

136249

United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Requesters

June 1988

# MILITARY PERSONNEL

## Impact of Joint Duty Tours on Officer Career Paths



136249

**RESTRICTED**—Not to be released outside the General Accounting Office except on the basis of the specific approval by the Office of Congressional Relations

RELEASED

542468 | 136249

---

---

National Security and  
International Affairs Division

B-229366

June 6, 1988

The Honorable Sam Nunn  
Chairman, Committee on  
Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Bill Nichols  
Chairman, Subcommittee on  
Investigations  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

In April 1987, you requested that we assess the Department of Defense's (DOD) proposals to modify the joint officer personnel policies established by title IV of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. We provided our assessment of these proposals in our report, Military Personnel: Proposals to Modify the Management of Officers Assigned to Joint Duty (GAO/NSIAD-88-78, Apr. 19, 1988). However, at that time, our analysis of proposals to modify the tour length requirements set by the Reorganization Act was incomplete. This report completes our analysis of these proposals.

## Background

Title IV of the Reorganization Act had several objectives. It sought to improve the quality of officers assigned to joint (multiservice) organizations, increase their educational and experience levels, and expand the exposure of officers to joint matters.

To achieve these objectives, the Reorganization Act and, more recently, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989 established policies governing the management of officers assigned to joint duty.

- Minimum tour lengths were established for joint duty assignments. The tour length applying to officers in the grades of colonel (Navy captain) and below is set at 3-1/2 years. The tour length applying to general/flag officers is set at 3 years.
- The Secretary of Defense may waive the minimum tour length for any officer. However, an average tour length of 3-1/2 years (3 years for general/flag officers) must be maintained. Overseas tours and tours terminated for specified reasons (e.g., medical condition) may be excluded when computing the average.

- A category of officers known as joint specialty officers was created. To qualify as a joint specialist, an officer must normally complete a joint professional military educational program and a full tour of duty in a joint duty assignment, in that sequence.
- Only joint specialists may fill positions designated as critical. At least 1,000 joint duty assignments must be designated as critical. Almost all the critical positions will be at the grades of lieutenant colonel and colonel (Navy lieutenant commander and captain).
- Officers with critical occupational specialties involving combat operations, who are nominated for the joint specialty, may serve tours of less than 3-1/2 years, but not less than 2 years, on their initial joint duty assignment. However, DOD is limited in the number of such assignments that may be excluded in computing the average tour length (up to 10 percent of all joint duty assignments).
- A joint duty assignment is a prerequisite for promotion to brigadier general or rear admiral (lower half).
- A joint duty assignment as a general/flag officer is required for appointment to certain senior leadership positions: combatant commander, service chief, and chairman and vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

## Reducing Tour Lengths for Officers in the Grade of Colonel and Below

DOD has proposed reducing the minimum and average tour length applying to field grade officers<sup>1</sup> from 3-1/2 to 3 years. In support of the proposal, DOD officials stated that (1) there is limited time in an already crowded career path to spend 3-1/2 years in a joint assignment, (2) a longer tour length limits the number of colonels qualified for selection to general/flag officer by affording fewer officers an opportunity for a joint assignment, (3) a 3-1/2-year tour forces disruptive mid-year moves for families, (4) a 3-1/2-year tour would encourage consecutive joint tours to fill critical billets, and (5) long tours would limit the availability of officers for command assignments.

We discussed DOD concerns about the impact of a 3-1/2-year tour on selectivity for general officer, mid-year moves, and the other concerns in our April 1988 report. Our analysis of the impact of a 3-1/2-year joint tour on the career path of field grade officers is summarized below and discussed in detail in appendix I.

<sup>1</sup>Field grade refers to the grades of major/lieutenant commander, lieutenant colonel/commander, and colonel/captain. Although the law does not limit joint duty assignments to general and field grade officers, DOD designated only positions in these grades as joint assignments.

---

## Time in Career Path

In testimony before the Subcommittee on Investigations, House Committee on Armed Services, DOD officials stated that there is limited time in officers' career paths at the field grade level to accomplish all the things an officer needs to do and that there were key positions that an officer needed to hold to assume higher level commands as a general officer. Further, DOD officials stated that time in joint assignments should not take officers away from war-fighting assignments, suggesting that it was expected to replace time spent in other staff positions. DOD officials also argued that extended time away from war-fighting duties erodes war-fighting skills.

To examine time in career paths, we analyzed the field grade assignments of officers with operational specialties recently selected for promotion to brigadier general and rear admiral (lower half). We limited our analysis to officers with operational specialties because the congressional debate centered on this group. Operational specialists include Army combat arms officers; Marine Corps ground and aviation officers; Air Force pilots, navigators, and missileers; and Navy unrestricted line officers. The group we reviewed represents 61, 83, 70, and 59 percent, respectively, of the total Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Navy brigadier generals and rear admirals (lower half) chosen by the services' selection boards. We focused on recent selectees because the most promotable officers are being targeted for joint assignments and face the most crowded career paths. Officers who are less promotable and less likely to be selected for command positions or professional military education would likely face a less crowded career path.

To determine how much time officers spent away from war-fighting duties (and therefore to evaluate the possible effect on war-fighting skills), we identified the career time spent in and out of war-fighting assignments for each officer. For this purpose, we defined war-fighting assignments for the services as follows: Army—division, brigade, battalion, and company level assignments; Air Force—wing and squadron level assignments; Marine Corps—fleet marine force assignments; and Navy—sea duty and major shore commands. The services identified certain of these war-fighting positions as key to assuming higher levels of command. We determined the amount of time spent in those key war-fighting positions. Finally, to analyze the possible effects of a 3-1/2-year joint tour on the erosion of war-fighting skills, we identified the maximum consecutive time spent in non-war-fighting assignments.

