ACCESSING TALENT: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Arthur T. Coumbe

February 2010

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. Authors of Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) publications enjoy full academic freedom, provided they do not disclose classified information, jeopardize operations security, or misrepresent official U.S. policy. Such academic freedom empowers them to offer new and sometimes controversial perspectives in the interest of furthering debate on key issues. This report is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

*****

This publication is subject to Title 17, United States Code, Sections 101 and 105. It is in the public domain and may not be copyrighted.

*****

Dr. Arthur T. Coumbe is the command historian, U.S. Army Cadet Command, Fort Monroe, Virginia and an adjunct faculty member at Austin Peay State University. He has authored a number of articles and books on Army ROTC history and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871. He received a B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy and a Ph.D. from Duke University.

Introduction.

There are few issues that incite passionate discussion within the Army more than officer accessions. Source of commission especially is a very sensitive subject that is approached with extreme caution by most Army leaders. This sensitivity is so great that it has sometimes inhibited an honest and open discussion of some of the most elemental and critical aspects of officer accessions.

This paper, however, steers clear of contentious comparisons between officer accessions sources, focusing instead upon the varying educational requirements and intellectual screening mechanisms that the Army has used over the last sixty years to regulate entry into the Officer Corps. The ROTC receives the most thorough treatment because it has been (except for relatively brief periods during conflicts) the largest source of Army officers. Equal attention is devoted to OCS during those periods when it provided a significant volume of new officer accessions. Discussion of the Military Academy is limited due to its low susceptibility to the fiscal pressures and forces that have caused frequent, whipsaw changes in ROTC and OCS accessions policies.

As in previous papers, this one sets the stage for a discussion of post-World War II accessions programs and policies, beginning with developments during the interwar period. It then examines officer accessions into the 1990s, the point at which the *Accessing Talent* companion paper begins its most detailed analysis.

Interwar Period.

West Point generally dominated officer accessions in the two decades before World War II. Indeed, for several years in the 1930s, the Military Academy provided the only input into the Officer Corps. The Army also obtained a sizable proportion of its new officers during the interwar period from "civil life," a category made up almost exclusively of graduates of civilian universities and senior military colleges. Participation by enlisted men in commissioning program was negligible. The enlisted ranks accounted for less than three percent of the annual officer accessions cohort in the early twenties and less than one percent in certain years during the 1930s.[1]

During this period, the ROTC did not produce active duty Army officers. Its mission was to produce Officers' Reserve Corps (ORC) officers — a manpower pool that could be drawn upon in case of mobilization. It was not until the mid-1930s that an avenue opened for ROTC graduates to serve on active duty, and then on a very limited basis. The Thomason Act of 1935 authorized a year of active duty for 1,000 ROTC graduates annually, fifty of whom could be awarded Regular Army commissions upon completion of their tours.[2]

The Army had many more applicants for commissions than it had officer vacancies during the interwar years. Since commissions were highly valued, competition for them was intense, made even more so by the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. In this environment, accessions standards were high, the candidate screening process rigorous. West Point could accept only a fraction of applicants and could therefore be fairly selective in its admissions. Men seeking commissions from "civil life" (or from the enlisted ranks for that matter) were subject to stringent physical, moral, and educational examinations. The educational examination was quite extensive and required a passing knowledge of the principal subjects covered in good

undergraduate programs. Candidates for a "line" commission (troop units), for example, had to pass oral and written tests in U.S. history, geography, spelling, grammar, composition, algebra, plane geometry, natural science, and "ordinary problems involving the use of logarithms" in addition to tests required by the branch for which they were applying. Candidate review boards were instructed to further screen candidates based on their ability to think clearly and express themselves in a clear and logical manner.[3]

The strict selection and screening process used by the Army resulted in a high level of intellectual attainment. Between 1920 and 1940, nearly all new officers were college graduates, this in a time when an undergraduate degree was a true mark of distinction and a much more uncommon accomplishment than it is today.[4]

World War II.

World War II forced the Army to reconfigure its officer accessions, not in accordance with any strategy imperatives, but in response to dynamic and dangerous external conditions which the War Department tried to accommodate as best it could. The demands of the time caused frequent changes in accessions policies, and the entire officer procurement effort took on an improvised and tentative quality. Production surpluses were followed by production shortages as personnel managers attempted to regulate a very complex process that few seemed to totally understand. Despite these troubles and the unavoidable inefficiency and wastage that accompanied them, the system proved resilient and effective enough to supply the Army's officer needs in World War II.

The vast majority of officers who led an Army that eventually grew to 8,300,000 men came from three sources: (1) peacetime military training agencies — the National Guard, the Officers' Reserve Corps (ORC), the ROTC, and the Citizens' Military Training Camps (CMTC); (2) the civilian community — a body of men with special skills who were awarded direct commissions and served primarily in the technical and professional services; and (3) officer candidate schools (OCS).[5]

OCS was by far the largest source of new officers during the war. In its selection of candidates, the Army, as it had in World War I, gave preference to enlisted men, since they were widely viewed as making the best platoon leaders, superior to both ROTC and West Point graduates.[6] The Army General Classification Test (AGCT) was used to screen OCS candidates. Administered to all inductees, it attempted to measure both native abilities and talents gained via schooling and social experience. Numerical scores were grouped into five classes, with Class I representing the highest intelligence and Class V the lowest. To qualify as an officer, a man had to fall into Class I or II. Thus, the Army tried to ensure that all of its officers possessed a minimum level of intellectual attainment.[7]

To provide officers for the vastly expanded Army, however, the War Department had to make certain compromises with educational standards. Whereas before the war, line commissions had been virtually restricted to college graduates, tens of thousands of non-degreed men now flooded into the Officer Corps. The educational "standard" prescribed in Army regulations was merely the possession of "such education or civil or military experience as will reasonably insure satisfactory completion of the course." This, of course, left a lot of room for interpretation.[8]

As the mobilization progressed, the Army had to reach deeper and deeper into its pool of enlisted talent to get OCS candidates. As one official history of the OCS program put it, Army

Ground Forces (AGF) staff officers had to seek out "ways of squeezing the maximum number of graduates from the material at hand despite the fact that the supply of even poorly-qualified candidates was none too abundant." Observers at AGF headquarters noted a marked decline in the quality of new officer accessions as the war progressed.[9]

From World War II to Vietnam.

