

It Takes TWOS: It's Time for Another Total Warrant Officer Study

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This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Total Warrant Officer Study (TWOS)—a 1985 Department of the Army initiative to redefine the role of Warrant Officers out to 2025. This historic anniversary presents an opportunity to reevaluate long-held views about what it means to be a Warrant Officer and how we can optimize the Cohort for the next 40 years.

Introduction

Senior Warrant Officers owe the Chief of Staff of the Army clear-eyed recommendations on Warrant Officer force structure optimization to support the Army Transformation Initiative (ATI). To accomplish this, we must engage in difficult conversations, maintain transparency, and let the data inform our recommendations. Simply put, it's time for another TWOS.

The thesis of this article is that the Army should conduct another comprehensive, army-wide study to examine the role, utilization, and professional development of Warrant Officers, informing changes that would enhance combat readiness. This theme is supported by the results of a 2025 survey of Field Grade Warrant Officers included in this article. This 2025 survey offers insights into how the Warrant Officer Cohort perceives its identity, education, and the role of Senior Warrant Officers.

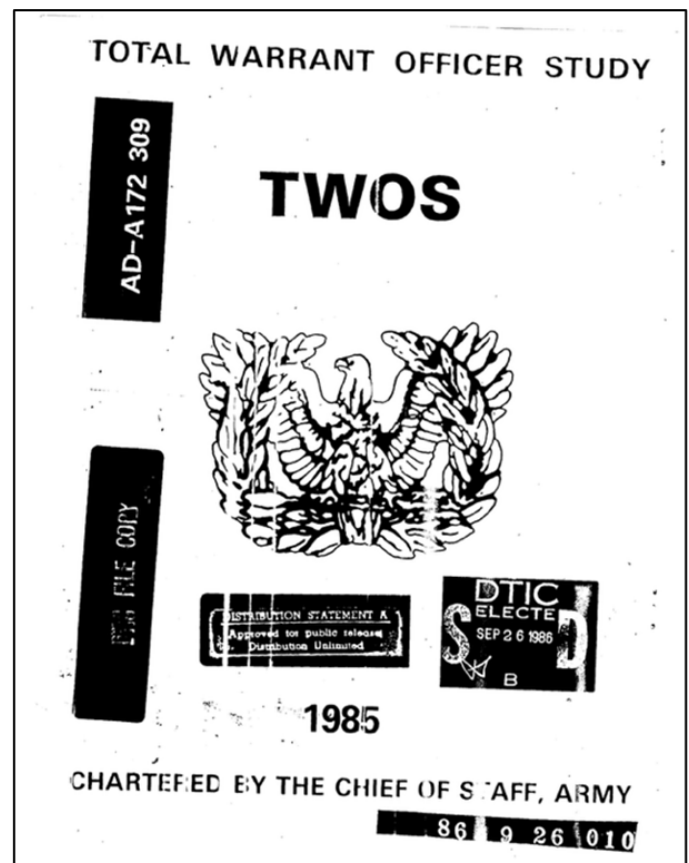
This article proceeds in three parts. First, it describes the outcomes of the 1985 TWOS and contemporaneous surveys and legislation. Second, it presents the results of a 2025 survey of Field-Grade Warrant Officers from across the Army. Lastly, it provides recommendations for the future of the Warrant Officer Cohort.

Two of a Kind

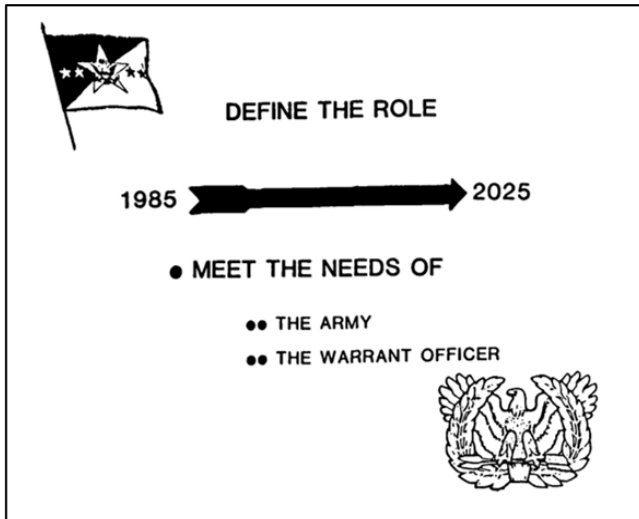
Today's Army is in a transformational period, remarkably similar to the post-Vietnam era in which the original TWOS was conducted. The 2025 Army Transformation Initiative (ATI) charges the Army to "build a leaner, more lethal force" in which "every role must sharpen the spear or be cut away." In this spirit, the Warrant Officer Cohort owes the Army some homework on how we plan to gain efficiencies. And we can't afford to get this wrong, as our conclusions will impact overall Army readiness and the careers of countless future Warrant Officers.