To assure that the field grade time was comparable to the time officers can reasonably be expected to spend in these grades in the future, we

compared the number of years of service the officers in our analysis had at the time of promotion to major to the years of service of officers currently being promoted to major. We identified a difference that was particularly great for Army and Marine Corps officers; the difference occurred primarily as a result of the Vietnam expansion. According to DOD officials, during Vietnam, captains were promoted to major much sooner than they are today. Consequently, officers are currently being promoted later to major, but have similar target time periods for selection to general/flag officer. Thus, these officers will have fewer years of field grade time than the officers covered by our analysis. As a result, we adjusted the data to reflect this difference and provide a better basis for projecting the likely impact of a joint tour.

Table 1 presents our initial (unadjusted) analysis. Table 2 shows the adjustment factors and table 3 displays the adjusted analysis.

**Table 1: Field Grade Experience of Recent Selectees for General Officer—Unadjusted Data**

Figures in average years				
Category	Army	Marine Corps	Air Force	Navy
War-fighting assignments	7.7	6.3	7.3	8.5
Non-war-fighting assignments	9.7	11.1	7.0	8.9
<b>Field grade, total</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>17.4</b>
Time spent in key war-fighting positions	4.8	2.6	5.2	6.1
Maximum period of consecutive non-war-fighting assignments (median years)	5.0	6.1	3.8	2.8

**Table 2: Time Until Promotion to Major for Recent General/Flag Selectees Compared to 5-Year Average (Fiscal Years 1983-87)**

Average years of commissioned service at promotion to major	Army	Marine Corps	Air Force	Navy
5-year average	11.2	11.0	11.4	9.5
Recent general/flag selectees	7.4	8.5	10.0	8.1
<b>Difference</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.4</b>
Percent reduction <sup>a</sup>	22	14	10	8

<sup>a</sup>Percent reduction was calculated by dividing the difference by the total number of field grade years (shown in table 1).

**Table 3: Field Grade Experience of Selectees for General Officer—Adjusted Data<sup>a</sup>**

Figures in average years

Category	Army	Marine Corps	Air Force	Navy
War-fighting assignments	6.0	5.4	6.6	7.8
Non-war-fighting assignments	7.6	9.6	6.3	8.2
<b>Field grade, total</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>16.0</b>
Time spent in key war-fighting positions	3.7	2.2	4.7	5.6
Maximum period of consecutive non-war-fighting assignments (median years)	3.9	5.2	3.4	2.6

<sup>a</sup>Adjusted data were derived by reducing unadjusted numbers shown in table 1 by the percent reduction shown in table 2.

The difficulty in accommodating a 3-1/2-year joint tour thus appears to differ from service to service.

- For all services, there is enough total non-war-fighting time, on average, to accommodate a 3-1/2-year joint tour (4 years to avoid mid-year moves), coupled with a year of professional military education.<sup>2</sup> However, such a tour will likely require an increase in the consecutive time Army, Air Force, and Navy officers normally spend away from war-fighting assignments.
- Although there is adequate time in total, service officials are concerned that a 3-1/2-year joint tour will severely limit the availability of high quality officers for positions within their own service requiring operational specialists and limit the ability to accommodate individual deviations from the average career path.
- There is sufficient time during field grade years for Marine Corps officers (somewhat less for Navy officers) to become joint specialists by completing school and a joint assignment and then serving in a critical joint position (about 9 years<sup>3</sup>).
- The Army and Air Force joint specialist who serves two joint tours during the field grade years will likely need to divert time from war-fighting duties. The option of a 2-year initial joint tour for officers with critical occupational specialties involving combat operations will be of limited value to these officers. The 2-year option would normally apply early in the field grade career paths when longer periods of non-war-fighting time is available to accommodate joint assignments.

<sup>2</sup>Professional military education is generally 10 months, except for the Armed Forces Staff College, which is 5 months.

<sup>3</sup>Based on two 3-1/2- to 4-year joint tours, plus up to 2 years of professional military education.

Thus, our analysis tends to indicate that there is time in the career path to accommodate a single joint duty tour of 3-1/2 years. However, a determination of the appropriateness of a tour length reduction will need to consider the impact on the consecutive time away from war-fighting duties, the impact on joint specialists who serve two tours, service concerns about the availability of high quality officers for staff positions at corps-level commands, major commands, and service headquarters; and additional problems raised in our April 1988 report, such as the availability of officers for command assignments.

## Tour Length Requirements for General/Flag Officers

DOD has also proposed reducing the tour length applying to general/flag officers from 3 to 2 years. DOD argues that a 2-year tour would (1) allow for a greater breadth of experience among candidates for senior leadership positions, (2) increase the number of qualified candidates for positions that require joint experience as a general/flag officer, and (3) reduce turbulence among general/flag officers in nonjoint assignments.

Our April 1988 report discusses DOD concerns about the number of qualified candidates for senior leadership positions and turbulence among officers assigned to service (nonjoint) organizations. Our analysis of assignment experience at the general officer grades follows and is discussed in greater detail in appendix II.