World War II transformed the Army, and nowhere was this more evident than in the Officer Corps. One of the most striking changes that took place was the drop off in the percentage of college graduates. Before the war, over 75 percent of the Officer Corps had baccalaureate degrees. By 1955, only 49 percent did.[10]

The Army was able to maintain its authorized officer strength in the post-war years in part because of the huge influx of non-degreed officers during the war. While most officers in this category separated soon after the war was over, thousands were retained in a career status. The wartime injection of these high school graduates into the Officer Corps created a five year "hump" of excessive strength and reduced the number of spaces available for lieutenants and captains. The number of junior officers was further diminished by the continual cutting of new accessions to bring the Army into alignment with rapidly declining authorized strengths. As a result, the Officer Corps suffered from a severe rank imbalance. Throughout most of the 1940s and 1950s, it had many more senior and far fewer junior officers than needed.[11]

The dynamics of officer accessions changed drastically in the post-war period. After dominating the accessions process for a century and a half, West Point lost its quantitative preeminence as a commissioning source. The vast size of the Cold War defense establishment, of course, was the reason why. Indeed, by the mid-1950s, ROTC was producing more regular officers than the Military Academy, and by the early sixties was responsible for more than 80 percent of annual officer accessions. Meanwhile, OCS, decommissioned following World War II, was revived in 1951 due to demand stemming from the Korean conflict. Out of that experience, Army personnel managers decided to keep the program in operation to facilitate its regeneration during an emergency.[12] From the early-fifties, then, OCS remained a permanent part of the commissioning mix, producing between 6-10 percent of all active officer accessions until the Vietnam War.

The ability of the Army to screen candidates for commissioning dropped markedly after World War II as the attractiveness of an Army career plummeted. The erosion of pay and benefits, the presence of many low quality officers left over from the war, a booming economy, and the declining prestige of the military profession made military service a relatively uninviting option for the talented college graduate. The calculus of officer accessions now was very different than it had been in the interwar period. Then, the Army had a surfeit of college graduate applicants and was able to exercise great discretion in its selection process. Officers were obtained on a competitive, selective basis from what one colonel described as "a higher caliber group in our society." After 1945, however, there were fewer applicants than required. Those that the Army did attract, moreover, were as a group not drawn from the nation's most capable undergraduates. For all practical purposes, then, little screening took place.[13]

Even West Point, which had historically been considered the Army's "gold standard" for commissioning, struggled to fill its cadet corps with qualified applicants. Admissions standards were intermittently lowered to secure enough students. There were several years in the decade

after 1945, in fact, in which Military Academy authorities had to invoke special provisions of the law to appoint cadets to vacancies that had gone unfilled because of the absence of a sufficient number of qualified candidates through the normal appointment system.[14]

The ROTC, too, found it difficult to enroll top notch students. One Army War College student at the time noted that the Army's collegiate commissioning program was filled with "lower caliber individuals" despite the fact that all were college undergraduates. Problems surfaced in the immediate aftermath of the war. At that time, the Army took note of the high rate of academic failures among ROTC cadets. Too many students were being trained in ROTC and subsequently dismissed because they did not complete the minimum requirements for a baccalaureate degree. Concerned about this trend, the War Department General Staff in May 1946 directed the Adjutant General to devise a test that would screen out those undergraduates who did not possess the ability to attain a college degree. The result was the development of the ROTC Qualifying Test 3 (RQ-3). At the same time, the ROTC Personal Inventory was introduced as an instrument to predict leadership ability and measure motivation.[15]

The RQ-3 test was first administered in 1949. Within months of its introduction, however, it was suspended because it was screening too many candidates out of the ROTC program and preventing the Army from achieving its officer production goals. The inception of the Air Force ROTC and the expansion of the Naval ROTC had intensified competition for qualified officer candidates among the services, and faced with this, the Army felt that it had no choice but to sacrifice quality for quantity.[16]

Some argued that the ROTC's growth in the early-fifties further diluted of cadet quality. This growth was fueled by several factors. The draft deferment that ROTC participation conferred upon military age youth motivated many undergraduates to enroll in the program. At the same time, the Army embarked upon a major institutional expansion of ROTC to meet the needs of the Korean War. ROTC units were also eagerly sought after by college presidents, who saw them as a way to maintain or boost their institutions' enrollments and financial solvency. The convergence of these factors, coupled with the suspension of the RQ-3 qualification test, soon drove officer production well above the needs of the active Army and hundreds of these excess officers were minimally qualified. Many could not meet the minimum mental standards required for admission into OCS, and complaints arose that even Distinguished Military Graduates (DMG), supposedly the cream of the crop, were, as a group, substandard officer material.[17]

