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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF THE 180A:  
THE SPECIAL FORCES WARRANT OFFICER**

by

Michael G. Varner

March 2015

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Robert Burks  
George Lober

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**THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF THE 180A: THE SPECIAL  
FORCES WARRANT OFFICER**

Michael G. Varner  
Chief Warrant Officer Four, United States Army  
B.S., Campbell University, 2010

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
March 2015**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Special Forces warrant officer is vital to the health of the Special Forces Regiment. The warrant officer's institutional knowledge—developed over years of operational experience—is essential to the success of Special Operations Forces' global endeavors. The Special Forces Regiment harnesses its future institutional capability through the recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers. For the past five years, the Special Forces Regiment has seen a decrease in its warrant officer recruitment and retention rates. If left unattended, these rates will likely continue to decline.

This thesis offers insights into the factors affecting the recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers. By looking at recruitment and retention policies and assessing expert opinion in the Regiment, this thesis attempts to determine the recruitment and retention modifications that may reverse the declining trend. In doing so, this thesis identifies multiple factors affecting the recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers and, specifically, focuses on two: (1) recruitment is drawn from a limited pool of eligible non-commissioned officers who face both the stigma of leaving the NCO ranks and pay disparities if they choose to transition; and (2) the lack of upward mobility through the senior warrant officer ranks.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	assistant detachment commander
AIP	assignment incentive pay
CCWO	command chief warrant officer
CSAB	critical skills accession bonus
CSM	command sergeant major
CSRB	critical skills retention bonus
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
DLPT	Defense Language Proficiency Test
E-7	sergeant first class
HQDA	Headquarters Department of the Army
HRC	Human Resources Command
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
MOS	military occupational specialty
NCO	non-commissioned officer
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
OEMA	Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis
SERB	selective early retirement board
SGM	sergeant major
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
USAJFKSWCS	United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School
USASFC	United States Army Special Forces Command
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
WO1	warrant officer one



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First and foremost, I would like to thank my family. I am sincerely grateful for the personal support, understanding, and patience provided by my wife, Angela. The numerous hours spent researching and writing this thesis detracted from our time together. I cannot thank you enough for your devoted support. To my stepchildren, Jay and Elena, I express my sincerest appreciation for your sacrifices throughout the past 18 months while I labored to achieve this goal. To my nine-month-old daughter, Mikayla, I promise to spend more time with you in the future.

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Finally, I wish to applaud all members of the Regiment and specifically, those who have paid the ultimate price for our freedom. I am honored to have served with you all. I sincerely hope this endeavor strengthens our Regiment. One team, one fight!

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND: HEALTH OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT

Special Forces warrant officers—military occupational specialty (MOS) 180A—are vital to the health of the Special Forces Regiment. Their institutional knowledge is essential to the success of Special Operations Forces’ global endeavors. The Special Forces warrant officer’s role has evolved from that of a technician to a “continuity expert” in his field. The current description of the 180A is defined as:

Special Forces (SF) warrant officers are combat leaders and staff officers. They are experienced subject matter experts in unconventional warfare, operations and intelligence fusion, and planning and execution at all levels across the operational continuum. They advise commanders on all aspects of special operations and are responsible for the integration of emerging technologies. (United States Army Warrant Officer Recruiting, 2014)

Their regional expertise, gained from years of experience in a specific theatre of operations, is one of the key elements that the former commander of the Army, Navy, and Air Force unified Special Operations Command advocated the Regiment expand upon (Jean, 2009, p. 1). As Admiral Eric Olson, former commander of the United States Special Operations Command, stated during the National Defense Industrial Association conference in April 2009, “We need to develop what I call the Lawrences of the world . . . we need Lawrences of every region, every country of the world . . . and we need them there for a long time” (Jean, 2009, p. 1). Admiral Olson was referring to T. E. Lawrence, the highly successful British advisor to the Arab Revolt in World War I, who was popularized in the 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia* in which a British soldier was able to unify and incite Arabs to defeat the Turks. The admiral elaborated:

We don’t yet fully understand the nature of the conflicts we are in—the cultures, the societies of the areas in which we are operating. We don’t really speak the languages, or know the family histories, the tribal relationships, how business is done. (Jean, 2009, p. 1)

In order to create the “Lawrences” that Olson was referring to, the Special Forces Regiment needs to harness the institutional knowledge gained from its Special Forces warrant officers’ years of experience. One way in which the Regiment can accomplish

this task is through the recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers. Historically, the Special Forces Regiment has never reached 100 percent fill of its warrant officer grade plates. Over the past five years, based on unpublished data provided by U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC), the Special Forces Regiment has seen a continued statistically significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0.015$ ) decrease in its warrant officer population from 88 percent of authorized strength in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 to 84 percent in FY 2014(see Figures 1 through 5). Yet, according to the same data, the officer corps has actually increased ( $p$ -value  $< 0.038$ ) and the non-commissioned officer (NCO) ranks have remained relatively flat from 99 percent in FY 2010 to 96 percent in FY 2014 ( $p$ -value  $< 0.0957$ ) (see Figures 1 through 5). In addition, data provided by HRC specifically for the year 2014 indicates the Regiment's Special Forces warrant officer population is currently 16 percent under authorized strength (see Figure 5). If left unattended, the Regiment's warrant officer population will continue to decline, depleting the Regiment of an extremely valuable asset. However, if addressed in the correct manner, the recruitment and retention of 180As will support Special Operations Forces and its missions well into the future.

## **B. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

The purpose of this thesis is to identify and examine several major factors affecting the recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers. Once such factors are identified, this thesis will recommend a strategy to reverse this trend and strengthen the Regiment's Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps.

## **C. RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1. Research Question**

This thesis intends to answer the following question: What recruitment and retention modifications are needed to stop and, ultimately, reverse the declining trend in the Regiment's Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps?

In answering that question, this thesis will examine current policies and procedures for those factors possibly affecting the decline in Special Forces warrant

officers and identify to what degree each of these factors is attributable to that decline. This thesis will recommend options to increase the recruitment and retention of the Regiment's Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps.

## **2. Approach**

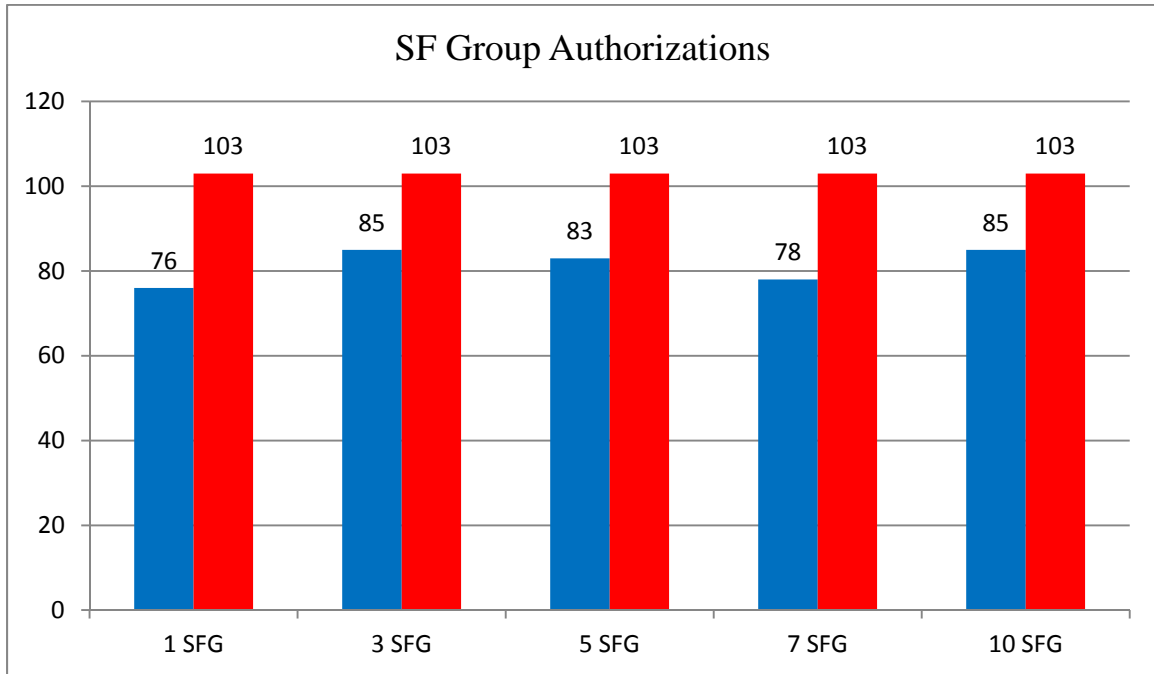
This thesis will analyze both quantitative and qualitative data.