In testimony before the Subcommittee on Investigations, House Committee on Armed Services, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, emphasized the need for recent operational experience for officers promoted to the 3-star rank. He cited the Navy fleet commander as an example that recent operational experience is essential to perform the duties of the position. According to the Chairman, officers spend 3 to 4 years at both the 1- and 2-star rank and should have an operational and staff assignment at each rank.<sup>4</sup>

To validate the career pattern of general officers, we analyzed the assignment patterns of the 3- and 4-star general/flag officers from operational specialties. Specifically, we summarized the assignment experience of these officers while they were at the 1- and 2-star levels (from promotion to brigadier general/rear admiral (lower half) to promotion to lieutenant general/vice admiral).

<sup>4</sup>One-star refers to the grade of brigadier general/rear admiral (lower half); 2-star refers to the grade of major general/rear admiral (upper half); 3-star refers to the grade of lieutenant general/vice admiral; and 4-star refers to the grade of general/ admiral.

Our analysis shows that general/flag officers held an average of 1.7 operational and 2.4 staff assignments during the combined 1- and 2-star period of their careers. Additionally, we found the length of these assignments were short in duration, averaging 1.3 years for all services. Finally, of the average 6 years available at the 1- and 2-star ranks, officers spent 5.5 years in operational and staff assignments with the remaining 0.5 years in joint assignments. Thus, the data suggest that significant changes to assignment patterns will have to be made in each of the services to accommodate a 3-year joint tour for general/flag officers.

---

## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objectives of this review were to validate DOD's concerns about the career paths of field grade and general officers and assess the difficulty in accommodating legislated tour lengths for joint assignments. We analyzed the assignment history of (1) officers selected for brigadier general and rear admiral (lower half) by the two most recent selection boards (most recent at the time this analysis began) and (2) the inventory (as of September/October 1987) of 3- and 4-star general/flag officers.

Because the congressional debate centered on the career paths of officers from operational specialties, we limited our review to officers from the following groups: Army combat arms officers; Marine Corps aviation and ground officers; Air Force pilots, navigators, and missileers; and Navy unrestricted line officers. We excluded officers who held these specialties in the past but were clearly being utilized in support specialties, such as acquisition or logistics. The Navy performed the analysis of the field grade experience of Navy rear admirals and we subsequently validated it. We performed our work between August 1987 and April 1988 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

---

## Agency Comments

In providing official oral comments on a draft of this report, DOD officials generally agreed with our analysis. They were concerned, however, that based on aggregate data, a reader might conclude that adequate time is available to complete full joint tours. DOD pointed out that our analysis does not address the availability of time within sub-specialty career fields (e.g., nuclear propulsion) or within an individual officer's career. A servicewide study, scheduled to be completed in late June 1988, will address the impact of various tour lengths on combat readiness, and will specifically assess impact on sub-specialty fields. DOD also

---

noted that aggregate data do not reflect the difficulty in managing the timing of the 3-1/2-year tour within an individual officer's career.

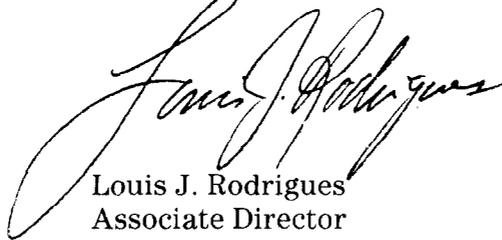
DOD expressed some disagreement with our classification of assignments into war-fighting and non-war-fighting. DOD believes a number of assignments do not clearly fall into either category. For example, it identified staff assignments, which we have categorized as non-war-fighting, that must be filled by officers from operational specialties. Although some staff assignments in the services require officers from these specialties, some positions in joint organizations also require officers from operational specialties. The primary issue is achieving a balance in the availability of high quality officers to fill positions in service and joint organizations requiring operational expertise without impacting war-fighting assignments. Our analysis, therefore, focuses on war-fighting assignments rather than assignments requiring operational expertise.

Officials generally agreed with our adjustments to the number of years officers can expect to spend in the field grade ranks. However, DOD believes that the reductions should only be applied to non-war-fighting assignments. We did not change our analysis since anything other than a straight percentage adjustment to the actual data requires speculation as to how the reductions would have occurred.

DOD officials concurred with our analysis of tour length for general/flag officers. They emphasized that given current patterns, significant adjustments will be necessary to accommodate a 3-year tour for general/flag officers. DOD also pointed out that by increasing tour lengths, the number of general/flag officers with joint experience decreases. As a result, fewer officers will be available for selection to senior joint positions requiring joint experience at the general/flag level.

---

As arranged with your Offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of the report. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request. If you have any questions or we can be of further assistance, please contact me on 275-4001.



Louis J. Rodrigues  
Associate Director

---

# Contents

---

Letter	1
Appendix I Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers Selected for General/Flag Rank Army	12
Appendix II Tour Lengths for General/Flag Officers	26
Tables	
Table 1: Field Grade Experience of Recent Selectees for General Officer—Unadjusted Data	4
Table 2: Time Until Promotion to Major for Recent General/Flag Selectees Compared to 5-Year Average (Fiscal Years 1983-87)	4
Table 3: Field Grade Experience of Selectees for General Officer—Adjusted Data	5
Table I.1: Field Grade Experience of Army Officers	13
Table I.2: Professional Military Education for Army Officers	15
Table I.3: Field Grade Experience of Marine Corps Officers	16
Table I.4: Professional Military Education of Marine Corps Officers	19
Table I.5: Field Grade Experience of Air Force Officers	20
Table I.6: Professional Military Education of Air Force Officers	22
Table I.7: Field Grade Experience of Navy Officers	24
Table I.8: Professional Military Education of Navy Officers	25
Table II.1: Summary of Assignment Time for General/Flag Officers at the 1- And 2-Star Ranks	26
Table II.2: Common Assignments for General/Flag Officers at the 1- And 2-Star Ranks	27

---

**Table II.3: Experience of General/Flag Officers At the 1-  
and 2- Star Ranks**

**28**

---

**Abbreviations**

DOD      Department of Defense

---

# Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers Selected for General/Flag Rank

---

This appendix discusses the field grade experience of officers recently selected for promotion to general/flag officer.

