

## Lesson 3

# Military Career Opportunities



### Key Words

Active Duty  
commissary  
counterpart  
enlistment  
exchange  
prerequisite  
recruiter  
Reserves

### What You Will Learn to Do

- Relate the military to your career goals

### Linked Core Abilities

- Build your capacity for lifelong learning
- Take responsibility for your actions and choices

### Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Explain the difference between the three career paths available in the U.S. Armed Forces
- Identify four ways to become a commissioned officer
- Identify basic enlistment qualifications and processes to enter the military
- Describe benefits provided to enlisted members of the military
- Describe the purpose of the Selective Service
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

## Introduction

The military is one of the largest employers of high school graduates in full-time positions. The U.S. Armed Forces hire over 365,000 enlisted and officer personnel each year. The military is one more career option to consider in your career planning. Serving in the armed forces allows you to contribute to your own advancement and to your country at the same time. In this lesson, you explore military careers and benefits. You also match military opportunities to your career interests.

### Note

For more information on military **enlistment** and education programs, go to <http://www.todaysmilitary.com>.

### Key Note Term

**enlistment** – to engage a person for duty in the armed forces

## Types of Military Career Paths

The military offers three career paths for its members: the noncommissioned officer path, the warrant officer path, and the commissioned officer path. The following sections introduce you to these career paths.

### Noncommissioned Officers

Noncommissioned officers (NCOs), as seen in the uniform of the day in Figure 9.3.1, are enlisted personnel who have advanced above the first three entry-level positions and hold supervisory positions over other lower-ranking enlisted members. Within the Army, NCOs are known as “the backbone of the Army” because they actually supervise the details involved in accomplishing the unit’s mission.



*Figure 9.3.1: An Army NCO in the uniform of the day.*

Courtesy of Rob Lewine/  
Corbis Images.

Noncommissioned officers' ranks start at pay grade E-4. They are better known as corporals in the Army and Marine Corps; petty officers third class in the Navy and Coast Guard; and sergeants in the Air Force. However, there are E-4s who are not noncommissioned officers. Those are specialists in the Army and senior airmen in the Air Force. Specialists and senior airmen are technicians in their field and, as such, do not normally supervise lower-ranking personnel.

### *Warrant Officers*

A warrant officer ranks between an enlisted person and a second lieutenant in the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps or between an enlisted person and an ensign in the Navy and Coast Guard. As technical specialists, each branch of service primarily assigns them to duties in their area of expertise.

### *Commissioned Officers*

Commissioned officers are the professional leaders of the military. The president of the United States appoints them, and the Senate confirms them to hold positions of authority in the Armed Forces. Officers range from Second Lieutenant in the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps (or ensign in the Navy and Coast Guard) to General of the Army or Air Force and Fleet Admiral of the Navy or Coast Guard. An officer's role is similar to that of a manager or executive in the civilian world. Officers are typically responsible for setting and meeting objectives by managing lower-ranking officers and enlisted personnel.

## *Military Career Groups*

Within the three types of military career paths mentioned in the previous section, you can find a variety of career groups. The following introduces you to these groups.

### *Noncommissioned Officers*

Noncommissioned officers specialize in 1 of 12 military career groups, as follows:

- **Human services occupations**
- **Media and public affairs occupations**
- **Health care occupations (note the medical lab assistant specialist doing lab work in Figure 9.3.2)**
- **Engineering, science and technical occupations**
- **Administrative occupations**
- **Service occupations**
- **Vehicle and machinery mechanic occupations**
- **Electronic and electrical equipment repair occupations**
- **Construction occupations**



*Figure 9.3.2: A medical lab assistant conducting lab work is the same in civilian life as in an Army career.*

Courtesy of Stacy Pick/  
Stock Boston.

- Machine operator and precision work occupations
- Transportation and material handling occupations
- Combat specialty occupations

Of these 12 categories, all have civilian **counterparts** except combat specialty occupations. A specialty is a particular branch of a profession or field of study to which its members devote or restrict themselves. The military offers over 2,000 job specialties within these 12 broad areas from which enlisted personnel can choose.

### **Warrant Officers**

Warrant officers also specialize in a single area of expertise. This area is generally in 1 of the 12 military career groups.

### **Commissioned Officers**

Officers have two areas of concentration or specialties. The primary area of concentration is further divided into fields such as combat arms, combat support, and combat service support. The secondary or functional area of concentration is a career field unrelated to the primary area of concentration. Each branch of the service normally assigns a secondary specialty to their officers after they have become qualified in their primary specialty.