Put Two and Two Together

Exactly forty years ago, in August 1985, the Army finalized the Total Warrant Officer Study (TWOS). The TWOS was the first and, to date, the only comprehensive analysis of the Warrant Officer program by the Department of the Army. (Note: Other Army studies on the Warrant Officer Cohort, such as



the 2002 Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP), were not Army-wide comprehensive studies on the scale of TWOS. The purpose of TWOS was “to examine the current and future (out to the year 2025) role, utilization, compensation management, and professional development of the Total Army Warrant Officer and to recommend changes if the effect would enhance combat readiness.” The output of TWOS was intended to “optimize every aspect of Warrant Officer management and development” to ensure Warrant Officers continue to “make critical contributions to the defense of our Nation.”



The primary instrument of the TWOS was a mail-in survey, supplemented by supporting workshops, Warrant Officer steering groups, General Officer advisory groups, and a comprehensive review of systems and programs. The TWOS analyzed more than 27,000 survey responses from Warrant Officers and O-grade commissioned officers from all three components, as well as retirees. It involved the individual evaluation of thousands of handwritten comments. The output was a series of recommendations based on three key questions: (1) What is the definition of the Warrant Officer? (2) What are Warrant Officers doing now? (3) What should Warrant Officers be doing in the future?

No Two Ways About it

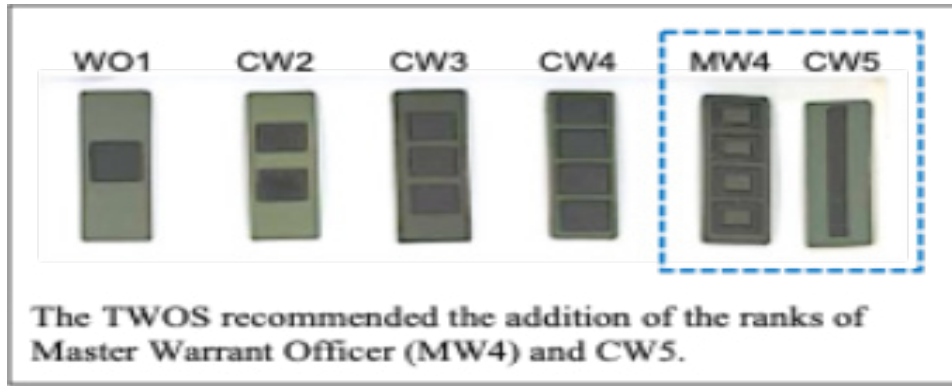
The TWOS final report recommended numerous changes to Warrant Officer recruitment, training, and retention—many of which remain in place today. However, the following short paragraphs will focus on three key outcomes of TWOS and contemporaneous legislation that remain topics of debate within the Cohort.

Warrant Officer Definition

The first TWOS recommendation was a rewrite of the Warrant Officer definition. While acknowledging that “Warrant Officers have been, and will continue to be, the Army’s technical experts,” the new definition included the word leadership for the first time. This change likely influenced the Defense Authorization Act of 1986, which codified Warrant Officers as commissioned officers—a break in the nearly seven-decade tradition of being “appointed by warrant.” Of note, the TWOS did not recommend this change. Instead, it resulted from a DoD initiative to align Army Warrant Officer grade plates with those of the maritime services, whose Warrant Officers were already taking the commissioning oath. The question of Warrant Officers becoming commissioned officers was an old debate by the time of TWOS. LTC Paul Coroneos argued in 1973, “The closer warrant officers are associated with their commissioned brethren, the less they will be able to avoid the strictures and problems of the officer corps and be available for concentration in their unique area of technical specialization.” Warrant Officers continue to experience this tension, as evidenced by the results of a 2025 survey included in this article.

CW5 Creation and Extension of Warrant Officer Service





The TWOS recommended the creation of a nominative Master Warrant Officer (MW4) rank that would be senior to all other CW4s. Further, it advocated for the creation of the rank of Chief Warrant Officer Five (CW5), which was ultimately realized in 1992. According to TWOS, the CW5 was envisioned as a “true branch technical integrator” with the “essence of the Warrant Officer role to remain at the warfighting level. TWOS also recommended a new career plan that provided the opportunity for warrant officers to remain on active duty for 30 years as a warrant officer or until age 62.

2025 Survey of Field Grade Warrant Officers

The author of this article conducted a survey of sixty Field Grade Warrant Officers (CW3-CW4) across 11 Army branches and all three components. The average participant age was 44 years, with an average time in service of 24 years. The purpose of the survey was to gather data on how today’s Warrant Officers perceive their identity, education, and the role of Senior Warrant Officers. The survey consisted of multiple-choice and free-text questions. The survey questions were largely based on the original 1985 TWOS survey packet. The survey’s results strongly suggest the Army would benefit from another comprehensive Army-wide study to examine the role, utilization, and professional development of Warrant Officers.

