian and military personnel law.

The various JAG Corps officers also provide legal counsel to commanders and individual service members in formal legal proceedings of courts martial and in the more informal nonjudicial proceedings. And they provide legal assistance with such things as wills and powers of attorney, both of which are critical to members who may be deployed anywhere in the world on short notice.

Lawyers often become officers through direct commission, as explained in the section "By appointment only: Receiving a direct commission," later in this chapter.

## *Media and public affairs officers*

Media and public affairs officers serve as liaisons between the military and civilian populations. They develop and produce radio and television commercials and Web content for recruiting purposes, videos for training, and press releases and news reports for informing the public. Some officers even coordinate the activities of military bands and various public displays and demonstrations, including flyovers at major sporting events and holiday celebrations.

## *Protective service officers*

The responsibilities of protective service officers extend far beyond the oversight of military police to deal with all aspects of protecting the safety of people and property on military bases and vessels. While military police focus primarily on law enforcement, emergency management officers plan and prepare for emergencies and respond when disaster strikes.

## *Support services officers*

Support service officers attend to the basic physical, emotional, and social needs and well-being of military personnel and their families. They oversee food service, conduct worship services and address spiritual needs (as chaplains), and strive toward establishing an environment (as social workers) that's less conducive to common social ills, including substance abuse and racism.

## *Transportation officers*

Transportation officers play a key role in every military operation by ensuring that personnel, equipment, and supplies arrive where they need to and when they need to. Officers typically specialize by mode of transportation — air, sea, or land — according to their training and experience. Some officers specialize as navigators. Engineers may oversee operations aboard ships and other large vessels, including the vessel's maintenance, repair, electrical system, and power generation. Transportation officers also may oversee the efforts and activities of various departments in meeting their collective transportation needs and goals.




























# *Grasping the Basics of Military Rank*

Every organization has a structure that enables individuals to work together to achieve organizational goals. Knowing the military's structure provides you with an organizational chart that enables you to see where you fit in, what opportunities you have to advance, and what you can expect in terms of responsibility and compensation.





















The following sections feature charts to help you envision the overall rank and structure of the military along with pay grades for each group: enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and commissioned officers.

## Enlisted personnel

Figure 1-1a and Figure 1-1b show the various ranks and associated pay grades (E-1 to E-9) for enlisted personnel.

Pay Grade	Army		Navy / Coast Guard	Marines	Air Force	
E-1	No Insignia			No Insignia	No Insignia	
	Private		Seaman Recruit	Private	Airman Basic	
E-2						
	Private First Class		Seaman Apprentice	Private First Class	Airman	
E-3						
	Lance Corporal		Seaman	Lance Corporal	Airman First Class	
E-4						
	Corporal	Specialist Four	Petty Officer Third Class	Corporal	Senior Airman	
E-5						
	Sergeant		Petty Officer Second Class	Sergeant	Staff Sergeant	
E-6						
	Staff Sergeant		Petty Officer First Class	Staff Sergeant	Technical Sergeant	
E-7 <sup>1</sup>						
	Sergeant First Class		Chief Petty Officer	Gunnery Sergeant	Master Sergeant	First Sergeant

**Figure 1-1a:**  
Enlisted  
personnel  
ranks and  
pay grades.

E-8 <sup>2</sup>									
	Master Sergeant	First Sergeant	Senior Chief Petty Officer		Master Sergeant	First Sergeant	Senior Master Sergeant	First Sergeant	
E-9 <sup>3</sup>									
	Sergeant Major	Command Sergeant Major	Master Chief Petty Officer	Fleet/Command Master Chief Petty Officer	Master Gunnery Sergeant	Sergeant Major	Chief Master Sergeant	First Sergeant	Command Chief Master Sergeant
E-9 <sup>4</sup>									
	Sergeant Major of the Army		Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy		Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps		Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force		

**Figure 1-1b:**  
Enlisted  
personnel  
ranks and  
pay grades.

<sup>1</sup>When the senior enlisted person in an Air Force unit is an E-7, he or she wears the First Sergeant rank insignia.

