

Today's cohort is definitely not your father's Warrant Officer Corps

By CW5 (Ret) Andrew Barr

I witnessed some dramatic changes in the overall management and use of warrant officers during the three decades I was allowed the honor of wearing the warrant officer rank in the U.S. Army.

Today's Signal warrant officers are the best educated, extensively trained, and most relevant group of officers to ever wear a warrant officer bar. They are placed in more crucial and challenging positions that impact unit function and mission than ever before. Today's warrant officer is better educated and trained because the Army and the branch leadership understand they must invest in the Signal warrant officers' lifecycle because of their relevancy in today's Army formations. The investment has been tremendous and the payoff is reflected in a warrant officer corps that is providing superlative performance.

There I Was

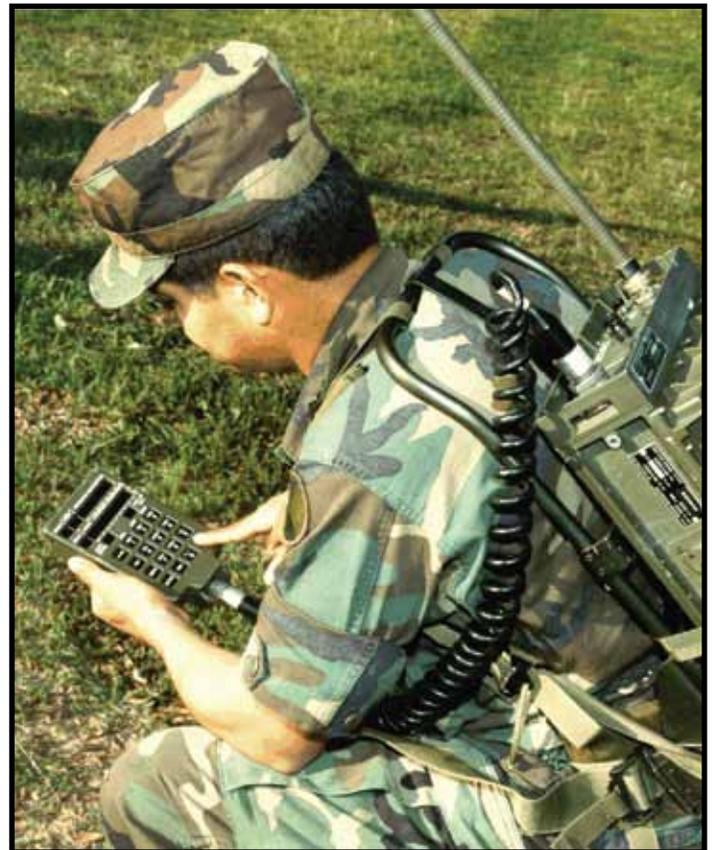
A recount of my experiences as a warrant officer serves to illustrate the dramatic changes in warrant officer management. In 1979, I had a small ceremony where my senior rater removed my stripes and placed a warrant officer bar on my shoulders. I was then sent to my first assignment as the technical expert. I received no additional technical or officer training and was expected to be a subject matter expert; when in reality I was a Soldier wearing a W1 bar with noncommissioned officer skills, expected to act like an officer.

My first assignment was as the operations officer supporting the U.S. Military Training Mission in Saudi Arabia. I was the only Signal warrant officer in the organization which was the norm for the time. I was tasked with managing over 30 Soldiers who were responsible for the operation of two fixed telecommunications centers separated by over 200 miles, seven high frequency radio sites located throughout the kingdom, and a handful of secure telephones.

Lucky for me my rater, MAJ Kevin Upton, believed in mentoring and counseling. He taught me how to be an officer and spent time teaching me how to brief, write, read, dress, and the esoteric nuances expected of an officer. He explained my specific roles and responsibilities. I discovered later that MAJ Upton set me up for success. Most of my peers did not have a similar experience and would later encounter tremendous career difficulties.

My first operations officer assignment required a seasoned warrant officer but when I was assessed, management of positions was not being accomplished well. There was a saying that 'a warrant is a warrant' indicating leaders did not recognize the progressive experience and training (which was lacking) of the warrant officer was as important as that for commissioned officers or NCOs of the period. There was no difference in the position coding. So a unit could receive a new W1 or the most seasoned W4 to fill a vacant position.

