
White Paper

Officer Management in 2040:
Developing Officers like a Winning
Major League Baseball Franchise



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Officer Management in 2040: Developing Officers like a Winning Major League Baseball Franchise

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ABSTRACT: *Officer accessions is the Army's means to identify, develop, and integrate professional military officers into specific specialties that best accomplish the Army's core responsibilities. In a global environment characterized by rapid technological modernization, this article examines how the current accession/leader development model prepares officers for the battlefield of 2040.*

The authors assert that rising global trends—geopolitical disputes, rapid transformation, and the diffusion of technology—shift the nature of warfare toward a dual domain: machine-centric conflict alongside analog, human-centric conflict. The current officer accessions leader development outcomes remain aligned with the goal of producing officers ready to fight and win our nation's wars. However, to promote the technical core competencies required of officers to succeed within machine-centric conflict, the authors propose a future force structure taking inspiration from the major league baseball franchise: a small, elite active-duty force operating at the forefront of evolving technologies, and a larger ready-reserve tailored for human-centric warfare, equipped with ample developmental opportunities for transition to active duty. These insights highlight the evolving demands and competencies officers will need to win in future warfare.

Introduction. The U.S. Army's enduring purpose —“to fight and win our Nation's wars”—remains constant even as the character of war transforms dramatically. By 2040, the Army officer's role in warfighting is vastly different on a machine-centric battlefield, yet the officer corps' foundational responsibilities remain unchanged: **Lead warfighting, Deliver Ready Combat Formations, Envision Future Warfighting, and Protect the Profession (civilian authority)** (Adapted from the Army homepage, four focus areas, [The Army's Vision and Strategy | The United States Army](#)). The Nation entrusts the Army with this responsibility: to develop professional military officers capable of leading across any operational environment. The three primary commissioning sources—The United States Military Academy (USMA), Army Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), and Officer Candidate School (OCS)—each develop officers against five leader development outcomes: warfighting, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, the professional military ethic, and holistic health and fitness (Figure 1). These outcomes are as essential to officer development in 2026 as they will be in 2040. However, when the second lieutenants of 2026 become field grade officers in 2040, war will be decidedly and potentially unrecognizably different from today.

Army Officer Corps' Responsibilities



**Officer Accessions
Leader Development Outcomes**

Figure 1. The five leader development outcomes required for Officers to Fight and Win our Nation's Wars in 2026 and 2040.

The transformation will be defined by a fundamental dichotomy. Future combat will be machine-centric – victory shaped by the connectivity, sustainability, and lethality of advanced systems: drones, machine learning platforms, and long-range precision weapons. Visionary entrepreneur Elon Musk elaborated on this observation during a fireside chat at West Point: the logic of this battlefield may become ruthlessly mathematical: outcomes determined by drone mass and kill rates, rendering individual Soldier lethality insufficient and casualty rates unacceptable ([Inside West Point: The Future of Technology in Warfare with Mr. Elon Musk](#)). Yet the Army must simultaneously prepare its officers to fight and win on an analog battlefield, one stripped of networks, reliant on legacy sensors and communications, and demanding timeless tactical competence. The officer corps of 2040 must be capable of dominating in both machine-centric and analog battlefields.

Officer accessions are already modernizing professional military education for field-grade officers, integrating artificial intelligence into operational planning and wargaming exercises to enhance analysis and decision speed. This reality also makes it imperative to critically examine which force structure is necessary for the officer corps to win in future conflict, and how officer accessions develop and allocate talent. Meeting the demands of 2040 requires more than incremental adjustment – it demands a fundamentally different accession and talent management model to form a smaller, competitively selected active-duty force paired with a larger, developed reserve

component. This model draws from proven talent pipelines outside the military, akin to a major league baseball franchise, where talent is refined in the reserve force (minor leagues) with the opportunity to transition to more specialized roles within the active duty (major leagues).