<sup>2</sup>The Army, Marines, and Air Force have two positions at pay grade E-8. Whether one is a First Sergeant or Master Sergeant/Senior Master Sergeant depends on the person's job assignment. The First Sergeant is the senior enlisted member of the unit.

<sup>3</sup>The Command Sergeant Major (Army), Fleet/Command Master Chief Petty Officer (Navy and Coast Guard), Sergeant Major (Marines), and Command Chief Master Sergeant (Air Force) are the senior enlisted members of their respective units.

<sup>4</sup>This insignia represents the senior enlisted person of each Service. The incumbent in each position is the spokesperson for the enlisted force at the highest level of each of the Services.

## Commissioned and warrant officers

Figure 1-2 shows the various rank insignia and associated pay grades for both commissioned (O-1 to O-10) and warrant (W-1 to W-5) officers.

## Pay scales and benefits

As with a career in any field, pay and benefits in the military correspond with each individual's level of responsibility, expertise, experience, and years of service. The compensation package consists of several components, which are covered in the following sections.







































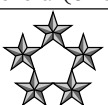

### Base pay (salary)

The military determines base pay (or salary) by pay grade and years of service. The higher the pay grade and the longer you serve, the more money you earn. The following list provides some ballpark figures applicable in 2010 for enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and commissioned officers:

- ✓ **Enlisted personnel:** Base pay ranges from \$1,447 per month (E-1 with less than 2 years of service) up to \$5,113 (E-9 with more than 18 years of service).
- ✓ **Warrant officers:** Base pay ranges from \$2,682 per month (W-1 with less than 2 years of service) up to \$5,905 (W-4 with more than 18 years service).
- ✓ **Commissioned officers:** Base pay ranges from \$2,745 per month (O-1 with less than 2 years service) up to \$12,121 (O-8 with more than 18 years service).



Military pay and allowances usually change annually. For up-to-date, detailed information about military pay and other forms of compensation, visit [www.dfas.mil/militarypay.html](http://www.dfas.mil/militarypay.html).

Commissioned Officers		Warrant Officers <sup>1</sup>		
Army, Air Force, Marines	Navy, Coast Guard Shoulder Insignia <sup>2</sup>	Army, Marines	Air Force	
			Shoulder	Collar
 2nd Lieutenant (O-1)	 Ensign (O-1)			
 1st Lieutenant (O-2)	 Lieutenant (Junior Grade) (O-2)		No Warrant Officer (W1) in the Coast Guard	
 Captain (O-3)	 Lieutenant (O-3)		Warrant Officer (W-1)	
 Major (O-4)	 Lieutenant Commander (O-4)			
 Lieutenant Colonel (O-5)	 Commander (O-5)		Chief Warrant Officer (W-2)	
 Colonel (O-6)	 Captain (O-6)			
 Brigadier General (O-7)	 Rear Admiral (Lower Half) (O-7)		Chief Warrant Officer (W-3)	
 Major General (O-8)	 Rear Admiral (Upper Half) (O-8)			
 Lieutenant General (O-9)	 Vice Admiral (O-9)		Chief Warrant Officer (W-4)	
 General (O-10)	 Admiral (O-10)		No Chief Warrant Officer (W5) in the Coast Guard	
			Chief Warrant Officer (W-5) <sup>3</sup>	
 General of the Army/Air Force <sup>4</sup>	 Admiral of the Fleet <sup>4</sup>			

**Figure 1-2:**  
Commis-  
sioned and  
warrant  
officer ranks  
and pay  
grades.

<sup>1</sup>There are no warrant officers in the Air Force.

<sup>2</sup>Collar insignia is the same as Army, Air Force, and Marines at comparable levels.

<sup>3</sup>Also referred to as "Master Warrant Officer."

<sup>4</sup>Also O-10. No equivalent rank in the Marine Corps or Coast Guard. This rank is generally reserved for wartime use only.