Today, warrant officers are placed in positions of increased responsibility based on their progressive training and experience. Manning documents identify specific pay grade requirements and, when possible, the correct grade is sent to fill the positions. Based on inventories of each grade, it may not



Signal warrant officers and Soldiers used the Enhanced Position Location Reporting System that was first fielded in 1987.

always be perfect, but we seldom see a W1 filling a senior position or a senior warrant officer filling an entry level position as was normal in the 80s.

My second assignment was the 414th Signal Company at Fort Meade, Md in 1981 to a tactical Signal battalion that contained three area Signal centers providing echelon above corps support.

This was my first assignment to a tactical Signal unit because my enlisted time was in Armor and Infantry units as a tactical communications chief and radio teletype operator. There would be other Signal warrants in the unit and this is where I discovered that my expectations as taught by MAJ Upton and the expectations by the other warrants would not be the same. I would go to my first physical training formation only to find that all enlisted Soldiers and other officers were there, but I could not find the other warrants. I would go to officer professional development only to discover I was the lone warrant officer in attendance. I attended unit social functions and felt obligated to support the commander as requested, while the other warrants did not feel the same obligation.

Attending off duty functions allowed me to have discussions with the decision makers, build personal relationships with the other officers in the organization, and ultimately allowed me to better influence decisions. Part of the confusion on behalf of the other warrants was that our roles and responsibilities were not well documented and that each commander or rater would determine the expectations of their warrant officers. The warrants expressed the feeling that they did not feel they were part of the officer corps and were only a part of a small group of warrant officers. This shortfall has changed dramatically during the past 10 years.

Our roles and responsibilities are well documented in Army

publications and are readily accessible by the commanders and O-grade officers in the field who rate warrant officers.

Interacting in all settings with fellow officers provided additional opportunities; such as the opportunity for selection over several warrant officers who were senior to me to be the platoon leader of an 80 Soldier ASC when the organization was short of commissioned officers. This experience was another learning experience that allowed me greater options in future assignments where I would be responsible for many Soldiers.

I attended the Warrant Officer Advance Course in 1983. Signal was one of the branches that had a WOAC at that time. This was my first formal professional military

education course as an officer. I signed into the unit at Fort Gordon and went to the assigned building and room on the following day. It was located in the old training area located between Academic Drive and 7th Street. They are probably among the oldest buildings still standing on Fort Gordon. All other students, officer and enlisted, were being taught in the new buildings on post.

We received a couple weeks of formal training on logistics, administration, and a few other common core topics that were beneficial. We were then told to visit the classrooms located on

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Today Signal warrant officers are managing technology that includes smartphone technology with an extraordinary array of applications that multiply daily.

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post that were of interest to us and ask if we could sit in on the instruction. We never touched any equipment or discussed any specifics about what we would be required to do in our future positions. My racquetball game was never better than when I left Fort Gordon three months later.

Today, the WOAC is a challenging experience where the warrant officer leaves with the knowledge and skills to better support their units at the W3 level. Fort Gordon has invested greatly in the training opportunity. It is not a review of what the officer learned in their basic course but an upper level, if not graduate level, educational experience for the student.

There We Were

A Department of the Army study, The Warrant Officer Study, was completed in 1985 and a number of changes occurred as a result of the study. This was the first DA-level comprehensive study of warrant officer management from pre-appointment to retirement. It spanned the total Army, both active and reserve.

The study determined that warrant officers' technical expertise alone was not enough to meet the requirements of the Army's current and future doctrine. They identified that warrant officers needed to be proficient in basic tactical and leadership skills. This finding led the Army to stop direct appointments and to establish a warrant officer candidate school for all newly appointed warrant officers similar to the officer candidate school that the other officers attended.

Technical warrant officers started attending a course that the Aviation branch established for training their warrant officers at Fort Rucker, Ala. Two satellite locations for the training were established; one at Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland and the other at Fort Sill, Okla. These satellite locations remained as training sites for a couple of years until all training was centrally located at Fort Rucker in 1990. The curriculum was the same at all three. The primary problem with the curriculum was that most Aviation warrant officers were junior enlisted Soldiers or Soldiers who enlisted to become pilots and only experienced basic training in their Army career. The Signal warrant officer was already an NCO with several years' experience. The training did not consider the skills and experiences the NCO brought to the course. It was 20 years before the WOCS would recognize the NCO skills and provide two separate courses; one for the candidate who was neither a graduate of the Warrior Leader Course or a NCO, and one for those who were both. It has become a relevant part of the leadership training received by the newly accessed warrant officer. This was a great

step in providing a better, more relevant training experience.