---

## Army

Table I.1 details our analysis of the career paths of Army officers from combat arms branches (infantry, armor, artillery, aviation, and air defense) who were selected for promotion to brigadier general by the 1986 and 1987 promotion boards. Army officials identified the key war-fighting positions for officers in these specialties as battalion operations officer and/or executive officer at the grade of major, battalion commander at the grade of lieutenant colonel, and brigade commander at the grade of colonel.

**Appendix I  
Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers  
Selected for General/Flag Rank**

**Table I.1: Field Grade Experience of Army Officers<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Percentage Officers who served in position</b>	<b>Average time Officers that served in positions (years)</b>	<b>All officers (years)</b>
<b>War-fighting assignments</b>			
Key assignments			
Executive officer, battalion	51	0.9	0.5
Operations officer, battalion	49	0.9	0.4
Commanding officer, battalion	100	1.9	1.9
Commanding officer, brigade	94	2.1	2.0
<b>Total, key assignments</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>4.8</b>
Other assignments			
Division	76	2.1	1.6
Other battalion	26	0.8	0.2
Other brigade	67	1.2	0.8
Military Assistance Command-Vietnam	34	0.9	0.3
<b>Total, other assignments</b>	<b>94</b>		<b>3.0</b>
<b>Total war-fighting assignments</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>7.7</b>
<b>Non-war-fighting assignments</b>			
Corps	40	1.4	0.6
Forces Command, U.S. Army Europe, Numbered Army	26	1.4	0.4
Army headquarters	71	2.4	1.7
Unified and combined commands	21	1.7	0.4
Joint Chiefs of Staff/Office of the Secretary of Defense	19	1.9	0.3
School faculty and staff <sup>b</sup>	76	2.6	2.0
Professional military education	100	1.9	1.9
Other education and training	54	1.4	0.8
Miscellaneous <sup>c</sup>	71	2.4	1.7
<b>Total non-war-fighting assignments</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>9.7</b>
<b>Total field grade time</b>			<b>17.4</b>

<sup>a</sup>Officers selected for brigadier general by the 1986 and 1987 selection boards from combat arms branches (infantry, armor, artillery, aviation, and air defense). This analysis covers 70 of the 114 officers selected by those boards.

<sup>b</sup>Includes training centers and schools, such as the U.S. Army Infantry School, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and college Reserve Officer Training Corps.

<sup>c</sup>Includes assignments, such as the Army Personnel Center, Training and Doctrine Command, and Recruiting Command.

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

As shown in table I.1, all selectees served as battalion commander and almost all served as brigade commander. About half served as battalion

executive officer and operations officer, and 80 percent served in at least one of these two positions.

Recent selectees for general officer spent, on average, about 4.8 years in key assignments. This represents 27 percent of the time between promotion to the grade of major and selection for brigadier general.

To examine the effects of a 3-1/2-year joint tour on the erosion of war-fighting skills, we computed the amount of consecutive time officers spent in non-war-fighting assignments. Based on discussions with Army officials, we equated war-fighting time with assignments to positions at the division level and below. For each officer, we then identified the maximum period of consecutive time spent in non-war-fighting assignments.

We found that the median period of consecutive non-war-fighting time was 5 years. Long periods of non-war-fighting assignments were more likely to occur early in the officers' field grade years. About 71 percent of the longest non-war-fighting periods involved time at the grade of major, 57 percent at the grade of lieutenant colonel, but only 26 percent involved time at the grade of colonel. (Assignments often involved time at more than one grade.) A full joint tour may thus be more feasible earlier in the field grade years.

Professional military education and other education and training averaged 2.7 years. As shown in table I.2, a high proportion of officers attended intermediate- and senior-level military schools. All the officers attended at least one school, and 97 percent attended both senior and intermediate schools.

**Appendix I**  
**Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers**  
**Selected for General/Flag Rank**

**Table I.2: Professional Military Education for Army Officers<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Percent of officers</b>
Intermediate service school <sup>b</sup>	
Armed Forces Staff College	14
Army Command and General Staff College	59
Other intermediate service school	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>
Senior service school <sup>c</sup>	
National War College	11
Industrial College of the Armed Forces	1
Army War College	77
Other senior service school	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>
Either intermediate or senior school	100
Both intermediate and senior schools	97

<sup>a</sup>Officers selected for brigadier general by the 1986 and 1987 selection boards from combat arms branches (infantry, armor, artillery, aviation, and air defense). The review covers 70 officers of the 114 selected by those boards.

<sup>b</sup>Intermediate schools are 10 months, except for the Armed Forces Staff College, which is 5 months.

<sup>c</sup>Senior schools are 10 months.

**Marine Corps**

Table I.3 details our analysis of the career paths for Marine Corps officers from combat specialties (ground combat and aviators) who were selected for promotion to general officer by the 1987 and 1988 promotion boards. Because there were differences between the career paths of the two groups, the analysis is displayed for all officers and the two groups separately.

