



The 131A Talent Management Gap: An Example of Re-thinking Promotion & Assignment Structure

By CW3 Jesse R. Crifasi

Introduction

General Raymond T. Odierno, 38th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, recently published “Leader Development and Talent Management, The Army Competitive Advantage” in *Military Review*. He emphasized greatly the most valuable asset the Army possesses today, its leaders. He references the Army Operating Concept: “Win in a Complex World”, and states:

Our number one priority must remain the development of our competitive advantage, our leaders. It (also) requires institutional processes that optimize the performance of Army professionals through rigorous education programs and a superior talent management process.¹

Field Artillery Warrant Officers, MOS 131A, are officially part of the larger Officer community. We wear the same branch insignia as the generalist FA Officer, serve in the same units, and have the same core competencies, but there remains a cultural “separate but equal” stigma within our community. This disparity is the “The Talent Management Gap” and is adversely affecting the growth and development of 131As throughout our branch.

In the numerous War Fighter Forums, Warrant Officer Professional Development Seminars, round table discussions, and feedback sessions in which we participate, similar complaints arise consistently within the 131A community with respect to growth and talent development. Concerns such as, “My Commander does not let me work in my MTOE job; I have been at the Battalion too long; I don’t know what I am supposed to do in this job; I can’t get to the Warrant Officer Advanced Course (WOAC); I got bumped down the PME Order of Merit list; I don’t know where I am going to PCS next move cycle, etc....,” are routinely voiced.

Commanders too are frustrated by their inability to predict when they may lose a 131A to a Professional Military Education (PME) course or other career enhancing military school. Commanders also lack predictability for their 131As within Officer movement cycles and express disappointment in their inability to shape their future assignment. Most concerning however, is the lack of high quality 131As in critical assignments at Brigades, DIVARTYs, and Divisions across the Operational Army.

This is not to say we do not have talented and competent 131As in the WO Cohort, however there is an undeniable negative performance perception throughout the Operational Army. Some would attribute this to a failure in our accessions standards or a reduction in the availability of quality candidates and while these factors certainly contribute to the problem they are not the root cause. The lack of codified Key Developmental (KD) assignment designations and competitive select assignments within our current career map is what is creating the gap for 131As across the Operational Army. It is institutional in nature and must be addressed through institutional change.

The solution for this challenge is the implementation of competitive KD and competitive select assignments into the 131A Professional Development Model. DA PAM 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, defines a KD position as

one that is deemed fundamental to the development of an officer in his or her core branch or FA (Functional Area) competencies or deemed critical by senior Army leadership to provide experience across the Army’s strategic mission.”²

This definition certainly applies to our duties, scopes, and responsibilities within Operational Army units and is



supported by the Fires Development Leader Strategy's competency framework. It clearly illustrates 131A critical and collective tasks as Fires Leader Competencies (see Figure 1.0).