### **Military Career Paths: Prerequisites**

To follow your chosen military career path, you must meet certain **prerequisites**. This means that you must meet specific qualifications before reaching your military goal. This might include working your way up through the ranks, taking a training course, or completing a degree program.

#### **Key Note Term**

**counterpart** – something that is similar or comparable to another, as in function or relation

#### **Key Note Term**

**prerequisite** – a requirement or condition you must meet or achieve before being able to move on to your goal

### *Noncommissioned Officers*

You become a noncommissioned officer by advancing through the enlisted ranks. Competition among your peers is the basis for promotions within the NCO corps. Ability, job performance, skill, experience, and potential are the major considerations for advancement; however, at each grade level, there are certain minimum requirements for promotion such as time in service, time in grade (present level of work), and successful completion of skill-level examinations. Also, in some cases, there are military educational requirements which an NCO must meet.

### *Warrant Officers*

In some branches of the service, personnel must first work their way up through the enlisted ranks; then, after meeting the required prerequisites, they may apply to become a warrant officer. However, some of the services also require you to be a certain rank before you are eligible to apply and they prefer their warrant officers and warrant officer applicants to have an associate's degree or the equivalent. In the Army, one way you can become a warrant officer is by enlisting for the Warrant Officer Candidate School in its Aviation Program.

### *Commissioned Officers*

There are four main pathways to become a commissioned officer:

- **Completion of ROTC**
- **Graduation from a service academy**
- **Completion of Officer Candidate School (OCS) or Officer Training School (OTS)**
- **Direct appointment**

### *Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)*

The Reserve Officers' Training Corps is a course that you can take while in college. The Army refers to its course as the Senior ROTC program (or SROTC). SROTC is a two- to four-year program that has extensive military training both on campus and at summer camps.

Many colleges and universities across the country offer one or more ROTC programs for the Army, Navy/Marine Corps (the Marines do not have their own program), and Air Force. In some cases, you may be eligible for a military scholarship (where the military pays most of the educational costs plus a monthly stipend of \$150 for up to 10 months per year) or financial aid while participating in ROTC. After graduating from college and successfully completing the ROTC training, you become a commissioned officer. This commission will incur an eight-year service obligation. Participants must be younger than 27 years of age for the Army—25 for the other services—when commissioned. Cadets wear the proper ROTC uniform on certain days during the school year.

### *Service Academies*

There are four service academies for which you can apply and receive a commission in the U.S. Armed Forces. Applicants for the U.S. Military Academy at West

Point, New York (for Army applicants), the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland (for Navy and Marine applicants), and the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colorado, must be nominated, usually by a member of Congress, to be considered. Nominations for the Coast Guard Academy at New London, Connecticut, are made competitively on a nationwide basis, that is, congressional nominations are not required.

Each academy is a four-year program in which you can graduate as a military officer with a bachelor of science degree. At these academies, the government pays your tuition and expenses. In return, you are obligated to serve six years on **Active Duty** and two years in an inactive reserve status. Applicants must be at least 17 years of age but not older than 22; a U.S. citizen; of good moral character; able to meet the academic, physical, and medical requirements; not be married or pregnant; and not have any legal obligations to support family members. Acceptance to an academy is highly competitive. Each year, they receive between 10,000 and 12,000 applications. Of those who qualify, only about 1,200 receive appointments.

### **Officer Candidate/Officer Training Schools**

If you are a college graduate with a four-year degree and do not have any prior military experience, you may join the service of your choice with a guaranteed option to attend Officer Candidate School (OCS) or Officer Training School (OTS). Course lengths vary by service, but they are normally less than six months. Then, after successfully completing the training, you are eligible to become an officer.

If you earn a degree while serving on active duty, you may apply for OCS or OTS. You must first meet all of the prerequisites and your unit commander must approve your request. Additionally, each state National Guard has its own Officer Candidate School that takes applicants directly from its own units. If they successfully complete the training, they are commissioned and are usually sent back to the unit from which they came to serve as officers.

### **Direct Appointment**

A person in a professional field, such as medicine or law, may receive a direct appointment and become a commissioned officer even without prior military training. The grade that a professional receives on entering into the military depends on two factors: years of schooling and prior experience in that profession. For example, a professional could start out at the grade of captain. The appointment of professionals accounts for the majority of the direct appointments made by the services.

