

ARI Research Note 2010-08

**Development and Evaluation of a Video Designed to
Enhance Officer Career Continuance**

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September 2010

**United States Army Research Institute
for the Behavioral and Social Sciences**

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE					
1. REPORT DATE (dd-mm-yy): September 2010		2. REPORT TYPE: Final		3. DATES COVERED (from. . . to) March 2006 - January 2009	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Development and Evaluation of a Video Designed to Enhance Officer Career Continuance				5a. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER DASW01-03-D-0016 DO0024	
				5b. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER 622785	
6. AUTHOR(S) Fred A. Mael (Mael Consulting); Alexander Alonso (American Institutes for Research); Jeff W. Johnson (Personnel Decisions Research Institutes); and Nehama Babin (US Army Research Institute)				5c. PROJECT NUMBER A790	
				5d. TASK NUMBER	
				5e. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Mael Consulting 6403 Western Run Drive Baltimore, MD 21215 Personnel Decisions Rsrch Inst. 650 3 rd Avenue S., Suite 1350 Minneapolis, MN 55402				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER American Institutes for Research 1000 Thomas Jefferson Street Washington, DC 20007 Army Research Institute 2511 Jefferson Davis Highway Arlington, VA 22202	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U. S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral & Social Sciences 2511 Jefferson Davis Highway Arlington, VA 22202-3926 ATTN: PARU				10. MONITOR ACRONYM ARI	
				11. MONITOR REPORT NUMBER ARI Research Note 2010-08	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Contracting Officer's Representative and Subject Matter POC: Kelly S. Ervin.					
14. ABSTRACT (<i>Maximum 200 words</i>): The purpose of this research was to develop and evaluate an intervention designed to improve U.S. Army company grade officer career continuance. This intervention was a video featuring interviews with former officers to present their perspective on what aspects of the Army they miss in civilian life. We conducted focus groups with 155 current company grade officers to evaluate the ability of the video to influence career decisions and intentions toward staying in the Army. Between 15-29% of participants agreed with various post-viewing survey questions about the video changing different attitudes they had about the Army (e.g., appreciate aspects of being an officer that were taken for granted, more convinced they made the right choice by joining the Army), and over 45% said that the video helped clarify for them the unique benefits of being an officer. There was some degree of consensus from different sources that if the video was shown to officers who were at a decision point, if the showing of the video was accompanied by counseling by one's commander, and if the video was also shown to the spouse as a stimulus of much-needed conversation, that it could prove to be well worthwhile and possibly advantageous in retaining company grade officers.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Career continuance; Army company grade officers; officer retention; interventions for improving continuance					
SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF			19. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	20. NUMBER OF PAGES	21. RESPONSIBLE PERSON
16. REPORT Unclassified	17. ABSTRACT Unclassified	18. THIS PAGE Unclassified	Unlimited	60	Ellen Kinzer Technical Publication Specialist 703.602.8049

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Army Project Number
622785A790

Personnel, Performance
and Training Technology

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DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF A VIDEO DESIGNED TO ENHANCE OFFICER CAREER CONTINUANCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Requirement:

This report summarizes research carried out pursuant to the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Science's (ARI's) Contract # DASW01-03-D-0016-0024, under the auspices of its Personnel Assessment Research Unit (PARU). Retention of officers, primarily at the rank of captain and major during years four through seven after commissioning, has again surfaced as a concern. In order for the Army to have an appropriate number of senior-level officers in the future, it is important that at least a minimum proportion of officers choose to remain in the active Army after the required Active Duty Service Obligation (ADSO) or to stay in active service until eligible to retire. In response to the need to improve retention among enlisted Soldiers and company grade officers, ARI instituted a research program entitled "Strategies to Enhance Retention" (code named "STAY"). The officer portion of the STAY program sought, over a three-year period, to improve the continuance of the Army's company grade officers. One purpose of the officer portion of STAY was to recommend, develop, and empirically evaluate interventions for improving the continuance of company grade commissioned officers. An overriding model of officer retention and a total of twenty-nine potential interventions were identified, and three of the interventions were chosen to be developed and evaluated during this three-year period. The purpose of this research was to develop and evaluate one of these interventions, a video that featured interviews with former officers to present their perspective on what aspects of the Army they miss in civilian life.

Procedure:

An extensive screening process was used to select former officers to appear in the video. We conducted phone interviews with 70 former officers recruited through various sources (e.g., United States Military Academy Alumni Associations, individual Reserve Officer Training Corps, and a female officers' network). The final group chosen for the video consisted of eight former officers and their spouses who were relatively successful in their civilian lives and were able to express in an insightful and compelling way what they missed about the Army, their regrets about having left when they did, and their willingness to advise current officers to at least consider thoughts about leaving.

After choosing a video production firm, we shot full-day interviews and collected action footage with the chosen officers and their spouses. Once filming was completed, interviews were transcribed and scriptwriting began. The script was constructed in the documentary tradition. Rather than using a narrator in the video, the story unfolded through the interweaving of the video participants' voices and lives. A first draft of the video was presented to the Army for review. A number of suggestions were made by members of ARI, Human Resources Command, and other entities. It was revised a number of times until a final version was completed and presented to ARI and the office for the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Army (G-1) for immediate release to senior officers.

We conducted an evaluation study to (a) evaluate the influence of the video on current officers' attitudes and intentions toward staying in the Army, and (b) determine how the video might be revised to make the message more effective. We conducted focus groups at which 155 current

company grade officers were shown the video and queried about their reactions. We developed surveys to be completed by the officers both before and after viewing the video. We also conducted focus groups with 25 spouses of current officers, with no surveys administered.

Findings:

Between 15-29% of those responding to the post-viewing agreed with survey questions about the video changing different attitudes they had about the Army (e.g., appreciating aspects of being an officer that were taken for granted, being more convinced they made the right choice by joining the Army), and over 45% said that the video helped clarify for them the unique benefits of being an officer. About 34% said that because of their seeing the video they would now take into account the positive aspects of being an officer when making career decisions. About 15% said that seeing the video actually increased the likelihood of their staying until retirement. Over half wanted a formal program that would enable them to speak with former officers, and 41% said that they wanted their spouses to speak to former officers' spouses.

Generally, regardless of the video's impact on attitudes, it was lauded as being technically sound (and was compared favorably to previous Army efforts during the focus group discussions). There were some suggested changes to the video, which were made prior to delivery of the final version.

Utilization and Dissemination of Findings:

The video was viewed during the development stage by the Vice Chief of Staff for the Army, who felt that it could add significantly to retention efforts. He therefore tasked his staff to disseminate the video. The video was sent via Army Knowledge Online (AKO) to officers above the rank of major in the early spring of 2008 so that they could use it in conversations about retention with company grade officers. The responses of senior officers to the video provided to the G-1 were generally quite positive.

During the focus groups, a consensus emerged that the video could be effective to spur conversation about whether it would be a smart idea to leave the Army, provided it was shown at the right time and in the right setting. All felt that there were windows of opportunity at which decisions were made and that that was when it would be most relevant. They did not feel that it could be effective when shown in a classroom setting (such as in the focus groups), especially if shown at the wrong stage of a career. Rather, it should be shown to an officer on a one-on-one basis by a commander, although not necessarily viewed by the officer and commander together – rather, watched by the company grade officer as a springboard to a discussion with the commander. Many officers and almost all spouses felt it should also be seen by a couple together or even by a few couples together (up to six couples) with a discussion facilitator. This would enable the husbands and wives to open communication on a difficult issue – whether there would be negative repercussions for/by the officer if he or she left for the family's sake or negative repercussions for/by the spouse and family if he or she did not leave. These officers and spouses felt that the video could spur discussion in a way that simply sitting down to talk could not.

DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF A VIDEO DESIGNED TO ENHANCE OFFICER CAREER CONTINUANCE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
Former Officers as Retention Resources	2
Support for the Concept	2
Why and How This Intervention Would Impact Retention	3
Use of Film by the Military.....	4
CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE INTERVENTION	5
Identification	5
Means of Achieving the Benefits of Identification	6
War, Patriotism, and Identification	7
The Relative Anomie of Civilian Life	8
War and the Achievement of Identification's Benefits.....	8
UNIQUE MILITARY FEATURES.....	9
Camaraderie	9
Teamwork and Trust	9
Higher and Noble Purpose	10
Altruism and Sacrifice.....	11
Patriotism	11
Military Uniform.....	12
Excitement of Battle Environs	12
Self-validation through Willingness to Engage in Warfare	13
Unique Opportunity to do All-Encompassing Leadership in the Military Environment.....	14
Quality of People.....	14
Instrumental Advantages of the Army Officer's Lifestyle	15
Travel and Lifestyle	15
Physical Fitness.....	15
Financial Security.....	15
Summary of Missed Aspects of Being an Officer and OID.....	15
CHOOSING FORMER OFFICERS FOR THE VIDEO	17
Recruiting for Preliminary Interviews	17
The Structured Interview.....	18
The Spouses' Structured Interview	19
Criteria for inclusion in video	20
Criteria for Exclusion from the Video	20
Summary of Demographics and Findings for all Interviewees.....	21
Choice of the Final Video Group.....	22
VIDEO PRODUCTION	25
Selection Process for the Video Firm.....	25
Video Production Process	25

CONTENTS (continued)

EVALUATION.....	27
Development of the Pre- and Post-Measures and the Focus Group Questions.....	27
Focus Groups	27
Sample.....	27
Situational Limitations and Mitigating Factors	28
Results	29
Officers.....	29
Spouses.....	30
Others	30
Technical Merits.....	30
Optimal Usage of the Video.....	30
Suggested Changes	31
Requests to Delete Problematic Material	31
Requests for Additional Material	31
Requests for Other Points of View	31
Proposed/Made Edits to the Video after the Focus Groups	32
Suggestions for Future Videos	33
Analysis of the Survey Data.....	33
Sample Characteristics	33
Post-Viewing Survey	37
Attitudes toward the Video’s Technical Aspects	37
Attitudes Impacted by the Video	37
Attitudes about Utility of Video.....	37
Attitudes Toward Engagement with Alumni	39
Direct Change in Plans after Seeing the Video.....	39
DISSEMINATION OF THE VIDEO BY ARMY AND RESPONSE.....	41
Final Timeline	43
THE FINDINGS IN LIGHT OF THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION.....	44
CONCLUSION	45
REFERENCES.....	47
APPENDIX A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FORMER COMPANY GRADE OFFICERS.....	A-1
APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SPOUSES OF FORMER COMPANY GRADE OFFICERS	B-1

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 ASPECTS OF ARMY OFFICER EXPERIENCE MISSED BY FORMER OFFICERS IN RELATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION (OID) MOTIVES	16
TABLE 2 THINGS MISSED BY THE FORMER OFFICERS	23
TABLE 3 REASONS CITED BY FORMER OFFICERS FOR LEAVING ACTIVE ARMY DUTY.....	24
TABLE 4 FREQUENCY OF POST-VIEWING CAREER INTENTIONS BY PRE-VIEWING CAREER INTENTIONS (N = 149)	36
TABLE 5 FREQUENCIES FOR POST-VIEWING SURVEY ITEMS (N = 149).....	38

Introduction

The Army puts great expense and effort into the selection and training of officers. The cost of accessioning an officer is estimated at \$210,000 per Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) graduate and \$260,000 per United States Military Academy (USMA) graduate. When officers leave early in their careers, the Army does not receive a satisfactory return on this investment. Of greater concern is that lack of retention can leave the Army shorthanded and hampers the ability to fulfill missions. Retention of officers, primarily company grade officers at the rank of captain and major during years four through seven after commissioning, has resurfaced recently as a concern. In order for the Army to have an appropriate number of senior-level officers in the future, it is important that a minimum proportion of officers choose to remain in the active Army after the required Active Duty Service Obligation (ADSO) or to stay in active service until eligible to retire. In response to the need to improve retention among enlisted Soldiers and company grade officers, ARI instituted a research program entitled "Strategies to Enhance Retention" (code named "STAY"). The officer portion of the STAY program sought, over a three-year period, to improve the continuance of the Army's company grade officers. One purpose of the officer portion of STAY was to recommend, develop, and empirically evaluate interventions for improving the continuance of company grade commissioned officers. An overriding model of officer retention and a total of twenty-nine potential interventions were identified, and three of the interventions were chosen to be developed and evaluated during this three-year period. The purpose of this report is to describe research to develop and evaluate one of these interventions

Company grade officers who are contemplating leaving the Army at the end of their first ADSO can turn to a range of sources to inform their decisions. One source is the officer's commander, who is expected to counsel his or her subordinate officer on the subject of career intentions. However, an extensive series of focus groups with company grade officers and commanders and interviews with civilian and military personnel at Human Resources Command (Mael, Quintela, & Johnson, 2006) revealed that at the current time, some officers fail to devote the necessary time to this endeavor. In addition, some commanders are viewed as lacking the information or credibility to be the primary source of advice or guidance for the company grade officer considering leaving the Army. Moreover, some company grade officers admit that they were reluctant to discuss their career doubts with their current commanders. They feel that, by doing so, they would be stigmatized in the eyes of their commander and fellow officers and thus passed over for opportunities. Others stated the view that their commanders may be insufficiently informed about the civilian workplace and lifestyle to provide unbiased information about the pros and cons of career continuance. Thus, these company grade officers often turn to a wide range of others for advice, including classmates and relatives who never served or headhunters with their own prejudices, and receive information that may be ill-informed about the pros and cons of staying.