Concerned about officer quality, the Army at the 1953 summer camps administered the RQ-3 examination to all attendees. Twenty percent of the cadets failed the test. From this and other indicators, senior Army leaders concluded that units had been given to colleges whose students did not in the main have the potential to become officers. The schools with the highest failure rates were "in nearly every case" open admission — they required only a high school diploma for matriculation. It was noted that many of these open admission colleges were located in the South and drew their student population from small high schools with uneven standards. The academic demands placed on students attending these colleges were "correspondingly low."[18]

As a result, on September 18, 1953, the Department of the Army directed that all ROTC students must attain a score of 115 on the RQ-3 test to be admitted into the advanced course. There was general agreement that this move had a desirable effect. The requirement ensured a minimum mental capability in officer aspirants regardless of the standards of the college that they attended. Still, the Army was not satisfied with the quality of the product that ROTC was turning out. The reinstatement of the RQ-3 had reduced the worst abuses but it did not reverse

the post-war trend that saw the cream of America's undergraduates generally avoid military service, particularly service in the Army.[19]

OCS also faced difficulties during this period, although its problems were of a different nature. Throughout the fifties, OCS had a very high average attrition rate of 44 percent. By comparison, the average rate during World War II was 33 percent. Observers blamed inadequate screening and selection mechanisms for the higher attrition. Service on OCS selection boards was an additional duty for most officers, considered a distraction from their principal responsibilities. Consequently, screening for motivation and suitability was often hasty and haphazard.[20]

Screening for mental ability was more systematic. OCS applicants had to attain a score of 115 on the Officer Candidate Test (OCT) for admission (the OCT was essentially equivalent to the RQ-3; both required a score of 115 to pass). Thus, the OCS selection process from 1950-1954 was actually more rigorous than for ROTC. Observers found a close correlation between OCT scores and attrition rates, as individuals scoring below 115 failed the course in disproportionately high numbers. The "best candidates" scored between 126 and 155. Authorities were reluctant to increase the minimum score, however, because they recognized that it would result in an unacceptable reduction in eligible candidates.[21]

The educational requirements for acceptance into OCS, on the other hand, were minimal. To be admitted, applicants needed only a high school diploma or a GED certificate. Such a low educational standard, many Army leaders recognized, had a number of untoward effects. First, it lowered graduation rates at OCS; researchers found that there was a high correlation between success in the program and level of education. Second, it was a significant handicap to those marginally educated officers when they entered the field grade ranks. They found it difficult to deal with subordinates with better educations. And third, it had a deleterious effect on the quality of the Officer Corps as a whole. The example set by these minimally educated officers discouraged the most capable lieutenants and junior captains from staying in the service.[22]

One of the persistent problems faced by the Army in the 1940s and the 1950s was its inability to convince large numbers of men to apply for officer candidate training. While OCS was expanding in World War II, the demands of troop units being activated outran the supply of inductees. Serious shortages of enlisted personnel ensued. Procurement of officer candidates in the requisite numbers was therefore difficult in the extreme. The AGF felt that the trouble lay in the reluctance of unit commanders to send key men to OCS. That headquarters therefore imposed OCS quotas on all units, practically eliminating the voluntary nature of the program. The requisite quantity of officers was produced but only with difficulty and the use of rather severe methods.[23]

During the Korean War, the lack of qualified applicants again plagued the OCS program. In 1952, this led to the failure of OCS to make its officer quota. In 1953, the Army, concerned about OCS production problems, conducted a study that found that less than a third of the men eligible for OCS actually applied. After the war, things deteriorated even further. Throughout the remainder of the 1950s, in fact, only 10 percent of eligible soldiers applied for OCS. This was a major concern for Army leaders since they were convinced that the quality of officers produced depended primarily on the degree of selectivity that could be exercised in the choice of applicants.[24]

The three biggest deterrents to OCS participation, the Army found, were (1) the longer period of duty required of officers (as compared to enlisted men), (2) a belief that OCS entailed a

greater likelihood of recall after separation from active duty, and (3) a reluctance to assume "responsibilities" (since most had no intention of staying in the service to retirement). The first deterrent listed — the longer period of obligated service — was perhaps the most important one. The more ambitious and educated enlisted men, the Army found, generally had attractive opportunities in the civilian world and consequently severed their connection with the Army as soon as they could.[25]

Vietnam.

The Vietnam War created a new accessions environment and a need for a vastly expanded officer corps. All three principal accessions sources saw their output substantially increased. From the onset of the Vietnam build-up, the Army wanted the ROTC to provide the bulk of its officers. However, because of the lag time associated with the ROTC commissioning process, it took the Army four years to ramp up ROTC production to anything approaching the desired volume. As a result, the rise in OCS production was initially most dramatic, although the Army's other pre-commissioning programs also registered historic gains.

The Department of the Army ordered a major build-up of the OCS program in August 1965. By 1967, OCS had become the Army's largest producer of officers. The 19,226 active duty officers it produced that year represented the summit of post-World War II OCS production, almost twice that of the ROTC and thirty four times that of West Point.[26] In 1968, however, the Army began to "phase down" the OCS program, and after that year, OCS production fell off sharply. By the early 1970s, OCS's commissioning share was back within historic norms.[27]

The Army's 1960s expansion of the ROTC actually preceded the Vietnam build-up. The Kennedy administration had adopted a new "flexible response" strategy that entailed a significant growth in Army end strength. This only aggravated the Army's officer procurement problems, already fairly serious in the l950s. In 1963 the Defense Department reported that the Army missed its annual officer accessions mission by over 2,000 lieutenants. It also suffered from qualitative shortfalls in its new officers. To be sure, due primarily to the ROTC, the percentage of college graduates in the Officer Corps had increased since the early fifties — rising from under 50 percent to over 70 percent. Still, congressional and Army leaders were not satisfied with the caliber of officer they were getting, and all publicly acknowledged that the ground forces were not getting a fair share of the nation's talented undergraduates.[28]