In 1987, I was commissioned an officer in the U.S. Army, as were all chief warrant officers. Congress changed the law to standardize the procedures used by the military services that had warrant officers in their inventory. A key provision was that all chief warrant officers received commissions, while warrant officer ones continued to be appointed, not commissioned. The primary goals of the decision to commission warrant officers included the authority to administer oaths of reenlistment, designate selected warrant officers as commanding officers with greater authority to impose non-judicial punishment under Article 15, UCMJ and to characterize service of commissioned WO as "commissioned service." The opportunity to administer oaths is something I have cherished over the years. I am extremely proud of the many warriors to whom I was allowed to administer the oath. Although the opportunity to command is not one that Signal required, we have had a few positions where it was used. Other branches use their warrants to fill that position concurrent with their technical expertise. Prime examples are the bandmasters and transportation warrant officers. There have been many attempts to have a newly appointed W1 be commissioned and not appointed.

Many of the recommendations from TWOS were implemented in law or policy in 1992. Passage of the Warrant Officer Management Act of 1992 mirrored the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act that was passed in 1980. DOPMA established a common officer management system built around a uniform notion of how military officers should be trained, appointed, promoted, separated, and retired. Similarly, WOMA changes included a single promotion system for warrant officers, tenure requirements based upon years of warrant officer service and authorization for the Secretary of the Army to convene boards to recommend warrant officers for selective mandatory retirement. This was a direct attempt to integrate warrant officers into the officer corps.

The W5 pay grade was also part of WOMA. This had been a desire of the Army for many years and was finally approved in law. The new pay grade was established to fill the most senior levels of the Army. This was an indication of the increase in the relevance and overall understanding of the warrant officer by Army leadership.

The TWOS study group, as many previous study groups, had determined that a requirement existed for highly experienced senior warrant officers to serve as branch technical integrators and advisors to commanders and their staffs. This finding served as primary justification for establishment of the new grade.

During this same period, a number of policy changes occurred. They included coding of posi-

tions in authorization documents by rank grouping and automatic Regular Army integration at the CW3 level.

The Warrant Officer Leader Development Action Plan, the plan developed based on the results from TWOS was approved in 1992. WOLDAP was a total Army plan designed to ensure both active and reserve warrant officers were appointed, trained and utilized to a single standard.

Before moving on however, it is prudent to note another DA study named The Army Training and Leader Development Panel was completed in 2002. It picked up where TWOS left off. The study concluded the Army must make fundamental changes in the warrant officer cohort to support full spectrum operations.

At the heart of the change was a complete integration of warrant officers into the larger officer corps; a process begun in the 1980s but never completed. Specifically, the study concluded that the Army needs to clarify the roles of warrant officers, then make changes to their professional development, training and education, and manning.

Many initiatives were identified following the final report that had a dramatic impact on today's warrant officers' ability to support the force.

I will skip some assignments and go to 1999 when I was promoted to CW5 and assigned to serve in a branch immaterial position in the G1 of the Army located in the Pentagon. I had no idea what I got myself into, but it was obvious that I would have to learn quickly to be relevant in this position. Again, a number of O-grade officers assisted me to learn how to be a staff officer since none of my PME courses had prepared me to work in that type of environment.

I was involved in two major studies of the warrant officer and was part of the implementation process when, in 2004, I was se-

lected to be the second Regimental chief warrant officer of the Signal Regiment.

The biggest changes to the warrant officer during my three decades occurred during the past eight years. I will highlight a few of them and attempt to provide a short analysis of each.

Here We Are

A new definition for the warrant officer was developed in 2005 to encompass all warrant officer specialties and grades and to include the leadership responsibility. It currently reads:

"The Army Warrant Officer is a self-aware and adaptive technical expert, combat leader, trainer, and advisor. Through progressive levels of expertise in assignments, training, and education, the WO administers, manages, maintains, operates, and integrates Army systems and equipment across the full spectrum of Army operations. Warrant officers are competent and confident warriors, innovative integrators of emerging technologies, dynamic teachers, and developers of specialized teams of Soldiers. They support a wide range of Army missions throughout their career. Warrant officers in the Army are assessed with specific levels of technical ability. They refine their technical expertise and develop their leadership and management skills through tiered progressive assignments and education."

The Warrant Officer Division, first established in 1974 at PERSCOM to centrally manage warrant officer assignments and professional development, was deactivated and the responsibility for professional development and management, assignments, training, and education of all officers was assigned to the branch proponents in the Officer Personnel Management Division at PERSCOM. This change was required to better support the organizations in the field and identified that

warrant officers are full members of the Signal officer corps. This was another part of the integration into the officer corps.