However, although there is no empirical evidence, former commanders at Human Resources Command have stated anecdotally that a significant portion of the company grade officers who leave the Army prior to retirement regret their decisions to leave the Army. A number of officers who have left the Army have either returned to or attempted to return to the Army. As will be described in this report, a number of former officers who leave find that civilian work is not as fulfilling as Army work, primarily because of the lack of overarching national purpose or the

lack of camaraderie, selflessness, and team orientation found in the Army. Others simply miss the excitement and clarity of mission. Only in retrospect do some officers realize how unique their opportunities in the Army were and that they needlessly left service prematurely.

Former Officers as Retention Resources

For these reasons, it was determined that it would be advantageous to make the experiences of knowledgeable and credible former officers available to company grade officers. Based on the focus groups, it emerged that the ideal profile of such persons would be former officers who (a) have credibility because of their successful Army service; (b) are no longer employed by the Army; (c) understand the virtues and hardships of being a company grade officer in the Army; and (d) understand the realities and limitations of the civilian workplace and lifestyle despite currently succeeding in civilian work.

Alumni are widely used in the academic world for recruiting, fund raising, and networking with new graduates (Blakeley, 1974; Ransdell, 1986). They are also used in the corporate world to recruit members to the organization, bring business to the organization, and mentor current employees, and they are seen as credible sources of information (Nielsen, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2005). The current intervention sought to harness the willingness of Army officer alumni to help further the Army's goals.

We proposed in this intervention to produce a video that would showcase former company grade officers describing what they miss about being Army officers and the unique experiences and values that are not easily reproduced in the civilian world. The goal of the video was to provide company grade officers the opportunity to reflect on those Army-specific intangibles that they may take for granted and that may cease to be a part of their lives were they to leave after their first ADSO. It would also educate senior commanders to the views of former company grade officers and empower them to conduct counseling more effectively. Exposing company grade officers to such a video and then evaluating the extent to which such exposure affected their attitudes about continuing in the Army was seen as an effective, low-cost component of an overall retention strategy. By focusing on the cognitive-emotional value of being an Army officer, the video complements other efforts to demonstrate the financial/transactional benefits of staying in the Army until one is eligible to retire. As opposed to stressing the tangible benefits that the officer *receives* by staying until retirement (e.g., pension, medical insurance), the video was to highlight those qualities that the officer was able to *contribute* to his/her unit and country (e.g., sacrifice, concern for Soldiers' lives), how these contributions made the officer feel more alive and productive, and how the officer might regret foregoing these opportunities prematurely.

Support for the Concept

The idea of using alumni as retention resources was heartily endorsed by both commanders and company grade officers during US Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) focus groups from the inception of the STAY project (Mael et al., 2006). These focus groups occurred during early through mid-2006 at Forts Hood, Riley, and Lewis. A Retention Strategies Working Group (RSWG) rated this intervention as potentially effective and feasible at a meeting held at ARI in November 2006. Similarly, during a meeting at Fort Leavenworth in December 2006, two large focus groups of Command and General Staff College School of Advanced Military Studies

(CGSC SAMS) majors considered this intervention to be potentially effective as well. The former officers who were interviewed for the video were both appreciative that the Army valued their perspective and were enamored with the potential benefit of this intervention. They stated that they benefited from access to former officers and may have benefited additionally from a more formal pairing of officers with credible alumni. In addition, most expressed willingness to serve as resources for direct conversations with current company grade officers, and many were already doing so informally. Thus, four groups of current and former Army officers from a wide range of ranks endorsed the soundness of this intervention and none had the concern that this effort would glamorize leaving or lure officers out of the Army.

Why and How This Intervention Would Impact Retention

We proposed that these former officers who had left the Army prior to completing 20 or more years of service would be credible sources of influence for undecided current officers for a number of reasons. First, they could provide a realistic perspective on the pros and cons of ending one's career as an officer prior to retirement eligibility and could combat the "grass is greener" syndrome that may occur among company grade officers. Second, they could highlight the benefits of continued Army service that may be taken for granted by current officers. Third, they could contradict false assumptions about corporate life, such as the presumed shorter workday or the relatively small amount of travel required for all jobs. Fourth, as former members of the Army, they could be seen as less biased and more knowledgeable about the outside world than one's commander. It was clear from interviews with former officers that even those who are financially successful in their civilian careers still miss aspects of Army life. Hence, they could make a convincing case for urging company grade officers not to leave without seriously considering continuing as officers.

The purpose of the planned video was to showcase those former officers who displayed the greatest credibility and passion and were best able to make current officers reconsider their leanings toward leaving prematurely. The primary planned message of the video was that (a) leaving the Army has benefits for some but it is not a panacea, (b) the intangible benefits of being an Army officer should not be taken for granted, and (c) one should not leave without knowing what one wants from life and having a plan. The measure of success of the intervention was to be changes in company grade officers' attitudes and perspectives on leaving prior to retirement as a result of seeing the video.

Research on the topic of psychological contracts suggests that when a perceived violation of the social contract has occurred, an employee tends to shift to a transactional contract with his/her employer (Pate & Malone, 2000). Once this transactional contract predominates, employees tend to downplay psychological factors such as affective commitment when making decisions about staying with the organization (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). The former officers interviewed in this video, as well as the current officers in the focus groups, mentioned a number of occurrences that they considered a violation of their social contract. This intervention harnesses the suggestions of former officers to reconsider the psychological factors so central to their contract with the Army and to also keep in mind those aspects of the social contract that are still intact before deciding to end the relationship earlier than desired.

Use of Film by the Military

The US military has a long history of using film images to both recruit individuals to join the military and inspire current members of the military to have positive feelings about their membership in the armed services (Suid, 2002). The 1918 film *The Unbeliever* was credited with leading more than 200 men to enlist in the Marine Corps at the recruiting booth of a Denver movie theater during its first week of showing. The film was also used internally to increase pride among Marines. By contrast, critics have noted that most recent commercial films (e.g., *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*) depicting military themes have fostered crudely negative stereotypes about the military as being filled with amoral, vicious, drug-addicted, and/or misanthropic Soldiers (Medved, 2005; Powers, Rothman, & Rothman, 1996; Roth-Douquet & Schaeffer, 2006). Only recently have commercial films reversed this trend by showing sympathetic portrayals of Soldiers (e.g., *Band of Brothers*, *Saving Private Ryan*), but they tend to focus on earlier wars such as World War II that enjoyed a wider consensus of support among the populace. What is evident is that both the military and its detractors have seen film as a powerful tool to influence audiences.

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Intervention

Conceptually, this intervention attempted to effect a shift in the factors being considered by company grade officers when making early career decisions. The video sought to address the bases for officer identification with the Army and to highlight them as a crucial part of the decision to continue as an officer. Thus, this section discusses a model of organizational identification (OID) motivation and the conceptual bases of the core elements that bind an officer to the Army even after leaving the Army.

Identification

The underlying premise of the current effort is the theoretical perspective that puts commitment to and organizational identification (OID) with the military at the center of joining and retention decisions. Both commitment and identification have long-established relationships with military retention (Mael & Ashforth, 1995; Griepentrog, Klimoski, & Marsh, 2006) and other variables such as motivation, performance, organizational citizenship, extrarole behaviors, and reduced attrition in civilian organizations (Cheney, 1983; Dessler, 1999; Pratt, 1998). While much has been written on establishment and maintenance of identification (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Kramer, 1993), little attention had been focused on why individuals choose to identify with an organization, even in situations that may not be most personally beneficial. The Mael and Ashforth (2001) model, based on previous OID research (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992, 1995), posits five main motives for organizational identification: (a) self-esteem, (b) transcendence of self, (c) meaning, (d) belonging, and (e) raised aspirations. The following are abridged from Mael & Ashforth (2001):

1. *Enhancing self-esteem.* Research generally suggests that social identification enhances self-esteem by enabling the individual to internalize the status and successes of the identification object (Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Pratt, 1998).
2. *Transcending self.* Angyal (1941) stated that the healthy person “wishes to share and participate in something which he regards as being greater than his individual self” (p. 172). Similarly, immersion in others has been proposed as an antidote to critical self-evaluation and resultant depression (Simon, 1993). The various theorists find value in identification in that it takes people beyond their own concerns, providing them with an impetus to invest themselves in altruism and unselfishness. This perspective suggests that people are naturally predisposed to identify with entities that are greater or more enduring than themselves. People *enjoy* and are perhaps ennobled by caring about the fate of institutions larger than themselves.
3. *Meaning.* Others argue that identification with others or with valued causes can be a source of meaning and purpose in life (Haughey, 1993; Royce, 1908; Schaar, 1957; Shea, 1987). Beyond the benefits of selflessness that can be gained from identification, there may be gains in the form of perceptions that one is associated with efforts that have intrinsic meaning to the individual. In striving for a larger or nobler goal, the person finds a more purposeful life for himself or herself.

4. *Belonging*. Baumeister and Leary (1995) postulate a need to belong, which they describe as a “pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal interactions” (p. 497). Identification may also facilitate *depersonalized belonging*, the sense of community based on the perception of a common identity (Brewer, 1981). In depersonalized belonging, attachment is not predicated on interpersonal bonds formed by those who come to know each other, but on the social identity that the individuals share.
5. *Raising aspirations*. Identification may also provide a benchmark for one’s behavior and a spur to maximize one’s potential. Seeing what others are capable of achieving and identifying with such others provides a person with the motivation to strive and achieve (e.g., Ibarra, 1999). When a tangible focal model or an archetype of an organizational figure exists, there is an implicit demand or challenge put to the person to try to “measure up.”

Means of Achieving the Benefits of Identification

Having described five primary potential benefits of identification, it is worthwhile noting that each of these benefits is probably best satisfied under certain conditions. The following are some hypothesized conditions for providing each benefit (Mael & Ashforth, 2001):

- *Enhanced self-esteem* may best be achieved when the focal entity is successful and admired, when the connection between the entity and the individual is visible to others (Gibson, 1994), and if possible, when the entity’s success can be at least partially attributed to the individual. Thus, attachment to the military for this motive may fluctuate somewhat depending on the degree to which the military is admired in society; but the wearing of uniforms, among other things, assures that the individual’s ties to the military are visible.
- *Transcendence of self* may best be satisfied if some degree of sacrifice or altruism is involved, if the benefits to the individual are intangible, and if the individual is more or less deindividuated (that is, regarded by himself or herself and others as an anonymous exemplar of the entity; Zimbardo, 1969). Certainly, the military demands the ultimate sacrifice if required, as well as submersion of personal needs to the needs of the mission, the unit, and the hierarchy.
- *Meaning* may best be attained if the focal entity is believed to embrace or pursue highly desirable values and goals, if the entity has presumed longevity if not permanence, if the entity’s essence is consistent despite the vagaries of its current leadership, and if the entity cannot in some way betray, disillusion, or reject the individual. The military has goals generally perceived as noble by many of its members (e.g., fighting terrorism, combating druglords, training and protecting civilians) although perceptions may vary on the other elements of meaning.
- *Belonging* may best be achieved by entities that dramatically symbolize membership, provide forums for direct and indirect interaction, and that require the participation rather than just the admiration of members. All would apply to the military.