The Leader Development Outcomes. Officer accessions trains five leader development outcomes that align with and support the four responsibilities of the *Army Officer Corps*.

Warfighting: Training infantry tactics at the individual through platoon-level and proficiency in Warrior Skills. Level I is foundational and has remained consistent for the past 100 years of warfighting.

Problem-solving, Creative & Critical Thinking: A rigorous undergraduate academic program accomplishes these outcomes. USMA has direct control of this through its core curriculum and academic majors. ROTC and OCS reinforce these qualities through scholarships awarded and candidate selection with field training and class exercises.

Professional Military Ethic: Central to our Army's strength is its submission to civilian authority and professional conduct. Officers protect the profession by ensuring they understand the responsibilities of the oath of office and professional standards. At USMA, this is referred to as "character development."

Holistic Health & Fitness: Close combat is the most mentally, physically, physiologically, and spiritually demanding activity for human beings. Cadets develop and embrace the disciplines, habits, knowledge, and aptitudes needed to maintain continual combat readiness.

These leader development outcomes were as relevant to producing officers in 1925 or 1940 as they are in 2026 and will be in 2040. As Field Manual No. 1 illustrates through historical examples, any individual, whether a corporal or dentist, can apply these outcomes in warfighting and change the result of a battle. This principle forms the foundation of officer development.

Duality of Warfare in 2040: The branches and responsibilities of company and field-grade officers in 2040 will differ significantly from those of today. While the precise conditions of future warfare remain uncertain, current trends point to the operational environment of the future. Three broad developments are reshaping how the Army postures to fight and win: the intensification of territorial conflicts driven by geopolitical competition, the rapid transformation of combat capabilities, structures, and tactics, and the proliferation of advanced technologies among both state and non-state actors.

Increasing instability along global political boundaries continues to prompt nations to employ all instruments of power as tools of deterrence. Former Chief of Staff of the Army General Randy George illustrated this dynamic before Congress, highlighting how posturing a mid-range fires system in the Philippines deterred Chinese aggression while serving as "a symbol of deterrence, strength, and partnership."([Posture of the Army Address](#)). Beyond physical positioning, the accelerating pace of doctrinal change, the integration of artificial intelligence, and the demands of weapon systems require the Army to continuously modernize its capabilities while countering those of our adversaries. Additionally, this environment places greater emphasis on fostering creativity and adaptability at every echelon, enabling "transformation in contact" to establish and maintain the advantage against a variety of threats.

Within the last decade, acquisition reform within the Army prioritized streamlining decision-making processes and the shift from platform- and program-centric acquisitions to capability-based funding ([Army Transformation and Acquisition Reform](#)). The increasing expansion of more connected and destructive systems for actors across all levels of conflict, particularly at the tactical level, drives transformation to counter enemy assets and establish a technological advantage. However, for future Army officers, possessing the creative and critical thinking required to integrate modern systems into their warfighting function is just as crucial as possessing the systems themselves.

On a machine-centric battlefield, units rapidly acquire, disseminate, and analyze information to make informed actions, achieve key objectives, and win. In a resource-constrained environment, this also shifts the way combat effectiveness is measured: quantitative metrics—drone range, detectability, and cost-effectiveness—may better capture battlefield performance than traditional indicators alone. Meeting these demands requires officers and Soldiers who can translate modern capabilities into warfighting success, not merely operate them.

That force will be smaller and more lethal. A relatively small number of highly effective officers and Soldiers will operate within multi-domain formations, leveraging advanced technology across all domains to deter and/or defeat adversaries. This interoperable battlespace demands more than technical proficiency; it also requires officers capable of analyzing intelligence from various systems, conducting adaptive planning under pressure, and executing comprehensive tasks in degraded conditions. TRADOC pamphlet “The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028” highlights that the Army must “excise careful talent management” to ensure “high-quality personnel” who can “thrive in ambiguity and chaos” ([TRADOC, 2018](#)).