Another initiative that was part of the integration process was a change to AR 670-1 that directed warrant officers to wear the insignia of their branch and not the insignia of the warrant officer called the Eagle Rising. This was met with many emotional challenges. With over 80% of today's Signal warrants having never worn anything but the branch insignia, the emotion has subsided and it has been moved to its place in history. The purpose behind wearing the branch insignia is part of integrating warrant officers into the officer corps which brings synergy and better understanding that warrants are officers. Wearing branch specific insignia and colors in lieu of the warrant officer insignia and colors changed in 2004. Additionally, the increasingly joint nature of operations with the Department of Defense and the expanded use of the most senior warrant officers in joint operations validated the need to standardize CW5 rank insignia among all the services that employ them. The CW5 insignia that was approved in 1972 is worn instead of the master warrant insignia that had been worn since 1992. The master warrant officer was an interim rank used by the Army from 1989 until 1992 when the W5 grade was approved. A formal DA selection board was used to identify the MWO who would be placed in the senior positions that the CW5 eventually filled. The decision was made by DA leaders when CW5 was formally approved to continue to use the MWO insignia so those MWO who were not selected for promotion would not be identified.

Other changes that support the integration included placing warrant officer information in publications that contain officer

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information instead of maintaining two separate publications.

In 2004, DA mandated that each proponent establish a chief warrant officer of the branch position to serve as the principal advisor to the commanding general/branch chief on all matters pertaining to warrant officers. Specific roles and responsibilities were identified for these positions that would allow better involvement and management for each branch warrant officer. The Signal Regiment established its RCWO position in 1999.

In 2005, the promotion zones of consideration were reduced allowing CW2s and CW3s to get promoted faster. It eliminated the Below Zone opportunity for promotion to CW3 and CW4. The reduction allowed a CW2 or CW3 to be considered for promotion to the next grade with 3 years time in grade and promoted in their fourth year. It allowed a newly accessed warrant officer to be promoted to CW4 in ten years of warrant officer service. CW4 TIG remained at 5 years. This was the second time in less than 8 years the zones had been reduced. A similar change occurred in 1997 reducing the TIG from 6 years to 5 years. A number of reasons contributed to this decision, but it ultimately increased the number of senior warrant officers in the inventory. A problem may be realized soon that too many senior warrants are in the inventory and steps may be taken in the future to increase the TIG zones for promotion.

Delinking professional military education from promotion was effected a few years ago. Prior to this change, a Signal warrant officer had to be a W3 or on an approved promotion list to attend their WOAC. This meant that a warrant officer could go eight years without attending formal technical training at a branch school. If the purpose of the WOAC was to prepare a warrant officer to fill the CW3 positions and they were not allowed to go to school until they were filling the position, it was obvious the process was flawed.

Technical changes in the Signal community added to the challenge. Delinking the PME from the promotion process allows a warrant to attend WOAC, WOSC and WOSSC at an earlier time to better prepare them for the next promotion. Many discussions of requiring completion of PME attendance have been around for years and may be mandated if warrant officers do not voluntarily attend. The Reserve Components currently require attendance prior to promotion.

The accession process has been dramatically refined and now must be accomplished online. The chain of command is part of the staffing process and applicants can easily apply. A formal process was established in the 1980s and much better informa-

tion is now provided for the applicant. The process has matured to an extremely easy, valid applicant friendly online procedure that can be completed in a very short amount of time. A board of officers review and vote on each application. The board uses the time tested selection process that the Army uses for promotions and command and schools selection. It is now a legitimate process that allows the Army to access the best applicants.

One of the greatest things accomplished at Fort Gordon was to require all Reserve Components to complete the same training as the Active Component.

Prior to 2005, RC warrant officers could take a series of tests and get credit for attendance at the technical training. The RC students were being disadvantaged and were not being set up for success because the tests were not a valid indication of the student's knowledge. The dramatic increase in theory education and hands-on training and testing eliminated that option and the knowledge that the RC warrant would be deployed and expected to provide the same support mandated that all complete the same training.

A significant targeted pay increase for warrant officers was provided in 2007. This pay raise assisted with the accession process because, for the first time, an E7 did not lose money in base pay when pinning on a W1 bar.

It also showed that the Army is very serious in supporting the performance of the warrant officer. It was a very difficult action to gain added pay for the warrant officers because it is a Department of Defense pay scale. The Air Force does not have warrant officers and the other branches maintain a much smaller inventory of warrants. This action took over five years to accomplish.