- *Raising aspirations* may work best when the entity embodies lofty goals, has a prototypical person or star performer serving as a role model and spur to achievement, and when the attachment to the entity can be expressed directly or metaphorically (as in applying an athlete's hustle to one's exercise regimen). The military is a primary location for hero-admiration and using others' example to motivate both effort and sacrifice.

War, Patriotism, and Identification

One of the enduring themes across the nineteenth-century war literature...is that war constitutes in its essence a transcendence of all petty calculations and self-serving motives...war is capable of defining precisely what it means to be human, because it involves giving up the supreme 'self-interest,' life itself. (Pick, 1993, p. 15)

This strong statement appearing to glorify war is a recurring theme in the writings of renowned scientists, philosophers, and military scholars (Clausewitz, 1932/1984; Ellis, Ruskin, and von Moltke, cited in Pick, 1993). Hegel (1821/1967) said that war forges a nation's character, and that "the ethical moment of war is the transcendence of selfishness and individualism...corruption in nations would be the product of a prolonged, let alone 'perpetual,' peace" (p. 209).

Philosophers have written that war is a component of human nature, unexplained and unexplainable by rational motives. As Kant said, "War requires no motivation, but appears to be ingrained in human nature and is even valued as something noble" (1985, p. 123). Hobbes wrote that the state of war among nations is so natural that cessation from fighting should not be called "peace" but rather "breathing time" (1642/1949). However, some have argued that war (and nationalism in general) took on a greater societal role in the 19th century. The reason is that precisely at that time, modern man was experiencing greater anomie and isolation from changes in economic structures and dissolution of the coherence and cohesiveness of religiously and ethnically based societies (Ehrenreich, 1997).

Even the civilians who are behind a war effort have commented on their feeling *better* when war is taking place in their lands. As a French woman said after World War II: "You know that I do not love war or want it to return. But at least it made me feel alive, as I have not felt alive before or since" (Gray, 1970).

This not to say that fighting wars is a panacea, nor that society would be enhanced if all its citizens were perpetual Soldiers. War carries considerable psychic risks, beyond the physical risks of death and injury (Grossman, 1995). Combat necessarily entails the destruction of others, including friends and foes, and subjects one to traumatic events. Thompson (1994), in summarizing the various "end of war" theories, some of which relate to the perceived inevitability of massive destruction of life and material and the likely counter-productivity of war (Mueller, 1989), appears to move away from the romanticized version of war championed in the 19th century. Rather, this section explains that for all its great danger and potential for dehumanization and tragedy, military participation provides experiences and benefits rarely matched in civilian life, as will be explained below.

The Relative Anomie of Civilian Life

Former Soldiers, even veterans of relatively unpopular and unsuccessful wars such as America's involvement in Vietnam, report that they found a sense of belonging, sacrifice, and purpose in war that was difficult to recapture in civilian life (Kimball, 1987). Some found that their only antidote to post-war anomie was spiritual meaning (Olson & Robbins, 1992). Gibson (1994) has demonstrated that as a result of post-Vietnam alienation with organized, bureaucratic society, many people have embraced the New Warrior mentality espoused in fiction, film, and lifestyle, where war is again glorified as a peak human experience. However, the New Warrior is a departure from previous Soldiers in his or her lack of patriotic motivation or the desire to protect a homeland and loved ones. Rather, the New Warrior is typically a solitary renegade (e.g., Rambo) betrayed by both enemy countries and his or her own country's bureaucracy, involved in a never-ending war against evil forces. For the alienated New Warrior, identification is detached from patriotism and resides only with abstract war and warriorship – yet it still exerts a powerful pull.

In some cultures, this attachment to war has reached extremes. In the aftermath of World War I, thousands of German Soldiers found themselves bereft of purpose. To a certain extent, they had been primed to idealize war through a network of youth groups, which expressed a hate for bourgeois life, a desire for action and conflict for their own sake, and an idealization of war. These Soldiers, rather than demobilizing, were attracted to the Freikorps, a continuing decentralized military organization that acted in parallel with the German Army. The Freikorps evolved into powerful supporters of the eventual rise of the Nazi Party and the monstrous reign of Hitler and his comrades over Germany (Waite, 1952). Even in other cultures, the reintegration of veterans into their traditional societies can be difficult and stressful (Hillman, 2004). Conversely, in a society which has more of a Minuteman (citizen-soldier) tradition (Fehrenbach, 1963) versus a professional soldier tradition, the vast majority of veterans integrate smoothly and even rise to positions of significant responsibility within the traditional society.

War and the Achievement of Identification's Benefits

War and active military expression of patriotism appear to have the potential to satisfy numerous needs associated with identification under certain conditions. On one hand, self-esteem needs can be achieved if one fights for a successful nation and is insulated from any claims of atrocities. Transcendence can be attained by putting one's life on the line for one's country and by donning the de-individuating trappings of the military (e.g., uniform, rank). War can provide a sense of meaning if the nation a person fights for has some claim to stability and its government can be expected not to turn on the person and his or her subgroup later on. Belonging can be realized through active participation with like-minded others. Finally, raised aspirations can be achieved through the stakes of war and the real and mythical role models that indoctrination and actual combat provide.

Unique Military Features

In this section, we elaborate on the motives that make military service uniquely appealing. These motives are not readily obvious to members of the media and the upper classes in the United States whose families are underrepresented in the military (Roth-Douquet & Schaeffer, 2006). However, these are the types of aspects of military life that former officers cited as things they miss about the military. They are derived from literature across a number of disciplines and are also drawn from the numerous interviews with former officers described later in this report. A number of the aspects have clear relationships to OID motives while others are more instrumental or situational advantages of being an Army officer. The first six could be described as attachments to military membership and to fellow Soldiers. The next two would be described as attachment to war itself. Additional instrumental advantages of being an officer are described briefly. A summary table relates these aspects to the aforementioned OID motives.

Camaraderie

The military is the scene of great bonding, especially when forged under duress (Kaplan, 2005). Included is a desire to help one's comrades, guilt when not able to be with them in battle or help shoulder their responsibilities, and grief when unable to save them or alleviate their suffering in times of duress.

The enduring emotion of war, when everything else has faded, is comradeship. A comrade in war is a man you can trust with anything, because you trust him with your life. "It is," Philip Caputo wrote in *A Rumor of War*, "unlike marriage, a bond that cannot be broken by a word, by boredom or divorce, or by anything other than death." Despite its extreme right-wing image, war is the only utopian experience most of us ever have. Individual possessions and advantage count for nothing: the group is everything. (Broyles, 1984)

This camaraderie is forged by experiencing the full gamut of human behavior and emotions together and by training together repetitively. McNeill notes that humans seek out "entrainment," defined as the imposition of synchronized movements on a number of individuals. There are indications that many of the rhythmic activities endemic to military life – drill, marching formation, group physical training - lead to a primal bonding of individuals into a cohesive group (McNeill, 1982, 1995).

Teamwork and Trust

The scope of military activities requires coordinated team effort and there is a great emphasis on working together in concert rather than trying to assert one's independence at the expense of the unit. The military thus reflects a communitarian value system (Etzioni, 1993) rather than the more typical, individualistic one popular in American society. Sampson (1977) has criticized American psychology for the presumption that self-contained individualism is healthier or more moral than more collectivist orientations (e.g., Kohlberg, Colby, Gibbs, Speicher-Dubin, & Power's [1978] theory of moral development): "It is within a heavily individualistic system that we pit individual against group and come out rooting for the success of the individual over the group...we do our science a disservice if we believe that this is inevitably carved in granite"

(Sampson, 1977, p. 777; cf. Gilligan, 1982; Glendon, 1991). Military action and war is the ultimate communal activity. “We may enjoy the company of our fellows, but we *thrill* to the prospect of joining them in collective defense against the common enemy” (Ehrenreich, 1997, p. 224).

Trust has been described as an essential virtue and a prime feature of a functional organization (Bennett, 1967; Hosmer, 1995; Solomon, 1992). Perhaps as a function of the often selfless sacrifice and teamwork that are common in the military, the military is also seen as a culture in which, in comparison to the civilian workplace (especially the corporate workplace), trust is an absolute necessity and a norm among comrades. While acknowledging that there are some officers who look out primarily for their own career advancement, they are seen as outliers rather than fitting the desired leadership profile.

Higher and Noble Purpose

Commenting on the American Civil War, John Stuart Mill (1862) wrote:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is *worth* a war, is much worse...A man who has nothing which he is willing to fight for, nothing which he cares more about than he does about his personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

Similarly, Ehrenreich (1997) has commented that:

The passions of war (are)... among the ‘highest’ and finest passions humans can know: courage, altruism, and the mystical sense of belonging to ‘something larger than ourselves.’ (p. 238)

Historically, even civilians and those who were in principle known to oppose war have been known to become “ecstatic” and enthralled by even vicarious involvement in war (Ehrenreich, 1997). Hirschman (1982) wrote that:

For important sectors of the middle and upper class...the war came as a release from boredom and emptiness, as a promise of the longed-for community that would transcend social class. (p. 5)

An anonymous Vietnam-era Soldier wrote:

The ultimate appeal of serving in the Army is being part of something bigger than yourself. This is a rare feeling, very difficult to experience in civilian life. Neither civilian jobs nor sports teams ever have the intensity or totality of what a Soldier experiences during war.

However, the modern officer’s large-purpose, high-impact roles are certainly not limited to what would traditionally be called war. He or she has the opportunity to build and rebuild roads, water works, and other parts of societal infrastructure; build schools and improve health care; put modern forms of governance in place; safeguard the lives of societal minorities; and reconstruct

societies in ways that substantially improve the wellbeing of the population. Many former military personnel have found that these opportunities dwarf their current civilian work, no matter how enjoyable, in scope and significance.

Altruism and Sacrifice

Authors from a range of perspectives have argued that the transcendence of one's self-interests is beneficial to the self, independent of how it benefits others. For example, Wallach and Wallach (1983) sharply criticized the egoism and selfishness seemingly advocated by psychology. They marshalled extensive evidence from theorists, therapists, and studies that an outward focus, in which one immerses oneself in others' needs, is more healthy and therapeutic than focusing solely on one's own needs or desires (Frankl, 1978; Rawls, 1971; Yalom, 1980). When joined with real belief in the larger value for which one is being altruistic, that other-oriented perspective can also include significant and even ultimate sacrifices for the benefit of other people.

The sacrifices that Soldiers will make for each other and for their cause are legendary, noble, and moving and are well-documented across many wars (Gray, 1970; Hillman, 2004). Speaking of altruistic behavior during the American retreat from the Yalu during the Korean War, Marshall (1953) wrote that "witnesses saw more of the decency of men than had ever been expected." In the words of Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer (2006):

The bravery of the Soldier is not the bravery of the person "into" bungee jumping, proving to himself and the world that he's capable. Rather, service is a gift to other people – it's a gift to the country, to fellow Soldiers, an attempt to use your training to fulfill a task that the country asked you to do. (p. 130)

One of the related attractions of military service and war is the clarity of purpose, the clear-cut distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong, friend and enemy. This is in contrast to the shaky coalitions and individualistic profit orientation of civilian work life; the tensions of balancing work, family, and other responsibilities; or the murky moral and ethical dilemmas of daily life. To recall the title of a book by Kierkegaard (1956), "purity of heart is to will one thing."

War replaces the difficult gray areas of daily life with an eerie, serene clarity. In war you usually know who is your enemy and who is your friend, and are given means of dealing with both...War is an escape from the everyday into a special world where the bonds that hold us to our duties in daily life--the bonds of family, community, work - disappear (Broyles, 1984).

When the preeminence of a single value or mission takes hold, it is more understandable that one would willingly give his or her all, including the ultimate sacrifice, to achieve that mission.

Patriotism

One of the attractions of military life, which encompasses in some ways the concepts of higher purpose and sacrifice, is the expression of patriotism. It differs from the others in that it

has a focal object that has many levels of meaning that cannot be replaced by activities such as subsequent volunteer work for social causes. There is the general collective aspect and the protection of family and other loved ones. However, there may also be a mystical attachment to the nation and to generations past and future, and the unique defining spirit of the country. For some, military service is the most tangible and least vicarious way to express that attachment.

