

# LET'S GO ARMY, FINISH THE RACE!

**CW4 David M. Saggio, MP/JA**

On August 1, 2020, the starter's pistol fired, and the Army was off; the marathon had begun. The problem was identified, a solution proposed, and the remedy initiated. The Army started with a strong cadence and seemed well on its way to success. The success they so desperately sought seemed to be at their fingertips; then the unthinkable happened: they stopped. The race was not over; only two-tenths of a mile remained. Despite their seemingly unstoppable momentum, they were motionless just short of the finish line. The marathon they entered and seemed to have adequately prepared for was to protect the military's meritocracy. The identified problem was the potential for biases to contaminate the very framework of the military board process. The appearance of gender and racial biases were not just conceivable; they were probable. This is a critical juncture where immediate action is needed to ensure the integrity of our promotion processes.

The solution proffered was to redact the gender from all documentation and remove the Service Members' official Department of the Army photo. This solution carried us 26 miles into our 26.2-mile marathon. The remaining two-tenths of a mile can be completed by implementing an AI scrub of all board files to sanitize all identifiable demographic information. If we run each board file through an AI filter to replace all proper names and personal pronouns (he, she, him, and her) with SM (short for Service Member), we can further protect the meritocracy of the military. This innovative approach will not only eliminate potential biases but also ensure a fair and equitable selection process for all Service Members.

As stated above, I am proposing an additional scrub of all board files. This would result in a board member receiving a board file with an HRC-generated board file number replacing the Service Member's Personally Identifiable Information. Additionally, in every location where the boarded Service member's name or representative pronoun would have appeared, the board file will simply read SM. This will help remove any intentional or unconscious biases that may be applied by determining the Service Members' gender, race, or ethnicity through the narratives within their board file. While we can all agree there is no perfect solution, this will significantly aid in an unbiased, truly meritoriously based selection process in the future. This solution ensures fairness and equality in the boarding process, reassuring all involved.

Effective August 1, 2020, the United States Army removed the requirement for DA Photos for all selection and promotion boards and the redaction of "all data" that indicated gender, race, and or ethnicity. Removing the DA photo was the fastest and, quite frankly, the most effortless attempt to combat improper bias within our promotion system. We owe it to our entire community to carry this across the finish line and complete what we started nearly five years ago. According to Kearney (2020), "In the commercial job market, candidates with more ethnicity-identifying information on their resumes were significantly less likely to be called for interviews. Similarly, resumes with pictures of minorities or women were strongly correlated with negative reactions by potential employers, even when minority applicants held elite credentials such as Ivy League college degrees."

This proposed process will exponentially increase the number of best-qualified selectees throughout our formation. This will immediately lead to a stronger and more resilient population, significantly improving our Army's overall readiness and sustainability. The positive impact of this proposal on our Army's strength and preparedness cannot be overstated. Not only can this be implemented immediately, but it will also produce lasting positive results. The utilization of computer-based applications, such as AI, can achieve the requested results with little to no additional resource requirements for the Army. It would be

naive to believe this would not create additional requirements; however, the most significant would be the additional personnel hours needed to run these through the system. The benefits of this proposal grossly outweigh these requirements.

While exploring this proposal's feasibility, I requested a third party's assistance to conduct a proof-of-concept test. This test was performed utilizing both the ChatGPT and NiprGPT platforms. The proof-of-concept was conducted utilizing excerpts from historical narratives from his OERs. The first test was a success. I then performed a second test using an excerpt from one of my past OERs, and again, the test was a success. These tests were conducted on the micro (individual) level; however, the simplicity in application demonstrated the viability of this proposal to be implemented at the macro (full board) level.