### ***a. Quantitative***

This thesis will gather specific quantitative data regarding the Regiment's Special Forces warrant officer strength from the Army's Human Resources Command (HRC). This data will expose the Special Forces Regimental strength of its Special Forces warrant officers annually from 2010 through 2014. An analysis of this data will demonstrate the decline in the Regiment's Special Forces warrant officer strength over the past five years, proving the need to focus on the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officers. Figures 1 through 5 depict the Regiment's total Special Forces warrant officer assigned and authorized strength and subordinate group authorizations from 2010 through 2014.

# 180A INVENTORY DEC 2010

Total 180A Strength **88%** (519/590)



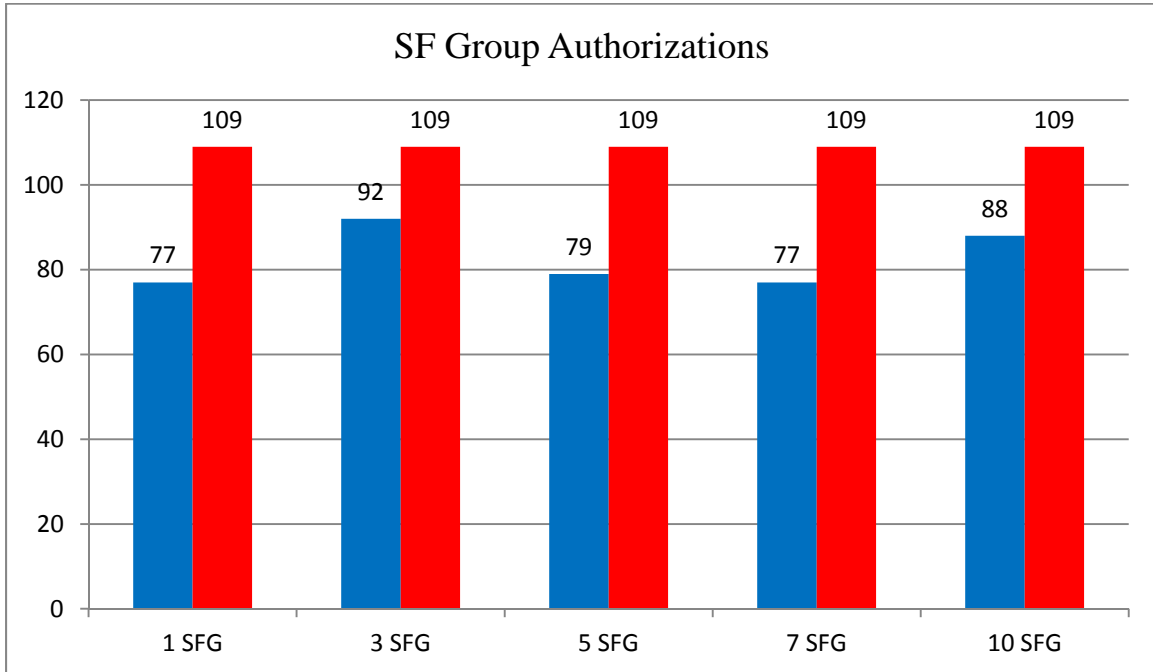
	ASGN	AUTH	% FILL
<b>W-5</b>	30	17	176%
<b>W-4</b>	93	77	121%
<b>W-3</b>	114	136	84%
<b>W-1/W-2</b>	282	360	78%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>88%</b>

\*Data provided by U.S. Army Human Resources Command

Figure 1. Group Authorizations (Top) and Total 180A Inventory (Bottom) December 2010

# 180A INVENTORY NOV 2011

Total 180A Strength **88%** (550/624)



	ASGN	AUTH	% FILL
<b>W-5</b>	33	24	138%
<b>W-4</b>	114	105	109%
<b>W-3</b>	98	152	64%
<b>W-1/W-2</b>	305	343	89%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>88%</b>

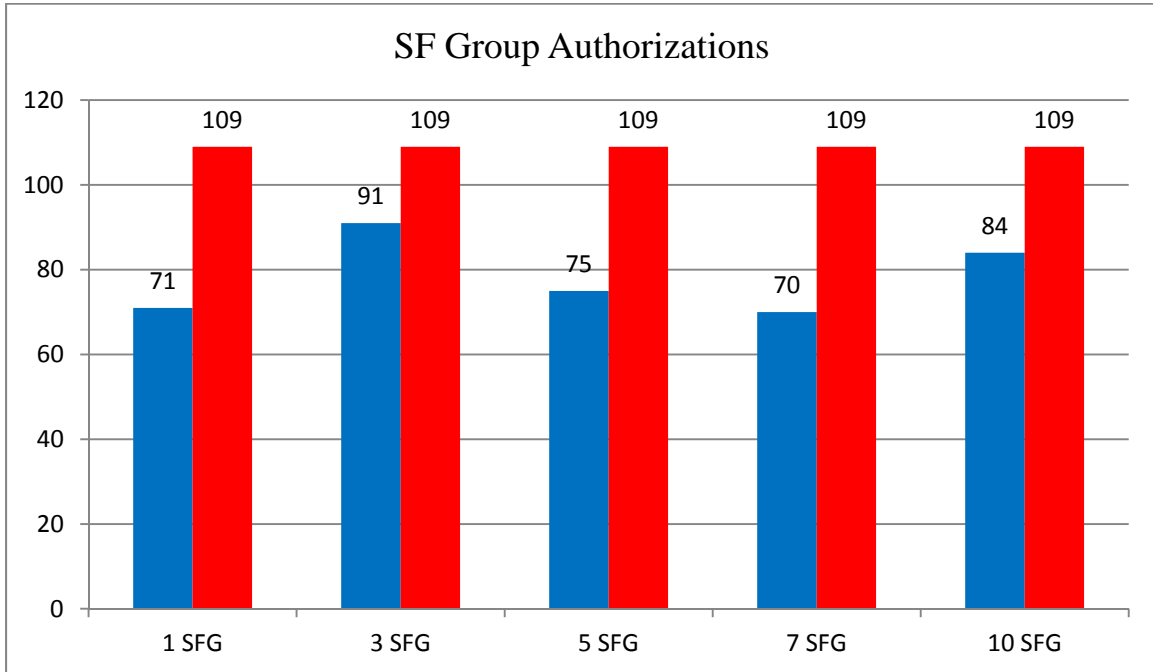
\*Data provided by U.S. Army Human Resources Command

Figure 2. Group Authorizations (Top) and Total 180A Inventory (Bottom) November 2011



# 180A INVENTORY NOV 2012

Total 180A Strength **87%** (537/620)



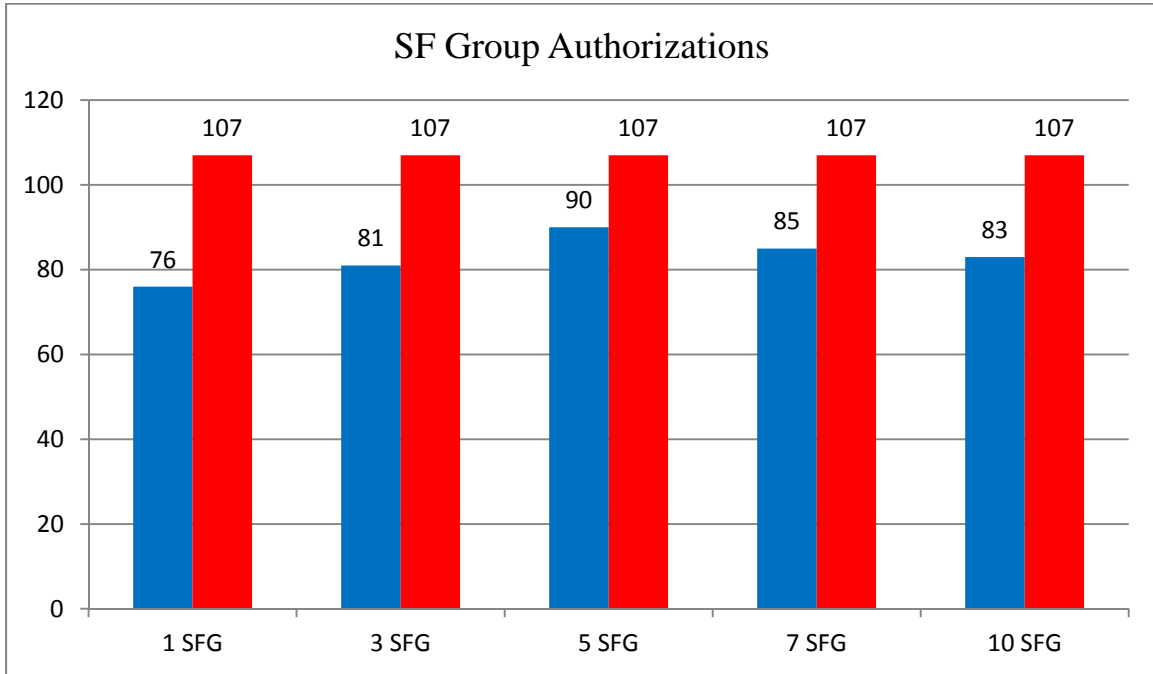
	ASGN	AUTH	% FILL
<b>W-5</b>	37	24	154%
<b>W-4</b>	119	90	132%
<b>W-3</b>	123	163	75%
<b>W-1/W-2</b>	258	343	75%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>87%</b>