Military Uniform

Distinctive dress is a way to assert and convey one's identity and establish presumptions of allegiance and/or competency in the eyes of the onlooker (Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Davis, 1992; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). For some officers, the military uniform is a clear way to inform others about one's identity and competence. This has the value of establishing one's status within the organization, whereby symbols of rank, unit, and other decorations act as a visual resume for others and telegraphs how others should respond in return. In regards to the civilian population, the uniform quickly conveys a message that to at least some or most onlookers would be positive. For this reason, some officers have stated that they missed the uniform that provided a quick reference point for others about their capabilities or status. Nothing in civilian garb was able to compensate for this loss.

Excitement of Battle Environs

The philosopher Edmund Burke described that which is sublime as "that state of soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror ... the mind is so entirely filled with its objects, that it cannot entertain any other" (in Nicolson, 1961). Numerous writers have described the experience of war as participant or even as civilian observer, as sublime, all-encompassing, awe-inspiring, and as having a beautiful terror (Hillman, 2004). General Robert E. Lee was quoted as saying, "It is well that war is so terrible, lest we should grow too fond of it." "Part of the love of war stems from its being an experience of great intensity... War stops time, intensifies experience to the point of a terrible ecstasy" (Broyles, 1984). Military veterans speak of the "combat high."

In even more mystical terms, Broyles (1984) writes:

The love of war stems from the union, deep in the core of our being between sex and destruction, beauty and horror, love and death. War may be the only way in which most men touch the mythic domains in our soul. It is, for men, at some terrible level, the closest thing to what childbirth is for women: the initiation into the power of life and death. It is like lifting off the corner of the universe and looking at what's underneath. To see war is to see into the dark heart of things, that no-man's-land between life and death, or even beyond.

And Mockenhaupt (2007) writes that:

War is like nothing else... War peels back the skin, and you live with a layer of nerves exposed, overdosing on your surroundings, when everything seems all wrong and just right, in a way that makes perfect sense. And then you almost die but don't, and are born again, stoned on life and mocking death... this is the open secret: War is exciting. Sometimes I was in awe of this, and sometimes I felt low and mean for loving it, but I

loved it still. Even in its quiet moments, war is brighter, louder, brasher, more fun, more tragic, more wasteful. More. More of everything.

War, its urgency and high-stakes outcome, is also a stark contrast to the mind-numbing and stultifying nature of numerous civilian jobs and organizations (James, 1910). Even a committed pacifist such as William James (1910) wrote that:

War's horrors are a cheap price to pay for rescue from the only alternative supposed, of a world of clerks and teachers, of coeducation and zoophily, of 'consumers' leagues' and 'associated charities,' of industrialism unlimited, and feminism unabashed. No scorn, no hardness, no valor any more! Fie upon such a cattleyard of a planet! (p. 8)

Mockenhaupt (2007) writes that "relearning everyday life, the sense of mission can be hard to find. And this is not just about dim prospects and low-paying jobs in small towns. Leaving the war behind can be a letdown, regardless of opportunity or education or the luxuries waiting at home."

Another related thrill mentioned by former Soldiers is the pleasure of "blowing things up." Vietnam veterans such as author William Herr (Herr, 1977) and tunnelrat Billy Heflin (interviewed in the film *First Kill*) admit that there were attractions to killing even within a general aversion to war. Broyles (1984) states that

One of the most troubling reasons men love war is the love of destruction, the thrill of killing. In his superb book on World War II, *The Warriors*, J. Glenn Gray wrote that 'thousands of youths who never suspect the presence of such an impulse in themselves have learned in military life the mad excitement of destroying.' It's what Hemingway meant when he wrote, "Admit that you have liked to kill as all who are Soldiers by choice have enjoyed it some time whether they lie about it or not."

Self-validation through Willingness to Engage in Warfare

An anonymous Vietnam era Soldier wrote that war was the "ultimate test of all my mental, physical and spiritual qualities. Some veterans think that if they can survive such an experience, they can survive anything."

There is an extensive literature linking warfare with self-definition of masculinity. War has, across many civilizations, been among the most gendered of activities (Ehrenreich, 1997). War has often been pursued not as a means to an end (such as obtaining natural resources), but as an end in itself. It is used to initiate young men into manhood, to win renown, and to maintain companionship (Davie, 1929; Garlan, 1975; Kroeber & Fontana, 1986). As recently as 1946, applicants for US citizenship were required to promise military service (or an equivalent for pacifists, such as serving as a medic) as a condition of citizenship (Roth-Douquet & Schaeffer, 2006). Buckley (1983) has written that in the post-Vietnam era, a number of non-participants felt guilt at having missed the war. By contrast, those who served felt they had been confirmed as men by the experience. "I have been weighed on the scales and have not been found wanting." Broyles writes that "some men my age ... who didn't go to war ... now have a sort of nostalgic longing for something they missed, some classic male experience, the way some women who

didn't have children worry they missed something basic about being a woman, something they didn't value when they could have done it.”

Some who did not experience war try for substitutes such as mock wars and paintball games, or use military vocabulary to describe business dealings and other competitions. It has been estimated that only 5-20% of paintball participants are actual military veterans; for those who experienced the real thing, acting out the substitute is not necessary (Gibson, 1994). Even among those who had been members of the military, those who missed a war because of injury sometimes express a sense of loss and of having been diminished (Gibson, 1994). Ehrenreich (1997) writes that:

To the nonwarrior – the peasants, for example, who so often found themselves in the way of thundering warrior hosts – war can be a catastrophe on the scale of plague or famine. To the warrior, though, it is the very condition of life, of a good life, anyway, which women and peasants can never share. In war he finds adventure, camaraderie, searing extremes of emotion, proof of manhood, possibly new territory or loot, and always the chance of a “glorious death,” meaning not death at all but everlasting fame. (p. 150)

Unique Opportunity to do All-Encompassing Leadership in the Military Environment

A number of former officers mentioned that they were able to lead their Soldiers in an all-encompassing way that was appealing. They were leading and instructing on work-related matters, as well as counseling and sometimes protecting or rescuing their troops in non-work related matters. Although going to jail in the middle of the night to bail out one's Soldier was not a completely fond memory, it was remembered as an example of how engrossed they could be in helping someone as leaders. By contrast, they felt their control, influence, and engagement with civilian subordinates to be more constrained, limited to the work day, and therefore less satisfying. In the words of a new officer (Roth-Douquet & Schaeffer, 2006):

Becoming a Marine officer goes way beyond duty to your country or continuing family traditions. A second lieutenant infantry officer has in his hands the life and well-being of forty young men, some older than himself. Becoming an officer in the United States Marine Corps is not a job, it is a calling. (p. 77)

Quality of People

Officers tend to see their military peers as a cut above the people they encounter in civilian life in terms of loyalty, integrity, courage, and other positive characteristics. This may be a function of their being trained and acculturated into a society with honorable values and/or a function of the qualities which typify those who volunteer to join such a culture. They believe that their brushes with life and death issues give them perspective on what is and is not important in life. They find that civilians often lack that perspective, leading them to obsess or become enraged over trivialities in the workplace. Moreover, the typical Army unit may be more ethnically and racially diverse than most towns and neighborhoods in the U.S., and interaction between diverse people is more likely than even in demographically diverse home towns. That is also seen by some as advantageous. In a 2005 poll by Military City (the publisher of *Army Times*, *Navy Times*, and similar publications), 91% of polled active duty officers and enlisted

personnel felt that racial and ethnic minorities were treated more fairly in the military than in the larger society (Roth-Douquet & Schaeffer, 2006).

Instrumental Advantages of the Army Officer's Lifestyle

Travel and Lifestyle

A number of former officers and their spouses have cited unique side benefits of the military lifestyle that were especially appealing to those who came from small towns, as well as to those who were not otherwise disposed to foreign travel or learning about other cultures. These included travel to interesting places within and outside the U.S. and exposure to different cultures and societies. For some, moving every few years, making new friends and neighbors, and learning about different regions and societies were distinct advantages (although others, primarily those with older children, often saw relocating as a problem).

Physical Fitness

Active duty Soldiers and officers spend a good deal of time involved in exercise and physical activities such as marching and running. Even those officers in staff positions have ample opportunities and facilities for exercise and the benefit of living in a culture that values physical fitness as a priority. For many, moving into the civilian world also marks a transition into a much more sedentary lifestyle, often despite the best of intentions. For this reason, the military is often missed because of the associated feelings of being physically fit and at one's appropriate weight.

Financial Security

Financial security is often advanced by senior leadership as a reason why company grade officers and Soldiers should consider staying in the military until retirement. Guaranteed medical benefits and pensions are one of the key selling points currently used to try to convince company grade officers to stay until retirement. Conversely, among those who leave, a certain minority admit to missing the safety of the military system. Although this does not appeal to the same instincts as most of the aforementioned motives, it does enter into retention decisions. However, in the words of researcher John Farris (1984):

Most career-oriented officers make their decision to remain in the military despite perceptions of economic loss. Much more significant in determining career plans are the satisfactions of the military work role and the relationship with co-workers and supervisors [what the military calls camaraderie].

Summary of Missed Aspects of Being an Officer and OID

Table 1 presents a conceptual mapping of the non-instrumental motives for OID together with the aforementioned aspects of being an officer that evoke attachment. While this model has not yet been tested empirically, it provides a framework for the intervention by specifying the components of officer life that evoke attachment and placing them within the context of a generalized OID model.

Table 1

Aspects of Army Officer Experience Missed by Former Officers in Relation to Organizational Identification (OID) Motives

Aspects	OID Motives				
	Self-esteem	Transcending Self	Meaning	Belonging	Higher Aspirations
Camaraderie				X	
Teamwork & Trust		X		X	
Higher Purpose	X	X	X		
Altruism/Sacrifice		X			
Patriotism		X	X		
Military Uniform	X			X	X
Excitement of Battle			X		
Self-Validation Battle					X
Total Leadership		X			
Quality Military People	X				X

Choosing Former Officers for the Video

We used an extensive screening process to choose officers to appear in the video. The following sections describe the steps taken to select the final group of former officers from a large number of candidates.

Recruiting for Preliminary Interviews

The first step in planning the video involved interviewing former officers in order to clarify the message of the video and to find potential candidates for participation in the video. Solicitation of individuals for preliminary interviews took place through various outlets. Some of those contacted include:

- The USMA Alumni Association
- The Human Resources Command (HRC) Officer Retention Office
- The OCS Alumni Association and individuals with contacts within that organization
- Various individual current and former officers with colleagues who had recently left service
- The HRC ACAP office involved with out-processing of departing officers
- The Green to Gray Association
- The ROTCs of various colleges including Loyola of Maryland, Pennsylvania State, Tennessee, Arizona State, Howard University, Oregon, Texas A&M, Louisiana State, Louisiana Tech, Florida International, Florida Atlantic, South Florida, UCLA, and at least two dozen more
- Employers of military contractors in the metropolitan Washington DC vicinity who have high concentrations of former military officers

The USMA Alumni Association was particularly helpful in that they agreed to send out a request letter to the presidents of the classes of 1997-2001 that was then forwarded to their classmates. Although the various ROTCs were helpful, they were usually handicapped by not having current civilian contact information for those officers who had left the military. In addition, in contrast to the USMA Alumni Association, they did not have continuous staff with strong ties to alumni and were therefore not always as confident about their ability to convince alumni to participate. The OCS Alumni Association was unfortunately not responsive despite trying various routes to engender their participation. We also advertised in a Washington DC newspaper (*The Washington Times*) to no avail.

When we did succeed in interviewing an officer, we then asked him or her to suggest to former comrades that they participate as well. This yielded additional participants. Spouses of former officers were recruited directly through their husbands (the only relevant spouses of female officers were themselves former officers).

The Structured Interview

The interviews took place by phone and were either recorded by a research assistant taking notes or with an Internet-based recording device that allowed for later transcription by a research assistant. The first portion of the interview consisted of an intensive review of the officer's career. This portion covered issues such as:

- Initial decision to become an officer
- Family influences
- Basis for choice of branch and assignment
- Career intentions at each stage of the officer's career
- Assignment experiences and satisfaction with assignment and commanders
- Marital and family status and social life throughout
- Key points that led the officer to consider and decide to resign
- Efforts (if any) of the officer's commanders to either convince the officer to stay and/or to make arrangements to achieve conditions seen by the officer as requirements for reconsidering departing, such as desired assignments, schooling for the officer, or location unification with a dual career spouse
- The role of headhunters and other sources in enabling the officer to find post-service employment
- Whether or not the officer is or was in the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) after completing his/her active duty

The first part of the interview enabled us to better understand the complex web of reasons that would convince an officer who had been open to or clearly committed to staying through retirement to change his/her mind.