I believe the biggest cultural change for warrant officers occurred when the Army changed the basic structure for the Army and went to the brigade centered structure.

This action placed Signal warrant officers in a combat arms brigade for the first time. It doubled the necessary Signal warrant officers required to support the force. The increase also applied to the RC. Prior to 2004, Signal warrants supported the brigade from the Signal battalion. The brigade commander did not know who the warrants were or what they did. Teams were sent from the Signal battalion to support the brigades, but they did not contain the Signal warrant. Therefore, the brigade commander's exposure to any warrant officer was usually limited to only one technical warrant, the motor maintenance technician, who was in every battalion motor pool.

This is important because the combat arms brigade commander may later become a general officer in a decision-making position to support the lifecycle management of warrant officers. I briefed

many senior general officers while assigned to the Pentagon and learned quickly that I needed to provide a short introduction brief on what technical warrant officers did to support the Army prior to any formal briefing of any warrant officer topic. The general officers understood the purpose of Aviation warrant officer but had little or no knowledge of the technical warrant based on their limited exposure. That is now changing. Every brigade now has about 50 warrants of a variety of branches in their unit. The Signal warrant officer in the brigade is being recognized by the commander and the impact provided by the warrant officer is being identified. The brigade commander is not basing all opinions of warrant officers on his experience with only one technical warrant officer. Exposure to only one of anything limits your view.

Another recent significant change is in the number of warrant officers being assigned to the senior Army organizations. More senior warrant officers are being

placed at senior level headquarters as staff officers providing their influence as the proven experienced technical leaders in the decision making processes that affect the Army. The more advice they provide the more advice the senior leadership desires from them.

There You Must Go

We must assertively dispel the notion that warrant officers are a separate segment of the officer corps and move with diligent actions to completely integrate into one officer corps bonded with common goals and an understanding of one another's roles. Warrant officers must discontinue any thoughts of inflexibility to perform outside their specialties in order to operate effectively in the full spectrum of Army operations.

I saw many other changes in the management and education of the warrant officer during the last three decades that I will not address based on the space allocated for this article. Let me state again that the Signal warrant officer of today is the best trained, educated,

and relevant Signal warrant officer to stand in our formations.

It is not your daddy's Warrant Officer Corps anymore. Technology, the changes in training, and fighting a war for more than 10 years have changed things significantly.

Anyone who has not been associated with the Army during the last 10 years would not recognize the warrant officer of today. The changes have legitimized the warrant officer and what they do to earn their pay. The previous changes are just a beginning of what the warrant officer of the future will see. It was awesome to see firsthand the relevancy of the warrant officer change as it did and to have a vision of what is expected of the future warrant.

CW5(Ret) Andrew Barr retired in March of 2010 after serving almost 40 years in the Army, over 30 of those years as a warrant officer. He served in a myriad of assignments and was the second Regimental chief warrant officer for the Signal Regiment.



ACRONYM QuickScan

ATLDP - Army Training and Leader Development Panel

ASC - Area Signal Centers

CW2 - Chief Warrant Officer Two

CW3 - Chief Warrant Officer Three

CW4 - Chief Warrant Officer Four

CW5 - Chief Warrant Officer Five

CWOB - Chief Warrant Officer of the Branch

DA - Department of the Army

DOPMA - Defense Officer Personnel Management Act

EAC - Echelon Above Corps

JIIM - Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational

MDMP - Military Decision Making Process

MWO - Master Warrant Officer

NCO - Noncommissioned Officer

OIL - Observation, Insights and Lessons

OPD - Officer Professional Development

OPMD - Officer Personnel Management Division

PERSCOM - (Army) Personnel Command

PME - Professional Military Education

PT - Physical Training

RC - Reserve Component

RCWO - Regimental Chief Warrant Officer

SSC - Senior Service College

SMA - Sergeants Major Academy

TIG - Time in Grade

TWOS - The Warrant Officer Study

W1 - Warrant Officer One

WLC - Warrior Leader Course

WO1 - Warrant Officer One

WOAC - Warrant Officer Advance Course

WOBC - Warrant Officer Basic Course

WOCS - Warrant Officer Candidate School

WOLDAP - Warrant Officer Leader Development Action Plan

WOMA - Warrant Officer Management Act

WOSC - Warrant Officer Staff Course

WOSSC - Warrant Officer Senior Staff Course