\*Data provided by U.S. Army Human Resources Command

Figure 3. Group Authorizations (Top) and Total 180A Inventory (Bottom)

# 180A INVENTORY DEC 2013

Total 180A Strength **86%** (558/646)



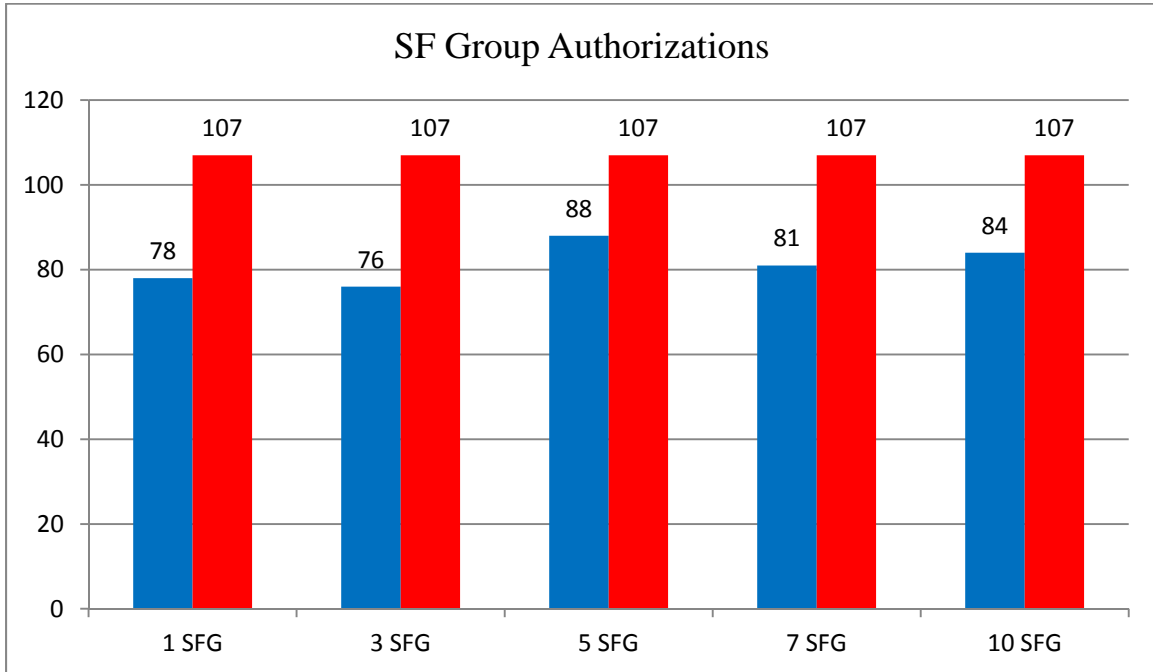
	ASGN	AUTH	% FILL
<b>W-5</b>	34	24	142%
<b>W-4</b>	101	91	111%
<b>W-3</b>	140	171	82%
<b>W-1/W-2</b>	283	360	79%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>86%</b>

\*Data provided by U.S. Army Human Resources Command

Figure 4. Group Authorizations (Top) and Total 180A Inventory (Bottom) December 2013

# 180A INVENTORY MAY 2014

Current Total 180A Strength **84%** (540/646)



	ASGN	AUTH	% FILL
<b>W-5</b>	34	18	189%
<b>W-4</b>	95	85	112%
<b>W-3</b>	138	184	75%
<b>W-1/W-2</b>	273	359	76%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>84%</b>

\*Data provided by U.S. Army Human Resources Command

Figure 5. Group Authorizations (Top) and Total 180A Inventory (Bottom) May 2014

*b. Qualitative*

This thesis will also use a semi-structured, qualitatively interpreted assessment process that utilizes grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss 1995) to gather in-depth insights in conditions affecting the decline in Special Forces warrant officers. Since there has been little to no published data concerning this endeavor, based on their expertise and experience, 10 current and former, top leader Special Forces warrant officers were selected to participate in this study. Additionally, one Special Forces commander and two Special Forces command sergeant majors were included to provide the perspective of the command team.

In order to gain insight into the major factors affecting recruitment and retention of the warrant officer regiment, discussions with senior experts were conducted over a two-week period. The discussions were semi-structured based on the senior expert's responses, and all discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed by the author. Each transcription has been subsequently verified by the senior expert. The core of each discussion period included the following questions: However, for reasons of confidentiality, the identities of the participants have not been linked to their individual comments. Instead, almost all comments derived from these discussions have been cited as "name withheld."

- 1) What difficulties has the Regiment seen with regard to the recruitment of Special Forces non-commissioned officers?
- 2) What are the current strategies regarding recruitment of Special Forces non-commissioned officers into the Special Forces warrant officer program?
- 3) What retention difficulties has the Regiment experienced with regards to Special Forces warrant officers?
- 4) How do we retain Special Forces warrant officers in the Regiment?
- 5) In what ways does civilian contract work affect Special Forces warrant officer retention?
- 6) What would be the expected benefit of changing the Regimental Table of Organization and Equipment with regards to recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers?

- 7) Can 18As (Special Forces officers) who are selected for separation transition to a Special Forces warrant officer?

#### **D. FINDINGS**

This thesis finds that the Regiment's issues with the recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers are affected by the limited recruitment pool of eligible non-commissioned officers and the lack of upward mobility to the senior warrant officer ranks.

The recruitment pool of eligible non-commissioned officers is limited by four major factors. First, the recruitment of Special Forces warrant officers can only draw from within the non-commissioned officer ranks of the Special Forces Regiment. This pool of candidates is further restricted by three additional factors that include a required skill set, a minimum language proficiency score of 1/1, which is quite low, in a designated language, and a set of service and school requirements, which include three years of service on an Operational Detachment Alpha and graduation from the Achilles Dagger course. Adding to these restrictions are four conditions within the Regiment, including competition for the best qualified non-commissioned officers, command emphasis on recruitment, pay disparity, and a perceived loyalty stigma, all of which further complicate the recruitment process.

In terms of retention, this thesis identifies the inability to be promoted to the senior warrant officer grades as a significant factor influencing retention. Overall, the greatest retention difficulty correlates to the regiment's over-strength CW5 grade plate population.

This thesis concludes by offering several recommendations for improving both recruitment and retention, including reducing the perceived stigma of transitioning to the warrant officer Corps; initiating a SERB, or other reduction mechanism, to address the over strength of the CW5 grade, maintaining the incentive bonus; and formalizing the 180A as an official member of the command team.

## **E. THESIS STRUCTURE**

This thesis proceeds as follows:

- Chapter II examines the significance of being a professional warrant officer and the responsibilities to society associated with that position. This chapter provides a longitudinal review of the United States Army warrant officer origins and discusses the history of the United States Army Special Forces warrant officer.
- Chapter III presents an overview of the policies for utilization of the Warrant Officer Corps.
- Chapter IV analyzes the quantitative and qualitative data gathered through discussions with the Regiment's "senior experts" regarding the sustainment of the Special Forces Regiment through the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officers.

This analysis includes a review of formal military doctrine, specific policies governing the Special Forces warrant officers, knowledge gained from other scholarly writings and personal discussions with 13 of the Regiment's "senior experts." Finally, this thesis provides conclusions and recommendations pertaining to the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officers.

