

## Why GAO Did This Study

GFOs are the elite leaders of the U.S. military. In August 2013 Congress raised questions about costs associated with GFOs as the size of the military forces decreases.

GAO was mandated to assess the trends in costs of the active duty GFO population from FY 2001 through FY 2013. This report (1) identifies changes in the population and statutory limits for active duty GFOs relative to other active duty personnel, and the extent to which DOD updated GFO requirements, and (2) assesses what is known about the costs associated with active duty GFOs and their aides and trends in such costs, including trends in GFO compensation costs relative to those of other active duty personnel from FY 2001 through FY 2013. GAO assessed the availability of cost data and analyzed available active duty military personnel population and cost data, including costs for compensation, housing and travel for FY 2001 through FY 2013, using FY 2013 dollars. GAO also met with DOD officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD update GFO requirements and define circumstances for doing so, improve information related to GFO aides, and define costs associated with GFOs. DOD partially concurred with the recommendations on updating requirements and improving information on GFO aides, and did not concur with defining costs associated with GFOs, citing among other reasons, a need for flexibility and the adequacy of existing information. GAO continues to believe the recommendations are valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-14-745](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or [farrellb@gao.gov](mailto:farrellb@gao.gov).

## MILITARY PERSONNEL

### DOD Needs to Update General and Flag Officer Requirements and Improve Availability of Associated Costs

#### What GAO Found

The general and flag officer (GFO) population (i.e., officers ranked at or above brigadier general or rear admiral) experienced higher rates of growth than the enlisted population since fiscal year (FY) 2001. The Department of Defense (DOD) has not comprehensively updated GFO requirements—the number of GFOs needed to fill positions—since 2003 to reflect changes in the active duty force nor has DOD defined circumstances under which such an update should occur. GFO population growth was generally consistent with the growth in GFO statutory limits. From FY 2001 through FY 2013 growth was not evenly distributed across all military ranks. For example, the GFO and non-GFO officer populations grew from 871 to 943 (8 percent) and from 216,140 to 237,586 (10 percent), respectively, while the enlisted population decreased from 1,155,344 to 1,131,281 (2 percent). DOD officials attributed these differences to the greater flexibility that military planners have to decrease the enlisted population. DOD guidance requires military personnel requirements to be periodically evaluated. DOD conducted a comprehensive update of GFO requirements in 2003 and concluded that the department needed more GFOs than were authorized by Congress. However, DOD officials said that they have not comprehensively updated the requirements since 2003 or advocated for an increase of GFOs because of fiscal constraints. Nevertheless, without periodically conducting a comprehensive update of DOD's GFO requirements, and defining when such an update should occur, it will be difficult for DOD to help ensure that the GFO population is properly sized and structured to meet its assigned missions.

The full cost to DOD for GFOs from FY 2001 through FY 2013 is unknown because complete cost data for GFOs and their aides were not available and trends in available cost data varied. Certain cost data were fully available and complete for FY 2001 through FY 2013, while other cost data were either partially complete or unavailable because of reporting practices, retention policies, inconsistent definitions, and reliability factors. Also, the position of officer aide is not defined in departmental guidance and as a result all military services were not able to consistently track the number of personnel in these positions. Cost data related to GFO compensation and housing were readily available, and trends for these costs varied, with compensation increasing by 38 percent and housing decreasing by 67 percent from FY 2001 through FY 2013. Measured on a per capita basis, compensation costs grew by 18 percent for GFOs, 19 percent for non-GFO officers, and 32 percent for enlisted personnel over the same time frame. GAO assessed GFO commercial travel and per diem and GFO health care costs as partially complete because data were not available for FY 2001 through FY 2013. For the years in which complete data were available, travel and per diem costs increased by 4 percent from FY 2009 through FY 2013 and health care costs grew by 77 percent from FY 2003 through FY 2013. Other cost data, including data for GFO travel on military and government flights, GFO personal security details, and certain enlisted and officer aide costs, were not readily available or GAO determined them to be unreliable because of concerns regarding completeness or accuracy. By defining the officer aide position and GFO and associated aide costs, DOD will be able to better account for the full costs of GFOs and improve its ability to make sound workforce allocation decisions.