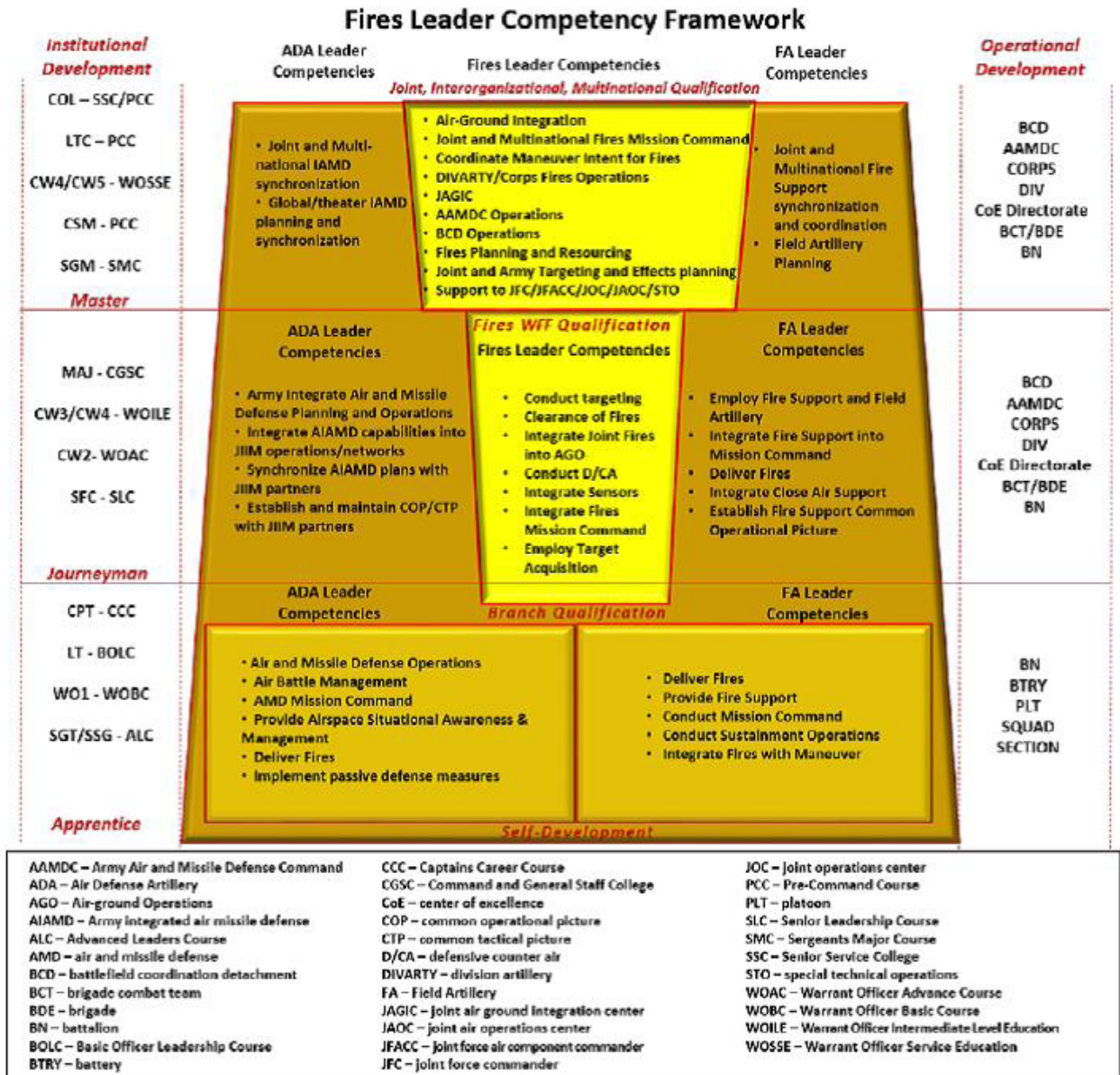


Figure 1.0 Fires Leader Competency Framework

These tasks are unquestionably the foundation of what 131As do. Codifying select positions as KD and competitive select assignments supports the Fires Leader Competency Framework and addresses the gap. Fortunately, the template for WO KD and competitive select assignments already exists. The Engineer and Adjutant General branches have already successfully codified KD positions within DA PAM 600-3 for their WOs as will be explored later.

Where We Are

The Command and General Staff College (CGSC), otherwise known as Intermediate Level Education, is mandatory for Majors in order to be eligible for their 04 grade KD assignments. The selection and appointments to this course are centrally managed by Human Resources Command at Fort Knox, KY and scheduled in



accordance with an Officer's year group timeline. A Major knows when and where in his or her timeline that they will attend Intermediate Level Education and more importantly where they can expect to serve their KD assignments years in advance. This framework is predictable and effective for both the Officer and Commander.

The 131A's Warrant Officer Advanced Course (WOAC) at Fort Sill, by contrast, must be requested by the individual 131A utilizing a DA Form 4187, "Request for Personnel Action," and approved by the 131A's Commander. The requested class date is then forwarded to the 131A Branch Manager for placement on a PME Order of Merit List prioritized by time in grade. The 131A then awaits a seat to open up in the Army Training Requirements and Resource System (ATRRS) which can occur as early as 12 months prior to or as late as 90 days prior to the requested class date. The problems resulting in this process are numerous but the two most critical are:

1. The burden for meeting PME milestones is on the WO, whereas for the generalist Officer the burden is on FA Branch.
2. The 4187 process gives the local unit Commander the illusion of determining 131A's PME attendance date whereas the FA Branch Order of Merit List truly determines it.

These two processes for education selection could not be more different, yet the Fires Leader Development Strategy characterizes both CGSC and WOAC as journeyman level institutional development. Theoretically they should be administered similarly. Inadequacies in the PME parity have been addressed through many studies and panels over the years such as:

1. Total Warrant Officer Study (TWOS) published in 1986.4
2. The Army Training and Leader Development Phase III-Warrant Officer Study (ATLDP PHIII), published in 2002.5
3. The Warrant Officer Continuum of Learning Study (WOCLS), published in 2013.6

These reports are thorough in their analysis for which they were commissioned. However, they have never realized the goal of complete Officer integration in the areas of PME, career guidance, and assignment predictability as we all know. Unfortunately, as of this writing, we are awaiting the release of the Warrant Officer 2025 Strategy which may address some of these issues. However, there will still be a need to conduct a detailed analysis on how successive assignment progression through the Operational Army prepares 131As for future success. These questions essentially frame the talent management gap challenge:

1. What jobs, assignments, and billets does the WO1, junior CW2, senior CW3, need to perform in order to be considered qualified for our senior strategic level positions in the operational Army?
2. What jobs make them qualified for serving as PME Instructors, Observer/ Controller Trainers, Fellowship Members, and Program Directors in the Institutional and Operational Army?
3. What jobs prepare them for operational assignments at the Division, Corp, Echelons Above Corp (EAC) and Joint organizations?