### *Incentive pay*

Military personnel, including officers, may receive additional compensation in the form of *incentive pay*, including flight pay for pilots, submarine pay, diving-duty pay, career sea pay, parachute pay for paratroopers, and extra pay for foreign language proficiency.

***Special pay***

Some officers, particularly those in the health professions (medicine, dentistry, nursing, veterinary medicine, and so on), may receive special pay to bring their compensation somewhat in line with that of their civilian counterparts in an attempt to make the military option more attractive.

***Allowances***

Allowances consist of money in lieu of room and board and, for enlisted personnel, clothing maintenance. Allowances may cover the cost of off-base housing, food, clothing, cost of living adjustments for areas with a relatively high cost of living, moving, overseas expenses, and lodging. Service members with dependents also may be eligible for a monthly family separation allowance.

***Retirement benefits***

After 20 years of active duty in the military, you're eligible for retirement at 50 percent of your base salary plus 2.5 percent for every year you remain in the military past the 20 years (up to 30 years). In other words, if you serve for 30 years, you get 75 percent of your base salary.

National Guard and Reserve retirees also receive a percentage of their base salary calculated on the number of points accumulated during the time of service. The military personnel in these branches earn points for monthly weekend drills and annual training.

***Educational benefits***

With a career in the armed forces, you can go to school and have Uncle Sam pick up the tab. You can earn educational benefits with one of the following two programs:

- ✓ **Tuition Assistance (TA):** If you're willing to extend your military service contract, you're eligible to have the military pay up to 100 percent of your tuition, including enrollment, lab fees, computer fees, and any other special fees.
- ✓ **Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB):** MGIB provides up to 36 months of education benefits to eligible veterans for college courses or vocational training. You typically have ten years to take advantage of the MGIB benefit, but that time may vary. In addition, you may need to make payments toward the plan during your term of service to be eligible. (For details, visit [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov).)

## ***Officerhood: How Do I Get There from Here?***

You can take any of the following four different paths to becoming an officer in the military:

- ✓ Complete training in Officer Candidate School (OCS) or Officer Training School (OTS)
- ✓ Enroll in and complete the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program while in college
- ✓ Graduate from a military academy
- ✓ Receive a direct commission

The following sections describe each of these paths in detail.





No matter which path you take, each branch of the armed forces has its own requirements for becoming a commissioned officer, so check with recruiters or admissions counselors for specifics. The following are the basic requirements that pertain to all branches of the military:

- ✓ **Age:** 19 to 29 years for OCS/OTS; 17 to 21 for ROTC; and 17 to 22 for military academies
- ✓ **Aptitude:** As proven by score on officer qualification test
- ✓ **Citizenship:** U.S. citizen
- ✓ **Education:** Four-year college degree from accredited educational institution
- ✓ **Marital status and dependents:** May be single or married; maximum number of dependents varies according to branch; must be single to enter and graduate from one of the military academies
- ✓ **Moral character:** No criminal record
- ✓ **Physical condition:** Good overall health and vision; height 5 feet to 6 feet 5 inches for men and 4 feet 10 inches to 6 feet 5 inches for women; healthy weight for age and height
- ✓ **Waivers:** Some qualifications may be waived depending on individual circumstances

## *Taking the fast track with OCS or OTS*

OCS and OTS provide a fast track to becoming an officer for those who have a bachelor's degree and didn't benefit from attending a military academy or participating in ROTC. Competition for entrance into one of these programs is stiff, but if you're accepted, you're on track to becoming an officer in 16 to 17 weeks.