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## II. THE ORIGINS

What does it mean to be a military professional and, more specifically, a professional military officer? First, consider the definition of what it means to be a professional. As defined by Huntington (1972) in his book *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military*, “professional” is defined as “the distinguishing characteristics of a profession as a special type of vocation are its expertise, responsibility, and corporateness” (p. 8). A professional individual is considered an expert within a specialized field through his knowledge and skill. This expertise can only be attained through protracted experience and education. It is crucial that the individual continue furthering his knowledge through institutions of higher education (Huntington, 1972, p. 8). This gained knowledge ensures the essential expansion and transmission of his specific expertise. Huntington adds, “Contact is maintained between the academic and practical sides of a profession through journals, conference, and the circulation of personnel between practice and teaching” (p. 8). A professional’s education can be divided into two phases: the first, a broad background in common core subjects normally provided by a general educational institution; and the second, a focus on the specialized knowledge and skills directed towards a specific profession that are gained through unique institutions associated with the vocation itself. The professional individual is an expert who performs a service that is crucial to the livelihood of a society. Doctors, professors, law enforcement personnel, and soldiers are all necessary for the functioning of a society. Furthermore, as Huntington observes that “the client of every profession is society, individually or collectively” (p. 9). The central disposition of the individual’s service and unique specialty requires that he respond to society when called upon; this, in essence, is the responsibility of a professional.

The career responsibility to respond to society when called upon distinguishes these specialized professionals from others. As Huntington (1972) proclaimed, “The responsibility to serve and devotion to his skill furnish the professional motive” (p. 9). Professional organizations preserve a sense of unity through their standards of competence and responsibility. The association with a professional organization,



possession of a specific skill set, and the responsibility to society distinguish the professional from the laymen. Furthermore—unlike professional individuals in the civilian sector—military professional officers maintain a specific central skill. Military officers contain the ability to manage violence during armed combat. Indeed, as Huntington asserts, “The direction, operation, and control of a human organization whose primary function is the application of violence is the peculiar skill of the officer” (p. 11).

#### **A. THE ORIGIN OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY WARRANT OFFICERS**

Public law in 1916 established a distinct and separate grade from traditional officers and enlisted members; those who served in this grade became known as warrant officers. Both historically and traditionally, United States Army warrant officers have been regarded as highly specialized technicians. The first warrant officers served as mates and chief engineers in the mine planter units of the Coast Artillery. In 1918, two warrant officer ranks were created, and within two years, there were more than a thousand authorized positions within the Army. However, Congress reduced this allocation by approximately 400 in 1926 (Brown, 1976, p. 19). A revision of the warrant officer rank took place in the 1930s when “the rank of warrant officer was a reward for outstanding performance to non-commissioned officers who were too old for a commission . . . this grade was not justified by organizational needs but was deemed justifiable solely on a reward basis” (Brown, 1976, p. 20).

The War Department provided little supervision and maintained a decentralized management system of its warrant officers during the Second World War. For this reason, neither the Army’s warrant officers specific population, nor their individual specialties were accurately documented. Furthermore, dissimilar to the Officer Corps, the Warrant Officer Corps did not contain a prescribed career developmental model. However, as Brown (1976) observes, “Following World War II, an incentive concept was adopted which was based on the idea of capping each enlisted career field with a warrant officer position” (p. 19). The pay grade composition established in 1949 remains similar to the grade composition utilized today, which contains the following ranks: warrant officer-one, chief warrant officer-two, chief warrant officer-three, and chief warrant

officer-four. The rank of chief warrant officer-five was established in 1992 under the Warrant Officer Management Act (Warrant Officers Heritage Foundation, 2013). The competence of the Army warrant officer spans nearly 100 years of institutional background, making the warrant officer the natural choice for maintaining continuity within the Special Forces Regiment.

## **B. THE ORIGIN OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL FORCES WARRANT OFFICER**

This thesis will next turn to the history of the United States Army Special Forces warrant officers. The following is the account of Colonel John H. Crerar regarding the initiative behind the creation of Special Forces warrant officers. Due to the lack of official documentation regarding the inception of the Special Forces warrant officer, Colonel Crerar composed a memorandum called “The Special Forces Warrant Officer, the Beginnings” for the current Special Forces warrant officers. Since nearly all of the documents concerning the creation of the Special Forces warrant officers were lost, Crerar’s account is generated primarily from his memory. According to Crerar (2013), “The development of the Special Forces warrant officer specialty was an inherent element in the devising of the Special Forces officer and enlisted specialties.”

In 1981, Chief of Staff of the Army General Edward C. Meyer directed that a study be conducted concerning the problems associated with special operations management. The Special Operations Personnel Career Management Study—more commonly referred to as the “18 Program”—was headed by Colonel Charles Beckwith and Crerar. Colonel Beckwith and Colonel Crerar alone comprised the study group. Additionally, Colonel Crerar was recalled from his retirement specifically to partake in this effort. Throughout July and August of 1981, Beckwith and Crerar devised their list of recommendations for General Meyer. Aside from a few trips to Washington, DC, most of their time was spent in John F. Kennedy Hall on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The colonels’ study included recommendations regarding all of the Army’s Special Operations Forces components. However, as Crerar (2013) states, “The problem that led to the consideration of warrant officers . . . was particular to [Army] Special Forces.” Under the current Table of Organization and Equipment for a Special Forces Operational

Detachment Alpha, the executive officer of the detachment was a lieutenant. Due to a lieutenant's limited time in service and minimal exposure to a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha—primarily due to additional obligations from his branch—a lieutenant's contributions to the detachment were limited. As Crerar succinctly notes, "Justly or not they [the lieutenants] were often viewed as burdens on their detachments." The colonels researched a variety of ways to recruit better qualified lieutenants; the best officers seemed to originate from the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Officer Candidate School, and the pool of those who were directly commissioned.

Even more important than possessing a formal education, the study group concluded that the most vital factor affecting successful leadership was previous military experience. Since a lieutenant served a mere four years prior to promotion to captain, and generally one year of that time was spent on additional schooling, most lieutenants did not gain sufficient experience to command a detachment effectively. The colonels first looked at the possibility of Officer Candidate School graduates, with their extensive enlisted time, filling this billet, but the numbers were still insufficient. According to Crerar (2013), "COL Beckwith suggested that Limited Duty Officers (LDO), similar to those in the Navy, who would be appointed from the ranks of senior SF Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) would offer a feasible solution." This idea was practical, but it was discarded after further investigation found it too difficult to gain the needed approval from the deputy chief of staff for personnel, Lieutenant General Max Thurman. Colonel Crerar remembered a conversation in which Colonel Paris Davis, a former commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group, mentioned one of his non-commissioned officers recommending the use of warrant officers in place of lieutenants. Sergeant First Class Scott Herbert, during a conversation with Davis on how to improve Special Forces, suggested the utilization of a warrant officer. Colonel Crerar proposed to Colonel Beckwith the idea of a warrant officer filling the position of a lieutenant. Beckwith at first thought the idea too radical, but upon further examination, concluded the concept would work.

As Crerar (2013) recalls, "Warrant officers would not only have the military experience that the lieutenants lacked, but, as they would come, it was assumed, from the

Special Forces Non-Commissioned Officers, they would have specific SF relevant knowledge and experience.” Additionally, the Special Forces warrant officers would provide a level of consistency to the Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha that was not feasible through officers who transitioned off the detachment after only a year or two. Furthermore, warrant officers could serve longer on the detachment through warrant officer-one and chief warrant officer-two pay grades—currently, “WO1/CW2s must successfully serve for a minimum of three years at the SFODA level” (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 171). In addition to the aforementioned benefits, the recruitment of warrant officers from the Special Forces non-commissioned officer ranks would support reducing the promotion blockage of Special Forces non-commissioned officers at the higher grades. Further research was conducted to ensure the study group was confronting the “what if” questions regarding the introduction of a warrant officer on an Operational Detachment Alpha (Crerar, 2013). One of the most pertinent concerns focused on the promotion opportunities available to warrant officers after their Operational Detachment Alpha time. While the answer was not immediately available, it was presumed that Special Forces warrant officers would ascend to positions within the battalion, group and Special Operations Command levels (Crerar, 2013).

On August 18, 1981, Major General James B. Vaught, accompanied by Colonels Beckwith and Crerar, briefed the Army’s chief of staff, General Edward C. Meyer, on the entire study and the proposed effects if implemented. The chief of staff had no objections to the proposed actions; he directed the study group brief its findings to the assistant chief of staff for Intelligence, the commander of the Military Personnel Center, and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (Crerar, 2013). After Colonel Beckwith retired, Major Lyle Drake joined Colonel Crerar and continued pressing the study group’s findings. According to Crerar (2013), “Almost every subordinate division and branch of each Army Staff directorate and each element of the Military Personnel Center were briefed, either formally or informally.” The study group encountered opposition by numerous offices and individuals, but Crerar and Drake were able to explain the relevance of the group’s findings, which quelled the oppositions’ doubts. Ironically, the Warrant Officers Division of the Military Personnel Center was opposed to adding Special Forces warrant

officers to their division. The chief of the division thought that the proposal was feasible but unacceptable due to the fact that the Special Forces warrant officers would have to “command” the detachment in the absence of a commissioned officer (Crerar, 2013). Colonel Crerar reminded the chief of the division that warrants commanded aircraft and ocean vessels; why, he asked, could a warrant officer not command a detachment?