Our senior 131As currently provide the responses to these questions with the wisdom and experience of their long years of service; however, their responses are entirely subjective and biased (although not necessarily in a negative manner). Common backgrounds, assignments, and experiences between junior WOs and senior WOs have become the evaluating criteria for assignment suitability. While this can be beneficial and not without merit, there is no substitute for qualitative objective regulatory guidance.

In contrast, when similar questions are asked of Battalion and Brigade Commanders substituting Captains or junior Majors for WOs you receive consistent answers. Those answers are consistent because they are already codified in DA PAM 600-3 which clearly stipulates that Battery/ Company/ Troop Commander, Battalion/ Brigade S3, and XO experiences are desirable for success as future Army strategic leaders. The 131A would be a more valuable asset to our FA community if our career guidance was as objectively defined and codified.



What Do We Want To Be?

The existing 131A career map is simply inadequate for objective, qualitative, and consistent professional growth. DA PAM 600-3 which states, "Officers are encouraged to read all branch and functional area (FA) chapters, regardless of branch, FA, military occupational specialty (MOS), or career field held, because unique and valuable lessons in Army culture and officer professional development are found in every chapter,"³ provides us with the guidance needed to fix the gap.

When comparing our current career map with Engineering Technician's, MOS 120A, significant lessons can be learned and applied to our own professional development model (see Figure 1.1).

AC/RC 120A ENGINEER WARRANT OFFICER CAREER MAP

26 February 2014

Years	0	3	4	9	10	16	17	22
RANK	WO1	CW2		CW3		CW4		CW5
PME	WOBC	WOAC		WOSC		WOSSC		
Functional Training	Sapper, Ranger, Airborne, Air Assault			CFMO Certification Course (ARNG)				
	USACE PROSPECT							
Key Developmental Assignments	Vertical Construction Platoon OIC	Vertical Construction Platoon OIC Survey and Design Detachment OIC		Combat Support Hospital Engineer Tech Bde Survey and Design Prime Power BMO (Heavy Maintenance)		Division Staff (En Staff Officer) Corps Staff (En Staff Officer) Service School-Training (Instructor)		USAES Regimental CWO Prime Power School Cmdr ASCC Staff (En Staff Officer)
Developmental / Broadening Assignments	Vertical Construction Platoon OIC	Prime Power Platoon OIC Fire Fighting Detachment OIC White House Service Operations (Asst FM) Warrant Officer Career College (TAC Officer)		White House Service Operations (FM) Service School-Training (Instructor / Writer)		USAES En Personnel Dev Office HRC-WO Career Management 120A/125D Prime Power Bn Staff Service School-Training (Trng Dev / Writer)		IMCOM JMD USACE
Self Development	AA/AS Degree (Complete by CW2)					Graduate Degree (Complete by CW5)		
	BA/BS Degree (Complete by CW4)							
	Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) Exam							
	Professional Engineer (PE) Exam, Project Management Professional (PMP) Exam							
CSA Reading List, EN Commandant Reading List, Center of Military History Reading List 1-4, ADP 6-22, EN/Tech Association Membership/Contributions, Global Assessment Tool (GAT), Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF)								
Credentials / Certifications	Engineer in Training (EIT), PMP							
	Facilities Planner							
	Certified Professional Constructor Building Plans Examiner Certified Survey Technician		PE					

Figure 1.1 120A Engineer WO Career Map



The 120A can clearly see what his or her KD assignments are by rank and PME requirements. It is similar to a generalist Officer's career map and allows the Engineer Commander to more easily manage his or her 120As. When this career map is compared to the 131As the inadequacies are easy to distinguish. Our career map is simply not as objective or detailed leading us to ask the question above to address the gap (see Figure 1.2).