To boost both the quantity and quality of officer production, Congress passed the ROTC Vitalization Act of 1964. This legislation instituted an Army ROTC scholarship program, increased the ROTC stipend, provided for a two-year ROTC commissioning program, and expanded the Junior ROTC. After the war began, additional legislation expanded the Army ROTC from 243 units in 1964 to 285 units in 1971.[29] As a result, by 1969 ROTC had resumed its place as the Army's largest commissioning source, and in 1970 reached its historic production high of over 16,000 officers.[30]

West Point also experienced growth in the 1960s. Legislation passed in 1964 raised the enrollment ceiling at the Academy from 2,500 to 4,400 cadets. As a result of this increase, the institution's officer production rose by nearly 90 percent between 1963 and 1973. As was the case with the ROTC, the legislation providing for the expansion of the Military Academy predated the Vietnam War. It was inspired by the same forces and qualitative and quantitative concerns about officer production that had informed the ROTC Vitalization Act of 1964.[31]

As had occurred in previous conflicts, however, much of the increase in quantity was realized at the expense of quality. Due to the pressure of numbers, the Army's ability to screen was soon restricted. All of the major accessions sources were eventually forced to lower their commissioning standards during this era.

In the case of OCS, attempts were initially made to hold the line on quality and avoid some of the turmoil that followed the expansion of the OCS program in World War II and Korea. Before Vietnam, as we have seen, OCS had primarily been an avenue for enlisted people to gain a commission. In 1964, only 28 percent of the 1,688 OCS graduates commissioned that year had a college degree. The next year, the Army began to aggressively target college graduates for its OCS program. By the early-seventies, about 70 percent of OCS graduates held a baccalaureate degree. By that time, however, the annual OCS cohort had been drastically reduced from its peak in 1967. Thus, despite the Army's push to make maximum use of the OCS college graduate enlistment option, approximately half of all captains in 1970 did not have a baccalaureate degree.[32]

According to contemporary records, there were other troubling aspects of the OCS program. Some insisted that greatly diminished attrition rates were evidence of a dilution of OCS commissioning standards rather than improved candidate screening and selection. From the high average attrition rates of 44 percent which predominated throughout the late-fifties and early-sixties, in 1966, the first full year of the OCS build up for Vietnam, the rate fell to 30 percent. The next year, it sank to 20 percent. (Only after ROTC officer production reached desired levels did OCS attrition rates start rising again). Pressed for officers to meet the leadership demands of the Vietnam War, some contended, the Army had no choice but to relax its screening procedures.[33]

West Point was by no means immune from the noxious effects of officer production pressures. Its ability to be selective in admissions also deteriorated as the Vietnam War dragged on. For several years in the early 1970s, in fact, the Academy had to admit virtually all minimally qualified candidates to make its numbers. The Military Academy's quality problems are more difficult to document today because the Army and Academy authorities were understandably reluctant to publicize such trends.

The ability of the ROTC program to cull the marginally capable from its ranks also declined, especially during the latter stages of the Vietnam War. Many factors in addition to the vastly expanded demands of the war contributed to this development. Campus and social unrest, the progressive elimination of compulsory ROTC (70 percent of ROTC units were compulsory in 1959; only seven percent were by 1973), and the gradual lessening of draft pressures after 1969 all, it was believed, reduced ROTC enrollment, and consequently reduced the Army's ability to screen officer aspirants.[34]

One method that the Army used to boost officer output through ROTC was to lower commissioning standards for students enrolled in Military Junior Colleges (MJC). In 1966, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) introduced the Early Commissioning Program (ECP). The ECP permitted MJC graduates, who heretofore had to wait until they completed their baccalaureate degree to be commissioned, to enter the Officer Corps immediately upon completion of their junior college studies. Thus, instead of getting 21-year-old men with baccalaureate degrees, the Army annually commissioned several hundred 19-year-olds with associate degrees.[35]

Drastic change in the ROTC host university and college base was another factor that affected officer production. In an attempt to counter the elimination of compulsory programs and to ensure that production capacity kept pace with the officer requirements, the Army expanded ROTC by over 17 percent (from 243 to 285 colleges and universities) between 1964 and 1972. In the same timeframe, a number of universities, including Yale, Harvard, Dartmouth and Stanford, severed their connections with the Army ROTC. Thus, in addition to the 42 schools needed to reach the 285 mark, the schools leaving the program also had to be replaced. Most of the newcomers were not top tier schools, but were small or medium-sized state institutions located in the South, the Midwest or the West.[36] This raised concerns about product quality, with some worrying that it would lower the intellectual level of the Officer Corps. As General Donn Starry later observed, "There is no way to replace a Harvard…or Yale except with Harvard or Yale."[37]

The Army used the ROTC institutional expansion to achieve greater ethnic diversity in its new officer accessions. Before World War II, most black reserve officers received their commissions through ROTC programs at Wilberforce and Howard University. In the immediate post-war period, and an additional twelve ROTC units were established at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) by 1949. There matters stood, and by the 1960s, African American representation in the junior officer ranks was in decline (from roughly 3 percent in 1962 to about 1.5 percent in 1969). During this same period, black ROTC enrollment also fell. The Army attempted to redress this by increasing its presence at HBCUs, as a high proportion of serving black Army officers had graduated from these institutions. By 1973, the number of historically black schools hosting ROTC units had risen to 19.[38]

The addition of these black colleges to its institutional portfolio brought quick ROTC enrollment and production dividends, in relative if not absolute terms. The percentage of black graduates in the ROTC commissioning class rose from 2.6 percent in 1969 to 3.6 percent in 1973. Over the same period, the African American share of total ROTC enrollment grew from 6.6 percent to 10.8 percent.[39] These numbers seemed to bode well for the Army's diversity efforts.[40] Yet the reliance upon HBCUs had its troubling aspects. While ROTC enrollment rates at black colleges were above average, black student participation in ROTC at predominantly white institutions was well below average. This was a source of concern because, in the late-sixties and early-seventies, black students in increasing numbers and percentages were attending predominantly white colleges. Additionally, ROTC units at HBCUs were much more inefficient officer producers, on average, than were units on other campuses, with far lower ratios of "cadets enrolled" to "cadets commissioned."