The next part of the interview consisted of structured questions regarding the following:

- A summary of why the officer left the active Army
- Things that the officer preferred about civilian life
- Things that the officer missed about being an officer
- Any regrets that the officer had about leaving when he or she did
- Any way that things could have been arranged or worked out differently so that the officer would have continued as an officer

- Any advice the officer would have for a company grade officer debating whether or not to leave
- If the officer would have benefited from talking to a former officer when making his/her decision to leave
- If the former officer would be willing to mentor current company grade officers seeking an outside sounding board or mentor

The protocol for the former officer interviews appears in Appendix A. Those interviews that were taped were able to be timed. The average time for an officer interview was 72 minutes with a range from 40-118 minutes.

The Spouses' Structured Interview

A stated intent of the video was to present the perspectives of former officers and their spouses. Therefore, a series of parallel interviews of spouses was initiated for two reasons. First, it allowed exploration of the issues that went into the decision to leave from the spouses' perspective as well. It was not always the case that a couple agreed on the primary reason for the early departure, especially if one of them felt it was for family reasons. Second, the insight and verbal capability of the spouse was to be a factor in the choice of officers to appear in the video. Therefore, a series of interviews was conducted with spouses after speaking with the officer. The goals were to determine if the spouse shared the officer's perspective on why he/she left and what he/she missed. It was also hoped that insight would be gained about the influence of the spouse on the decision to leave and whether leaving for family reasons led to any friction or recriminations toward the spouse. Although we did not ask those latter questions directly because of invasiveness concerns, and we saw no evidence whatsoever of any abuse, some evidence of tension was offered by a small number of officers or their spouses.

Interviews took place by phone and were either recorded by a research assistant taking notes or with an Internet-based recording device that allowed for later transcription by a research assistant. The interview, which was briefer than the officer interview, covered issues such as:

- When in the officer's career did the couple meet, date, and marry
- Family influences of the spouse
- Spouse's career training and current career involvement
- A summary of why the officer left the active Army
- Things that the officer missed about being an officer
- Any regrets that the officer had about leaving when he or she did
- Any way that things could have arranged or worked out differently so that the officer would have continued as an officer

- Any advice the spouse would have for a company grade officer's spouse debating whether or not to leave
- If the spouse would have benefited from talking to a former officer's spouse when making the decision to leave
- If the spouse would be willing to mentor current company grade officers' spouses seeking an outside sounding board or mentor

The protocol for the spouse interviews appears in Appendix B. Those interviews that were taped were able to be timed. The average time for a spouse interview was 38 minutes with a range from 14-77 minutes.

Criteria for inclusion in video

The stated goal in developing a roster of 6-8 former officers for appearance in the video was to gather a group of attractive and articulate former officers who were relatively successful in their civilian lives. Ideally, they would be able to express in an insightful and compelling way what they missed about the Army, their regrets about having left when they did, and their willingness to advise current officers to at least consider thoughts about leaving. There was an expressed preference for those who had spouses so that the film's message would resonate with the spouses of current officers. In addition, there was an expressed preference for those who had been deployed, optimally to Afghanistan or Iraq.

It was also deemed preferable to have a group that was diverse in terms of the following:

- Current occupation
- Spouse's occupation
- Current geographical location
- Demographics (race, sex, ethnicity)
- Source of commission
- Branch
- Reasons for leaving

Although our preference was to satisfy all of these criteria, the priority was to find compelling, credible, and articulate spokespersons for the message over achieving maximal diversity of every type.

Criteria for Exclusion from the Video

Although there were a number of credible candidates for appearance in the video, there were also criteria for exclusion that reduced the pool of viable candidates. These included:

- The officer's current work was so related to previous military work (e.g., the officer moved from active duty military intelligence to civilian government intelligence work) that the transition was totally seamless or in some cases brought the officer's goals as an officer to greater fruition.
- The officer missed nothing, had no regrets, and/or was bitter. (This was a very rare occurrence, given that all interviewees had volunteered to be interviewed).
- The officer had never been deployed or even left the continental U.S. as an officer.
- Very similar to or redundant with others who had the same positive qualities but who were chosen because they had more diverse backgrounds or were more interesting or passionate in their manner of speech
- Having been detailed to another service or to an atypical assignment for the majority of one's career.
- Current domestic, career or economic turmoil that would be distracting or reduce the officer's credibility, in the sense that their missing the Army would be seen as a result of failing as a civilian.

Summary of Demographics and Findings for all Interviewees

The sample of 70 interviewees was 78.6% male and 21.4% female. The sample was also 82.6% Caucasian and 17.4% of other minority or ethnic groups, including African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans, despite strenuous efforts to recruit more minorities. One African-American female who was actually scheduled to be in the video declined to participate at the last minute because of a personal crisis. Of the participants, 86% had been deployed to one or more foreign locations and 50% had been in Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

Sixteen branches were represented in the sample, with the most numerous being from Engineers (12), followed by Infantry (9), Aviation (9), and Armor (7), although there was moderate representation of Artillery/Field Artillery and Military Intelligence as well. There was one Officer Candidate School (OCS) graduate in the group, while 22% were from Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and the remaining 76% were from the United States Military Academy (USMA). Because of timing, Engineers and Infantry were overrepresented in the video. Their statements in the video were not branch-specific, however, so they were able to relate their experiences to officers from other branches.

Table 2 presents the aspects of being officers that were missed by the sample of former officers. The aspect of being an officer most frequently cited was camaraderie with other Soldiers, cited by 84% of respondents. Another frequently cited aspect was working for a higher purpose (68%). Some other frequently cited aspects included the officer's unique leadership opportunity (49%), excitement (45%), and teamwork and trust (42%). The next tier of aspects missed included the type of work and skills used in the Army (36%), patriotism (32%), quality of people in the Army (32%), wearing the uniform (30%), unique experiences and lifestyle (including travel and foreign stations) (29%), sacrifice (28%), and physical activeness and fitness

(25%). Others mentioned were structure (rules, roles, promotion track) (19%), financial security (13%), self-validation in battle (10%), and competition (9%).

A content analysis of interview transcripts was conducted to identify trends in reasons for leaving the Army, as well as other factors that were associated with their decisions. Table 3 shows the reasons the interview participants gave for leaving the Army when they did. (The table shows raw numbers of Officers citing the reasons, while this paragraph discusses the data in terms of percentages). Each provided a primary reason and (if relevant) additional reasons that factored into their decisions. It is possible that the reasons seen as primary in retrospect may be more or less accurate than reasons cited or believed at the time. For primary reasons cited, the most common were deployment duration and frequency (13%), unhappiness with leadership and command climate (not with one's own leader) (9%), and spouse unhappiness or infirmity (9%), with a number of other reasons cited by 7% or less of respondents. For reasons cited as either primary or secondary, the most common were unhappiness with leadership and command climate (not with one's own leader) (31%), the unappealing nature of staff positions lying ahead in one's career (28%), being blocked from a desired or promised assignment (28%), deployment duration and frequency (26%), unhappiness with one's own leader (24%), and spouse unhappiness or infirmity (22%).

Choice of the Final Video Group

The final group chosen for the video consisted of eight former officers, seven male and one female. These included one African-American and one Asian-American. The group was also diverse in terms of their occupations, spouse's occupations, branches, current geographic locations, reasons for leaving the Army, and types of things they missed about the Army. Their common threads were that they fit the aforementioned criteria and were attractive, believable spokespersons to appear on camera.

Table 2
Things Missed by the Former Officers

What was missed (rank ordered)	Percentage Cited	Number	Covered in Video?
Camaraderie	84%	58	Y
Higher Purpose	68%	47	Y
Unique leadership opportunity	49%	34	Y
Excitement	45%	31	Y
Teamwork and Trust	42%	29	Y
Skills used/work done	36%	25	Y
Patriotism	32%	22	Y
Quality of people and leaders	32%	22	Y
Wearing the/a uniform	30%	21	Y
Unique experiences and lifestyle	29%	20	Y
Sacrifice	28%	19	Y
Physical activeness and fitness	25%	17	Y
Structure (rules, roles, promotion track)	19%	13	N
Financial security	13%	9	N
Self-validation in battle	10%	7	Y
Competition	9%	6	N

Table 3
Reasons Cited by Former Officers for Leaving Active Army Duty

Reason Left (<i>Category</i>)	Primary Reason	Secondary Reason	Total Citing This Reason
<i>Personal</i>	33		
Deployment duration and frequency	9	9	18
Spouse unhappy or infirmity	6	9	15
Child care or concerns	5	6	11
Inability to find spouse	3	5	8
Own physical or emotional problem	4	1	5
Spouse occupation	4	1	5
Dual family concerns	1	4	5
Parental death or infirmity	1	1	2
<i>Career</i>	20		
Staff roles ahead not appealing	3	16	19
Unhappy not doing core branch work	5	10	15
Bored and needed new challenge	4	7	11
Promotion path blocked or long queue	5	5	10
Concerned about earning ability	1	8	9
Never intended to stay past first ADSO	2	0	2
<i>Organizational</i>	15		
Unhappy with leadership and command climate	6	15	21
Blocked from assignment	5	14	19
Unhappy with own leader	1	15	16
Unhappy with promotion policy and favoritism	1	10	11
Blocked from education chance	2	5	7
Total <i>N</i>	68		

Video Production

Selection Process for the Video Firm

A number of video firms who had experience with short documentaries for the Department of Defense or other government agencies were evaluated by the research team, which included one member who had studied film direction and had valuable amateur experience in the area. A number of criteria for choosing a director were evaluated, including (a) style as evidenced from work samples, (b) ability to tell a coherent story, (c) sophistication, (d) ability to be credible with both idealistic and skeptical audience members, (e) ability to reflect nuance, (f) openness to client suggestion, and (g) recommendations. The final choice was Betsy Cox, an independent producer who had worked previously with Video/Action (VAF), a Washington based firm that produces socially conscious films. Ms. Cox had also produced films for Maguire-Reeder, a Washington firm specializing in military documentary films. It was felt that Betsy Cox combined the best of both worlds, the storytelling prowess of VAF and the military expertise of Maguire-Reeder.

Video Production Process

The research team worked carefully with the producer to screen the potential participants, to produce the video interview questions, and to gain the participation of the former officers throughout. Generally, the interview script followed the initial interview that had been conducted and recorded by the research team with a particular officer and his/her spouse. Full day video shooting was scheduled in Temple, TX; Dallas; Boston; San Diego; and Washington, DC. At each location, the producer hired a camera and sound professional to do the actual video filming. The producer conducted the interviews and supervised the staging of “b-roll” (action footage) with the assistance of the research team. Spouses were also interviewed and when relevant, children of the officers were filmed as well (but not interviewed). Officers were filmed in the workplace, engaged in strenuous recreational activities (such as surfing and jogging), domestic activities, and reminiscing about military life with pictures and uniforms. Each person who appeared on camera filled out a release form that was reviewed by the Army’s legal authorities.

Concurrently, U.S. Army stock footage and photographs – depicting Soldiers and officers in both training and deployment situations – were obtained.

Once filming was completed, interviews were transcribed and scriptwriting began. The research team and producer developed a thematic outline of how the video would unfold. The producer then carefully screened all of the footage (interviews and b-roll). During this process, sound bites from the participants and scenes from their lives which best captured the core messages were selected.

From these selections, an initial cutting script was drafted. The script was constructed in the documentary tradition. Rather than use a narrator, the story unfolded through the interweaving of the video participants’ voices and lives.

The video followed the contents of the interviews and was organized in the following loose structure:

- The difficulty of "making the call" to leave or stay
- Unique excitement, purpose and camaraderie in the Army
- The sense of loss when working/living on the outside
- Reasons why the officers left the Army
- Disappointment with the civilian world of work and its values
- Influences of spouses on leaving and how it impacts the relationship
- The importance of making a sound and informed decision on whether to leave or stay

Once the cutting script was completed, editing began on a non-linear computer-based editing system called AVID. Editing is a lengthy process, with the initial goal of producing a rough cut that compellingly captures the editorial content. Once that occurred to the satisfaction of the research team, editing focused on the stylistic look and feel of the film.