Key war-fighting assignments for field grade officers were identified as battalion commander and regiment commander in the case of ground combat officers, and squadron commander and group commander in the case of aviators. As shown in table I.3, 100 percent of the ground and air officers served in at least one of the key assignments. Ground officers spent an average of 2.1 years in these key assignments, compared to aviators who spent an average of 3.3 years in key assignments.

Appendix I  
 Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers  
 Selected for General/Flag Rank

Table I.3: Field Grade Experience of Marine Corps Officers<sup>a</sup>

	Ground combat officers		
	Percentage Officers who served in positions	Average time Officers that served in positions (years)	
		All officers	(years)
<b>War-fighting assignments</b>			
Key assignments			
Commanding officer, battalion/ squadron	67	1.3	0.9
Commanding officer, regiment/ group	67	1.9	1.3
<b>Total, key assignments</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>2.1</b>
Other assignments			
Other battalion/squadron	42	0.9	0.4
Other regiment/group	42	1.0	0.4
Division/wing	58	1.3	0.7
Marine expeditionary task forces	42	0.9	0.4
Fleet marine force headquarters	17	1.9	0.3
Military Assistance Command-Vietnam	42	1.4	0.6
<b>Total, other assignments</b>	<b>92</b>		<b>2.8</b>
<b>Total war-fighting assignments</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>4.9</b>
<b>Non-war-fighting assignments</b>			
Marine Corps headquarters	100	3.9	3.9
Navy headquarters	25	1.5	0.4
Unified/combined commands	33	1.4	0.6
Joint Chiefs of Staff/Office of the Secretary of Defense	33	1.8	0.6
Training facility	83	3.8	3.1
Miscellaneous <sup>b</sup>	42	2.9	1.2
Professional military education	100	1.5	1.5
Other education and training	75	1.5	1.1
<b>Total, non-war-fighting assignments</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>12.4</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>17.3</b>

**Appendix I  
Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers  
Selected for General/Flag Rank**

Air officers			All officers		
Percentage Officers who served in positions	Average time		Percentage Officers who served in positions	Average time	
	Officers that served in positions (years)	All officers (years)		Officers that served in positions (years)	All officers (years)
75	2.1	1.5	70	1.6	1.1
75	2.3	1.8	70	2.1	1.5
<b>100</b>		<b>3.3</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>2.6</b>
100	2.2	2.2	65	1.7	1.1
63	1.8	1.1	50	1.3	0.7
75	1.6	1.2	65	1.4	0.9
38	1.0	0.4	40	0.9	0.4
25	1.3	0.3	20	1.6	0.3
0	0.0	0.0	25	1.4	0.4
<b>100</b>		<b>5.1</b>	<b>95</b>		<b>3.7</b>
<b>100</b>		<b>8.4</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>6.3</b>
88	2.0	1.9	95	3.3	3.1
38	1.9	0.7	30	1.7	0.5
38	3.1	1.2	35	2.3	0.8
0	0.0	0.0	20	1.8	0.4
50	2.8	1.4	70	3.5	2.4
75	2.4	1.8	55	2.6	1.4
88	1.4	1.3	95	1.5	1.4
63	1.6	1.0	70	1.5	1.1
<b>100</b>		<b>9.2</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>11.1</b>
		<b>17.6</b>			<b>17.4</b>

<sup>a</sup>Officers selected for brigadier general by the fiscal years 1987 and 1988 selection boards from combat specialties (ground combat and aviation). Our review covers 20 of the 24 officers selected by those boards.

<sup>b</sup>Includes assignments such as Marine barracks, Marine district, Marine air base, and Marine air detachments.

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

Overall, Marine Corps officers spent 6.3 years in war-fighting assignments (i.e., assignments within the fleet marine force structure). Aviators spent about twice as much time in war-fighting assignments as did ground officers. In total, ground officers spent an average of 4.9 years

(28 percent) of the field grade years in war-fighting assignments, compared to 8.4 years (48 percent) for air officers.

We computed the amount of consecutive time officers spent in non-war-fighting assignments to examine the effect of a 3-1/2-year joint tour on the erosion of war-fighting skills. Based on discussions with Marine Corps officials, we equated war-fighting time with assignments within the fleet marine forces. We then identified the maximum period of consecutive time each officer spent in non-war-fighting assignments.

The median period of consecutive non-war-fighting time for ground officers was 7.0 years, compared to 4.1 years for aviators, with an overall average of 6.1 years for all selectees. Nineteen of the 20 officers covered by our analysis had a block of time in non-war-fighting assignments in excess of 3-1/2 years. Longer periods of consecutive non-war-fighting time occurred most often in the early careers of aviators, but were more evenly distributed in the careers of ground officers. For aviators, 75 percent of these non-war-fighting assignments involved time at the grade of major and 37 percent at the grade of lieutenant colonel, with none of this time occurring at the grade of colonel (assignments often involved time at more than one grade). Conversely, for ground officers, 59 percent involved time at the grade of major, 84 percent at the grade of lieutenant colonel, and 33 percent at the grade of colonel.

Professional military education and other education and training averaged 2.5 years per officer. As shown in table I.4, a high percentage of officers attended professional military schools. About 95 percent attended at least one school, and 60 percent attended both intermediate- and senior-level military schools.