One reason was the difficulty that HBCU-affiliated units had in qualifying their cadets for the ROTC advanced course due to years of unequal educational opportunity in the U.S. In 1969, for example, almost 49 percent of the students taking the ROTC qualification test at seven black institutions failed it, while the national failure rate was about 15.1 percent. To redress this, the Army sponsored special remedial academic programs at HBCUs to lower the failure rate among cadets. It was quite evident, however, that much more had to be done in this area if the Army hoped to realize its minority procurement goals.[41] Thus, to increase officer accessions, the Army adopted a policy of liberal waivers for scores on the RQ-8 and RQ-9 exams, the latest successors to the RQ-3 exam introduced by the Army in 1949. The minimum raw score on the ROTC Qualifying Examinations, RQ-8 and RQ-9, was 50. Local commanders had the authority to grant waivers for RQ scores of between 44 and 50. CONARC headquarters was the approval authority for scores below 44.[42]

Waivers for the RQ test, along with waivers for medical, behavioral, and physical issues, started to be liberally dispensed. This helped to increase the number of minority officers attaining commissions as well as helped the Army maintain a certain level of officer production as it was gradually weaned away from the draft. It also, of course, lowered the level of intellectual attainment among junior officers.[43]

The Advent of the All Volunteer Force (AVF).

ROTC emerged from the Vietnam War as the Army's largest commissioning source. It accounted for about 75 percent of active Army accessions in the 1970s. The Military Academy also assumed an enhanced role relative to the one it had in the decade before Vietnam producing 17 percent of new officers in the decade after the war. After the experience of Vietnam, with its large influx of lieutenants without degrees and the shock of the My Lai episode, the Army had become somewhat wary of officers without baccalaureate degrees.[44] OCS was therefore reduced to a "caretaker status," just large enough to ensure that it could be reactivated quickly in the event of an emergency. Its post-Vietnam share of the annual commissioning cohort averaged a modest eight percent.

With the advent of the All-Volunteer Force, females and minorities assumed a much larger role in the Army's officer accessions plan. By the end of the seventies, African Americans comprised over 10 percent and women over 15 percent of the annual ROTC commissioning cohort. Women began to enter commissioning programs in large numbers in the early seventies. After admitting them on an experimental basis in the fall of 1972, the ROTC was thrown open to women in 1973. West Point admitted its first cohort of 119 women in 1976, the same year that OCS adopted a gender integrated approach to officer training.[45]

The early and mid-1970s were years of ambiguity in officer accessions. Due to constantly declining end-strengths, a new and enhanced role for the reserve components, and an indeterminate international situation (the first half of the seventies were the years of détente with the Soviet Union), there was a great deal of uncertainty about what officer production levels should be. The Army's Deputy Chief of staff for Personnel (DCSPER) noted in his annual historical summary for 1973 that "the balancing of qualitative new procurement against the reductions in the force presented major problems." In fact, the ROTC operated without a definite mission through the mid-seventies. ROTC administrators were told simply to produce as many lieutenants as they could. This methodology presented no immediate problems. The Army merely took what it needed for active Army requirements and gave the remainder to the reserve components, which in the immediate aftermath of Vietnam were still brimming with officers. Only in 1976, after U.S.-Soviet relations began to worsen and reserve component officer strength approached dangerously low levels, did the Army assign a definite production objective to the ROTC.[46]

Concerns about officer accessions quality plagued the Army throughout the first decade of the All Volunteer Force (AVF). With the phasing out of conscription after 1970, the Army found that it could not meet minimum active duty commissioning targets without lowering accessions standards. Finding the RQ test too restrictive, it began experimenting with other tests that promised easier access into the Officer Corps. The Cadet Evaluation Battery (CEB) was selected to replace the RQ examinations and came into widespread use in 1971. It was much less rigorous than its predecessors.

Despite this, the new screening tool revealed a disturbing trend. Average scores on the CEB steadily declined after 1971. In that year, the average CEB score was 22. By 1975 it had dropped to 17. Some ROTC instructors claimed that the situation was worse than the test scores indicated. According to them, there were widespread irregularities in the administration of the new test. Since ROTC cadre members had total control over testing, they could provide close and detailed "coaching" to their charges. Pressed to make numbers, many of them reportedly did so.[47]

Several studies conducted during this period added to the Army's concerns about the quality of its officer aspirants. J.J. Card and W. M. Shanner of the Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) authored a 1976 study indicating that ROTC cadets had lower high school and college grade point averages and lower verbal aptitudes than their non-ROTC classmates. The epochal Review of Education and Training for Officers (RETO) study (1978), commissioned by the Chief of Staff of the Army, also expressed strong reservations about ROTC's selection methods, concluding that its "intelligence standards" were "inadequate" and suggested that little screening and culling was being done at all.[48]

The changing character of the ROTC cadet corps was yet another source of concern. In the 1970s, the percentage of ROTC cadets attending the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities plummeted while those enrolled at less selective institutions shot up sharply. The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) was aware of this trend but, given the fiscal realities of the late seventies, the intense pressure to meet officer accessions objectives, and the relatively high employment rate that prevailed at the time, could do little to reverse it.