Even though the Warrant Officers Division of Military Personnel Center remained against the concept, the division did not present any objections when Major General Arter, chief of the Military Personnel Center, was briefed on January 15, 1982. The deputy chief of staff for Personnel, Lieutenant General Thurman, and the deputy chief of staff for Operations, Lieutenant General William R. Richardson, signed a memorandum that was later presented to the Army’s Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, and forwarded to the Secretary of the Army, the Honorable John Marsh. The vital excerpt read, “We have agreed, after careful assessment, that a separate career system for Special Operations personnel is feasible and appropriate for enlisted personnel (CMF 18), warrant officers (MOS 018), and commissioned officers (SC 18)” (Crerar, 2013). The decision was made, and within one year, the position of the Special Forces warrant officer was created. Colonel Crerar, along with Colonel Beckwith and later Major Drake, had fought an uphill battle to initiate the inception of the warrant officer in Special Forces.

While both the origins of the United States Army warrant officer and the history surrounding the creation of the Army’s Special forces warrant officer are valuable and intriguing, neither account clearly illuminates the current problems concerning the decline in the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officers.

### III. UTILIZATION POLICIES FOR WARRANT OFFICERS

The policies for utilization, conditions for selecting warrant officer positions, and the directives for conversion to the present warrant officer military occupational specialty system were announced on April 12, 1960 in the Department of the Army Circular 611-7 publication. In 1966—six years after the publication of the Department of the Army Circular 611-7—the Department of the Army formed a study group to develop a Warrant Officer Professional Management System. The group was tasked to develop an official Warrant Officer Career Program, which would support the Army’s requirements in the utilization of the warrant officer and provide adequate career opportunities to these officers to ensure further recruitment of quality personnel. After examining the Warrant Officer Corps’ “pay, promotion, utilization, and education,” the group effectively initiated a tri-level education system that was established in 1972 (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 4). This system provided formal training for warrant officers throughout the entry, intermediate, and advance levels. Personnel Command—now the Army Human Resources Command—initiated the Warrant Officer Division in 1974. This division provided centralized management to all warrant officers, apart from those in the Judge Advocate and Army Medical Department. Since warrant officers were excluded in the 1981 Defense Officer Personnel Management Act—in which the officer career management was codified—the Army’s Chief of Staff, General John A. Wickham, chartered the *Total Warrant Officer Study*. The study, initiated in 1984, created a new definition for the warrant officer as follows:

An officer appointed by warrant by the Secretary of the Army based upon a sound level of technical and tactical competence. The warrant officer is the highly specialized expert and trainer, who, by gaining progressive levels of expertise and leadership, operates, maintains, administers, and manages the Army’s equipment, support activities, or technical systems for an entire career. (Warrant Officers Heritage Foundation, 2013, 1957 section)

In December of 1991, six years after the publication of the *Total Warrant Officer Study*, the Warrant Officer Management Act was signed into law. This document is the current foundation for warrant officer management today and serves as the counterpart of

the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act. The Warrant Officer Management Act provides for management of “warrant officers by years of warrant officer service rather than total service, [and] automatic RA integration at the Chief Warrant Officer-3 (CW3) level” (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 4). In addition, the act formally “created the rank of CW5, permitted selective retention and retirement, and eliminated the dual promotion system” (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 4). The Army’s Chief of Staff, General Gordon R. Sullivan, approved the *Warrant Officer Leader Development Action Plan* in February of 1992. This document furthered the groundwork of the Total Warrant Officer System and the Warrant Officer Management Act. The *Warrant Officer Leader Development Action Plan* focused on training, assignments and civilian education for warrant officers; it provided a blueprint for future warrant officers to follow. The Army Training and Leader Development Panel was chartered by the Army’s Chief of Staff in 2000, General Eric K. Shinseki. Under this study, the original warrant officer definition provided by the *Total Warrant Officer Study* was revised. The current definition of the Army warrant officer reads:

The warrant officer of the Future Force is a self-aware and adaptive technical expert, combat leader, trainer, and advisor. Through progressive levels of expertise in assignments, training, and education, the warrant officer administers, manages, maintains, operates, and integrates Army systems and equipment across the full range of Army operations. Warrant officers are innovative integrators of emerging technologies, dynamic teachers, confident warfighters, and developers of specialized teams of Soldiers. They support a wide range of Army missions throughout their careers. (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 4)

Today’s Army’s warrant officers are recruited, trained, developed, educated, evaluated, promoted and separated through the policies and procedures of the Officer Professional Management System.

However, despite the fact that the Army has utilized warrant officers for nearly 100 years, none of the previously mentioned policies reference the warrant officer as part of the command team. Yet Special Forces warrant officers, in the ranks of WO1 through CW2 and occasionally CW3, serve on Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas (SFOD-A) as the assistant detachment commander (ADC) and assume the role of

detachment commander in the absence of the commander. On a Special Forces Operational Detachment, the 180A is officially part of the command team. Primarily, the ADC serves as the detachment's chief of staff while focusing on operations and intelligence fusion during mission planning and execution (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 171). Some Special Forces warrant officers serve as commanders of specialized teams (United States Army Warrant Officer Recruiting, 2014). Special Forces CW3s primarily serve as company operations officers, focusing on operations and intelligence fusion during mission planning and execution; they also serve as senior warrant officer advisors to the commander regarding all warrant officer related professional development (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 172).

Additionally, CW3s can serve as battalion assistant operations warrant officers, instructors, or doctrine writers at the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS), and staff officers at the United States Army Special Forces Command (Airborne) (USASFC(A)), United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), or a Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 172). Special Forces CW4s primarily serve as battalion operations warrant officers focusing on operations and intelligence fusion during mission planning and execution. Additionally, CW4s serve as senior warrant officer advisors regarding all warrant officer-associated professional development. Furthermore, Special Forces CW4s remain eligible to serve as a Special Forces group's assistant operations warrant officer, staff officer at USASFC(A), USASOC, USSOCOM, JSOC, TSOC, or Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA) (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 172). The Special Forces CW5s serve as Command Chief Warrant Officers (CCWO) for Special Forces groups, TSOCs, USASFC, and the Chief Warrant Officer of the Branch (CWOB), advising their commanders on all warrant officer related professional development and other interests as directed. Additionally, CW5s can serve as group operations warrant officers, focusing on operations and intelligence fusion concerning mission planning and execution (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 173).



The Special Forces Regiment's Table of Organization and Equipment regarding warrant officers was revised on September 9, 2011 when Brigadier General Edward M. Reeder signed a policy that created the Command Chief Warrant Officer at the Special Forces Group headquarters level (United States Army Special Forces Command [USASFC], 2011). Each Special Forces Group's "command team" is now comprised of the colonel, command chief warrant officer, and the command sergeant major. This structural change was proposed in 2005 by the United States Army Special Forces Command, which asked the commanders of each active Special Forces Group if they concurred with creating a position in the command team for their senior warrant officer. According to Thomas, "We believe the time and need for change is today . . . this is an opportune time to transform the 180A program to ensure it is adapting to 'today's' reality" (June 28, 2005).

In that regard, this thesis will investigate whether including the Special Forces warrant officers into the command teams—at both the company and battalion levels—will encourage both recruitment and retention for the Regiment. Furthermore, while the historical utilization policies of the United States Army warrant officer are interesting, not one of these policies clearly addresses the current problems regarding the decline in both the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officers.

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Over the past five years, the recruitment of Special Forces non-commissioned officers into the warrant officer program has seen a continued statistically significant (p-value < 0.015) decrease in its warrant officer population from 88 percent in fiscal year (FY) 2010 to 84 percent in FY 2014 (see Table 1). The current total 180A shortage of 16 percent (540 assigned /646 authorized) is misleading in the fact that the current inventory is top heavy in terms of rank structure (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

Table 1. 2014 180A Assigned/Authorized Numbers

	<b>ASGN</b>	<b>AUTH</b>	<b>% FILL</b>
<b>W-5</b>	34	18	189%
<b>W-4</b>	95	85	112%
<b>W-3</b>	138	184	75%
<b>W-1/W-2</b>	273	359	76%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>84%</b>

\*Data for 2014 provided by Human Resources Command

The current assigned number of CW4s and CW5s represent 24 percent of the current warrant officer population, which is 25 percent above current authorizations (see Table 1). One potential reason for the Regiment's over populated CW5 grade plate is the fact that there remains no mechanism, with the exception of retirement, by which to remove CW5s from service. In accordance with AR135-32, CW5s are authorized to remain on active duty until age 62, or 30 years of warrant officer service. This, in turn, affects the subordinate grade plates' ability to be promoted.