Conversely, the word “chaos” described not only the friction inherent in any complex operational environment, but also the specific conditions of a contested machine-centric battlefield, one in which modern systems are paralyzed or inoperable. The Army cannot assume technological superiority will persist. Officers of 200 must be equally prepared to fight and win when the network is down, drones are grounded, and the analog battlefield reemerges. This duality, requiring officers who thrive in both machine-centric and analog warfare, must be treated as a design requirement. For future warfare, therefore, our concept of service and obligation must transform. The Army will need far fewer active-duty officers to operate and lead within multi-domain formations, but will require a much larger guard & reserve force ready to fight when technological overmatch is neutralized or denied. Figure 2 illustrates a proposed Army force structure in 2040. The active-duty force will continue to conduct five types of operations: offensive and defensive operations, stability, defense support of civil authorities, and special operations. In conventional warfare, offensive, defensive, and some special operations will be mostly machine-centric, with an exceedingly small force structure required to support. Conversely, stability, defense support of civil authorities, and other special operations will remain predominantly human-centric and require an appropriately trained force structure to execute that mission set. Additionally, terrain, weather, and temperature may continue to restrict certain conflicts to a mostly human-centric battlefield: for example, arctic temperatures may continue to restrict drone use due to severe battery degradation in sub-zero temperatures. The lesson is consistent—whether locally, regionally, or globally, a force structured exclusively around technological superiority remains vulnerable to negation. An adaptive force with a ready officer corps reserve is the decisive hedge.