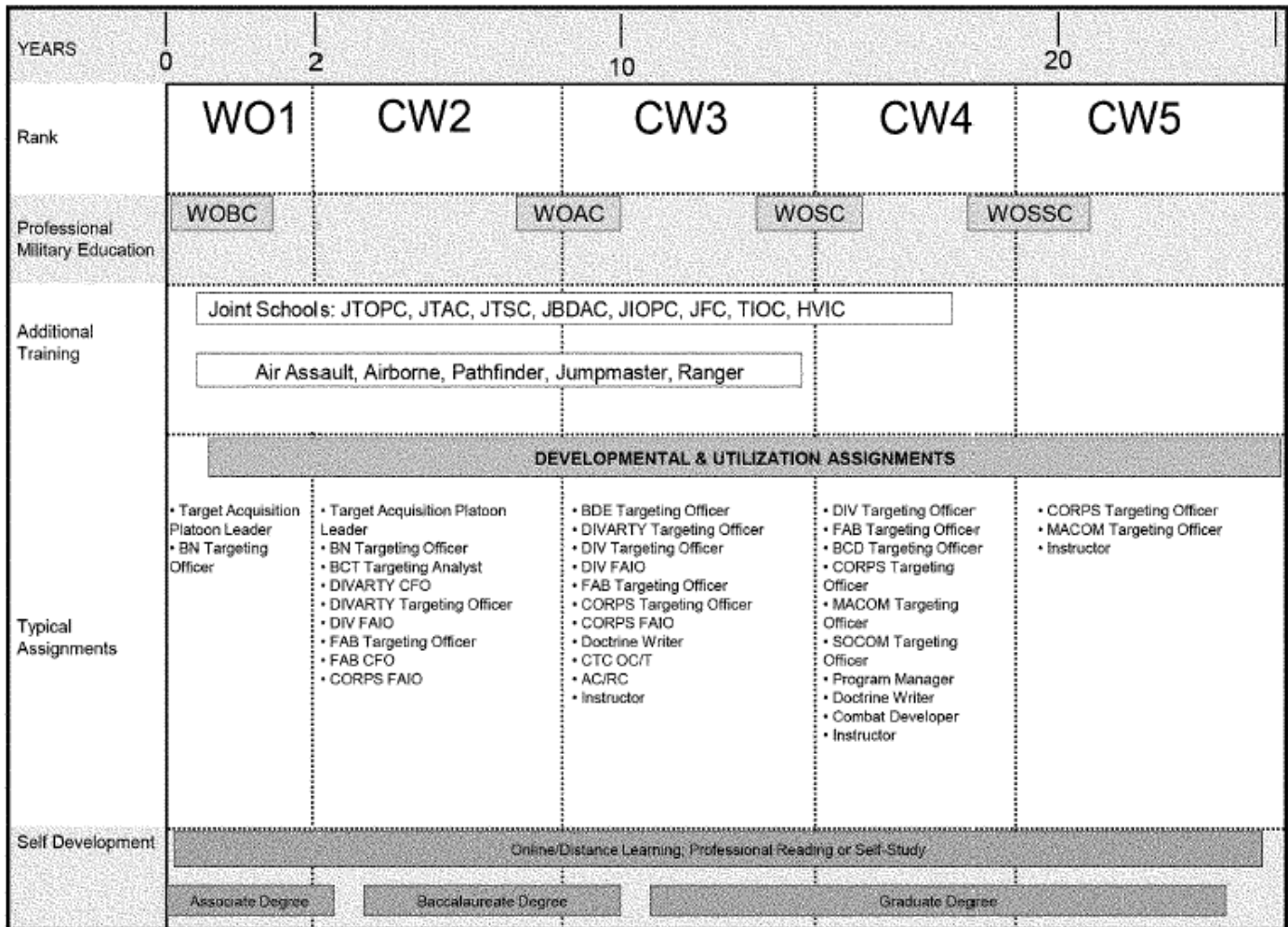


Figure 1.2 131 FA WO Career Map

A detailed 131A career map will have specified KD assignments, detailed service timeline, and specific milestones for both PME and civilian education. This format would closely emulate the FA Officer Development Model, paralleling 131A KD assignments for WO1s, junior/ senior CW2s and CW3s with equivalent Captain, Major, and Lieutenant Colonel KD assignments.

Additionally we should explore the idea of classifying 131A billets into disciplines or tracks. Anecdotal evidence shows that our most successful 131As have extensive backgrounds in intelligence, operations (IN, FA, AR, CAV, AVN), and command disciplines. These disciplines are the staff processes integral to any Operational Army organization that an experienced 131A masters by the time they reach a strategic level. Historically, WOs within our cohort struggling at senior levels were limited by Field Artillery focused assignments and experiences early in their careers.

Field Artillery focused assignments encompass three distinct processes of Field Artillery Operations, Fire Support, Target Acquisition, and Fires Delivery to include Cannon, Rocket and Fire Direction.