As the Special Forces community looks at current operations and future growth, it quite likely needs to address the issue that its junior warrant officers (W1-CW3) are actually 24.3 percent under strength (see Table 1). In fact, over the last five years, this

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<sup>1</sup> The total 180A shortage of 16 percent also hides the SF Group shortage of 24 percent (407/535).

group has only averaged 78.3 percent assigned with the highest assigned level (81.4 percent) occurring in 2011. This critical shortage was clearly expressed by one commander who commented that, when he assumed command, the Special Forces warrant officers were “around 50 percent strength at the W01 and CW2 ranks. Half of my ODAs did not have assistant detachment commanders” (name withheld, personal communication, May 1, 2014).

Considering the current international disorder—and the understanding that W1s and CW3s work at the Operational Detachment Alpha level—it appears paramount that the Regiment focus on the recruitment of Special Forces warrant officers in order to negate this continued downward trend.

## **A. RECRUITMENT PROCESS AND PROBLEMS**

The current shortfall in warrant officers aside, the Regiment, according to one senior warrant officer, needs to access approximately 58 new warrant officers each year to maintain current levels (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014). Unfortunately, the Regiment has historically failed to achieve this number. The Warrant Officer Candidate School—now the Warrant Officer Technical and Tactical Course—only graduated 21 new Special Forces warrant officers in June of 2002. The following class contained only 12 graduates, and the subsequent class contained zero graduates.<sup>2</sup> As a second senior warrant officer observed, “We have had an ebb and flow of recruitment for some time, the last time we met our recruiting goal was approximately seven years ago” (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014). The recruitment of non-commissioned officers into the Special Forces warrant officer program, though, remains difficult due to the small pool from which candidates are eligible. The current process and set of policies, under ideal conditions, establishes a narrow pool of candidates.

### **1. Process**

In order to sustain the Special Forces Regiment, the Regiment needs to continue to recruit the right Special Forces non-commissioned officers at the right time during

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<sup>2</sup> This is drawn from the author’s personal experience as a 2002 cohort graduate.

their career. There are currently four major factors that limit this pool of non-commissioned officers as potential candidates. First, the recruitment of Special Forces warrant officers can only originate from within the non-commissioned officer ranks of the Special Forces Regiment. This establishes an initial recruiting pool that is further reduced in size by the fact the current non-commissioned officer strength in the Regiment is at 96% (personal communication with 180A Proponency, Human Resource Command, November 4, 2014). Within this initial pool of candidates, there are three additional factors affecting recruitment: a required skill set, language proficiency, and service requirements, all of which further restrict the size of the recruitment pool. In order to be eligible for recruitment, the non-commissioned officer must have completed the Special Forces Qualification Course and maintain a military occupational specialty as an 18B (weapons sergeant), 18C (engineer sergeant), 18D (medical sergeant), 18E (communications sergeant), 18F (intelligence sergeant), or 18Z (operations sergeant). Additionally, the non-commissioned officer must have a minimum Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) score of 1/1 in his designated language. Finally, the non-commissioned officer must have served on an Operational Detachment Alpha for a minimum of three years, graduated from the Achilles Dagger course, and have less than 17 years of active federal service. These additional constraints reduce the pool of candidates. A U.S. Army Research Institute review of the September 2003 Enlisted Master File (EMF) suggests that this pool of eligible candidates could be as low as 2–6 percent of the SF NCO population.

The Regiment attempts to target and incentivize the best candidates from this small pool to transfer into the 180A program. Under the best of situations, this narrow recruiting pool makes achieving recruitment goals difficult, but there are at least three additional conditions within the Regiment complicating the recruitment process: command emphasis on recruitment, pay disparity, and a perceived loyalty stigma.

## **2. Problem**

Understandably, one will always find senior enlisted members who are completely loyal to the NCO Corps; they have developed their young soldiers to emulate them. As one senior warrant officer observed in confirming this tendency, “Undoubtedly, as the NCO Corps develops these great non-commissioned officers, they want to keep them within their ranks” (name withheld, personal communication, August 7, 2014). Four senior experts for this thesis commented on the fact that some non-commissioned officers simply do not want to become warrant officers. As one senior warrant officer noted, “Some have aspirations of being a team sergeant or SGM, which is acceptable because we need stellar NCOs as well” (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014). Supporting this observation, another senior leader stated that “the NCO Corps has some phenomenal individuals who want to become team sergeants, and rightfully so, since they are the backbone of the team” (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014). Several additional senior Special Forces warrant officers shared the same sentiment and also recognized that although it is paramount that the Corps selects the right NCOs to transition, it is completely understandable that many NCOs want to be a CSM (name withheld, personal communication, September 18, 2014), and as one CSM stated, “Many junior NCOs, like me, wanted to be a team sergeant” (name withheld, personal communication, October 13, 2014). Consequently, the desire to recruit aspiring, top performing NCOs can be problematic, as stated by one CSM who offered, “Too many times commanders and CSMs take it personal when soldiers within their formations want to challenge themselves by attending other courses/schools within the Army; they should see it as an opportunity to make the entire force better” (name withheld, personal communication, October 13, 2014). This conflict between the NCO corps and Special Forces fosters a tension between two competing choices: to groom top performing NCOs to become future CSMs in the Regiment, or to support and emphasize a transition to a warrant officer.

A healthy competitive environment for the best qualified non-commissioned officer requires strong command emphasis and leadership. During the discussions conducted for this thesis, issues regarding the probability of promotion and the lack of

command emphasis on a solid recruitment program were specifically addressed by several senior experts. As one senior warrant officer stated, “The number one issue affecting the lack of adequate recruitment of Special Forces non-commissioned officers into the Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps is the lack of command emphasis” (name withheld, personal communication, October 3, 2014). One CSM commented that “until the Warrant Officer Corps initiates a better way to manage its most senior ranks—and shows there is room for promotion—why crossover?” (name withheld, personal communication, October 13, 2014). One possible solution would be for command teams from the battalion level and higher to set clear policies that place the emphasis on filling the ranks with the right personnel.

Almost one-third (4/13) of the senior experts for this thesis commented directly on the issue of pay disparity. All believed that one major factor in the decline in recruitment was primarily due to the reduction in pay graduates experienced when transitioning from a Sergeant First Class to a Warrant Officer-One (name withheld, personal communication, August 11, 2014). The Special Forces Regiment’s leadership realized the disparity in pay was creating a grave sustainment problem. By 2005, warrant officer-one(s) began to receive “save-pay,” which offset their reduction in salary. Although this compensation assisted current Warrant Officer-One(s), it was not enough to attract the high quality NCOs needed to sustain the Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps. Today’s Special Forces non-commissioned officers who successfully complete the 20-week Warrant Officer Technical and Tactical Course are eligible to receive an accession bonus of \$20,000 through the Critical Skills Accessions Bonus (CSAB).

Qualified warrant officers will be paid a lump sum amount of \$20,000 upon technical certification at completion of the Warrant Officer Technical and Tactical certification Course for MOS 180A, incurring a six-year active duty service obligation upon approval by AHRC. (Military Personnel HRC, 2013)

This bonus was enacted to increase the retention of Special Operation Forces by assisting in the recruitment of Special Forces warrant officers (HRC, 2013). However, the continuing reduction of the military’s budget threatens this accession’s bonus authorization every year.

However, warrant officer pay was a significant issue prior to the targeted pay raises. Previously, according to a senior leader, there was no accessions bonus incentive or retention incentive bonus to balance out this disparity (name withheld, personal communication, August 7, 2014). As a second senior leader asked, “Why would an individual volunteer to take on more responsibility as the Assistant Detachment Commander (ADC), and potentially be the detachment commander, and make less monetarily?” (name withheld, personal communication, August 7, 2014). A senior warrant officer recalled that during a visit to the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis (OEMA) at West Point in 2003, “we gleaned the information on pay disparities and thus initiated and requested the 180A Critical Skills Accessions Bonus (CSAB)” (name withheld, personal communication, August 7, 2014). Ironically, the OEMA data gathered was utilized then by USASOC to initiate an enlisted critical skills retention bonus (CSRB); however, the 180As were not included. Fortunately, the 180As were able to readdress the issue and initiate the CSRB for warrant officers as well (name withheld, personal communication, August 7, 2014). In that regard, one CSM noted that the best recruitment tool available to offset the loss in pay when transitioning from a Sergeant First Class (SFC) to a Warrant Officer-One (WO1) was to offer “save pay.” He stated, “I believe that offering save pay is a better incentive than the CSAB of \$20,000” (name withheld, personal communication, September 30, 2014). Unfortunately, as a senior warrant officer pointed out, there exist numerous NCOs who do not know about the CSAB.

