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This issue paper aims to aid in the deliberations of the MLDC. It does not contain the recommendations of the MLDC.

Military Leadership Diversity Commission  
1851 South Bell Street  
Arlington, VA 22202  
(703) 602-0818

<http://mldc.whs.mil/>

# Military Occupations and Implications for Racial/Ethnic and Gender Diversity Officers in the National Guard and Reserve

## Abstract

Across the National Guard and Reserve, the majority of flag/general officers tend to advance from occupations related to tactical operations, which are closely linked to the overall mission of each Service. Tactical occupations tend to have higher concentrations of non-Hispanic white officers and male officers than do other occupations. Recent research suggests that individuals' occupational preferences at the time of initial occupational assignment play a role in this dynamic, as do the Department of Defense (DoD) and Service-specific combat exclusion policies for women. However, the potential reasons why women and racial/ethnic minorities do not choose tactical occupations are not fully understood. If the trend of women and minorities choosing nontactical occupations continues—along with the trend of senior leadership ranks being filled by officers from tactical occupations—racial/ethnic and gender representation at the highest levels of the U.S. military will continue to be limited.

In each Service of the U.S. armed forces, flag/general officers (pay grades O-7 to O-10) tend to come from the subset of occupations most closely linked to the Service's overall mission. In the Army and Marine Corps, flag/general officers tend to come from the combat occupations (e.g., infantry). In the Air Force, flag/general officers are most often pilots by trade. In the Navy, most flag/general officers come from the Unrestricted Line (URL) communities (e.g., surface warfare). These occupations also tend to have higher concentrations of white male officers than other occupations, which has an impact on the demographics of the most senior levels of leadership.

This issue paper (IP) characterizes the relationship between occupation and demographics for officers in the National Guard and Reserve while summarizing the implications for racial/ethnic and gender diversity at the highest levels. Like other IPs addressing racial/ethnic and gender diversity in the Reserve Component (RC), this IP focuses on Selected Reserve (SelRes) officers.<sup>1</sup>

## Tactical Occupations and Pay Grade

Using a snapshot from June 2010, Figure 1 shows the percentages of SelRes officers who served in tactical<sup>2</sup> (i.e., warfighting) occupations for three pay grade groups: company grade (O-1 through O-3), field grade (O-4 through O-6), and flag/general (O-7 and O-8).<sup>3</sup> The data show that the percentage of officers in tactical occupations increases with rank: across the RC, field grade officers are more likely than company grade officers to serve in tactical occupations, and flag/general officers are more likely than company grade officers to come from tactical occupations.<sup>4</sup> This pattern for *personnel* reflects the fact that the Services allocate more field grade and flag/general level *billets* to tactical occupations than to other occupations. As a result, officers who serve in tactical occupations have greater chances for advancement than do officers who serve in nontactical occupations.

## Tactical Occupations and Demographics

The importance of a tactical background for making it to the military's senior ranks has implications for the racial/ethnic and gender diversity of senior leadership in the SelRes because women and racial/ethnic minorities are less likely than men and whites, respectively, to choose or be assigned to tactical occupations. This means that women and minorities have fewer opportunities for advancement and will, therefore, be underrepresented

among leadership relative to their presence in the lower ranks, all else being equal.

Using the June 2010 data, Figures 2 and 3 show how the likelihood of serving in a tactical occupation varies by race/ethnicity and gender, respectively. For example, Figure 2 shows that 25 percent of non-Hispanic white company grade officers were in tactical occupations (vs. other occupations) in June 2010, and Figure 3 shows that just over 8 percent of female field grade officers were in tactical occupations.

Comparing across race/ethnicity groups, Figure 2 shows that, among company and field grade SelRes officers, white officers were more likely than officers from any other group to serve in tactical occupations. In contrast, black officers were the least likely to serve in tactical occupations. Figure 3, in turn, shows that female SelRes officers were much less likely than male SelRes officers to serve in tactical occupations, regardless of pay grade.

Appendix A shows these same data for each of the seven National Guard and Reserve Components.