The Army, recognizing a need for specialization of knowledge in these areas has corresponding enlisted MOSs, 13F, 13R/T, 13B/P, and 13D, respectively to execute successful FA Operations. Generalist FA Officers are expected to have working knowledge of all aspects of Field Artillery Operations but not necessarily specialized knowledge reflecting the multi-disciplined approach to their career paths.

The 131A is a hybrid of specialization and generalist. They specialize in Target Acquisition early in their career but then become more operational and intelligence process focused as they join staffs within combined arms team headquarters (i.e. BCT, DIV, CORP, EAC). 131As who are exclusively exposed to Field Artillery processes become narrowly focused and overly specialized. This “tunnel vision” of knowledge is detrimental to performance above Battalion, resulting in one-dimensional 131As who only have depth in FA enlisted specialization skill sets. FA Operations are clearly important but senior 131As require breadth of operational experience and knowledge beyond just those three components.

This controversial premise of specialization versus generalization appears counter-intuitive to the definition of a FA WO; however, it is a rational argument considering our area of technical expertise, Targeting. The Army Targeting Process, and all its associated technical processes, i.e. target acquisition, weaponeering, damage mitigation, counter-fire, air to ground coordination, etc..., is an integrating function by its nature similar to both Composite Risk Management and Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield processes.

Targeting is the process that integrates the Fires WfF into the Movement and Maneuver, Intelligence, and most importantly Mission Command WfFs. This makes the 131As the integrators of these other WfFs under the all-encompassing Fires Competency known as Targeting. It is not possible to integrate these other WfFs effectively without knowing what they are and how they work. Unfortunately, we see this premise validated consistently as 131As who lack this understanding struggle within the Operational Army (see Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.3 Integrated Targeting

Our newest and most junior WOs have the steepest development curve in our current career map. During the first three years of their career, which occur almost exclusively at the Battery and Battalion, we expect our junior 131As to develop these multi-disciplinary skills sufficiently enough for success at higher echelons.

Unfortunately, existing FA Battalion assignments rarely offer the opportunity to be exposed early to the aforementioned disciplines without becoming overly specialized in FA Operations, especially in Field Artillery Brigades. We see many junior 131As defaulting back to their former enlisted roles as Fire Supporters, Master Gunners, and Fire Direction Center Chiefs during these initial critical years. This limits essential



multi-dimensional development at the most impressionable time of the junior 131As career. Conversely, 131As that have had experiences and success along these multi-dimensional disciplines are highly valued by Commanders who recognize that Field Artillery Operations are simply one component of the integrated combined arms fight.

These multi-dimensional 131As are better prepared to operate successfully at the Brigade level regardless of whether it is in an Infantry, Armor, Stryker Brigade Combat Team, or Field Artillery Brigade. 131As simply cannot develop one-dimensionally and expect to provide the best possible service to our units and Commanders nor groom senior 131As for positions requiring strategic thought. The proposed progression chart addresses the gap institutionally (Figure 1.4). It is not a final proposal rather its purpose is to illustrate an example of a sophisticated career development model we should develop.

