

1969

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OFFICER PROMOTION PLANNING

A lecture delivered at the Naval War College

by

Commander James K. Martin, U.S. Navy

What is my promotion opportunity? This a question that all officers ask periodically from the time of commissioning until departure from the naval service. While this may seem a simple query, it, in fact, demands a rather complicated response.

Promotion opportunity is a consequence of personnel planning, and the opportunity for selection is a statistical analysis of selection board results. Promotion opportunity is composed of three factors: (1) the prescribed number—the number of officers that shall be maintained in a grade or combination of grades for a particular category, (2) the flow point—the total commissioned service accrued prior to entering the promotion zone, and (3) the promotion percentage—a percentage description of

the number of officers authorized to be selected divided by the number of officers in the promotion zone. In the unrestricted line these three factors are established for each grade above lieutenant and are interdependent. For the grades of lieutenant and below, promotion percentages and flow points are established, but prescribed numbers are not required. The number of officers in these grades is a product of the ensign input which is a function of the total strength authorized.

Prescribed numbers are established for lieutenant commanders and above in the unrestricted line and limited duty officer communities and for the combined grades of captain, commander, and lieutenant commander in the restricted line. The staff corps has no

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grade ceilings; instead, total corps ceilings are established by law as a percent of the unrestricted line strength. For example, the total ceiling for the Supply Corps and Civil Engineer Corps active list officers is 12 percent and 3 percent, respectively, of the existing unrestricted active line strength.

Since promotions are made to vacancies in the grades of lieutenant commander and above in the line, the number to be selected must necessarily be a function of vacancies. Vacancies as defined by law "occur whenever and to the extent that the actual number of officers in a grade or combination of grades falls below the prescribed number." Thus it can be seen that the prescribed numbers establish the ceilings for the respective officer grades, and the annual vacancies created therein reflect the number to be selected.

Flow point, the second factor, takes the time element into consideration for planning. Current flow points are shown in figure 1, and for comparative purposes similar information for the other services is included. The differences which exist do not necessarily indicate a "better chance" but rather that different services have different laws, different needs, and vastly different personnel situations.

The third factor to be considered is the percentage description of the number of officers to be selected from the zone and is commonly, but mistakenly, referred to as the "promotion opportunity." If 70 officers in the unrestricted line are authorized to be selected from a zone of 100, this amounts to a 70 percent factor and is referred to as "line fraction." By law, the restricted line is guaranteed not less than line fraction. The difference is small, but distinct. For example, a zone of 12 officers at a promotion percentage of 70 percent in the unrestricted line would result in eight selections (8.4 rounds down to eight). In the restricted line this same situation would result in

nine selections simply because eight selections would be 66.6 percent which is less than the 70 percent line fraction.

Figure 2 is the unrestricted line officer structure as seen by a promotion planner. For each grade the three factors which make up promotion opportunity are shown. Each year the Secretary of the Navy reviews this structure. Decisions are made for the flow points, promotion percentages, and prescribed numbers starting with the captain grade. Each grade, in turn, supports the one above; and changes of any of the three factors in any grade are closely studied for the effect on adjacent grades. Ensigns are promoted to lieutenant (junior grade) by their commanding officers on an all qualified basis. Thereafter, all promotions in the unrestricted line are by selection board actions to the next higher grade.

With the above discussion in mind, let us now turn to the actual development of a promotion plan. This process is carried out in three basic steps:

1. Estimating vacancies.
2. Making 10-year projections by assuming fixed or variable values for:
 - a. Prescribed number
 - b. Flow point
 - c. Promotion percentage
3. Extracting next fiscal year's plan from the 10-year projection (which is updated each year).

Vacancies are estimated for each year group based on the development of attrition factors, exclusive of known statutory losses, for each year of commissioned service. Using this information, 10-year projections are constructed in order to quantitatively examine the three promotion opportunity factors and to maintain equal opportunity consistent with the needs of the service.