### Explanations for Minority and Female Officer Underrepresentation in Tactical Occupations

As shown in IP #57 (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2010d), the vast majority of SelRes officers (nearly 90 percent) have prior active duty experience before joining the SelRes, usually at the rank of O-3 or O-4. Therefore, the reasons for female and minority underrepresentation in tactical occupations in the SelRes are likely to be the same as the explanations for their underrepresentation in tactical occupations in the active component (AC). IP #23 (Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2010a) identified differences in occupational preferences as a key factor for minority

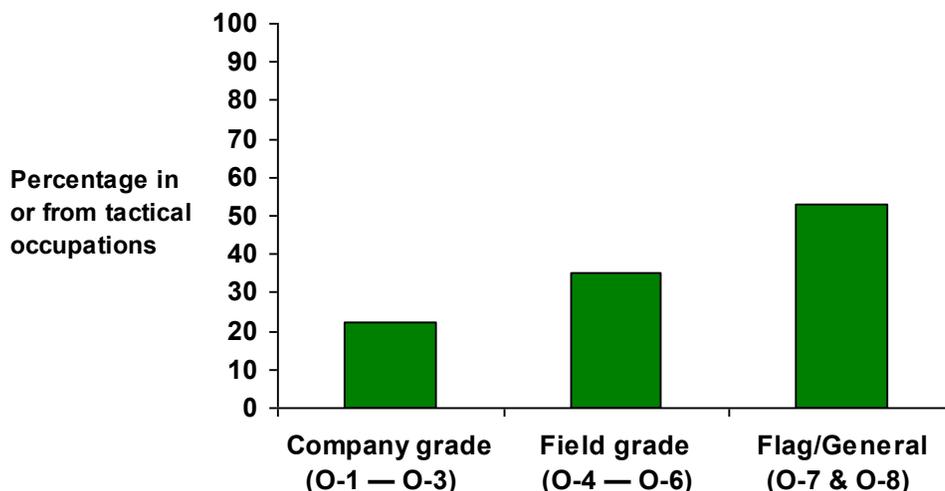
underrepresentation in tactical occupations. That IP also identified the Department of Defense (DoD) and Service-specific combat exclusion policies as a key factor for women.

### Occupational Preferences

While each Service and commissioning source has a distinct career field assignment process, there are some common elements. As the first step in this process, the Service obtains career field preferences from each individual. The Service then combines these preference rankings with rankings of the individuals according to traits such as academic achievement, leadership, and physical fitness. Thus, career assignment is a function of both the officer's preference and his or her merit ranking, as well as Service priorities (Lim et al., 2009).

At least for male officers, the available evidence suggests that white men prefer tactical occupations at much higher rates than minority men. Using FY 2007 Army ROTC Branching Board data for assignments of male officer candidates,<sup>5</sup> Lim et al. (2009) found that minority male officer candidates were less likely than white male officer candidates to indicate preferences for combat arms<sup>6</sup> (i.e., tactical) occupations. All racial/ethnic groups received their preferred occupations at similar rates, despite the tendency for minority officer candidates to rank lower, on average, than white officer candidates. Thus, Lim et al. concluded that the divergent preferences (rather than the differences in merit ranking) were the primary cause of the high concentration of white officers in tactical occupations in the Army. In further support of Lim et al.'s findings, recent data on Air Force officer preferences presented at the November 2009 meeting

Figure 1: Percentage of SelRes Officers in or from Tactical Occupations in Each Pay Grade, June 2010



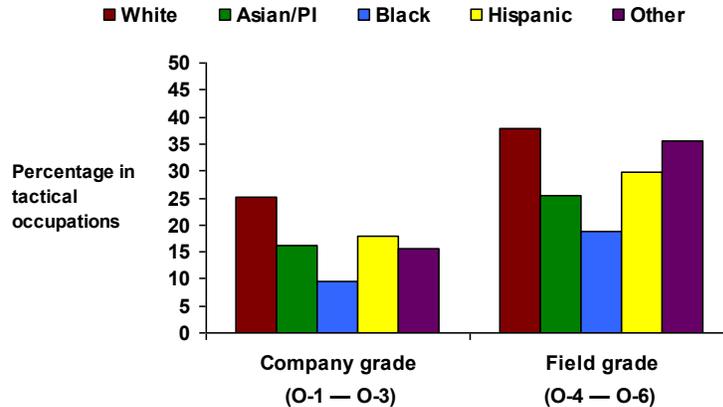
SOURCE: Reserve Components Common Personnel Data System, June 2010, provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC).

of the MLDC showed that the group of officers that preferred rated occupations (i.e., tactical in the Air Force) in 2009 contained a higher percentage of men and whites than other occupations. Across two Services with two different core missions, data were consistent with the theory that divergent preferences primarily drive the high concentration of white men in tactical occupations.