131A KEY DEVELOPMENT PROGRESSION CHART

YEARS WO SERVICE	0 Year	1-2 Years	3-4 Years	5-6 Years	7-8 Years	9-10 Years	11-12 Years	13-14 Years	15-16 Years	16+ Years	
RANK	WO1	WO1	CW2	CW2	CW3	CW3	CW4	CW4	CW5	CW5	
MILITARY EDUCATION	WOBC			WOAC		WOILE		WOSSC		SENIOR STAFF COLLEGE	
CIV ED MILESTONES		ASSOCIATES DEGREE			BACHELORS DEGREE			MASTERS DEGREE/ DOCTORATE			
CONVENTIONAL FORCES											
TRACKS	INTELLIGENCE		FA BN S2	BCT/ FAB FAIO	DIV FAIO	CORPS FAIO	COCOM FAIO				
	OPERATIONS		*FA BN TARGO/ CFO	*IBCT/ ABCT TARGO	*DIVARTY TARGO		*DIV/ CORP TARGO			COCOM DEPUTY COF	
	COMMAND		*FA BN TA PLT LDR	*FAB/ DIVARTY TA PLT LDR	TAB CDR						
	FAB		*FAB TA PLT LDR	FAB CFO	FAB FAIO	*FAB TARGO					
	CAB				CAB TARGO						
	BCD					FAIO	TARGO	*SR. TARGO	DEPUTY FSCOORD		
	SPECIALIZED FORCES										
	CIVIL AFFAIRS				CA BN TARGO	CA BDE TARGO					
	RGR/ SF			*RGR BN TARGO/ CFO		*RGR REGIMENTAL/ SF GROUP TARGO		USASOC CHIEF OF TARGETING			
	CYBER						CYBER FS PLANNER/ FSCOORD	ARCYBER TARGO/ CYBERCOM TGT CHIEF		JOINT CYBER CENTER TARGO	
INSTITUTIONAL FORCES											
OC/ T						*CTC OC/T		*CTCD OC/T			
INSTRUCTOR				*WOCC TAC	*WOBC INSTRUCTOR		*WOAC INSTRUCTOR		*WOSC/ WOSSC/ SSC INTSTRUCTOR		
DEVELOPERS							COMBATE DEVELOPER/ DOCTRINE WRITER		PROGRAM/ DIRECTORATE MANAGER		
TARGETING CENTER							TARGET DEVELOPER	PROGRAM MANAGER	FTC DEPUTY MANAGER		
BROADENING ASSIGNMENTS											
TRACKS	OPERATIONS		HHB XO		BCT FSO/ FA BN S3	FAB S3		FAB S3		DIV DEPUTY FSCOORD/ DIVARTY S3	
	INTELLIGENCE			FA BN AS3		FAB AS3		DIVARTY AS3			
	STRATEGIC					FAB S2		DIVARTY S2			
	OTHER					STO MANAGER		COUNTER TERROISM TASK FORCES		DEFENSE NUCLEAR THREAT REDUCTION AGENCY	
				ARSTAFF WO ADJUTANT			TRAINING WITH INDUSTRY/ FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS/ GRAD DEGREE PROGRAM				DEPARTMENT OF STATE/ FBI/ BATF
ADDITIONAL DUTIES											
BN/ BDE/ DIV DUTIES		UNIT STATUS REPORTING OFFICER									
		SAFETY OFFICER				BDE PRECISION FIRES PROGRAM	DIV/ CORP PRECISION FIRES PROGRAM	COCOM PRECISION FIRES PROGRAM			
		AIR OFFICER				MANAGER	MANAGER	MANAGER			
		PHYSICAL SECURITY OFFICER									

*BOLD FACE DENOTES KEY DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS

Figure 1.4 Proposed 131A Key Development Progression Chart

Broadening assignments are an exciting topic of discussion within senior Warrant Officer Leader groups in the Army. When we examine broadening assignments for 131As we should be open to the idea of characterizing billets traditionally reserved for generalist Officers as Local Broadening Opportunities (LBO). Positions such as XOs, Assistant S3s, S2s, and Target Acquisition Battery (TAB) Commanders make good 131A broadening experiences precisely because they expose the 131A to all aspects of operations beyond the Battery level.

This proposal is certainly contrary to our shared perception of traditional 131A roles and responsibilities,



but anecdotal evidence shows that 131As who have done these jobs successfully are highly valued and well rewarded. As one junior CW2 stated, "Being a (TAB) XO opened my eyes to the wider world of how the Army works and my role in it." Other 131As have had similar experiences performing well as FA Battalion S3s, FSOs, and S2s. These 131As were selected over generalist Officers because of their abilities rather than rank or distinction as a WO.

Commanders are empowered to place the right Officer in the right job at the right time for the success of his or her organization. This practice is not new nor unique to the 131A community and should not be discouraged, rather we should embrace and institutionalize it within our career map. Implementing this proposal will require overcoming some challenges, such as one currently residing in AR 614-100, *Officer Assignment Policies, Details, and Transfers*, which prevents assignment of WOs outside of properly coded positions without HQDA approval.¹¹ This restriction can be addressed with an HRC waiver and can easily ensure access to these opportunities. LBOs would create more experienced, confident, valued, and competitive 131As across the Operational Army.

Instituting a competitive assignment process is the next logical step to Officer integration for the 131A. Competitive assignments within the Army ensure only the most qualified officers rise to top levels of leadership and exercise the influence and inspiration that is called for in the Fires Leadership Development Strategy¹². Top performing generalist Officers are assigned to KD positions in order to ensure they are the most qualified for senior positions. Clearly, there is no equating the 131A assignments with those of generalist FA Officers; however, as Fires Leaders we are afforded unique opportunities to shape unit policies and procedures. This trust, given to us by our Commanders, should not be taken lightly and we should ensure only the best performing 131As are influencing and inspiring their organizations.

Fortunately generalist Officers have an already proven framework for instituting competitive selection rates for PME, promotions, and most importantly command selection. The below visualization model depicts a command selection rate of .00005% for Captains aspiring to Brigade/ DIVARTY 06 level command. It clearly demonstrates just how seriously the Army vets its senior leaders (see Figure 1.5).