I believe an improved recruitment marketing approach within the groups would prove beneficial. A simple poster promulgating the \$20,000 CSAB, leadership opportunities, promotion opportunities, extended ODA time, military schools, and higher civilian education opportunities incurred when transitioning to a warrant officer would greatly assist in our recruitment effort. (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014)

A second obstacle to recruitment, in addition to the perceived disparity in pay, was expressed by a majority (8/13) of the senior experts, who feel a stigma still exists—perpetrated by the NCO Corps—with regard to a soldier transitioning to a Special Forces warrant officer. For example, one senior leader observed,

In my 18 years in the Regiment, the problem I saw early on was the stigma against becoming a warrant officer, or an officer for that matter. I saw multiple instances where team sergeants—and other senior NCOs—would try to talk a junior NCO out of becoming a warrant officer. (name withheld, personal communication, May 1, 2014)

The impression exists that senior NCOs promulgate the perception of disloyalty to the NCO Corps—and the Regiment—if an individual decides to transition to a warrant officer. According to one leader, “Overall, the greatest difficulty has been the stigma that the NCO has no loyalty to the NCO Corps” (name withheld, personal communication, August 11, 2014). However, this perception is not universal throughout the regiment. One senior warrant officer stated his group sustained no stigma issues regarding the recruitment of NCOs into the Warrant Officer Corps (name withheld, personal communication, September 18, 2014). Furthermore, one CSM stated he had not witnessed a great deal of difficulty regarding recruitment of Special Forces NCOs into the warrant officer program; rather, he actually observed a growth of Special Forces warrant officers at the detachment level (name withheld, personal communication, September 30, 2014). Overall, it appears there still exists a concern with the loyalty stigma associated when an NCO attempts to transition to the Warrant Officer Corps. As noted by one senior warrant officer, “We still have some senior NCOs that do not support the program 100 percent . . . they begrudgingly support it” (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014).

## **B. RETENTION PROBLEMS**

Five of the 13 senior experts directly referenced the inability to be promoted as a factor influencing retention. The remaining eight senior experts did not have a direct observation of promotion as a potential issue and therefore did not comment on it. Overall, the greatest retention difficulty correlates to the regiment’s over-strength CW5 grade plate population. For example, the Regiment had 51 CW4s eligible for CW5 in 2014, four above the zone, 20 in the primary zone, and 27 below the zone. Out of the 51 eligible CW4s, though, only six were selected for promotion to the grade of CW5 (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014). As noted by one senior warrant officer, the younger warrant officer population is contemplating, “What is my potential



for promotion now . . . when the CW4 and CW5 grade plates are over strength?” (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014). According to a second senior leader, “Senior CW3s and CW4s recognize the Regiment contains 20 authorized positions for CW5s, yet we currently have 35 CW5s still serving; with an additional six that were just selected for promotion.” He added,

To alleviate this, we need to initiate a Selective Early Retirement Board. The Regiment needs to remove those CW5s that are only moving laterally, or filling CW3 or CW4 billets. (name withheld, personal communication, September 18, 2014)

The Regiment currently contains some very talented CW4s who may be forced out because the Regiment has too many CW5s in service. As a senior warrant officer admitted, “The biggest waste I have seen is at the CW4 level, the promotions are just not there” (name withheld, personal communication, August 11, 2014). That warrant officer’s assessment was supported by others, one of whom acknowledged, “There is no process in place to ensure CW5s retire in a timely basis to make room for upward mobility of mid-grade warrant officers” (name withheld, personal communication, October 3, 2014). The promotion to CW4 and CW5 is strained due to the limited number of billets. One CSM stated, “There should be a separation board or a Retention Control Point—built into the rank structure—in order to sustain the most qualified warrant officers” (name withheld, personal communication, October 13, 2014).

One additional area of noted concern among the senior experts is the impact of bonuses on retention. Dissimilar to the NCO Corps, the opportunity for warrant officers to receive bonuses is limited. Since the Regiment’s senior warrant officers decided to decline the Assignment Incentive Pay, the qualified mid-grade warrant officers face a limited chance at promotion and no longer have the opportunity to receive the AIP bonus (name withheld, personal communication, October 13, 2014). While against receiving the AIP bonus, a senior leader noted, “Although we still receive \$20,000 for the CSAB and \$150,000 for the CSRB, the Army withdrew the ability to draw both bonuses concurrently . . . this included other warrant officer MOSs as well” (name withheld, personal communication, August 7, 2014). Accordingly, individuals with 12 years of service are advised to accept the CSAB, and those with 16 years of service are advised to

apply for the CSRB after two years (see Table 2). In order to retain high-quality Special Forces operators, some individuals believe the Regiment must continue incentivizing through bonuses; others speculate these bonuses will vanish due to current financial constraints (name withheld, personal communication, August 7, 2014).

Additionally, individual senior experts commented on the CSRB and outside organizations affecting retention. For example, one senior warrant officer contends the CSRB remains relevant in order to keep warrant officers until 25 years of service (name withheld, personal communication, August 8, 2014). Essentially, Special Forces warrant officers who have completed their six-year active duty service obligation and are retirement eligible possess—as a second senior warrant officer observed—a wealth of experience and knowledge. Consequently, they become marketable to outside organizations. (name withheld, personal communication, September 18, 2014). Such civilian organizations typically offer a greater salary when compared to the Army.

Table 2. Critical Skills Retention Bonus  
(after Under Secretary of Defense, 2013)

Grade	YOS	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	6 Years
CW2/CW3	19-23	\$18,000	\$30,000	\$50,000	\$75,000	\$150,000

However, a few of the senior experts noted that the Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSAB) has bolstered the Regiment’s ability to retain its talented Special Forces warrant officers for the future and that both the (CSAB) and the Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) have assisted with the recruitment and retention of the Regiment’s Special Forces warrant officers (names withheld, personal communications, August 7 & 8, 2014).

Unfortunately, though, these financial initiatives still appear insufficient by themselves to meet recruitment and retention objectives.

**C. POTENTIAL REMEDIES**

Assessment of the collected data were initially analyzed using grounded theory to identify the range of concepts and themes within the data set related to potential solutions

for the Regiment’s recruitment and retention problems. This thesis used categorical analysis to identify passages and group related themes to identify basic concepts and to potentially identify a set of concepts with broad consensus among the leaders. Senior expert’s responses were classified using three levels of assessment (i.e., disagree, moderately agree, and strongly agree) for each of the identified concepts. These ratings were assigned based on responses to the core set of discussion questions. Passages from all parts of the discussion were coded, examined, and used to confirm or modify the assessment. Table 3 provides the categorized scores for each of the 13 senior leaders for each major recruitment and retention concept. The five concepts identified in Table 3 offer potential methods of improving both recruitment and retention.

Table 3. Concepts of Improving of Recruitment and Retention

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Disagree	Not Addressed
Command Emphasis of the 180A Program	11	0	0	2
Reduce Perceived Stigma of the NCO Corps	7	1	1	4
Initiate a SERB for the CW5 Grade	10	0	0	3
Maintain Monetary Incentive	12	0	0	1
Formalize the 180A as an Official Member of the Command Team	10	1	2	0

In order to further stimulate the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officer, the Regiment’s commanders may need to demonstrate greater emphasis of the 180A program. From the non-commissioned officers’ accessions into the Special Forces warrant officer program, through their professional development and career management, commanders and command sergeant majors may need to make the recruitment of Special Forces warrant officers a priority.

Senior leaders should take a more active role in addressing the perceived stigma associated with a Special Forces non-commissioned officer transitioning to a Special Forces warrant officer. The Special Forces warrant officer program only strengthens the

Regiment; the issue of disloyalty to the non-commissioned officers Corps should be replaced with a sense of the loyalty to the Regiment.