Training focuses primarily on leadership, but physical training, military history, and basic drill (marching) also are part of the program. Entrance requirements and program curriculum (and length) vary among the different branches of the military. For details, check out the Web site for the branch that interests you:

- ✓ **Air Force:** [www.au.af.mil/au/holmcenter/OTS](http://www.au.af.mil/au/holmcenter/OTS)
- ✓ **Army:** [www.goarmy.com/ocs](http://www.goarmy.com/ocs)
- ✓ **Coast Guard:** [www.gocoastguard.com/find-your-career/officer-opportunities/programs/officer-candidate-school](http://www.gocoastguard.com/find-your-career/officer-opportunities/programs/officer-candidate-school)
- ✓ **Marines:** [officer.marines.com/marine/making\\_marine\\_officers/officer\\_candidates\\_school](http://officer.marines.com/marine/making_marine_officers/officer_candidates_school)
- ✓ **Navy:** [www1.netc.navy.mil/nstc/otc/ocs.asp](http://www1.netc.navy.mil/nstc/otc/ocs.asp)

## *Hopping on the college track with the ROTC*

The ROTC is the path to becoming an officer that's specifically intended for college students. If you earn your undergraduate college degree while completing the ROTC program, you obtain a commission in one of the United States' armed forces. This type of commission isn't the same as a direct commission as discussed later in this chapter.

Can you enjoy the “college life” if you’re involved in an ROTC program? Absolutely! Hundreds of colleges or universities in the United States offer ROTC programs, and participating in one of the many programs requires a modest commitment of time and effort. You must do the following to participate:

- ✓ Take ROTC as an elective course
- ✓ Participate in additional activities, including physical fitness training
- ✓ Wear your ROTC uniform for special events and weekly meetings

You can participate for two or four years to earn a partial or full scholarship. In exchange for your participation in the program, ROTC offers the following benefits:

- ✓ **Tuition assistance:** All ROTC participants receive some form of tuition assistance. Students who qualify also can apply for ROTC scholarships to cover room, board, and books.
- ✓ **Leadership skills:** ROTC-learned skills benefit you in any walk of life because leadership is a valuable asset in the business world and in any community in which you choose to live or become a member. You learn at an early stage the basics of being in charge.
- ✓ **Career guidance:** If you’re interested in a particular career, military service can help you pursue your interests and acquire the knowledge, skills, and experience you need to be successful in the field you choose.
- ✓ **Training and experience:** Aside from an advanced education, you gain job experience at the same time.



Start with a leg up! If you enter the service on active duty following graduation and completion of ROTC, you start at a management level as an officer. As a result, you start using what you’ve learned right out of school. You won’t find many other employers who hire you in as a manager upon graduation.

For the most up-to-date information on the ROTC program, visit [www.rotc.com](http://www.rotc.com).

## *Attending and graduating from a military academy*

The most thorough and rigorous officer training occurs at four-year military academies, including West Point. In these academies, officer training is an integral part of each student’s college education. The learning environment is highly structured and disciplined. Students must not only complete their course work, but they must also participate in leadership courses, physical fitness training, and drill (marching).

Competition and entrance requirements are stiff. You must

- ✓ Be a U.S. citizen
- ✓ Obtain a congressional nomination (not required for the Coast Guard Academy)
- ✓ Be between 17 and 22 years of age
- ✓ Have solid SAT/ACT scores
- ✓ Be physically fit and pass a physical fitness exam
- ✓ Meet high school GPA requirements
- ✓ Be single and remain single until after graduation



Applicants with a stellar high school record, including participation in team sports, student government, and community service have an edge. Being a team captain or president of an organization or serving in a comparable leadership position is an added plus, because it demonstrates leadership experience.

The United States has five military academies. Each provides a first-class education. Upon graduation, you receive a bachelor's degree and a commission in the armed forces. For the most detailed, accurate, and timely information about the available military academies, go to the following sources:

**United States Air Force Academy**

ATTN: Public Affairs Officer  
2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 320  
Colorado Springs, CO 80840-5016  
(719) 472-2990  
[www.usafa.af.mil](http://www.usafa.af.mil)

**United States Coast Guard Academy**

ATTN: Public Affairs Officer  
15 Mohegan Avenue  
New London, CT 06320-4195  
(203) 444-8270  
[www.cga.edu](http://www.cga.edu)

The Coast Guard reports directly to the Department of the Navy only in wartime; in peacetime it falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security.