Figure 3 is an example of a 10-year projection for the grade of lieutenant commander in the unrestricted line. Note that the fiscal year 1969 prescribed number is stated as 7,900, and

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FLOW POINT

Grade	Navy	Army	Marines	Air Force
Lt (jg.)	1 year	1 year	15 months	1½ years
Lt.	3 years	2-3 years	34 months	3 years
LCdr.	9 years*	7-11 years	8-9 years	11 years
Cdr.	14 years	14 years	16 years	17 years
Capt.	20-21 years	20 years	22-26 years	22 years

*Projected at 8 years for FY 1970

Figure 1

UNRESTRICTED LINE OFFICER STRUCTURE
FISCAL YEAR 1969

Grade	Flow Point	Promotion Percentage	Prescribed Number
Capt.	20-21 yrs.	60%	2,500
Cdr.	14 yrs.	75%	5,300
LCdr.	9 yrs.	85%	7,900
Lt.	3 yrs.	95%	Adjusts to meet authorized end strength
Lt.(jg.)	1 yr.	All qual	
Ens.	-	-	

Figure 2

note further in this projection that for subsequent fiscal years the number in grade declines and then levels off in the 7,000 range. The prescribed number, one of the promotion opportunity factors, is being permitted to vary whereas the other two factors, promotion percentage and flow point, are being held constant at 85 percent and 9 years,* respectively. This does not mean that this situation will remain as depicted but only that in order to make the projection at all, certain assumptions must be made. This example projection is only one of almost an infinite number that could theoretically be made.

To continue, below the standpipes is the number to select for each fiscal

year. This number is derived from the estimated vacancies (selections = vacancies). By applying the promotion percentage to the number to select, the size of the zone is determined, i.e., in 1969, 1,027 is 85 percent of 1,208. Conveniently, for this projection at any rate, the zone size corresponds with the size of the year group each year. This, of course, is not always true. The flow point is required in order to construct the projection but is not necessary for computation of the numbers to select or the size of the zone. A change in the flow point would, however, change the zones and either the number to select or the prescribed number. At the bottom of the projection are shown the lieutenant year groups, a through j, under the corresponding fiscal year in which they will be in the zone at the 9-year point.

*The flow point for LCDR's for Fiscal Year 1970 is projected to be 8 years.