**Appendix I**  
**Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers**  
**Selected for General/Flag Rank**

**Table I.4: Professional Military Education of Marine Corps Officers<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Percent of officers</b>
Intermediate service school	
Armed Forces Staff College	10
Marine Corps Command and Staff College	30
Other intermediate service school	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>
Senior service school	
National War College	25
Industrial College of the Armed Forces	5
Naval War College	35
Other senior service school	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>
Either an intermediate or senior school	95
Both intermediate and senior schools	60

<sup>a</sup>Officers selected for brigadier general by the 1987 and 1988 selection boards from combat specialties (ground combat and aviation). The review covers 20 of the 24 officers selected by those boards.

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

## Air Force

Table I.5 details our analysis of the career paths of Air Force officers from selected operational specialties (pilots, navigators, and missile operations) who were selected for promotion to general officer by the 1986 and 1987 promotion boards.

Air Force officials identified the key war-fighting assignments for field grade officers as squadron commander, deputy commander for operations of a wing, vice commander of a wing, and wing commander. In addition, such assignments as a squadron operations officer and commander of a combat support group were treated as key assignments, since officials viewed these as offering desirable operational experience.

**Appendix I  
Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers  
Selected for General/Flag Rank**

**Table I.5: Field Grade Experience of Air Force Officers<sup>a</sup>**

	Percentage Officers who served in position	Average time	
		Officers that served in positions (years)	All officers (years)
<b>War-fighting assignments</b>			
Key assignments			
Squadron operations officer	47	1.3	0.6
Commander, squadron	74	1.7	1.2
Commander, support group	12	0.9	0.1
Deputy for operations, wing	40	1.2	0.5
Vice commander, wing	72	1.1	0.8
Commander, wing	100	1.9	1.9
<b>Total, key assignments</b>			<b>5.2</b>
Other assignments			
Other squadron	75	1.4	1.1
Other wing	65	1.6	1.0
<b>Total, other assignments</b>			<b>2.1</b>
<b>Total war-fighting assignments</b>			<b>7.3</b>
<b>Non-war-fighting assignments</b>			
Air division	7	0.8	0.1
Numbered Air Force	18	1.1	0.2
Major command (Strategic Air Command, Tactical Air Command, U.S. Air Forces Europe, Pacific Air Forces, Air Training Command, and Military Airlift Command)	68	2.2	1.5
Air Force headquarters	78	3.3	2.5
Unified and combined commands	12	1.5	0.2
Joint Chiefs of Staff/Office of the Secretary of Defense	15	2.5	0.4
Other staff	34	2.1	0.7
Professional military education	100	1.3	1.3
Other education and training	25	0.8	0.2
<b>Total non-war-fighting assignments</b>			<b>7.0</b>
<b>Total, all assignments</b>			<b>14.3</b>

<sup>a</sup>Officers selected for brigadier general by the 1986 and 1987 selection boards from selected operational specialties (pilots, navigators, and missile operations). Our review covered all 68 officers selected from these specialties (out of a total of 97 line officers selected).

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

As shown in table I.5, there was significant variance in the assignments completed by recent selectees. All selectees served as wing commanders, close to three-quarters served as squadron commanders and vice wing commanders, and smaller proportions served in other key positions.

Recent selectees for general officer spent, on average, about 5.2 years in key assignments. This represents 36 percent of the average number of years between promotion to the grade of major and selection for brigadier general. In total, officers spent 7.3 years (a little more than half their field grade years) in squadron and wing level assignments.

To examine the effects of a 3-1/2-year joint tour on the erosion of war-fighting skills, we computed the amount of consecutive time Air Force officers spent in non-war-fighting assignments. Since war-fighting skills for pilots and navigators equate to flying duty and most positions at the squadron and wing level are credited as flying duty, we equated war-fighting skills with assignments at the squadron and wing levels.

The median period of consecutive non-war-fighting time totaled 3.8 years. These long periods of non-war-fighting assignments were more likely to occur early in officers' careers. (Assignments often involved time at more than one grade.) Sixty-eight percent of the longest non-war-fighting assignments involved time at the grade of major, and 65 percent at the grade of lieutenant colonel, but only 39 percent involved time at the grade of colonel.

If limiting the time in war-fighting assignments at the squadron and wing levels is undesirable, joint assignments will likely be increased by reducing the time high quality officers spend at Air Force headquarters and major commands. Over three-quarters of officers selected for brigadier general had a headquarters assignment and two-thirds had an assignment at the major commands identified in table I.1. The average time spent on these activities for all officers was 4 years. The average time spent at air divisions and numbered air forces was only about 3 months. The average time spent in other assignments was about 9 months, including assignments on the faculty of a school, as commander of a nonoperational organization, or at organizations not specifically identified in table I.1. Professional military education and other education and training averaged 1.5 years. As shown in table I.6, a high proportion of officers attended intermediate- and senior-level professional military schools. All officers attended at least one school and 62 percent attended both intermediate and senior schools.

**Appendix I  
Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers  
Selected for General/Flag Rank**

**Table I.6: Professional Military Education  
of Air Force Officers<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Percent of officers</b>
Intermediate service school	
Armed Forces Staff College	27
Air Command and General Staff College	41
Other intermediate service school	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>
Senior service school	
National War College	35
Industrial College of the Armed Forces	13
Air War College	34
Other senior service school	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>
Either intermediate or senior service school	100
Both intermediate and senior service schools	62

<sup>a</sup>Officers selected for brigadier general by the 1986 and 1987 selection boards from selected operational specialties (pilots, navigators, and missile operations). The review covered 68 officers of the 97 line officers selected by those boards.

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

## Navy

Our analysis of the field grade assignments (from promotion to lieutenant commander to selection for flag officer) of Navy flag officers is detailed in table I.7.