**United States Merchant Marine Academy**

ATTN: Public Affairs Officer  
300 Steamboat Road  
Kings Point, NY 11024  
(516) 773-5000  
[www.usmma.edu](http://www.usmma.edu)

The Merchant Marine Academy has a close relationship with the United States armed forces, as noted on its Web site, but it isn't part of the Defense Department.

**United States Military Academy**

ATTN: Public Affairs Office  
Taylor Hall, Building 600  
West Point, NY 10996-1788  
(845) 938-2006  
[www.usma.edu](http://www.usma.edu)

**United States Naval Academy**

ATTN: Public Affairs Officer  
121 Blake Road  
Annapolis, MD 21402-5000  
(410) 267-2291  
[www.usna.edu/Admissions](http://www.usna.edu/Admissions)

Valuable perks accompany a military academy education. Every student is, in a sense, on scholarship, because his or her education is paid for by American taxpayers. Not only that, each student also gets paid while in school!



If you're already enlisted, you may still have the opportunity to take this path toward becoming a commissioned officer. Contact your base/post education office for details.

## ***By appointment only: Receiving a direct commission***

Not all commissioned officers have had to participate in the grueling officer candidate training. A little more than 10 percent of officers receive their commissions via direct appointment. These are usually professionals with advanced degrees or training, including doctors, attorneys, and clergy, but there are other possibilities.

## ***Investigating Reserve and Guard Opportunities***

You may be able to earn a commission in the National Guard or Reserve, primarily through state-run schools and training programs. Some ROTC programs also permit you to accept a commission directly into one of the Reserve Components. For details, contact a local recruiter for the desired branch of the armed forces:

### **Air Force**

[www.afreserve.com](http://www.afreserve.com)  
(800) 257-1212

### **Army**

[www.goarmy.com](http://www.goarmy.com)  
(888) 550-2769

### **Coast Guard**

[www.uscg.mil/reserve](http://www.uscg.mil/reserve)  
(800) 883-8724

### **Marine Corps**

[www.marines.com/main/index/making\\_marines/eligibility/officer](http://www.marines.com/main/index/making_marines/eligibility/officer)  
(800) 627-4637

### **Navy**

[www.navalreserve.com](http://www.navalreserve.com)  
(800) 872-8767

### **Army National Guard**

[www.nationalguard.com](http://www.nationalguard.com)  
(800) 464-8273

## ***Checking Out Warrant Officer Opportunities***

Warrant officers serve as specialized officers within the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines. (The Air Force discontinued its warrant officer program in 1959.) Unlike commissioned officers, warrant officers ordinarily do not serve in typical officer command roles, and their careers emphasize depth rather than breadth of experience. While commissioned officers focus on expanding their horizons through higher levels of command, warrant officers concentrate on enhancing their expertise and leadership within the career field of their choice.

Here's the typical path to becoming a warrant officer: First you apply to Warrant Officer Candidate School (WOCS). Assuming you're accepted, you attend a Basic Combat Training (BCT) course, which typically lasts nine weeks. You then must complete WOCS.

If you already serve in the military and maintain a superior level of technical or tactical expertise, you also may be encouraged to enter the warrant officer program. Warrant officers in the aviation track attend the Warrant Officer Flight Training (WOFT) program after completion of WOCS.

Warrant officers account for a small percentage of active-duty military personnel — approximately 1.1 percent. They currently serve as senior technical experts and managers in a wide variety of occupational specialties and, in the Army, as pilots of various types of aircraft, including both helicopters and fixed-wing crafts. Most, even in the army, aren't pilots. Some warrant officers enter military service directly from civilian life, but most have served in the senior enlisted ranks.



In rank, warrant officers fall between enlisted personnel and commissioned officers.

To qualify to become a warrant officer, you must

- ✓ Be 18 years old at the time of enlistment
- ✓ Be a United States citizen
- ✓ Have a high school diploma
- ✓ Earn a minimum score of 110 on the ASVAB GT (Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery General Technical)
- ✓ Pass all events on the Army physical fitness test
- ✓ Be less than age 33 (if you're on the aviation track)