Within the U.S. Army, over 70 percent of its new officers come from ROTC each year. Within the other branches of the armed forces, about 15 percent of the military's new officers come from the service academies, 25 percent from officer candidate/training schools, 45 percent from ROTC, and 15 percent from direct appointment.

## **Enlisted Commissions**

Selected enlisted personnel from each service may qualify for appointment to one of the four service academies or may be eligible to attend an SROTC program. Other enlisted commissioning programs are as follows:

### **Key Note Term**

**Active Duty** – a condition of military service where members are on full duty, or subject to call, at all times to respond quickly to the nation's emergencies

- **The Army's Green to Gold program**
- **The Navy's BOOST (Broadened Opportunity for Officer Selection and Training) program**
- **The Army Medical Department's Enlisted Commissioning Program**
- **The Navy Enlisted Commissioning Program**
- **The Marine Corps Enlisted Commissioning Education Program**
- **The Airman Education and Commissioning Program**
- **The Coast Guard's Precommissioning Program for Enlisted Personnel**

In the last five programs, qualified enlisted personnel may collect full pay and allowances while attending college full-time. Those who graduate and finish an officer candidate program receive their commissions.

An enlisted person may also receive a direct appointment as an officer if that person demonstrates performance far above the standards called for in his or her occupational field and does not have a disciplinary record.

### Note

Appointments of this nature are extremely rare.

Remember, to join the military as an officer, you must have a bachelor's degree. Certain scientific and technical fields, such as medicine or law, require advanced degrees.

If you are interested in any of the options discussed in this lesson, your JROTC instructors, the school guidance or career counselors, and/or service **recruiters** will be able to give you the information you need.

### Key Note Term

**recruiter** – a member of the armed services who enlists new members into the armed forces

## Benefits of Military Service

The military can offer an exciting and rewarding career. It is important to research the career options that are available to you. When you enter the military, you must sign a contract that commits you to serving a specific amount of time. In return, the military offers you a variety of benefits, such as participation in sports (see Figure 9.3.3). Table 9.3.1 summarizes the benefits available.

## Selective Service

It is the legal obligation of young men to register with Selective Service when they turn 18 years of age. Failure to register can result in jail time, a fine, and other serious consequences. Not knowing about Selective Service registration is not a justifiable excuse under the law.



*Figure 9.3.3: Participating in sports and other recreational activities is just one benefit of military service.*

Courtesy of CACI and the U.S. Army.

**Table 9.3.1: Summary of Employment Benefits for Enlisted Members**

Benefit	Description
Vacation	Leave time of thirty days per year
Medical, Dental, and Eye Care	Full health, medical, hospitalization, dental, and eye care services for enlistees and most health care costs for family members; in remote sites, this care is available from civilian sources (dental care, especially for family members, is with civilian care under a dental plan)
Continuing Education	Voluntary educational programs for undergraduate and graduate degrees, or for single courses, including tuition assistance for programs at colleges and universities
Recreational Programs	<p>Programs include athletics, entertainment, and hobbies, such as softball, basketball, football, swimming, tennis, golf, weight training, and other sports</p> <p>Parties, dances, and entertainment</p> <p>Club facilities, snack bars, game rooms, movie theaters, and lounges</p> <p>Active hobby and craft clubs, and book and music libraries</p>
Exchange and Commissary Privileges	Food, goods, and services at military stores are available, generally at lower costs and tax-free, although the commissary does charge a small surcharge
Legal Assistance	Many free legal services for help with personal matters

### Key Note Terms

**exchange** – a store at a military installation that sells merchandise and services to military personnel and authorized civilians

**commissary** – a supermarket for use by military personnel and their dependents located on a military installation

**Key Note Term**

**Reserves** – a military force withheld from action for later decisive use; forces not in the field but available; the military forces of a country not part of the regular service

**Who Must Register**

The Military Selective Service Act states that male U.S. citizens and male immigrant aliens residing in the U.S. who are between the ages of 18 and 26 must register in a manner prescribed by proclamation of the president. The proclamation under which registration is presently required was signed on July 2, 1980. It provides that young men must register with Selective Service within 30 days of their 18th birthday.

A man is exempt from registering while he is on full-time active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces. Cadets and midshipmen at service academies are included in the exemption. Members of the National Guard and **Reserves** not on full-time active duty must register unless they have reached age 26 or are already registered.

Lawfully admitted nonimmigrant aliens (for example, those on visitor or student visas and members of diplomatic or trade missions and their families) are not required to register. Parolees and refugees who are aliens residing in this country must register.