The quantitative data gathered from the Army's Human Resources Command in May 2014 illustrates the Regiment's Special Forces warrant officer CW5 grade plate population at 189 percent strength, because there is no incentive for CW5s to leave, and no structural process for them to be encouraged to leave. Irrefutably, this over-strength grade plate hampers the upward growth of the Regiment's CW4 population. Consequently, stellar CW4s are being forced out of service due to the Regiment's inability to mandate a retirement of its CW5 grade plate. The Regiment should consider initiating a Selective Early Retirement Board for CW5s who no longer remain relevant to the force.

The Regiment should continue its efforts to incentivize the recruitment of its Special Forces non-commissioned officers into the Special Forces warrant officer program and incentivize the current Special Forces warrant officers to remain in service beyond their six year active duty service obligation. Some incentive bonuses should be continued in order to ensure no pay disparities exist when a Special Forces non-commissioned officer transitions to a Special Forces warrant officer.

The Special Forces warrant officer, at both the company and battalion levels, should be included as part of the command team. At the Operational Detachment Alpha level, the Special Forces warrant officer is the assistant detachment commander; he commands the detachment in the absence of the commander and commands half of the element during split detachment operations. According to the Table of Organization and Equipment, the next level in the organization at which the Special Forces warrant officer officially is considered part of the command team occurs at the Special Forces Group headquarters. Including Special Forces warrant officers into the command teams earlier in their career may properly develop them for future service as the group—or higher—command chief warrant officer.

The next chapter will summarize the findings from this thesis and offer concluding thoughts and recommendations based on these findings.

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## V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis examined the significance of being a professional officer, provided a brief history of the United States Army warrant officer, discussed the origins of the United States Army Special Forces warrant officer, and presented an overview of the utilization policies for the Warrant Officer Corps as a whole. The health of the Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps relies on the continued recruitment of the Special Forces non-commissioned officer and the sustainment of the current Special Forces warrant officer. Therefore, the Regiment should address both the current and historical problems surrounding the continued decline of its warrant officer population.

Through gathered quantitative and qualitative data, this thesis identified a historical problem concerning the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officer. The quantitative data gathered from the Army's Human Resources Command depicts a continuous decline in the health of the Special Forces warrant officer cohort from FY 2010 through FY 2014. As of May, 2014, the 180A inventory validated the overall strength of the Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps as 16 percent under its authorized strength—junior warrant officers (W1-CW3) are actually 24.3 percent under strength. Building upon the findings from the quantitative data gathered, this thesis examined seven research questions centered on the problems surrounding the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officer. First, what difficulty has the Regiment seen with regard to the recruitment of Special Forces non-commissioned officers? Second, what are the current strategies regarding recruitment of Special Forces non-commissioned officers into the Special Forces warrant officer program? Third, what retention difficulty has the Regiment experienced with regards to Special Forces warrant officers? Fourth, how do we retain Special Forces warrant officers in the Regiment? Fifth, in what ways does civilian contract work affect Special Forces warrant officer retention? Sixth, what would be the expected benefit of changing the Regimental Table of Organization and Equipment with regards to recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers? Seventh, can 18As (Special Forces officers) who are selected for separation transition to a Special Forces warrant officer?

The qualitative data gathered through conducting discussions with 13 of the Regiment's top experts exposed numerous problems regarding both the recruitment of Special Forces non-commissioned officers into the Special Forces warrant officer program and the retention of the Regiment's current Special Forces warrant officers Corps. Based on the consensus from the field research conducted, this thesis proposes the following principal modifications be incorporated to reverse this historical trend and bring the Regiment's Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps to 100 percent.

**A. FORMALIZE THE 180A AS AN OFFICIAL MEMBER OF THE COMMAND TEAM**

One area of influence that would greatly assist in the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officer is the revision of the Regiment's Table of Organization and Equipment—or a policy change initiated by USASFC—to include the 180A as an integral part of the command team. The Special Forces warrant officer, at both the company and battalion levels, should be included as part of the command team. At the Operational Detachment Alpha level, the Special Forces warrant officer is the assistant detachment commander; he commands the detachment in the absence of the commander and commands half of the element during split detachment operations. According to the Table of Organization and Equipment, the next level in the organization for which he officially is considered part of the command team is at the Special Forces Group headquarters.

Incorporating Special Forces warrant officers into the command teams earlier in their career could properly develop them for future service as the group—or higher—command chief warrant officer. Moreover, exposing 180As to a command team climate likely will prove beneficial to the Regiment as a whole.

Whether through a Table of Organization and Equipment change or through the initiation of a policy, the inclusion of the Special Forces warrant officer into the command team, at both the company and battalion levels, would likely assist in the recruitment and retention of the Regiment's warrant officer population. Moreover, this incentive would cost the Regiment nothing.

## **B. MAINTAIN INCENTIVE BONUSES**

As confirmed by the qualitative data gathered, the Regiment should continue to incentivize the recruitment of its Special Forces non-commissioned officers into the Special Forces warrant officer program and incentivize the current Special Forces warrant officers to remain in service beyond their six-year active duty service obligation. Some type of incentive bonus, therefore, should be continued in order to ensure that pay disparities do not exist when a Special Forces non-commissioned officer transitions to a Special Forces warrant officer.

The Critical Skills Accession Bonus (CSAB) has successfully bridged the pay gap that negatively affected the recruitment of Special Forces non-commissioned officers in previous years. Since the ability to receive the bonus tax-free is diminishing—due to the reduction of combat deployments—the Regiment might consider increasing the incentive bonus to counter this issue. As an alternative to offering the CSAB, the Regiment could promote active duty E-7s directly to CW2—a promotion mechanism currently used by the National Guard. However, it should be noted that this change could reduce the individual's amount of time on an Operational Detachment Alpha, and increased time on an ODA is one reason non-commissioned officers choose to transition.

The Regiment's Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB), currently offered to the Special Forces non-commissioned officers, should remain equivalent to the incentive offered to the Special Forces warrant officers. A disparity in the incentive amount offered to the non-commissioned officers' Corps could adversely affect both the recruitment and retention of Special Forces warrant officers. Additionally, the Regiment should consider permitting Special Forces warrant officers and non-commissioned officers the opportunity to receive the CSRB prior to 19 years of service.

## **B. INITIATE A SERB FOR OVER STRENGTH CW5 GRADE PLATE**

The quantitative data gathered from the Army's Human Resources Command in May 2014 illustrates the Regiment's Special Forces warrant officer CW5 grade plate population at 189 percent strength. This over-strength grade plate hampers the upward growth of the Regiment's CW4 population. Stellar CW4s are leaving service due to the



Regiment's inability to mandate retirements of its CW5 grade plate. The Regiment should initiate a Selective Early Retirement Board for CW5s who no longer remain relevant to the force.

**C. REDUCE PERCEIVED STIGMA OF THE NCO CORPS**

Senior leaders should actively address the perceived stigma associated with a Special Forces non-commissioned officer transitioning to a Special Forces warrant officer. This issue affects not just the non-commissioned Officer Corps, the Warrant Officer Corps, or the Officer Corps, but the health of the regiment as a whole. Senior non-commissioned officers should understand the transition of their younger soldiers into the Special Forces warrant officer program only strengthens the Regiment. Command emphasis should be placed on recruiting stellar non-commissioned officers to fill the Special Forces Warrant Officer Corps. The Special Forces warrant officer program needs to be embraced by the non-commissioned Officer Corps. Remove the stigma; one team, one fight!

**D. TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN EMPHASIZING THE 180A PROGRAM**

In order to further stimulate the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officer, the Regiment's commanders should assume an active role in emphasizing the 180A program from the non-commissioned officers' accessions into the Special Forces warrant officer program through their professional development and career management. Sergeant majors and command sergeant majors should also assume a commensurate level of ownership. Ensuring the right individuals transition, with the support of the non-commissioned officer corps, will further the credibility of the program and assist in diminishing the perceived stigma previously promulgated when a non-commissioned officer transitions into the warrant officer cohort.

The process of gathering the qualitative data described in this thesis drawn from discussions with 13 of the Regiment's top experts consumed an estimated 247 hours. This thesis empirically identified the current and historical factors affecting the recruitment and retention of the Special Forces warrant officer. In order to reverse the decline of the Special Forces warrant officer population, this thesis proposes the Regiment's leadership

observe and incorporate the above-mentioned principal recommendations. If not, the Regiment's warrant officer population will likely further deteriorate.

Unfortunately, this author was unable to contact all of the Regiment's command chief warrant officers. In further research, this author would recommend incorporating the insights from the remainder of these leaders and including additional thoughts from commanders and command sergeant majors. Additionally, this author would recommend contacting recently promoted Warrant Officer-Ones in order to gain further insight into the younger Special Forces warrant officer cohort's reasoning for transitioning.

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