Key war-fighting assignments for Navy officers include an executive officer tour, a command assignment at the grade of commander (referred to as commander command), and a command assignment at the grade of captain (referred to as major command).

Essentially all officers selected for promotion to flag rank completed these key assignments. Some officers, particularly aviation officers, completed additional executive officer and command tours. In total, Navy selectees spent an average of 6.1 years in executive officer and command tours.

Navy officers spent close to 17-1/2 years from promotion to lieutenant commander to selection as a flag officer, with about half this time (8.9

---

**Appendix I**  
**Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers**  
**Selected for General/Flag Rank**

---

years) spent in shore assignments (excluding shore commands, which the Navy views as key positions).<sup>1</sup>

The maximum period of consecutive shore time (excluding shore commands) varied by community, from a median of 2.6 years for aviation and submarine officers to 3.6 years for surface warfare officers, but averaged 2.8 years for all communities. Thus, the major adjustment needed to accommodate a 3-1/2-year joint tour will be on the amount of consecutive time spent in shore assignments.

---

<sup>1</sup>Several numbers differ from those presented in our testimony before the Subcommittee on Investigations, House Committee on Armed Services, on February 3, 1988. At that time, we had not completed our validation of data provided by the Navy. These corrections are not of sufficient magnitude to affect our conclusions.

Appendix I  
 Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers  
 Selected for General/Flag Rank

Table I.7: Field Grade Experience of Navy Officers<sup>a</sup>

	Percentage Officers who served in position	Average time	
		Officers that served in positions (years)	All officers (years)
<b>War-fighting assignments</b>			
Key assignments			
Executive officer	98	1.5	1.5
Commander command <sup>b</sup>	100	1.8	1.8
Post-command, command or executive officer tour <sup>c</sup>	35	1.6	0.6
Major command <sup>d</sup>	100	1.7	1.7
Sequential command <sup>e</sup>	31	1.6	0.5
<b>Total, key assignments</b>			<b>6.1</b>
Other assignments			
Other sea duty			2.4
<b>Total war-fighting assignments</b>			<b>8.5</b>
<b>Non-war-fighting assignments</b>			
Navy headquarters	83	2.5	2.1
Other non-war-fighting assignments	100	6.8	6.8
<b>Total non-war-fighting assignments</b>			<b>8.9</b>
<b>Total field grade time</b>			<b>17.4</b>

<sup>a</sup>Navy officers from aviation, surface, and submarine warfare communities selected for rear admiral (lower half) by fiscal years 1987 and 1988 selection boards. This includes 22 aviation officers, 18 surface warfare officers, and 8 submarine warfare officers.

<sup>b</sup>Command assignments at the grade of commander are referred to as commander command.

<sup>c</sup>Post-command tours refer to tours following commander command. The percent of officers with post-command tours varied by community—none of the surface officers had a post-command tour compared to 25 percent of the submarine officers and 68 percent of the aviation officers who had post-command tours.

<sup>d</sup>Command assignments at the grade of captain are referred to as major commands.

<sup>e</sup>Sequential commands follow major commands at the grade of captain. The percent of officers with sequential commands varied by community—none of the submarine officers had sequential command, compared to 6 percent of the surface warfare officers and 64 percent of the aviation officers who had a sequential command.

Navy officers were less likely to complete a program of professional military education than their counterparts. As shown in table I.8, only 14 of the 48 selectees (29 percent) graduated from an intermediate-level school and only 11 (23 percent) graduated from a senior-level school. Only 3 officers (6 percent) had completed both intermediate and senior schools.

**Appendix I  
 Analysis of Assignment Data for Officers  
 Selected for General/Flag Rank**

**Table I.8: Professional Military Education  
 of Navy Officers<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Percent of officers</b>
Intermediate service school	
Armed Forces Staff College	10
Naval War College (junior course)	19
Other intermediate service school	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>
Senior service school	
National War College	6
Industrial College of the Armed Forces	2
Naval War College	10
Other senior service school	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Both intermediate and senior service schools</b>	<b>6</b>

<sup>a</sup>Navy officers from aviation, surface, and submarine warfare communities selected for rear admiral (lower half) by fiscal years 1987 and 1988 selection boards. Includes 22 aviation officers, 18 surface warfare officers, and 8 submarine warfare officers.

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

# Tour Lengths for General/Flag Officers

This appendix examines the assignment pattern of general/flag officers, the extent to which officers have a mix of assignments, and the likely impact of a 3-year joint tour. To accomplish this, we analyzed the assignments of 3- and 4-star generals from operational specialties. Specifically, we looked at the experience of these officers from promotion to brigadier general to promotion to lieutenant general (and Navy equivalents).

Table II.1 displays the average length of time each of these officers spent at the 1- and 2-star ranks, and the average number and length of assignments held during that period. Though the length of time and number of assignments held at the 1- and 2-star ranks varied among the services, the average length per assignment was fairly consistent at a little more than a year. However, the average length of joint assignments was about 2 years for the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps officers; Navy officers averaged about 1-year joint tours.

**Table II.1: Summary of Assignment Time for General/Flag Officers at the 1- And 2-Star Ranks<sup>a</sup>**

	Average number of years	Average number of assignments	Average length per assignment (years)
Air Force	5.6	4.7	1.2
Army	7.3	5.2	1.4
Navy	4.7	3.5	1.3
Marine Corps	7.6	4.5	1.7
<b>All services</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>1.3</b>

<sup>a</sup>This analysis covers 118 3- and 4-star general/flag officers from operational specialties. This group is comprised of 33 Air Force, 37 Army, 37 Navy, and 11 Marine Corps general/flag officers.