The Army's officer production problem became more immediate in 1976 when the DCSPER determined that, in order to meet mobilization requirements, ROTC had to produce more than 10,000 officers a year by 1980.To ramp up to this level, the Army took a number of extraordinary measures. The most controversial was the extension of the Early Commissioning Program. Previously, the ECP was available only to graduates of military junior colleges. Beginning in 1978, however, it was extended throughout the ROTC institutional base. Cadets could now receive reserve commissions through ROTC without completing a baccalaureate degree. By the early 1980s, the ECP accounted for roughly half of all ROTC commissions. Even more worrisome to Army personnel managers was the fact that there were no minimum academic standards in place to cull unqualified ECP cadets from the ranks. Students with GPAs below 2.0 could now be commissioned, as scores of them were, and many officer aspirants reportedly entered the ROTC program with no intention of finishing their degree.[49]

Worries about the lack of ROTC screening and culling mechanisms deepened at the end of the 1970s, as increasing numbers of ROTC graduates began to fail their Army branch basic courses. In 1981, General Starry, the TRADOC Commander, observed,

> While we have always been concerned with ROTC graduates who perform poorly at the OBCs, it has been only in the past few years that this problem has become critical. Whereas in the sixties and early seventies the bottom 5 to 10 percent of ROTC graduates were fully able to complete OBC and meet minimum levels of proficiency, in recent years,…this group is often able to accomplish neither.[50]

While a disproportionate number of the lieutenants who failed OBC came from HBCUs, the problem was widespread. Many lieutenants from ROTC's less selective schools also could not meet the intellectual demands placed on them in their branch schools.

The Reagan Era.

The commissioning source mix in the 1980s differed little from the previous decade. ROTC's annual contribution declined slightly (from 75 to 72 percent) as did the Military Academy's (from 17 to about 16 percent) while OCS rose slightly (from 10 to 13 percent). The officer accessions environment in the 1980s (especially in the early part of the decade) however, was much more propitious than it had been for years. A high unemployment rate, a resurgence of patriotism, the heating up of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and the Reagan administration's firm support of the military services helped create this environment. The Reagan administration doubled the number of ROTC's scholarships and greatly expanded its institutional base. Simultaneously, West Point became one of America's "hottest" undergraduate destinations.[51]

With high unemployment rates and more scholarships, the number and percentage of ROTC cadets enrolled in America's more selective schools mushroomed, but the gains were widespread as well. Across the program's host colleges and universities, ROTC units now enjoyed an abundance of candidates and could be more discriminating in who they commissioned. The number of waivers granted for medical, moral, and academic issues was substantially cut back and failures at OBC gradually ceased to be a major problem.

The Army took a number of steps to increase the rigor of its officer applicant screening process. The most momentous was the introduction of the ROTC Quality Assurance System (QAS), which was designed to raise minimum contracting and commissioning standards. QAS required a minimum GPA of 2.0 for commissioning and also introduced the Officer Selection Battery (OSB) as a motivational and intellectual screening mechanism. While not as challenging as the old RQ exam, the OSB represented a modest upgrade over the CEB, which by the early eighties had fallen into disuse.[52]

The Post-Cold War Era.

The end of the Cold War ushered in a new officer accessions era. The Army had to adjust to both an ambiguous threat environment and sharp reductions in its end strength and force structure. During this period of reduced officer requirements, West Point's fixed officer production necessarily represented a larger share of annual commissions, almost 25 percent. ROTC and OCS, on the other hand, saw their share of annual commissions decline, to about 67 percent and 8 percent, respectively.

The biggest officer accessions changes occurred in the ROTC program, which saw its mission significantly reduced, its institutional base, management infrastructure, and manpower cut, and its scholarship budget come under sustained attack. Fully funded scholarships were an early casualty of the post-Cold War drawdown. A cap of 80 percent of tuition was placed on scholarships in 1988, even before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Further adjustments were made to the scholarship program in the mid-1990s with the introduction of the tiered-scholarship program, which set limits on scholarship outlays and was generally successful in holding down costs, primarily because it strictly limited the ROTC footprint at top tier schools.[53]

With diminished demand, personnel managers reasoned, the Army could be more selective in who it admitted into the Officer Corps. And indeed, for a few years this was the case. Early commissioning was virtually eliminated in 1991, with only cadets at MJCs remaining eligible.

ROTC program managers became more selective in who they sent to Advanced Camp. In 1991 and 1992, many professors of military science refused to send any cadets to summer training who in their estimation would not excel. During those same years, Cadet Command waged an aggressive campaign to reduce the number of lateral entry cadets into the ROTC Advanced Course (students who, for the most part, entered the ROTC program as college juniors). This was because students who entered the ROTC as freshman outscored their lateral entry fellows in almost every measure of performance and aptitude.[54]

