

Recovering from WO Pay Compression

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I am very concerned with the state of our Corps. Our numbers (applicants for WO) are in a flat diving tailspin and accelerating exponentially toward the ground. If sweeping changes don't take place very soon it will be the end of the Corps.

However, I write this month sensing a very exciting turn of events. As I have discussed in great detail over the past several years with many of you, one of our primary concerns and major lobbying efforts through the work of our Association is to push along a problem that has been aggravated by "pay compression". It took us nearly 25 years to get ourselves into this place. However, I have received advice from reliable sources that we are getting extremely close to the solution for this devastating problem.

This problem can be directly traced to our inability to recruit high quality NCOs and retain senior warrant officers. Many NCOs have stated that they see no real advantage to becoming a warrant officer from a pay perspective, as the pay difference is minor compared to the future opportunities offered to them by the NCO corps pay scales. When shown the higher promotion rates that we are enjoying in the Army they are not impressed as they feel that they can make the grades to be selected in the enlisted ranks. After all, they are the best of the NCOs and they are the ones that will do well in the NCO promotion system.

This is to say that over the years our NCO corps has earned well-deserved pay raises. This was spotlighted, placed on a pedestal and targeted when congress learned that many of **our junior NCOs were eligible for food stamps**. Instruments were immediately put into place to "rocket" the enlisted pay scales up to where it is today rapidly overtaking the warrant officer corps pay scales.

I recently have had the privilege of attending a briefing conducted by CW5 Al Eggerton of the HQDA G-1 office. In CW5 Eggerton's briefing, he addressed a proposed solution that has been approved by the HQDA G-1 (LTG Hagenbeck's Office) and has been submitted to the Quadrennial Review of Military Pay and Compensation (QRMC) Board. This is the official DOD body that has the responsibility of establishing our pay at the various grades and time of service as published every year or as needed. Military pay is an issue that is much bigger than just the Army, but impacts the entire Department of Defense.

Mr. Eggerton did make a point of mentioning the hard work of our past Executive Director, CW5 (Ret) Ray Bell and the fact that he was invited to brief about warrant officer pay to the Quadrennial Review of Military Pay and Compensation (QRMC) Board. There, Mr. Bell testified, described and first brought to QRMC attention the phrase "Pay Compression". Mr. Eggerton even went on to comment about how influential Mr. Bell was in bringing this issue to the forefront of the QRMC Board.

The HQDA G-1 has prepared proposed pay scale modifications with supporting rationale. The suggested solution set will make great strides on readjusting the pay cells back into alignment with those of where they were during the Hook Commission. This will put the pay back to the relationships of the percentages where they were initially placed.

The Hook Commission was the original body that established the warrant officer pay scales and postponed them in the DOD pay schedules. This is a formula that was derived from a pre-selected percentage over the identified pay cells at different amounts over enlisted pay cells at the same time in service cell. For example: The selected cells showed that W2s would be (at any given time in service) have "X" percent over E-7 pay (for the same time in service). W3s "X" percentage over E8 pay cell & W4 over E9. CW5 Eggerton showed how the proposed scales would look.

When I asked CW5 Eggerton for his permission to print this article he suggested that posting the pay scales in this article would be too presumptuous as it will most likely change several times before it is finally approved.

The resulting effect will have minimal impacts on the congressionally mandated pay tables (due to the extremely small size of our corps). It will, however, have huge positive reception from the warrant officer community and hopefully the warrant officer recruiting efforts.

The intent of all of this is to demonstrate the commitment by the Army and the DOD to the warrant officer corps of all services by restoring equality between the warrant officer and the NCO basic pays.

Additionally, this should increase both the short and long-term attractiveness of becoming a warrant officer in the Army today. At present, it is estimated that we will see the results in the next few months with an implementation most likely in this coming FY.

I personally carried Mr. Eggerton's message to three sets of general officer panels with a key interest in getting the issue recognized by the Army and DOD leadership. Each group found the information helpful and promised to carry the issue forward.

Facts taken from the G-1 briefing:

Our biggest problem is that we are such a small part of the Army and approach microscopic size with relationship to the Department of Defense. Warrant officers comprise roughly 2% of the Army (less in the other services that have Warrant Officers)

Active Army 53% (11,344)

ARNG 35% (7,495)

USAR 12% (2,475)

Total Army Warrant Officer Population – 21,314

_ More than 50% of the Army's personnel work in specialties that do not directly feed into warrant officer specialties (exception is aviation branch selects from all specialties)

_ Technicians are, on average, accessed as SSG with approximately 11 years of service—the minimum requirements are 4-6 years of experience in the feeder MOS and a BNCOC graduate.

_ The Army's current objective is to recruit technician warrant officers with approximately 8 years of service in the feeder MOS.

_ Warrant officer authorized career spans:

- W1-W4 can remain on active duty up to 30 years active federal service or 24 years of warrant officer service, whichever comes first.
- W5 can remain on active duty up to 30 years of warrant service.

_ Accessions have failed to keep pace with losses for the past nine years in a row.

_ If more emphasis is not placed on warrant officer accessions; warrant officer strength will continue to decline.

_ Pay scales have not kept up with the rest of the department of defense pay tables.

- _ Negative perceptions persist about WOCS.
- _ Contributions of the warrant officer Corps are not always made visible.
- _ Over 1/2 of technical service Warrant Officers are retirement eligible, now!
- _ Warrant officer's feel compensation is not commensurate with their skills and responsibilities of their duties.
- _ Pay compression, between warrant officer and NCO grades, is a significant deterrent for NCOs from becoming warrant officers.
- _ Vast majority (>86%) of potential candidates consider compensation as being an important part of their decision to become a warrant officer.
- _ Over the last 5 years active component applications for the warrant officer program have declined from 3.2 to 1.8 per vacancy requirement.
- _ Civilian job opportunities are becoming more competitive/attractive over continued military service.
- _ Results in a decrease in the quality of the force at the same time the need for quality warrant officers is increasing.
- _ Inequity exists between NCO and warrant officer pay relative to historical differences decreasing the premium for warrant officer service.
- _ Commissioning of warrant officers in 1986 expanded their roles and missions – asked to do more than in the past.
- _ As the Army evolves into the Objective Force, there is an increased role for the technical expertise warrant officers provide.

None of this is official. Of course, until it is announced through official DOD channels it is only optimistic to consider any of this being a "certain thing". However, I am extremely thrilled with the sensing that I am getting from the drinking fountain conversations that I have been having in the hallways in the buildings surrounding the Military District of Washington area. More to follow.....

We all owe both Mr. Bell and Mr. Eggerton deep, heartfelt gratitude for working to make this all happen. Please share this with your fellow warrant officers.

USAWOA has "racked one up" for the good of the Army. This is one of the main reasons that I am a member of USAWOA.

"For The Corps (and our future)!"

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