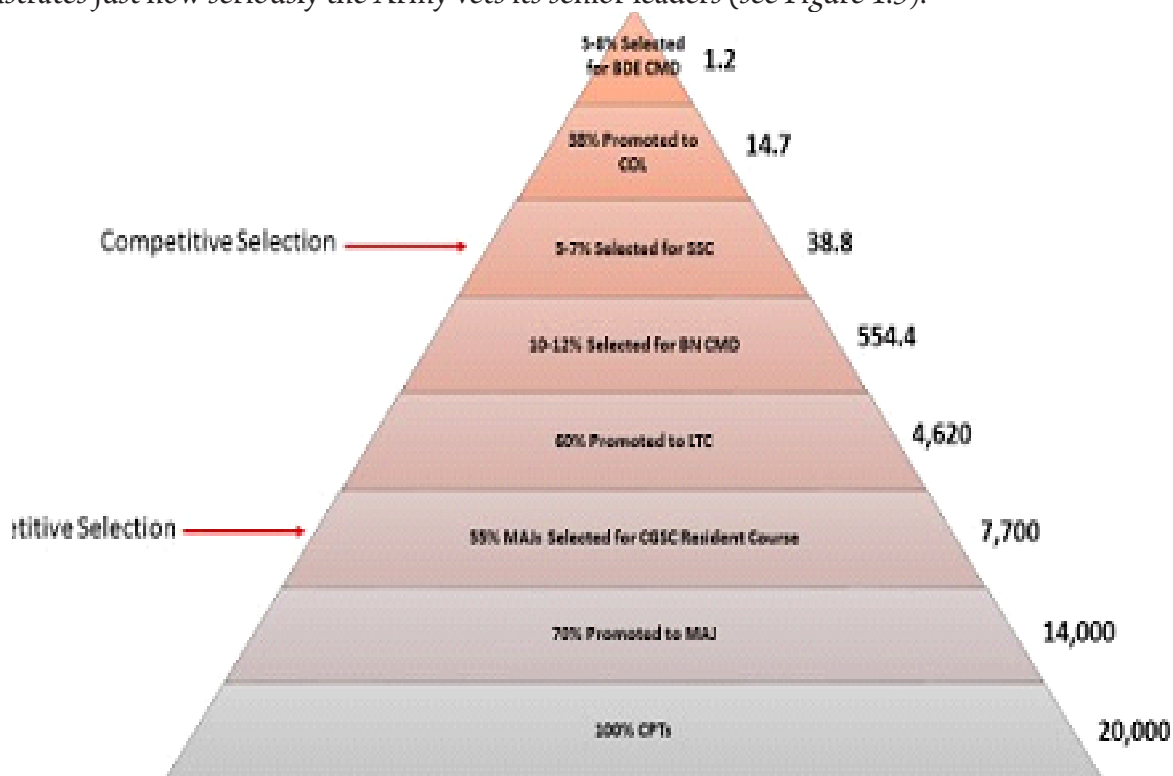


Figure 1.5 Generalist Officer Competitive Selection Visualization



As professionals we too should dedicate ourselves to selecting only the best, most qualified, 131As for assignments in key billets. Currently there exists no objective process for identifying top performers outside the Officer Evaluation Report (OER) and promotion processes. Our MTOE billets simply identify a WO grade for a position with possibly an ASI or SQI identifier to denote an Airborne or Ranger qualification discriminator. Officer Record Briefs (ORB) have no way to distinguish challenging assignments from non-challenging ones. We can only deduce this by screening OERs, the disclosure of which is entirely voluntary on the individual being vetted for a potential assignment. Only a handful of senior 131A leaders, at various agencies throughout the Army, are entrusted with assignment selection vetting, further obfuscating the process.

Picking the right 131A for an assignment starts with our WO Branch Assignment Manager at Human Resources Command who manages a population of approximately 450 131As from WO1 to CW5. Branch assigns 131As based on the requirements of the Officer Distribution Plan (ODP) as stated in AR 614-100 to an installation. The senior 131A on the gaining installation reviews the incoming 131As records and sub-assigns, with or without Commander's input, the 131A to a subordinate unit. The senior 131A for the gaining unit then repeats the process down the line until the incoming 131A is in his or her assigned duty billet.

Unfortunately, the inbound 131A has little input in this process beyond stating his or her preferences. The real loss is that there is little to no regulatory guidance to leverage for a suitable assignment. Our most junior 131As are being told that they can expect to be PCS'd every three to four years without any firm idea of where they may be going or what their future jobs may be. Many 131As are uniquely qualified for duty with highly specialized units but are not recognized as such on the career map. As a consequence we are losing many talented 131As who have become disenfranchised with this subjective process to the overall detriment of the FA community.