The favorable constellation of circumstances that permitted this selectivity, however, did not last. After 1992, the ROTC struggled to attract a sufficient number of qualified candidates to meet its mission. In fact, between 1992 and 2000, Cadet Command did not realize its assigned production objectives. A booming economy, low unemployment rates, and a steadily declining propensity for military service among military aged youth made the already tough task of officer recruiting even more difficult. In response, the Army again relaxed or eliminated many ROTC screening and culling mechanisms. The number of waivers granted to cadets, for example, steadily rose. In 1986, only three percent of the ROTC commissioning class had waivers. Seventeen years later, over 20 percent did. By 1996, Cadet Command had also done away with the Officer Selection Battery. Henceforth, the ROTC operated without a standard instrument to screen for mental capacity or career motivation. OSB's demise was an admission that, in the competitive labor market of the late-nineties, the Army saw little choice but to remove qualitative barriers to officer accessions, even though those barriers might not be particularly very high.[55]

Thus, by the mid-1990s, things had come full circle. The Army found itself in an accessions environment that was in certain ways analogous to the one that it had experienced in the early 1950s when its OCS program had a more rigorous screening mechanisms in place than the ROTC. And, as in the early fifties, some observers in the 1990s saw a decline in officer "quality" resulting from the absence of such screening. They feared that graduates of less competitive colleges who exhibited lower levels of intellectual attainment would come to comprise a disproportionately large portion of the Officer Corps.

Conclusion.

During the twentieth century, the Army tended to discard screening tools for its officer aspirants. The interwar years saw the Army employing rather rigorous officer selection instruments. Candidates from civil life (and the enlisted ranks) were required to pass a challenging examination that encompassed a wide range of academic subjects as well as satisfy a board of officers as to their ability to think and express themselves clearly. Almost all new officer accessions in the 1920s and 1930s, decades when a baccalaureate degree was a mark of distinction, were college graduates.

During World War II, however, intellectual standards were relaxed to meet officer requirements for an eight million-man Army. The War Department commissioned thousands of high school graduates and, as the war progressed, reached deeper into its pool of enlisted talent to come up with enough lieutenants to man the force.

The demand for vast numbers of junior officers during the Cold War did not allow for a return to the rigorous officer candidate screening of the interwar years. Lagging pay, the diminished prestige of the military profession, a booming civilian economy, and the rather turbulent internal

condition of the post-war Army discouraged the nation's top tier collegians from entering the Army. Both the Military Academy and ROTC experienced difficulties in attracting suitable candidates.

In the immediate post-war period, the ROTC operated without an intellectual screening tool. As the Korean War wound down, however, Army leaders became concerned about the lack of such an instrument. In 1953, ROTC program managers administered the RQ-3 test to cadets at Advanced Camp and found that a fifth of them could not meet the mental standards for admission to OCS. Authorities attributed the large number of failures in part to the recent expansion of ROTC in which a number of "marginal" colleges with open admission standards were admitted into the program's institutional base. The RQ-3 exam was subsequently reinstated to ensure a minimum level of mental attainment in all new officer accessions.

Although OCS throughout the fifties screened for mental capacity, its lower educational standards were a source of concern. To be admitted to OCS during this era, a candidate required only a high school diploma or GED certificate. Although Army personnel officers wanted to raise these standards, a lack of applicants prevented them from doing so.

The Vietnam War further strained the Army's ability to be selective about entry into commissioning programs. OCS admitted thousands of non-college educated candidates to meet wartime demands. Consequently, by 1970, half of all captains did not have a college degree. As draft pressures eased after 1969, ROTC and West Point also became less discriminating in their selection of candidates. In the early seventies, West Point had to admit virtually all qualified candidates. ROTC relied on the liberal dispensation of waivers to meet its assigned production objectives. The RQ tests, which had ensured a minimum level of intellectual attainment in new lieutenants, were, in effect, suspended in many portions of ROTC's institutional base.

With the end of conscription, the Army made its intellectual screening mechanisms less restrictive to help meet officer production goals and diversity objectives. The Cadet Evaluation Battery, which came into widespread use in the early 1970s, was less rigorous than its predecessor had been. Even so, CEB scores steadily declined throughout the 1970s. By the end of that decade, officer accessions had reached what some considered a crisis state. ROTC graduates, who made up three fourths of all new officer accessions during this period, were failing their Officers Basic Courses in disturbingly large numbers, and there were widespread complaints within the Army's school system about the poor "quality" of many recently commissioned officers.

The recession of the early eighties and the resurgence of patriotism that accompanied the Reagan era allowed the Army to raise accessions standards. The Officer Selection Battery was introduced to screen for mental capacity and career motivation and the Quality Assurance System was developed to ensure all ROTC met minimum academic standards. This interlude of relatively high selectivity in officer accessions proved to be temporary, however. With the end of the Cold War and the decline in service propensity among college aged youth, standards and screening were once again were relaxed. In 1996, a milestone was reached when the Army discontinued use of the Officer Selection Battery in ROTC. Since then, the Army's largest commissioning source has operated without an intellectual screening tool. Thus, from 1945 to 2000, the Army has found it increasingly difficult to screen for the talent it needs and still meet officer production and diversity objectives. Although Army accessions have been more selective during certain times (most notably during periods of high unemployment), these have been short-lived.