A first draft of the video was presented to the Army for review. A number of suggestions were made by members of ARI, HRC, and other entities, including students and instructors at a college ROTC. Based on this pretesting, the video was revised a number of times until a final version was completed and presented to ARI and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Reserve Affairs (G-1) for immediate release to senior officers. The video received strong positive reactions by the Vice Chief of Staff for the Army and other Army leaders.

Evaluation

We conducted an evaluation using the methodology described below. The focus groups had two purposes. The first purpose was to evaluate the influence of the video on current company grade officers' attitudes and intentions toward staying in the Army. The second purpose was to collect opinions on the video itself to determine how it might be revised a final time to make the message more effective.

Development of the Pre- and Post-Measures and the Focus Group Questions

Focus groups were planned at which current company grade officers were to be shown the video and queried about their reactions. Measures were developed to be completed by the officers viewing the video both before and after viewing. The pre-measure included basic demographic information, questions about deployment history and marital/family status, indicators of satisfaction with Army life and personal life, and previously used measures of commitment, identification and intent to stay or leave the Army. The post-measure repeated the intent-to-stay items, but was mainly devoted to two topics: (a) attitudes that may have changed as a result of watching the video, and (b) comments on the technical quality and appeal of the video. The focus group session agenda was to have the attending officers complete the pre-survey, watch the video, complete a post-survey, and then engage in a focus group discussion at which questions would be asked about the impact and message of the video. The focus groups had multiple purposes:

- To determine if watching the video had any affect on a range of proximal and distal attitudes.
- To determine the positive aspects of the video that elicited favorable responses by the focus group participants
- To ascertain what, if anything, about the video was distracting or upsetting that would require editing of the video.
- To determine what type of objections company grade officers might voice regarding the video's message. This would allow for preparing commanders to anticipate these objections and prepare responses ahead of time before having a retention meeting with their company grade officers.

Focus Groups

Sample

Researchers conducted 13 focus groups with 155 lieutenants (LTs) and captains (CPTs) at Forts Belvoir, Eustis, Carson, and Sill. The LTs were generally early in their careers and in training settings (i.e., Fort Eustis [transportation] and Fort Sill [field artillery]), while many of the CPTs had been on multiple deployments. Pre- and post-viewing surveys were completed as planned prior to discussing the video.

Researchers also conducted six focus groups with 25 spouses at Fort Riley and Fort Sill. The Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) on these posts provided access to the spouses. The spouses, who were civilians, did not complete any written surveys. As adjuncts to the officer and spouse groups, the video was also seen by various Points of Contact (POCs) for the data collections, the Chief of Staff of the First Infantry Division at Fort Riley, the Commandant at Fort Sill, and by various FRG leaders at Fort Riley and Fort Sill.

The focus groups were presented with a series of questions that had been reviewed by Army representatives. They were focused on determining what response the video evoked, how it might be improved, and most importantly, how it could best be used. However, the focus group interviews accomplished more than simply soliciting information from the officers and spouses. The discussion provided an opportunity to fill in information about the officers shown in the video (and thereby clarify occasional misinterpretations about topics such as their exact occupations and current job satisfaction), gave opportunities to explain why certain types of people were chosen as the participants in the video (e.g., time constraints, sequential access to certain participants), and provided an opportunity to explain the motivation behind making the video. The discussions suggested how valuable the role of a facilitator or commander could be when operationally presenting the video.

The officers, spouses, senior officers, and FRG representatives all expressed appreciation that someone associated with the video would come to their posts, answer their questions, and flesh out the picture. None of the 179 participants had any visceral emotional reaction that presented any cause for concern.

Situational Limitations and Mitigating Factors

As mentioned, many of the LTs in the sample reported that they were too new to be engaged in deciding whether or not to stay in the Army beyond their first ADSO, and some had a hard time identifying with the former officers in the video. Many of the CPTs were beyond the point of deciding to stay past their first ADSO and many had numerous friends who had already left the Army. Another complicating factor was that the Army had already made a limited distribution of the video to select senior officers, some of whom showed the video to their junior officers prior to the focus groups. For example, of the 40 CPTs at Fort Sill who watched the video, about 90% had already been shown the video the previous week by a senior leader during a mandatory lunchtime viewing billed as a retention session. This had a paradoxical effect: On one hand, some officers were negatively predisposed to the video because of how it had been billed and when it had been shown. On the other hand, they felt that seeing it a second time opened their eyes to nuances they had missed. For some, the second viewing increased their appreciation for the video and dispelled their initial negative reactions.

Every focus group had its own dynamic, often governed by the size of the group (anywhere from 7 to 19 officers); the room setting (cavernous classroom versus conference table or semicircle of desks); the quality of the audiovisual equipment; the annoyance level of the attendees (based on the time of day and whether it was during their free time or class time); and even the interplay and relationships among the officers. In most groups, officers watched the video quietly. In a handful of groups, however, some key officers provided running sarcastic commentary almost from the beginning. Often, if someone made a positive statement about the

video during the focus group and someone else disagreed strongly, the pro-video person would back down. Some participants would come over *after* the session to say that they really liked the video and disagreed with the more negative views expressed in the group. Nevertheless, despite the vagaries of group dynamics, each session provided some valuable information and some common themes emerged.

Results

In this section, responses by officers, spouses and others during the focus group discussions are reviewed separately.

Officers

The responses of officers were mixed. Some saw the video as a balanced statement of “look before you leap” and “the grass may not be greener.” Others saw the video as propaganda, heavily tilted toward the view that civilian life was terrible and that one should stay in the Army instead. Upon probing, it became evident that those viewers saw the video participants as generally successful in their civilian careers (as evidenced by their homes) but not happy. They felt that these were not a representative group of people and that their own friends who left were happy to be out of the Army without the same regrets. Yet others were just as adamant that most everyone they knew missed the Army and wished they could come back in.

In cases where the former officers' reason for leaving was sketchy, the viewers sometimes imputed their own explanations for why the officers had left. The viewers were often surprised, for example, to learn that one participant (who said that he “sat in front of a computer 12 hours a day”) was a successful consultant rather than a computer programmer. This changed their perception of the video positively and they felt that more information about what people were doing now (such as was accomplished with the participant who was an engineering project manager), would give the video more credibility. They said that they needed a more rounded view of some of the participants in order to be able to identify with those on the video. Through the focus groups, the officers obtained a better understanding of the difficulty in achieving true balance and the limitations imposed by time constraints.

The Army's intent was a big issue. On occasion someone in a group would say that they were “offended” that the Army thought it could change someone's mind about staying or leaving with a mere video, and that they should be putting their efforts elsewhere (in part by reducing deployments, in part by commanders showing concern and doing proper counseling). This was not a consensus view by any means. However, a good deal of hostility and cynicism toward the Army was expressed, especially by some of the CPTs.

The concept behind the video was discussed and there was strong consensus among the groups that they would like to talk to former officers directly. Although most claimed to have friends who had left who were sources of some information, they felt that they could benefit even more from talking to other officers who were either farther along and more settled, more similar to them, or perhaps just better to talk with. They were gratified to hear that the former officers in our database wished they had former officers to whom they could talk when they were leaving and that the former officers in the database were willing to talk with current officers.

Interestingly, unlike concerns voiced at the outset of this project, no one referred to the video participants as “quitters” or talked disparagingly about their lack of commitment or fortitude.

Spouses

In comparison to the company grade officers, the spouses generally saw the video as balanced, and they appreciated that it showed people who decided to leave because of their families and their spouses’ careers. Their responses to the video were overwhelmingly positive and they wanted their spouses to see it. The spouses were a more self-selected group, however, as spouse viewing was always optional. Nevertheless, the groups included spouses committed to extended Army careers, those who were undecided or ambiguous about the future, and those who were clearly leaning toward (and sometimes pushing toward) their officer spouses to leave the Army. They strongly identified with one wife in the video who expressed misgivings about “making” her husband leave.

Others

Senior officers and civilian officials (e.g., the Chief of Staff of the First Infantry Division at Fort Riley, the Commandant at Fort Sill, and various FRG leaders at Fort Riley and Fort Sill) who saw the video also saw the video as balanced (i.e., not propaganda) and viewed it favorably.

Technical Merits

The video received compliments for technical proficiency by all groups and was contrasted favorably to previous Army videos they had seen. No one said it was too long or meandering. However, there were a handful of complaints that some of the uniforms and training instruments in the stock footage were outdated and thereby distracting.

Optimal Usage of the Video

A consensus emerged that the video could be effective to spur conversation about whether it would be a smart idea to leave the Army *provided* it was shown at the right time and in the right setting. All felt that there were opportune times at which decisions were made and that that was when it would be most relevant. They did not feel that it could be effective when shown in a classroom setting (such as these focus groups), especially if shown at the wrong career stage. Rather, it should be shown on an individual basis by a commander, although not necessarily viewed by them together – rather, watched by the company grade officer as a springboard to a discussion with the commander. Alternatively, many officers and almost all spouses felt it should be seen as well by a couple together or even by a few couples together (up to six couples) with a discussion facilitator. This would enable the husbands and wives to open communication on a difficult issue - whether there would be negative repercussions for/by the officer if they left for the family’s sake or negative repercussions for/by the spouse and family if they did not leave. These officers and spouses felt that the video could spur discussion in a way that simply sitting down to talk could not.

Suggested Changes

Suggested changes included one sequence to be deleted, additional material about participants, and requests for other points of view in this or subsequent video(s).

Requests to Delete Problematic Material

The only portion of the video that was seen as problematic was the so-called “cap gun” section, in which a young boy is playing with a cap while his father, a former officer, is heard saying: “My oldest boy had a cap gun around the house... and he was firing it and the smell just brought me to life. You know, and I actually took the caps and just held them up to my nose so I could smell them”. This sentence on occasion elicited laughter and comments of being “creepy”, and so was deleted.

Requests for Additional Material

Among those who wanted more information, the primary requests were to know why people left, what were they doing professionally now, and why were they not joining again if they missed it so much. There were a number of requests to know more about the video participants. One former officer and his wife were seen as the model couple in terms of satisfying viewer interest because one could string together (a) why he left (b) what he was doing now, and (c) why he was not rejoining the Army even though he missed it so much. This provided a plausible explanation for telling someone to think more carefully *before* leaving rather than after. To a certain extent, another couple also provided most of this information. By contrast, it was not clear what two other officers were doing now that gave them any sense of satisfaction. The video is very tightly packed to maintain interest and nuance may have gotten lost in the first viewing. As evidence, those who watched the video a second time were able to pick up on points that were missed by some first-time viewers. Although no one said they minded watching it a second time, it would be hard to mandate. Some focus group participants were unclear as to why certain video participants had left or what they were currently doing, and there was particular curiosity about the lone female officer. As the focus group moderator fleshed out their stories in the focus groups, there were visible, positive changes in some viewers’ attitudes toward the video, even though that will not be reflected in the surveys. There was a clear desire to be able to follow a person’s story line and to possibly identify with them.

Requests for Other Points of View

There were some requests for additional points of view. A number would have liked to have seen officers who had left and then come back in. Some small minority would have liked to have seen officers who had worked on the outside before becoming officers. These viewers felt the participants all appeared to be people who had gone straight from school to the Army. They felt that they were somewhat naïve in their responses to civilian life. By contrast, people who had worked on the outside beforehand would be more credible. It is possible that having at least one video participant who explicitly described having gone through multiple deployments would have added an element that the viewers could have more readily identified with.

Others would have liked to have seen some officers who were perfectly happy after having left with no regrets whatsoever. These viewers could not really explain what that would

accomplish other than to show more balance and realism. The researchers had clearly chosen people based on their eloquence about what they missed. However, each of the 70 people who were interviewed missed a number of things about the Army. We wondered if some of these focus group participants were not being overly defensive about their possible lack of knowledge of what things were like on the outside. Even though the officers in the video clearly said that they were surprised by the outside world of work, this small group of focus group participants could not accept that they also may not be as attuned to the outside world as they thought. In conversations with video participants after the conclusion of some of the focus groups, they expressed the view that (a) the current officers may think they are more informed than they are about the civilian world, and (b) that their friends who have left may downplay (when talking to still-serving friends) the difficulties they are having as civilians in order not to admit that they were mistaken in leaving. It may take time for the video to gnaw at someone and create doubts, especially after discussion. That is more likely than the video having an immediate transformative effect on all (even though some officers claimed it did change their attitudes immediately). One needs to take into account the wide range of participants and the dueling psychological factors at play here, and to calibrate expectations accordingly.