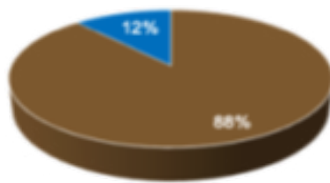
2025 Survey Demographics			
Component	n	Age (mean)	Years of Service (mean)
COMPO 1 (Active Duty)	27	41	21
COMPO 2 (National Guard)	17	46	27
COMPO 3 (Army Reserve)	16	47	26

Two Cents

The 2025 survey revealed no clear consensus on the question of Warrant Officer identity, specifically regarding the pros and cons of being “appointed by warrant” versus being a commissioned officer. However, the survey did identify a clear trend in how respondents view the Army’s utilization of Senior Warrant Officers. For example, 71 percent of total respondents answered “No” to the question: Is the Army getting full value out of the CCWO position? Similarly, 76 percent answered “Yes” to the question: Should CW5s be subject to selective retention boards? In aggregate, the results strongly suggest that Field Grade Warrant Officers would welcome the opportunity to provide significant input to another comprehensive Army-wide study, similar to the TWOS of 1985.

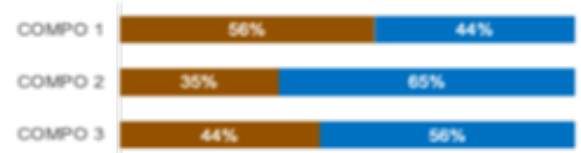
When you think about your identity in the Army, which do you most closely identify with?

■ Technical Expert ■ Generalist Officer



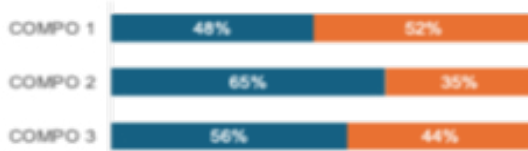
Would you rather the Army consider you "appointed by Warrant" or a Commissioned Officer?

■ Appointed by Warrant ■ Commissioned



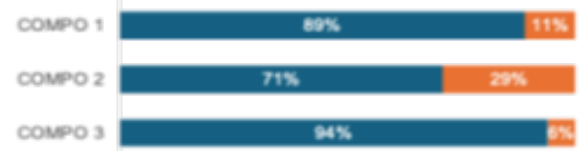
Do your Commissioned Officer duties compete with your ability to reach your full potential as a technical expert?

■ Yes ■ No



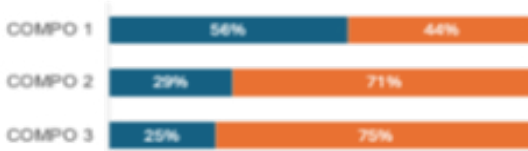
Should Warrant Officers receive civilian degrees as part of WOPD?

■ Yes ■ No



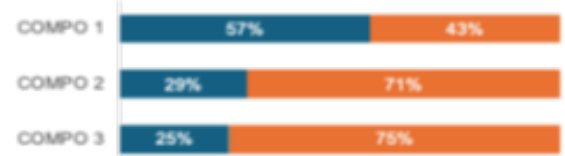
Should total WO service be shortened from 30 years to allow for career progression of CW4s?

■ Yes ■ No



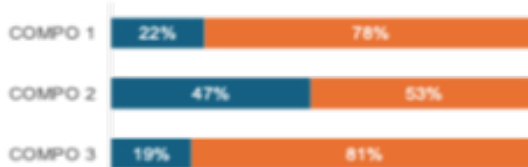
Are CW5s remaining in positions too long?

■ Yes ■ No



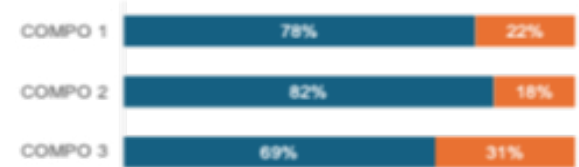
Is the Army getting full value from the CCWO position?

■ Yes ■ No



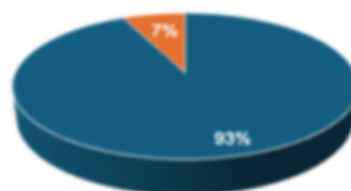
Should CW5s be subject to selective retention boards (SRB)?

■ Yes ■ No



Should the Army conduct another Total Warrant Officer Study?

■ Yes ■ No



Conclusion

Surveys are powerful tools for change. The TWOS of 1985 and associated legislation drove sweeping changes that have impacted every Army Warrant Officer over the past 40 years. As the Army Transformation Initiative charges the Army to “build a leaner, more lethal force” in which “every role must sharpen the spear or be cut away,” Warrant Officers owe the Army some homework on how we plan to gain efficiencies. To accomplish this, every Warrant Officer’s voice is critical to the conversation. Warrant Officers deserve a forum in which to capture their voices and let the data inform our recommendations. In other words, it’s time for another TWOS. But it’s okay—together we can do this, just as we did in 1985.

Editor’s note: CW4 Cody Herr is a senior intelligence analyst with two decades of experience supporting special operations. He holds a Master of Science in Strategic Intelligence degree from the National Intelligence University. He is a recipient of the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award and the Military Intelligence Corps Knowlton Award. His writing has appeared in the CIA journal Studies in Intelligence, the American Intelligence Journal, National Intelligence Press, and Special Warfare Magazine. The article is a peer-reviewed student paper from the Warrant Officer Senior Course.

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