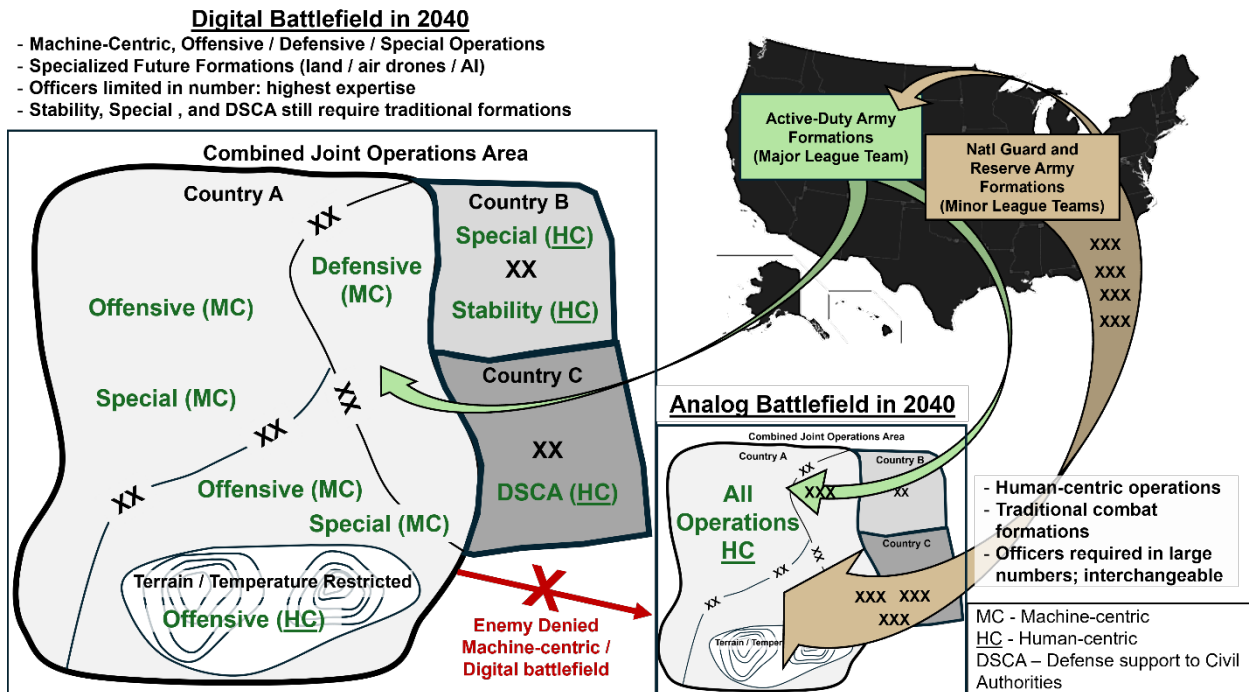


Figure 2. In 2040, the Army must be able to fight and win on two distinct battlefields: digital and analog. The digital battlefield is machine-centric, requiring a small number of expert officers for offensive, defensive, and special operations, while requiring more officers in operations that remain human-centric. If the enemy denies the digital battlefield, the Army needs a vast reserve of capable officers to lead traditional combat formations. The small active-duty force is developed in the National Guard and Reserve, while major league talent is developed and selected in the minor league farm system. The farm system serves as a national reserve for a prolonged analog battlefield.

This structural shift carries direct implications for officer accessions. A larger proportion of commissioned officers will join Security Force Assistance echelons, Special Forces, the National Guard, or the Army Reserve (the Army Reserve will be reorganized to serve as a Reserve of Warfighters rather than specialized support units). This new Army officer corps will serve as the Nation's reserve for an analog battlefield and stability operations. Therefore, Officer accessions must develop Leaders of Character who possess the **professional military ethic (character)**, **warfighting competencies (leadership/military/physical)**, and **mental capacity (academic)** to serve as the Nation's generational guardians of freedom. The definitive outcome of this model is an officer corps that the Nation can call upon across the full spectrum of its needs:

to lead smaller, elite active-duty formations in machine-centric and special operations; to lead human-centric stability operations at home and abroad; to serve the National Guard and Reserve through an extended initial commitment of ten years; and to remain physically, mentally, and professionally ready—for up to twenty years—as a strategic reserve for the analog battlefield. This is not simply a career structure. It is a generational compact: officers who accept the responsibility of protecting the Nation for as long as that responsibility falls to their generation.

Officer Accessions: Developing the talent to support a force structure that wins decisively. Since 1940, officer selection and development models have remained relatively consistent—

military and civilian schooling, assignments, performance in echelons of increasing responsibility—whereas the nature of warfare has drastically shifted, juxtaposing machine-centric operations with conventional warfare. Here, we present our recommendation for a future force structure that resembles either a Major League Baseball Farm System (franchise-affiliated minor league teams) or a Premier League Professional Soccer Club (Figure 2). For this discussion, we use the Major League farm system as our example of the 2040 force structure: a small and elite active-duty force with extremely high professional excellence, pay, and competition. The farm system (National Guard and Army Reserve) has two purposes: it provides a continuous opportunity for professional development and maintains a large ready reserve for human-centric operations. Within the farm system, there are many developmental opportunities, but the core competencies are aligned with the four functions of officers: Lead Warfighting, Deliver Ready Combat Formations, Envision Future Warfighting, and Protect the Profession (civilian authority). Holistic health and fitness are the foundation for every officer in the farm system: maintaining essential fitness and health is a central tenet for officers remaining in the National Guard and Army Reserve.

If the majority of commissioned officers are entering the farm system (National Guard/Army Reserve) rather than active duty, then important questions must be addressed for the farm system: what officers are doing, how long they serve, and what is their full-time job.

1. The purpose of the farm system is two-fold: first, it is the means for developing and selecting the best officers to serve on active duty. Second, it serves as a large national reserve for a return to human-centric/analog warfare.

2. Commissioned officers in the farm system are part-time (or full-time) and are trained in machine-centric and human-centric operations in support of the previously mentioned five types of Army operations. Within this system, as an analogy to our farm system, there are some players in the minor leagues who are prospects being developed for the major leagues, and others who remain in the minor leagues with little hope of ever being promoted to the majors. Both groups are necessary for a farm system to function: developmental talent and players who love playing the game and do not expect to ever make it to the major leagues. From the farm system, active-duty units select the best officers to lead Army operations. To remain on active duty, officers must maintain an elite level of performance. Accordingly, this will be a transformational shift in Officer accessions: Graduates of USMA will not necessarily be assigned to active-duty units (this is already the case for ROTC and OCS). USMA will transform its academic program to prepare graduates for a range of graduate requirements, not simply for active duty.