Many people will argue that we have fixed the issue and done enough to make the board process fair. If we do anything further, we will be degrading the effectiveness of the U.S. Army's board process. Additionally, we must trust the senior leaders entrusted to sit on these boards. I agree that we have to trust those and be tasked with ethically conducting these boards. I also concede that sanitizing and redacting information provided to board members could get out of control if not carefully monitored. Unfettered sanitation would lead to degraded effectiveness; however, that is not what this proposal seeks to authorize. By implementing these changes, we can further protect the integrity of all board members by removing any residual impression of bias. Headquarters Department of the Army Policy Notice 600-2 (2021) states, "Data identifying an officer's race, ethnicity, and gender will be redacted as part of the board file. Although some records under review by this board may contain such prohibited information, board members must disregard it." These changes will remove the remaining data identifying a Service Member's race, ethnicity, or gender with the SM nomenclature so they do not have to be disregarded.

I would argue the steps we have taken thus far were either a ruse to placate the people who initially reported this as a problem or, more accurately, are insufficient and not working. A review of the 2023 Demographics report of the armed forces shows a less than 1.5% change in active-duty strength between men and women and approximately .5% change in Service members who identify as part of a minority group. This would suggest either there is no issue in the process and standard deviance between genders and ethnicities, or the attempt we made to correct any inappropriate bias disparity was inadequate and is not working.

As I built this proposal, I discussed it with many Service Members to gain their insight into the current system and my proposed changes. I interviewed a prior board member from a recent warrant officer selection board. This board member confirmed that gender was redacted, and the DA photos were absent from any board files. When asked if they could determine the gender, race, and ethnicity of most of the boarded Service Members based on their name and the narratives contained within their file, they affirmed that they could very quickly. When asked if they believed these proposed changes would have added to or degraded the overboard selection process, they said they would have been a great addition. We all agree there must be some level of interpretation of the board files by the board members; however, those interpretations can be much more effective for the overall strength of the Army when they are based entirely on merit.

This will allow the Army to get the most qualified Service Member at every position and significantly increase the morale and esprit décor throughout our entire force. One senior warrant officer I interviewed expressed their continued concerns with the infection of gender bias throughout our systems for promotion and position selection. Whether this is something you have experienced or even if you do not believe it is still occurring, it is not our ethical duty to attempt to eliminate it, to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Once we have irradiated these biases, our population will be less likely to second guess our decision on placement and promotion. This will build a more cohesive Army, bolstering a more competitive culture of professionals working hard to achieve a higher position.

We need to pick ourselves up and finish this marathon. By removing the personally identifiable information and assigning a board file number for each file, we can begin to improve our current position. We can take this process across the finish line by following that up with replacing all proper names and identifiable pronouns. Implementing these changes will be extremely inexpensive as all the required assets are already available within our system. Furthermore, this proposal can be implemented as soon as the Army is ready to decide. Once implemented, these changes will dramatically improve our overall Army readiness, as we will retain and promote stronger, more qualified Service Members.

As stated above, this will build a more positively competitive culture within the Army. Indeed, these changes may not affect some Service Members, and despite some inevitable naysayers or counterproductive personalities, these changes will not negatively affect anyone. Considering the benefits mentioned above and the cost and time analysis, this proposal must be enacted immediately to improve our Army. We must do our ethical duty to protect the military's meritocracy, and these proposed changes do precisely that. We must build our strength from within to ensure we remain the strongest Army in the world. That is precisely what I am asking for through these proposed changes. **LET'S GO, ARMY, FINISH THE MARATHON STRONG!!!**

## References

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*Author's Note: CW4 David M. Saggio has served over 19 years in the United States Army, 3 years as a military court reporter, 2 years as an Enlisted paralegal, 1.5 years as an Executive Officer, 6 years as a Warrant Officer with The Judge Advocate General's Corps, MOS 270A, Legal Administrator, and 7 years as a Special Agent with the Army Criminal Investigation Division, MOS 311A. All individuals interviewed for this paper have requested to remain anonymous as of this publication. CW4 Joshua Gates assisted in developing this concept and successfully conducted the proof-of-concept test.*