### Female Officers and Combat Exclusion

Although initial occupation preferences affect the racial/ethnic distribution of men in tactical occupations, less is known about what drives the underrepresentation of women in tactical occupations. One obvious factor for women is that current DoD and Service policies bar women from serving in occupations or positions involving direct offensive ground

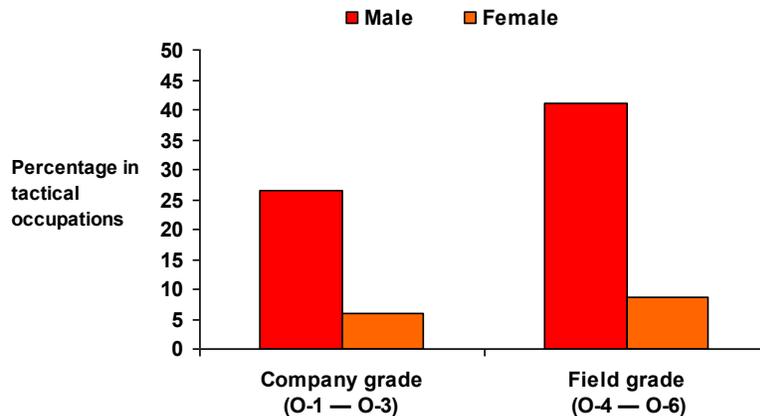
**Figure 2: Percentages of SelRes Officers from Each Race/Ethnicity Group in Tactical Occupations, by Pay Grade**



SOURCE: Reserve Components Common Personnel Data System, June 2010, provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC).

NOTES: 1. White = non-Hispanic whites; Asian/PI = non-Hispanic Asians and Pacific Islanders, Black = non-Hispanic blacks; Other = non-Hispanic American Indians, Native Alaskans, and individuals of more than one race. 2. For each pay grade group, the differences between the white percentage and every other percentage are statistically significant at the 95 percent level of confidence.

**Figure 3: Percentages of Male and Female SelRes Officers in Tactical Occupations, by Pay Grade**



SOURCE: Reserve Components Common Personnel Data System, June 2010, provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC).

NOTE: For each pay grade group, the difference between the male and female percentages is statistically significant at the 95 percent level of confidence.

combat (Harrell & Miller, 1997; Segal & Segal, 2004). That is, some occupations are completely closed to women (e.g., special forces), and women in combat occupations that are not closed cannot serve with units that are likely to engage in direct offensive ground combat. Since policy changes in 1993 greatly expanded opportunities for women to serve in the Navy, and to some extent, the Air Force, this policy is most restrictive in the Army and Marine Corps.

## Conclusion

The high concentration of white male officers in the flag/general ranks of the SelRes is partly a result of the high concentration of white male officers in tactical occupations. Recent research and data suggest that differences in initial career field preferences partly explain the high concentration of white male officers in tactical operations. However, little is known about the reasons why initial officer occupational preferences differ along racial/ethnic or gender lines. Regardless of the reasons why occupational preferences differ along racial/ethnic and/or gender lines, initial officer occupational classification has important implications for demographic diversity at the highest ranks of military leadership.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See IP #53 (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010b) for a description of SelRes and its relative importance within the RC and the armed forces in general.

<sup>2</sup>To facilitate inter-Service comparisons, we rely on the DoD occupational classification system. DoD defines tactical occupations to include all pilots, officers in occupations directly involving ground or naval arms, ballistic missile systems officers, and combat and operations staff officers.

<sup>3</sup>Flag and General officers lose their occupational designator when they are promoted past the O-6 pay grade. Historical data only allowed us to track the career fields for O-7 and O-8 officers. Therefore, our data do not contain information for O-9 and O-10 flag/general officers.

<sup>4</sup>The figure compares recent company and field grade officers with recent flag officers, ignoring changes in occupations across cohorts. The comparison could be misleading if the fraction of officers in tactical occupations has decreased over time.

<sup>5</sup>Female officers were not included in the analysis because women are restricted by policy from entering certain tactical occupations.

<sup>6</sup>In FY 2007, the Army grouped its occupations into three categories: Combat Arms, Combat Support, and Combat Service Support. Combat Arms occupations included Air Defense Artillery, Armor, Aviation, Corps of Engineers, Field Artillery, and Infantry. Based on an Army briefing at the November 2009 meeting of the MLDC, the Army has renamed its three occupational categories: Maneuver, Fire and Effects (formerly Combat Arms), Operational Support (formerly Combat Support), and Force Sustainment (formerly Combat Service Support). A few occupational fields were also reclassified: Military Police and the Chemical Corps were moved out of Operational Support and into Maneuver, Fire and Effects.

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