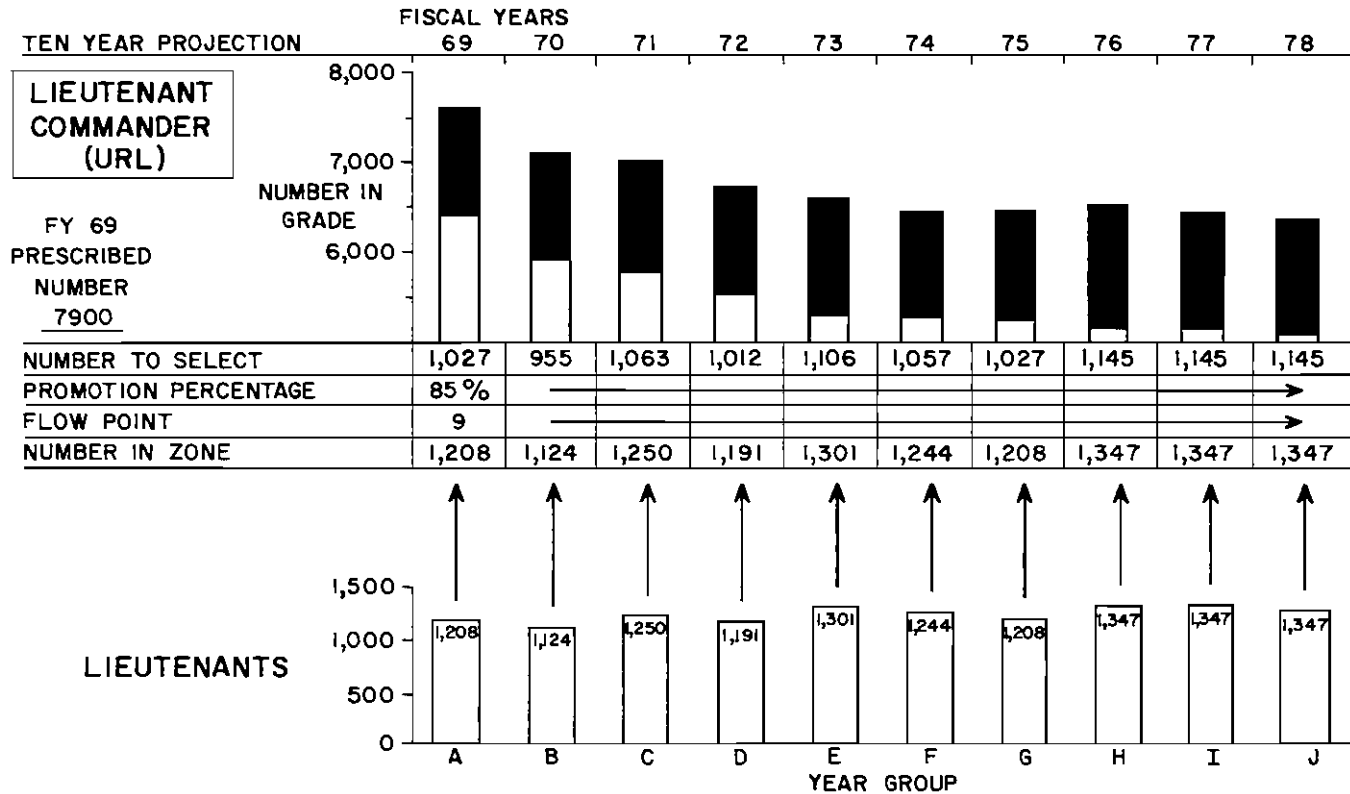


Figure 3

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The basis for a 1969 lieutenant commander promotion plan could be extracted from this projection. Such a plan would provide for 7,900 lieutenant commanders in grade and selection of 1,027 lieutenants at an 85 percent promotion percentage. The zone year group is year group a in the 9th year of commissioned service. Obviously, if more emphasis is placed on maintaining a particular prescribed number and permitting either the promotion percentage or flow point to vary, this projection would take on a different character altogether.

The value of such a projection, however, should be placed in proper perspective. While the advantage of being able to make comparisons "down the pike" provides substantial assistance, the projection still remains a possibility (one of many), not a commitment.

After the projections are constructed and all feasible options in each grade studied, the promotion planners will then turn to other aspects directly affected by promotions. The approved Navy-wide personnel requirements by grade and category are compared against the predicted results of the promotion plans in order that the real-life business of running the Navy is given full value. The size of the nonselected community in each grade is reviewed, as the up-or-out concept is essential to maintaining an equitable promotion flow.* The unequal size of succeeding year groups is considered. Maintaining optimum quality control in each grade, attracting top-quality officers, and retention are additional considerations that must be given attention. These and many other related factors are sifted through, and a structure, such as represented in figure 2, is assembled.

*While a nonselected officer may not be judged as best fitted to be promoted in the next higher grade by a selection board, this by no means infers that he is unsuited for his current grade. Such an officer is usually quite competent in the grade in which he is serving.

To provide detailed backup for the promotion structure, promotion plans for each grade are drawn up based on the information contained in the 10-year projections. Figure 4 is a sample promotion plan which illustrates the various aspects of a typical plan. On the left side the necessary elements are listed, and on the right side a pictorial representation of the year group numbers is given.

In this sample plan the grade is identified as the grade of captain. The prescribed number is 2,500. Vacancies have been estimated to be 265; therefore, the selections authorized are 265. By applying the approved promotion percentage of 60 percent to the number of selections authorized, the number in the zone is determined to be 442. At this point let us pause and define what is meant by "zone." Title 10 USC states:

The promotion zone in each grade shall be composed of that number of the most senior such officers under consideration, who are eligible for selection for promotion to the next higher grade and who have not previously failed of such selection, that must either be selected for promotion by the particular board or be considered as having failed of such selection, in order to maintain a flow of promotion.

The top of the promotion zone is identified as the most senior officer not failed of selection. In this case it is Commander Alfa. By counting down 441 names, the junior officer, Commander Bravo, is identified, and the zone of 442 is established. This zone, incidentally, includes all of year group 1948 and about one-third of year group 1949, which explains how year groups can become split for promotion.

When the selection board is convened, the number of selections authorized and the identification of the

SAMPLE PROMOTION PLAN

GRADE: CAPTAIN
 PRESCRIBED NO: 2,500
 EST. VACANCIES: 265
 NO. TO SELECT: 265
 PROMOTION PERCENTAGE: 60%
 NO. IN ZONE: 442
 SENIOR OFFICER - ALFA, B. C.
 JUNIOR OFFICER - BRAVO, C. D.
 ELIGIBLE:
 JUNIOR OFFICER - CHARLIE, D. E.