[1] Charles J. Denholm, "Officer Promotion and Elimination," Individual Study, USAWC, 26 March, 1956, 8; J. G. Harbor, "The Army as a Career," in *The Officer's Guide* (Washington, D.C.: National Service Publishing Company, 1930), 17.
[2] Arthur T. Coumbe and Lee S. Harford, *U.S. Army Cadet Command : The 10 Year History* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996), 21.
[3] U.S. War Department, *Special Regulations A: Examinations of Candidates for Appointment in Regular Army* (Washington, DC: War Department, May 17, 1920), 9-10; Denholm, "Officer Promotion and Elimination," 4.
[4] Samuel D. Burns, "Career Incentives for Officers," Individual Study, USAWC, 15 March 1954, 21; James B. Leer, "Career Incentives for Officers," Individual Study, USAWC, 15 March 1954, 4.
[5] R.R. Palmer, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1948), 38.
[6] Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall*: *Ordeal and Hope, 1939-1942* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 97. At the beginning of mobilization, Secretary of War Stimson tried to make OCS a course for college men, but General Marshall adamantly resisted, eventually threatening resignation over the matter. In the face of this threat, the secretary yielded and let Marshall have his way.
[7] Palmer, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, 103.
[8] William R. Keast, *Training of Officer Candidates in AGF Special Training Schools,* Study No. 31 (Washington*,* DC:Historical Section, Army Ground Forces, United States War Department, 1946), 53.
[9] *Ibid*., 18.
[10] Max L. Pitney, "Retention of Junior Officers," Student Thesis, USAWC, 19 March, 1959, 12.
[11] Denholm, "Officer Promotion and Elimination," 15.
[12] Henry Koepcke, "A Successful Infantry OCS Program," Student Thesis, USAWC, 19 March 1958, 11. To ramp up OCS for Korea, Army schools found that they had to develop their OCS methods and procedures almost as though the program had never existed
[13] Denholm, "Officer Promotion and Elimination," 19.
[14] Coy L. Curtis, "The Selection and Development of Officers," Student Thesis, USAWC, 15 March 1956, 40.
[15] Thomas R. Bruce, "Long Range ROTC Policy," Student Thesis, USAWC, 15 March, 1955, 31.
[16] *Ibid*., 25.
[17] *Ibid*., 26.
[18] *Ibid*., 30.
[19] Ibid., 26.
[20] Koepcke, "A Successful Infantry OCS Program," 17.
[21] *Ibid*., 29.
[22] Report, Army Field Forces, Officer Candidate School Board, Fort Monroe, Virginia, 8 February 1952.
[23] Koepcke, "A Successful Infantry OCS Program," 32.
[24] *Ibid*, 35.
[25] Ibid.
[26] U.S. Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DSCPER), Annual Historical Report: FY 1967, Washington, DC, Office of the DCSPER, 1967, 27.
[27] DCSPER, Annual Historical Reports for FY 1968 (34), FY 1969 (12), and FY 1970 (38).
[28] Coumbe and Harford, *U.S. Army Cadet Command : The 10 Year History,* 14.
[29] Ibid., 18.
[30] DCSPER, Annual Historical Report: FY 1969, 29.
[31] DCSPER, Annual Historical Reports, FY 1963 through FY 1970.
[32] Memorandum, DSCPER-CSD, U.S. Department of the Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, 19 August 1964, subject: Quality of the Officer Corps; Staff Study; MG Frank W. Norris, Review of Army Officer Educational System, Vol. I: Summary Report, 1 December 1971, 7.
[33] Koepcke, "A Successful Infantry OCS Program," 18; DCSPER, Annual Historical Reports for FY 1967 (37) and FY 1968 (16)..
[34] Victor Bruce Hirshauer, "The History of the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps, 1916-1973," Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1975, 398.
[35] DCSPER, Annual Historical Report: FY 1966, 41.
[36] Deputy Chief of Staff for Individual Training (DCSIT), HQ, US Continental Army Command (CONARC),

Semiannual Historical Report (1 January--30 June 1971), 1-2.
[37] Lewis Sorley, ed., *Press On: Selected Works of General Donn A. Starry* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Institute Press, 2009), I:604.
[38] Clarence A. Miller, "Procurement and Retention of Black Officers," Research Paper, USAWC, 7 April, 1972, 38.
[39] Robert L. Goldich, *The Senior Reserve Officer Training Corps: Recent Trends and Current Status* (Congressional Research Service, April 19, 1974), 31.
[40] Miller, "Procurement and Retention of Black Officers," 39; Goldich, *The Senior Reserve Officer Training Corps,* 32.
[41] Miller, "Procurement and Retention of Black Officers," 42.
[42] Ibid., 50.
[43] DCSIT, USCONARC, Report of the Tenth Annual CONARC ROTC Conference, 13-14 September 1972, 23 and 130.
[44] Coumbe and Harford, *U.S. Army Cadet Command : The 10 Year History,* 22.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] Donald Lloyd Cummings, "Army ROTC: A Study of the Army's Primary Offic`er Procurement Program, 1862-1977," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1982, 118.

[47] Sorley, ed., *Press On,* 604-605.
[48] J.J. Card and W.M. Shanner, *Development of a ROTC/Army Career Commitment Model: Management Summary Report* (Palo Alto, Ca.: American Institute for Research, March 1976), 30; Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Staff, A Review of Education and Training for Officers (RETO), (Washington, D.C.: May 1986), I:2 and III:2.
[49] Coumbe and Harford, *U.S. Army Cadet Command : The 10 Year History,* 37.
[50] Sorley, ed., *Press On,* 604.
[51] Coumbe and Harford, *U.S. Army Cadet Command : The 10 Year History, 58*.
[52] Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Reserve Officers' Training Corps Study Group Report*, (Washington, DC: DA, May 1986), 1-5.
[53] Coumbe and Harford, *U.S. Army Cadet Command : The 10 Year History, 198*.
[54] Memorandum, ATCC-PA, MG Wallace C. Arnold, to DCSPER, 6 December 1990, subject: Curtailment of Early Commissioning Program (ECP); Cadet Command Regulation 145-9, *Reserve Officers' Training Corps Accessioning and Commissioning*, 24 August 1992, 14.
[55] U.S. Army Cadet Command, Briefing Slides, ATCC-MO, n.d., "Reengineering Cadet Command Alternatives."