Table II.2 displays the most commonly held assignment categories. As shown in the table, assignments at service headquarters were common in all services. A high percentage of Army officers served as assistant division or division commanders, and Navy officers served as group commanders.

**Appendix II**  
**Tour Lengths for General/Flag Officers**

**Table II.2: Common Assignments for General/Flag Officers at the 1- And 2-Star Ranks<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Percent of officers</b>
<b>Air Force</b>	
Headquarters, staff	67
Major command, <sup>b</sup> deputy chief of staff	48
Major command, <sup>b</sup> other	42
Division, commander	40
Support command, <sup>c</sup> commander	36
Numbered Air Force, commander	33
<b>Army</b>	
Division, commander	73
Division, assistant commander	70
Headquarters, staff	51
Support command, <sup>c</sup> staff	35
School, commander	35
<b>Navy</b>	
Group commander	76
Chief of Naval Operations, staff	73
Support command, <sup>c</sup> staff	30
Type commander	24
<b>Marine Corps<sup>d</sup></b>	
Headquarters, staff	95

<sup>a</sup>This analysis covers 118 3- and 4-star general/flag officers from operational specialties. This group is comprised of 33 Air Force, 37 Army, 37 Navy, and 11 Marine Corps general/flag officers.

<sup>b</sup>Includes assignments at major commands, such as the Tactical Air Command, Strategic Air Command, and U.S. Air Force Europe.

<sup>c</sup>Includes assignments at support commands, such as logistics commands, systems commands, and training commands.

<sup>d</sup>Due to the small number of general officers, further categorization of assignments did not provide useful information.

Table II.3 summarizes the mix of assignments held by these officers at the 1- and 2-star ranks. For this analysis, we categorized assignments held into three groups—operational, staff and support command, and joint assignments. The operational category includes assignments within numbered armies and air forces, naval and fleet marine forces, as well as the commander and deputy commander of major war-fighting command organizations, such as Tactical Air Command or Forces Command. The staff and support command category includes staff assignments within the military service headquarters and war-fighting commands

**Appendix II  
Tour Lengths for General/Flag Officers**

and all assignments within support commands, such as personnel centers, training and recruiting commands, and logistics commands. The joint category includes assignments within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, unified commands, and combined (multinational) commands.

**Table II.3: Experience of General/Flag Officers At the 1-and 2- Star Ranks<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Marine Corps</b>	<b>All services</b>
<b>Operational assignments<sup>b</sup></b>					
Percent of officers	82	97	81	91	
Average years for officers who served in positions	1.9	3.1	1.9	3.1	
Average number of assignments per officer	1.7	2.4	1.2	1.7	1.7
Average years for all officers	1.6	3.1	1.5	2.8	2.1
<b>Staff and support commands assignments<sup>c</sup></b>					
Percent of officers	100	100	97	100	
Average years for officers who served in positions	3.6	3.6	3.1	3.7	
Average number of assignments per officer	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.1	2.4
Average years for all officers	3.6	3.6	3.0	3.7	3.4
<b>Joint assignments<sup>d</sup></b>					
Percent of officers	21	30	16	55	
Average years for officers who served in positions	1.9	2.1	0.9	2.0	
Average number of assignments per officer	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.6	0.3
Average years for all officers	0.4	0.6	0.1	1.1	0.5

<sup>a</sup>This analysis covers 118 3- and 4-star general/flag officers from operational specialties. This group is comprised of 33 Air Force, 37 Army, 37 Navy, and 11 Marine Corps general/flag officers.

<sup>b</sup>Included in this category are assignments at numbered armies and air forces, naval and fleet marine forces, and the commander and deputy commander of major war-fighting commands, such as Tactical and Strategic Air Commands and Forces Command.

<sup>c</sup>Included in this category are staff assignments at service headquarters and war-fighting commands, and all assignments at support commands, such as military personnel centers, training and recruiting commands and logistics commands.

<sup>d</sup>Included in this category are assignments within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, unified commands, and combined commands.

Our analysis shows that general officers had a mix of operational and staff assignments at the 1- and 2-star ranks. Officers averaged 1.7 operational assignments and 2.4 staff assignments during this block of time. Of the approximate 6 years available at the 1- and 2-star ranks, about

---

**Appendix II**  
**Tour Lengths for General/Flag Officers**

---

2.1 years were spent in operational assignments, and about 3.4 years were spent in staff and support command assignments.

The percent of officers who had joint experience during this part of their careers ranged from a high of 55 percent of the Marine Corps general officers, to a low of 16 percent of the Navy flag officers. Joint tours averaged 2 years for the Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force, and about 1 year for the Navy.

Our analysis suggests that each of the services will have to make changes to the assignment patterns in order to accommodate a 3-year tour for general/flag officers. The mix of operational and staff assignments is likely to change since officers have in the past spent an average of 1.3 years in each assignment.



---

Requests for copies of GAO reports should be sent to:

U.S. General Accounting Office  
Post Office Box 6015  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877

Telephone 202-275-6241

The first five copies of each report are free. Additional copies are \$2.00 each.

There is a 25% discount on orders for 100 or more copies mailed to a single address.

Orders must be prepaid by cash or by check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents.

---

United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use \$300

First-Class Mail  
Postage & Fees Paid  
GAO  
Permit No. G100

---