Those who are unable to register on schedule due to circumstances beyond their control—for example, those that are hospitalized, institutionalized, or incarcerated—do not have to register until they are released. After release, they have 30 days in which to register. Handicapped men who live at home must register if they are reasonably able to leave the home and go into a public place. A friend or relative may help a handicapped man to fill out the form if he is unable to do so by himself.

The fact that a man is required to register does not mean that he is certain to be drafted. If Congress should authorize a draft, a registrant within the group subject to induction would have his eligibility for service determined based on his individual situation at that time.

**Frequently Asked Questions About Selective Service Registration**

Q. What is Selective Service?

A. The Selective Service system is a government agency. Its job is to provide men for service in the Armed Forces if there is a national emergency.

Q. What is Selective Service registration?

A. When you register, you add your name to a list of all men in the nation, ages 18 to 25. The Selective Service would use this list to identify men for possible military service in a national emergency.

Q. Do females have to register?

A. No, by law they do not.

Q. What happens if there's a draft?

A. There has not been a draft since 1973, but if there was an emergency, and Congress ordered another draft, Selective Service would conduct a birth date lottery to decide the order in which to call men. The Selective Service would first call men who turn 20 in the calendar year in a sequence determined by the lottery. If the military needed more, the Selective Service might then call those men who are 21 to 25, youngest first.

Q. Do I have to register?

A. Yes, it is the law. If you do not register and the government prosecutes you, it could send you to jail for up to five years and/or fine you up to \$250,000. Not registering hurts you in other ways, too. You would not qualify for federal student grants or loans, job training benefits, or most federal employment.

Q. Is registration hard?

A. No, it is simple. Just go to any post office and ask for a Selective Service registration card. Fill in your name, address, telephone number, date of birth, and Social Security number. Then, give the card to the postal clerk. The clerk will ask to see some identification so bring your driver's license or some other piece of identification. It takes only about five minutes.

Q. Do I have to register at a post office?

A. Maybe not. You may receive a registration card in the mail, or you can obtain a card from your local recreation or social service center. If so, just fill it out and mail it to Selective Service. Check with your JROTC instructors; they may be able to register you over the Internet. Finally, check with your school's guidance office; you may be able to register there.

Q. Can I register online?

A. Check the Selective Service Web Site at [www.sss.gov](http://www.sss.gov) for online registration.

Q. When should I register?

A. Register within 30 days of your 18th birthday. If you are applying for federal student aid or job training, you can register up to 120 days before you turn 18 to avoid delays. If you cannot register on time because you are in a hospital or prison, you do not have to register until you are released. You then have 30 days in which to register.

Q. What if it's more than 30 days after I've turned 18 and I haven't registered?

A. Register at a post office immediately. Selective Service will accept a late registration, but the longer you wait, the longer you are breaking the law.

Q. Do all men have to register?

A. To make the system fair, the law requires all 18-year-old men to register. The only young men exempt from registration are foreigners who are in the U.S. temporarily as tourists, diplomats, or students; personnel on active duty in the Armed Forces; and students at U.S. service academies. Immigrant noncitizen males, 18 to 25 must register.

Q. How do I prove I registered?

A. After you register, Selective Service will mail you a card. Keep it as proof that you have registered. You may need it if you apply for federal employment, federal student aid, or job training. If you do not get your card within 90 days of registering, write to: Registration Information Office, P.O. Box 94638, Palatine, IL 60094-4638. Or call 1-847-688-6888.

Q. What if I change my address?

A. Notify Selective Service of your new address on a Change of Information form. You can get one at any post office. Or you can use the Change of Address form that comes with your acknowledgment card.

## Conclusion

Serving in the armed forces allows you to contribute to your own advancement and to your country at the same time. The Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard combined offer numerous opportunities each year for high school graduates in positions similar to those found in the civilian sector. Remember, the military is one more career option to consider in your career planning.

With fast facts and frequently asked questions, this lesson provided pertinent information for young male adults about the Military Selective Service Act and Selective Service registration. This lesson pointed out that it is not hard to register and that there are numerous ways that men can register. The main thing for males to remember is that when you are within 30 days of your 18th birthday, register.

In the following lesson, you will learn about what it takes to prepare yourself for college. You will explore what it takes to apply to a school, and what it takes to get in.

## Lesson Review

1. Compare and contrast the different career paths offered in the military.
2. Which noncommissioned career group interests you the most? Why?
3. What are the prerequisites for becoming a warrant officer?
4. Who must register for the draft? When must they register?