Spouses would have liked to have seen more about the spouses discussing their *own* post-military adjustment. They believed (correctly) that the focus (with the exception of one spouse) was on what the spouses felt their husbands missed, not what they themselves had missed.

Requests for additional material or participants led to a discussion about the time constraints that shaped decisions. The focus group participants were interested in the rationale behind limiting the video to 12 minutes. They were asked if they would still find the video engrossing if it were longer (with additional material and participants added). Their responses ranged from 15-30 minutes total length, although there were some significant disagreements about how long they would tolerate. The spouses felt that they would even watch 45-60 minutes if it covered the topics they cared about.

Proposed/Made Edits to the Video after the Focus Groups

Because the current version had many adherents and was liked by almost all for its flow and pacing, there was hesitation to add too much to the first version of the video. In addition, it was no longer possible to conduct new field interviews for the current video because of deadlines and budgetary constraints. Therefore the researchers proposed and, with the concurrence of the Army, made the following changes:

- Removed the aforementioned “capgun sequence” because of viewer objections to the scene
- Added each former officer’s current occupation to their identifier on screen (below their descriptor as a former officer) so that their comments about job satisfaction and their work organizations could be understood in the context of their positions.
- Added more footage for four of the participants, either about why they left or that they are doing well now, in order to present a well rounded depiction of their current lives without romanticizing those lives or minimizing what they miss about being an officer.

Suggestions for Future Videos

Focus group participants generally liked the idea of using this platform as a medium for raising issues but sometimes wanted more people in the video with whom they could personally identify. They understood that a single video could not cover all audiences in a realistic amount of time. Thus, there were a number of suggestions or requests for other, more targeted videos to be made in the future. The following are some of the more relevant categories:

1. The video was admittedly focused on married couples and to some extent, their concerns and reasons for leaving. There were no unmarried video participants, even though one was mistakenly assumed to be single. Unmarried officers did not have an airing of their concerns about finding spouses, moving around too much to establish relationships, and other related concerns ((Mael, Quintela, & Johnson, 2006). Their concerns may be worthy of a separate video.
2. The video was admittedly focused on active duty Soldiers, as they are the primary focus of retention efforts. Some of the presumed “grass is greener” fallacies that the video dispels are not as newsworthy to reservists who have already worked in the private sector. If anything, the reservists in the focus group often supported the message of the video in the face of skepticism from active duty officers. If retention of reservists is a concern, however, other issues need to be highlighted and other participants featured.
3. There were no complaints about the video not being sufficiently racially or ethnically diverse. No one from any minority group advanced the view that their retention issues were so unique as to have been misrepresented by the video. On the other hand, there were very few women (only 8 out of 155, all LTs) who viewed the video, and none of them spoke up at all, so it is difficult to ascertain if the concerns of female officers were addressed. Some of the spouses and other senior female officers and civilians who watched the video felt that female officers (and dual career couples) had specific issues that might better be covered in a separate video.
4. Officers at Fort Sill (field artillery branch) had been told during their initial viewing (prior to the focus group) that their branch had the lowest retention rates and so they wondered why they were not represented in the video. (The answer was that given the small number of slots available to appear in the video, former officers from other branches satisfied more of the desired criteria.) Others thought separate videos for combat arms, combat support, and service support would be helpful, especially if employment opportunities differ greatly.

Analysis of the Survey Data

Sample Characteristics

This section describes the demographics of those who participated in the pre- and post-survey and the focus group discussions (“focus group participants” as opposed to those who appeared in the video, referred to as “video participants”). The participants in the focus groups who took the pre-viewing and post-viewing surveys during the focus groups were 95% male. The group was 71% White, 11% African-American, and 8% Hispanic, with the rest from other or mixed groups. Married officers accounted for 57% of the sample, and those never married

accounted for an additional 37%. In addition, 42% had children. Of the 80% who had either spouses or significant others, 46% said that that person was supportive of their continuing in the Army; 20% were neutral; and 14% of the spouses/significant others were against continuing.

About 84% of those in the sample were active duty officers, and the majority of participants were either Captains (46%) or Second Lieutenants (2LTs) (40%), with only 13% First Lieutenants (1LTs). OCS was the primary source of commission (40%), followed by ROTC scholarship (28%), ROTC non-scholarship (17%), USMA (10%), or other sources. Although 12 different branches were represented, the largest blocs were from Field Artillery (47%) and Transportation (26%). Other than Infantry (7%) and Engineering (6%), no other branch accounted for more than 5% of participants. Although 34% had not been deployed (mainly the 2LTs), 42% had been deployed to OIF or OEF once, and another 24% were deployed 2 or more times.

In terms of reasons for joining the Army, officers cited multiple reasons for their choices. “I wanted to be an Army officer” was cited as “very important” or “important” (as opposed to “moderately important,” “slightly important,” or “not important”) by 71.6% of focus group participants. “To grow or mature personally” and “to develop leadership skills” were cited by 69.7% and 69.6%, respectively. “To expand my horizons and see the world” was cited by 64.8%, while “to express feelings of patriotism” was cited by 54.8%. “Financial aid” (46.4%), “training in a specific career area” (36.4%), and “family tradition” (25.1%) were also cited. Only 3.9% mentioned “pressure from family or friends” as a motivation for joining.

Table 4 shows the distribution of attitudes toward career continuance among the sample both before and after viewing the video. As is evident in Table 4, a majority of officers in the sample were undecided about their tenure with the Army or their desire to stay with the Army. Approximately 54% (91) officers indicated some level of indecision regarding their intended length of tenure with the Army. This includes:

- “I plan to stay in the Army beyond my obligation, but am undecided about staying until retirement” (15.6%);
- “I am undecided whether I will stay upon completion of my obligation” (26.0%); and
- “I will probably leave the Army upon completion of my obligation” (12.3%).

It is reasonable to assume that some of these officers could have their current career intentions swayed or solidified based upon additional information such as was presented in the video. Not surprisingly, plans to stay in the Army beyond the current ADSO and/or to or beyond retirement were correlated with organizational commitment ($r = .50$) and organizational identification ($r = .44$). As stated earlier, the theory behind this intervention was that invoking the aspects of military life that former officers missed (e.g., camaraderie, higher purpose, sacrifice, patriotism, etc.) would bring to the forefront the motives for increasing one’s OID with the Army by highlighting the components of OID motivation such as belonging, altruism, and higher purpose. In order for this heightened OID to express itself in a change in career intentions, however, the individual would have to be in career decision mode. However, a subset of the focus group participants may not have been at a career decision stage. For example, although a

new 2LT may have been undecided about the future, he may not have been seriously considering what path to take until his/her decision could be shaped by experiences and the need to choose would become more imminent.

Table 4

Frequency of Post-Viewing Career Intentions by Pre-Viewing Career Intentions ($n = 149$)

Post-Viewing Career Intentions	Pre-Viewing Career Intentions							Total
	Does not apply; I am currently mobilized from the Reserve component to serve on active duty.	I plan to stay in the Army beyond 20 years.	I plan to stay in the Army until retirement.	I plan to stay in the Army beyond my obligation, but am undecided about staying until retirement.	I am undecided whether I will stay in the Army upon completion of my obligation.	I will probably leave the Army upon completion of my obligation.	I will definitely leave the Army upon completion of my obligation.	
Does not apply; I am currently mobilized from the Reserve component to serve on active duty.	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
I plan to stay in the Army beyond 20 years.	0	14	1	0	1	0	0	16
I plan to stay in the Army until retirement.	1	4	23	0	0	0	0	28
I plan to stay in the Army beyond my obligation, but am undecided about staying until retirement.	0	1	2	24	2	1	0	30
I am undecided whether I will stay in the Army upon completion of my obligation.	0	0	0	0	35	3	0	38
I will probably leave the Army upon completion of my obligation.	1	0	0	0	1	14	2	18
I will definitely leave the Army upon completion of my obligation.	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	7
<i>Total</i>	14	19	26	24	39	19	8	149

Post-Viewing Survey

Attitudes toward the Video's Technical Aspects

Generally, regardless of the video's impact on attitudes, it was lauded as being technically sound. It was deemed visually appealing by 70% (only 11% disagreed); "pacing was good and kept my interest" was endorsed by 63.8% (with 13.5% disagreeing); 67.8% agreed that "the parts of the video came together and presented a clear message" (versus 16% disagreeing); the sound quality was deemed appealing by 75.5% (versus 8.8% disagreeing); and the musical score composed for the video was rated favorably by 74.5% (versus only 5.4% who disagreed).

Attitudes Impacted by the Video

Table 5 presents a number of attitudes that may have been affected by the video and that fall into one of three categories affected by the video: (a) general attitudes about being an officer and the alternative of being a civilian employee, (b) attitudes about career decisions after having seen the video, and (c) attitudes about spouses seeing the video. Each item was preceded by the words "After seeing the video" The first 12 items deal with general attitudes or perceptions impacted by the video. Most items showed agreement by 15-29% of the officers, although over 45% said that the video helped clarify for them the unique benefits of being an officer.

Attitudes about Utility of Video

The next four items (13-16) deal with the officers' views as to whether the video changed their attitudes regarding career decisions, and whether they felt it should be seen by relevant others. About 34% said that because of their seeing the video they would now take into account the positive aspects of being an officer when making career decisions.

About 15% said that seeing the video actually increased the likelihood of their staying until retirement. Considering that a significant portion of the focus group participants were LTs who had just started their careers or CPTs who had already decided to stay beyond their first ADSO and perhaps till retirement, the percentage who were in a position to seriously change their attitudes about staying were less than the total sample. The 15% would be a higher percentage of a smaller subset that were ready to consider changing career plans and could still make changes to their plans.

In addition, 27% said that they wanted their spouse to see the video. Considering that only 57% had spouses and an additional 23% had significant others, it is clear that the real percentage is actually somewhat higher. In addition, 37% felt that they wanted officers who were thinking about leaving the Army to see the video. Combining the non-overlapping responses on these two items, 45.2% of participants thought that it would be useful to show this video to someone. By combining the non-overlapping responses on these four items, it can be determined that fully 57.4% of the focus group participants felt that the video did or could have practical benefit either for themselves or for others.

Table 5
Frequencies for Post-Viewing Survey Items ($n = 149$)

Attitudes Impacted by the Video Items	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
1. I have a more realistic view of what civilian life would be like if I left the military.	54.8	29.7	15.5
2. I appreciate positive aspects of being an officer that I took for granted.	27.7	43.2	29.0
3. It's clearer to me that being an officer is a unique opportunity.	23.2	30.3	46.5
4. The former officers in this video seemed sincere in their description of the pros and cons of leaving the Army before retirement.	13.9	16.6	69.5
5. I am more proud than ever of being an Army officer.	38.1	40.0	21.9
6. I am more convinced I made the right choice by joining the Army.	29.0	43.2	27.7
7. Civilian life is not as impressive as I thought it was.	51.3	36.4	12.3
8. This video has challenged at least one assumption I had about civilian life after being an officer.	52.3	25.2	22.5
9. Former officers who recently left the Army would be influenced by this video to consider rejoining the Army.	36.1	43.9	20.0
10. I realize more clearly why I wanted to be an officer.	48.1	38.3	13.6
11. I could better explain to others why I have chosen to be an Army officer.	44.8	36.4	18.8
12. I could be a more effective Army recruiter.	48.1	31.2	20.8
Attitudes about Utility of Video Items	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
13. I would want my spouse or relatives to see this video.	38.7	34.2	27.1
14. I would recommend this video to other officers thinking about leaving the Army.	34.4	28.5	37.1
15. I will now be more likely to take into account the positive aspects of being an officer when making career decisions.	23.8	42.4	33.8
16. I would be more likely to consider staying in the Army through retirement.	49.0	36.1	14.8
Attitudes Toward Engagement with Alumni Items	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree
17. I would like there to be a program making former company grade officers accessible to current officers to gain their perspective on the choices that we face.	16.0	28.0	56.0
18. I would want to be able to speak to former officers like these one on one.	34.4	25.8	39.7
19. I would like my spouse to be able to speak to former officer's spouses.	24.0	34.7	41.3

Attitudes Toward Engagement with Alumni

The final three items (17-19) in Table 5 pertain to the underlying issue of whether current company grade officers feel that they or their spouses would want to have contact with former officers. As mentioned earlier, over 80% of the alumni who were interviewed felt that they would have benefited from speaking to a former officer prior to departing. In the current sample, over half wanted a formal program that would enable them to speak with former officers, despite the fact that most focus group members who spoke up said they were in touch with former buddies who had left the Army. In addition, 41% said that they wanted their spouses to speak to former officers' spouses. Considering that only 57% had spouses and an additional 23% had significant others, one realizes that the real percentage is actually somewhat higher.