3. Commissioned officers have two timelines for service in the farm system with obligation and compensation to support both roles: the anticipated developmental timeline is 2-6 years, and the anticipated timeline for immediate call to active duty in time of crisis is 10-15 years. Officers should remain as ready reserve for 20 years: this means they have maintained essential warfighting skills and holistic health and fitness.

4. Officers in the farm system will work in careers in industry and government related to their core competencies. Officers serving in the defense industry who have an in-depth understanding of emerging technologies are critical to maintaining dominance on a machine-centric battlefield. Additionally, as always has been the case, officers in the National Guard and US Army Reserve (the farm system) will work in every aspect of the US private and public sectors; much of this portion of the National Guard/Reserve remains unchanged. However, the individual ready reserve

requires complete transformation or dissolution. If an individual is not ready to activate, train conventional units for analog combat, and deploy and lead those units in combat, then the individual is neither ready nor a reserve.

In view of a machine-centric battlefield, where algorithms will make rules of engagement decisions, perhaps the central tenet to officership in 2040 should be the professional military ethic or “Jus in bello (justice in war)” -- a shift toward making ethics and morality the most important aspect of officers as we transition to machine-centric warfare. One of the risks of machine-centric warfare is that it can distance the person from the act of violence being committed in warfare. The machines operating in offensive/defensive operations will eventually be controlled by autonomous AI: what responsibility does an Army officer have for autonomous machines under his / her command? Will being removed from the front lines also remove a level of realism? How desensitized will the future Officers be if they are only seeing the violence of war through a screen? How can we protect against “total war” on the machine-centric end?

The Imperative for Action Now. Returning to Figure 1, the Army Officer Corps’ Responsibilities are unchanged in 2040 from the Army’s founding in 1775: lead warfighting, deliver ready combat formations, envision future warfighting, and protect the profession with its submission to civilian authority. Additionally, the attributes and competencies required from Army Leadership and the Profession [ADP 6-22](#) are arguably universal to military leadership. The five leader development outcomes of warfighting, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, professional military ethic, and holistic health and fitness are equally enduring. These three requirements are universal, and yet a critical strategy shift in accessions and talent management is now required to ensure that company and field grade officers are capable, available, and sufficient for the Army of 2040. Having a more specialized elite Active force and a more robust, longer-serving Reserve Force/National Guard would be a shift away from the Department of War’s force structures since World War II. The Major League farm system analogy is imperfect for describing a system as complex and diverse as the US Army, yet its principles and applications are understandable and appropriate. The developmental and assessment capabilities in the farm system ensure only the best performers serve at the highest levels, but the system also provides the structure for continued improvement, assessment, and selection across the organization, as well as tremendous depth when the battlefield changes. The principles of officership and warfighting are unchanged, but the applications of warfighting are under continuous transformation: our force structure must preempt the duality of warfare in 2040.

If structural changes are not envisioned and implemented within the next five to ten years, the Army will spend the defining decade of machine-centric warfare ten years behind—fielding officers shaped by a system designed for a world that no longer exists. By 2035, accessions must have adapted their commissioning model to meet the requirements for 2040.

In conclusion, accessions produce officers who will lead the Army for a generation, and the warfare transformation occurring over that generation’s service will be unlike any before it. The four officer responsibilities and five leader development outcomes remain unchanged in 2040. Therefore, officer accessions and talent management to lead 2040 combat formations must be innovative, flexible, elite, and redundant. An intellectual and organizational transformation for officer service and selection is critical to address the duality of warfare in 2040.