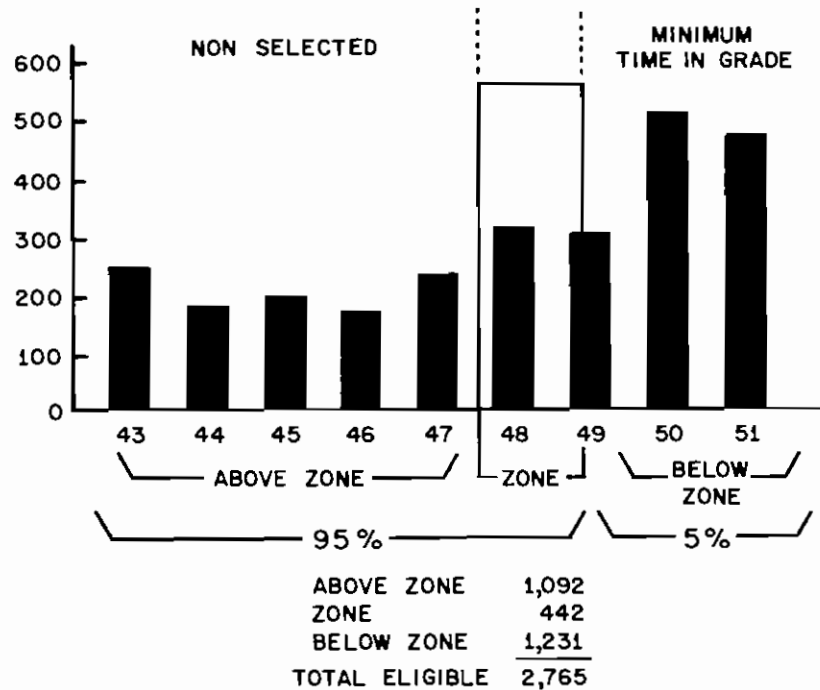


Figure 4

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zone are given to the board. These are the interim numbers. Seventy-two hours prior to the expected completion of the board's deliberations, the final number to select is determined. This is done by making a precise count of the officers actually in the zone on the day the board convened and applying the approved promotion percentage which gives the final number to select. The final number to select is always very close to the interim numbers given the board and amounts to a refinement of the interim numbers.

Referring again to figure 4, Commander Charlie is identified as the junior officer eligible. The criterion for below-zone eligibility is simple: permit each officer in the Navy at least two considerations for early selection, beginning with the grade of lieutenant eligible for lieutenant commander. This is a new policy which will go into effect in Fiscal Year 1970. The total number eligible also includes all above-zone officers that are in a nonselected status but still on active duty. Eligibility does not include retired officers on active duty who are, by law, not eligible for consideration for promotion. In the sample plan, year groups 1943 through 1947 are above zone. Of the 265 selections authorized, not more than 5 percent may come from below the zone. This below-zone limitation is the only restraint imposed by law on the board within the numbers authorized. The selection board is otherwise charged to establish a single best fitted standard for selection to be applied to all eligible officers whether in, above, or below the zone.

Thus, it may be seen that while the approved promotion percentage is 60

percent and that the determination of this is integral to the zone, the practical application of selecting the best fitted officers from among those eligible will reduce the in-zone percentage by a factor equal to the number of selections made out of the zone. The intent of the law is to provide equal opportunity for succeeding years, to provide for early recognition, through selection, of those few who are outstanding or "head and shoulders" performers while also providing that prior nonselection should not prejudice an officer's future opportunity for selection.

These then are the essentials of the promotion planning process. There are no simple answers to questions concerning promotion opportunity, and implicit in any understanding is knowledge of the promotion planning process. In the end, selection or nonselection is a function of relative values, the most important of which is the man himself.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Comdr. James K. Martin, U.S. Navy, did his undergraduate work at the University of Texas and is a graduate of the Naval War College, School of Naval Command and Staff. He has had duty in destroyers,

both in the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets, and has served on a cruiser and in the amphibious forces. He is currently Head of the Officer Promotion Plans Section of the Bureau of Naval Personnel and recently was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal for development of new concepts in officer promotion planning.