Additionally this removes our Commanders from the talent management process. Commanders take their responsibilities as WO career managers seriously and therefore want to have a positive input into the process. Again, for the generalist Officer there is a process to redress this but none exist for WOs. This culturally inherited process is a holdover from the days of the Warrant Officer Corp and contrary to the intent of the Officer Personnel Management System (OPM) which states, "The goal of this subsystem (ODP) is to place the right officer in the right job at the right time."³

Identifying which 131A assignments meet the KD classification is our first challenge when implementing this process. Let us use the BCT TARGO position as an example for sake of exploration. If we agree that a BCT Targeting Officer (TARGO) billet is a critical and essential assignment worthy of KD status, then logically we must ensure only the best CW3s are selected for that assignment. If we can agree that successful CW2s serving as TA Platoon Leaders and TARGOs at the FA BN (IBCT, ABCT, SBCT) provide the foundational growth for successful BCT TARGOs then these battalion level assignments should also be competitive select assignments. Lastly, if we agree that our BCT TARGOs should be graduates of WOAC, then WOAC itself should also be competitive select, with the best graduates assigned as BCT TARGOs. The below visualization model (Figure 1.6) shows us that we can competitively select our top 15% of total WO1/ CW2 population to fill the BCT TARGO billets throughout the Operational Army. This would install a top performing CW3 in a quality organization and send a clear message that these 131As are our best.

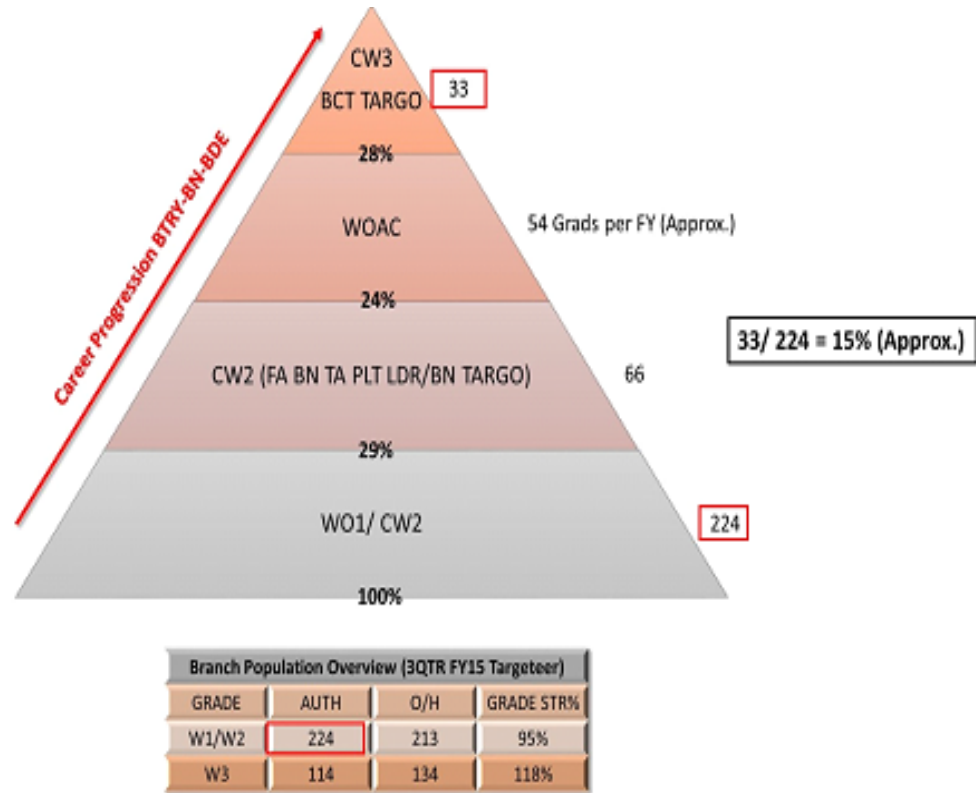


Figure 1.6 BCT TARGO Competitive Selection Visualization

The combination of successful past performance, in the right developmental billet, with the requisite PME is the framework we should adopt when deciding which KD assignments feed others. This is similar to the generalist Officer's KD framework and can be implemented for almost any 131A assignment deemed KD worthy. Foundational success at the lowest echelons will ensure success at the highest.

Closing

We have seen profound changes within the FA Branch over the last five years. Re-organization of Operational Army Field Artillery units, re-commitment to Field Artillery technical proficiencies, and integration of Air Defense and Field Artillery competencies are just some of the bold initiatives heralding the future of our branch. KD time and competitive select assignments implementation for 131As is the next bold step for the future which should not be feared but embraced eagerly. Institutionalizing KD and competitive assignments will provide future 131As with performance expectations that will be clear, unambiguous, and objective benefiting our cohort immensely which in turn benefits our units, Commanders, and the Army.

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