Direct Change in Plans after Seeing the Video

Each officer was asked the following question in both the pre- and post- video surveys:

Which of the following best describes your current active duty career intentions?

- ☐ Does not apply; I am currently mobilized from the Reserve component to serve on active duty.
- ☐ I plan to stay in the Army beyond 20 years.
- ☐ I plan to stay in the Army until retirement (e.g., 20 years or when eligible to retire).
- ☐ I plan to stay in the Army beyond my obligation, but am undecided about staying until retirement.
- ☐ I am undecided whether I will stay in the Army upon completion of my obligation.
- ☐ I will probably leave the Army upon completion of my obligation.
- ☐ I will definitely leave the Army upon completion of my obligation.

Most participants (128 out of 149, 86%) did not express any change in career plans, either in the direction of being more likely or less likely to stay, simply by watching the video in this setting and being asked for changed attitudes immediately after viewing. This included 12 who were mobilized from the Reserves (and hence not applicable), 14 who continued to plan to stay beyond 20 years, 23 who still planned to stay until retirement, and 24 who continued to plan to stay beyond their retirement. In other words, 61 participants (41% of the sample) were already planning to stay beyond their current obligation even before viewing the video. An additional 35 who were undecided about staying past their obligation remained undecided, representing 90% of those who were undecided before viewing. Another 14 were still leaning toward leaving and 6 were still definitely leaving upon completion of their obligation.

During the focus groups, it became clear that a number of officers did not consider it appropriate for them to change their Army career plans merely by viewing a video. Given that attitude, it is not surprising that so many would not change their views. It should also be noted that a number of those 86% who said their intentions were unchanged said in the other post-viewing questions that they now did have more positive attitudes about staying longer in the Army and about being an officer, and did recommend the video to those who were in decision mode. Thus, even those who were undecided both before and after viewing may have been affected by the viewing (by their own admission on the other questions) and may have become more open to follow-up persuasion by a commander. It would still suggest that the video could be a useful tool when used by a commander as part of a more comprehensive discussion.

There were 21 individuals (and an additional two in the Reserves) whose stated intentions after viewing the video were different from their stated intentions prior to viewing the video. They did not differ as a group from the total sample on any demographic or other variables. Of the four individuals who said they were undecided prior to viewing and changed their views, one said that he/she would stay beyond twenty years; two said that they would stay past retirement; and one said that he/she would probably leave.

Of the five who said that they would probably leave prior to viewing and changed their views, one planned post-viewing to stay past his/her current obligation, three were now undecided, and one now felt that he/she would definitely leave.

Of the two persons who said pre-viewing that they would definitely leave and then changed their views, both said post-viewing that they would probably (versus definitely) leave.

Another seven participants who originally said they planned to stay until retirement or beyond no longer expressed the same certitude, but each said that they would still stay past their current obligation (3) or until retirement (4), while one person upgraded from staying until retirement to staying beyond retirement. Hence, of the 11 who were unsure or leaning toward leaving at the end of their current obligation, nine were more open to staying after viewing. Of the eight who were already leaning to staying past their current obligation or beyond, none downgraded lower than staying past their current obligation. Obviously, these are very small numbers from which to generalize but they do indicate that the video can have a positive impact on some viewers.

Dissemination of the Video by Army and Response

The video was viewed during the development stage by the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, who felt that it could add significantly to retention efforts. He therefore asked that the G-1 disseminate a prototype of the video. The video was sent via AKO to a select number of LTC, COL, and general officers in the early spring of 2008 so that they could use it in conversations about retention with company grade officers. The response by the senior officers was generally quite positive. In this section, the narrative responses to the video and its use that were sent to the G-1 are summarized.

Ironically, some of the senior officers, especially those who found the video less useful, thought that the video was biased in the direction of *leaving* the Army sooner. Conversely, the company grade officers in the focus groups who were unhappy with the video thought that it was biased in favor of *staying* in the Army. Clearly, although every attempt was made to present a somewhat balanced picture in order to avoid the flavor of propaganda, some of those coming from certain perspectives found it biased in the opposite direction. What was most important is that the senior officers generally said that the majority of the company grade officers they showed it to during counseling found it useful and thought provoking. This confirmed the impression that watching the video in the context of counseling and at a point when the company grade officer was actively debating whether to stay or leave might be more effective than seeing it in a classroom setting when it may or may not be as relevant.

There were other interesting, yet critical, responses by individual senior officers who saw or used the video, which included the following:

- Making the video indicated desperation on the Army's part
- The video did not acknowledge the fact that if the captains who are nostalgic about leading Soldiers stayed in the Army, they would have had to adjust to the staff roles more common to majors
- The video overly demonized the private sector, whose existence the military is defending.
- The video would have been well served including those who left and returned.
- The video should have been made available to spouses.

Some of these comments mirrored comments that were occasionally voiced during the focus groups as well. However, the overwhelming majority of the over 350 comments received were positive and at times grateful and enthusiastic. The G-1 considered the video to be a successful tool in retention efforts. Included below is a selection of quotes (provided to the G-1) finding value in the video, which include suggestions for optimal usage:

- *I did view it, and thought it was excellent, as did my deputy commander. It appears to be a balanced presentation and therefore gets more credibility. I thought it was a good decision to include some spouses for their input – could have had even more of that... I do believe that this video should be shown in one on one counseling with company grade*

officers, but not just when they have made the decision to separate. This should be done before that decision is made – such as during OER counseling for instance.

- *Simply outstanding! This is exactly what we, as senior leaders, can show our company grade officers as they make the critical decision whether to stay the course or leave our Army. It is difficult to articulate what 27-28 year olds will face outside the Army if we ourselves have not taken such a step. Hearing from their peers, who have left the Army behind, and the regrets and fears they experienced as they entered the civilian work force, carries far more credibility than we could ever pass on. It is important that such a video be made available to senior leaders -- on DVD -- allowing us to close the door and go one-on-one with a junior Captain hedging on a decision to leave the service.*
- *Very impressive. It was not hard handed yet progressively helped viewers to "feel" what it would be like after getting out.*
- *I think the approach of using former Active Duty Captains is a bold move but a smart one. I didn't expect this approach ... so I was pleasantly surprised. I think the company grade officers will also be surprised and it will cause them to think.*
- *I saw the video for the second time and I think it will be a valuable tool for retention of company grade officer and even junior enlisted Soldiers in the ranks of E-4 and E-5. The video explains reasons involved in making the decision to leave but in many instances the decision is made alone and in a rush.*
- *I have viewed the video and have used it in two counselings with Officers; it has definitely been an effective tool. Most important aspect is that it helps to open a dialogue and develop the balance sheet of pros and cons with staying or going. It is important that our Leaders take the time to do this with their Officers BEFORE they make the decision to get out. Too many wait until it is too late and by then the Officer's mind is made up. I am planning on integrating the video with my Company Commander counseling also as a tool to help them counsel our young lieutenants.*
- *I was struck how the video avoided the sappy and the preachy. It presented real life struggles with deciding on a civilian or a military career, and did so in an honest and straightforward way. It doesn't sugar coat the difficulties and conflicts that families have in making those decisions. At the same time, the video presents some of the real shortfalls of civilian life that face many of our best and brightest officers. I was impressed with it because it so closely echoes the same conversations I hear in company grade officers, and those who have left the military. A fine, professional job that I think will be a useful retention tool.*
- *I just (finally) viewed the video as I was deployed for the last six weeks and not in a position to see it. Awesome is my first response. I think you nailed it. The comments make me rethink my retirement plans - to help my own upcoming transition after 27 plus years wearing the uniform.*

- *The video was quite frank from the perspective of both the former officers who were happy in their new civilian lives and those who weren't. It also accurately reflected the conflicting emotions among both types of former officer. The group of interviewees was appropriately diverse in regard to ethnicity and gender. The video accurately reflects the sensation of exposure to the amoral world of private sector business practices. The video does show both sides of the coin and reflects the difficulty of military family life, and sort of presents the private sector as a viable choice for those to whom that is an issue.*
- *The video was very professionally done. It is an excellent tool for retention. Having left AC , only to return later, I can echo much of the sentiment reflected in the video. We leave a big part of ourselves behind when we exit the military. Private sector work can keep us so busy that we don't really have time to reflect on our lives from day to day, whereas, the military encourages it, and makes time for it.*

Final Timeline

As of the date of this report, the video has been formally released by the G-1. There are no plans for further work on this video. At the current time there are no plans to make additional videos.

The interviews with the seventy former officers revealed that the primary aspects of being an officer that were missed after leaving corresponded to the primary motives for organizational identification (OID) that had been identified theoretically. Camaraderie, teamwork, higher purpose, total leadership, and excitement of battle – all of which can be seen as expressions of one or more OID motives – were endorsed by 30-84% of the former officers interviewed, as were other aspects. Certainly, it would be worthwhile in future research to empirically link these aspects of being an officer (or a Soldier) with each of the OID motives. It would also be useful to determine if the profiles would differ by sex, by race, and by military branch. In addition, it would certainly be useful to determine which missed aspects of being an officer have long term effects on the person's ability or inability to adjust to civilian life.

To the extent that the video was perceived as a useful tool, it was because it elicited memories and heightened awareness of how these OID motives could be achieved most or more successfully by staying in the military system despite hardships. Conversely, a number of the reasons cited for leaving the Army, particularly in the realm of disillusionment with leaders or perceptions of having been mistreated, speak to the possibility that when one's social contract with an organization is seen to have been violated, the resultant anger or bitterness may overwhelm otherwise positive feelings toward the larger organization or one's fellow officers or Soldiers.

Conclusion

The video effort was designed to fill a need in the area of clarifying for officers what was at stake in leaving the Army prematurely, how the grass outside was not necessarily greener, and to a certain extent how families needed to take everything into consideration before making such a drastic move. It was not a tool to allay or solve any of the underlying causes for early departure, such as multiple lengthy deployments, difficulties with leadership, or the other oft-cited reasons for leaving. Nevertheless, there was some degree of consensus from different sources that if it was shown to officers who were at a decision point, if the showing of the video was accompanied by counseling by one's commander, and if the video was also shown to the spouse as a stimulus of much-needed conversation, that it could prove to be well worthwhile and possibly advantageous in retaining company grade officers. The utility of the video concept for other purposes such as recruiting has yet to be tested, as is the use of the concept with other types of participants. The desire of current officers to communicate with former ones for guidance remains unabated. It would be useful to test the efficacy of the video more fully by studying its impact on company grade officers who are in decision range and who see it as part of a more comprehensive discussion with their commanders. We continue to share the view of the many senior and midlevel officers throughout this process who believed that this effort has merit.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Former Company Grade Army Officers

1. When in your career did you leave the Army?
2. Why did you leave when you did?
3. What do you like best about not being in the Army?
4. What do you miss most about not being in the Army?
5. What positive aspects of the Army officer experience just can't be found in the civilian world?
6. Did you or do you have any regrets about leaving when you did instead of staying longer?
7. What should company grade officers thinking of leaving the Army think about before deciding?
8. Are you willing to be someone who current officers could talk to? Do you wish you had had someone like that when you were considering leaving?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Spouses of Former Company Grade Army Officers

1. When did you meet/date/marry the officer spouse (before/after military)
2. Describe own background (military, military family, profession and career, current family size)
3. Your perspective on why your spouse left the military when he/she did (including what his/her aspirations of tenure were before that)
4. Your perceptions of what, if anything the spouse misses about the Army
5. Any regrets spouse has about having left?
6. (If spouse was there at the time) What could have made it end differently? Would alumni have helped?
7. What would *you* tell the spouse of a company grade officer contemplating leaving regarding his/her role in helping the decision?
8. Would you and your peers be willing to talk to them? Would you have talked to an alumni's spouse?