

# Retaining Expertise Through Lost-Cost Opportunity, Innovation, and Modernization

CW4 Phillip J. Hall, Special Forces



Chief Warrant Officers Felix Rodriguez and Michael Watson, geospatial intelligence tech officers assigned to the 522nd Military Intelligence Battalion, 207th Military Intelligence Brigade (Theater), participate in the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF) joint task force validation command post exercise at Caserma Ederle, Vicenza, Italy on Mar. 16, 2023.

## Introduction

Implementation of the Chief Warrant Officer Six (CW6) grade for select positions at the two-star level and above, offers a cost-effective, innovative solution to retain expertise without adding additional force structure. The military can maximize technical expertise and experience of senior warrant officers by capitalizing on their unique skills, education, and years of experience as technical advisors, systems integrators, and senior mentors. Implementing this grade by echelon ensures continuity of knowledge, experience, leadership while strengthening operational and strategic level effectiveness.

## The Retention Problem

The military invests considerable time and resources in its personnel, as people are the Department of Defense's number one asset (Cisneros, 2022). The military services equip them with a wide range of skills that can apply across different industries within the civilian sector. Warrant Officers are recognized as technical experts in various specialized fields, including logistics, aviation, and cybersecurity. Warrant Officer have leadership skills gained through operational experience; these veterans arrive ready to contribute from day one.



## ***Civilian Companies***

Companies create strategies to maximize efficiencies and lower costs in today's competitive business environment. One solution lies in recruiting experienced military veterans as they approach the end of their careers. These individuals create a talent pool, bringing years of expertise and training acquired in high-pressure, sometimes high-threat environments. They offer corporations a cost-effective substitute for lengthy, expensive training programs.

Consider the cost of training an aviator with minimal experience versus hiring a veteran with years of experience in military aviation, often on multiple platforms. Further consider expenses linked with developing and maintaining leadership compared to hiring a former military officer competent in leading troops in high-stress situations; these financial benefits become abundantly clear.

Most importantly, veterans are known for their strong work ethic, discipline, and commitment to mission success—qualities instilled through years of rigorous military training. A strong work ethic equals higher productivity, lower turnover rates, and a culture whose foundation is based on efficiency and results (Goozner, 2024).

## ***Retirements***

In 2023, approximately 1100 Warrant Officers retired between the grades of CW2-CW5, averaging 24 years of service in the US Army (W. Tuchtenhagen, personal communication, March 10, 2025). These retirements are a significant loss of expertise and a considerable financial blow to the Department of the Army. While a CW4 with 15 years of aviation training averages nearly \$27,000,000 in training (C. Carter-White, personal communication, March 10, 2025), other technical experts can average \$300,000 per individual. This financial burden pales in comparison to the irreplaceable experience of expertise walking out of the door.

These 1100 Warrant Officers represent 26,400 years of hands-on expertise and institutional knowledge translating to a significant reduction in the military's ability to:

- Maintain complex systems: Warrant Officers possess technical proficiency, which is critical for troubleshooting and ensuring the operational readiness of sophisticated equipment.
- Train and mentor personnel: Their experience is invaluable for shaping the next generation of junior officers and warrant officers and for providing commanders with recommendations based on years of experience.
- Develop and refine tactics, techniques, and procedures: Years of real-world experience contribute to evolving practical strategies and operational procedures.

This loss of personnel creates a knowledge gap that will take years to fill and millions of dollars to replace. Retaining this invaluable human capital through targeted incentives and creating additional opportunities is not just fiscally responsible, it is essential for maintaining military strength.

## **Addressing the Solution: Force Management**

The growth of the Warrant Officer cohort within the Department of the Army, from a mere 1,120 positions in 1920 to about 26,000 in 2025 (Winkler, 2023), highlights the increasing importance and contribution

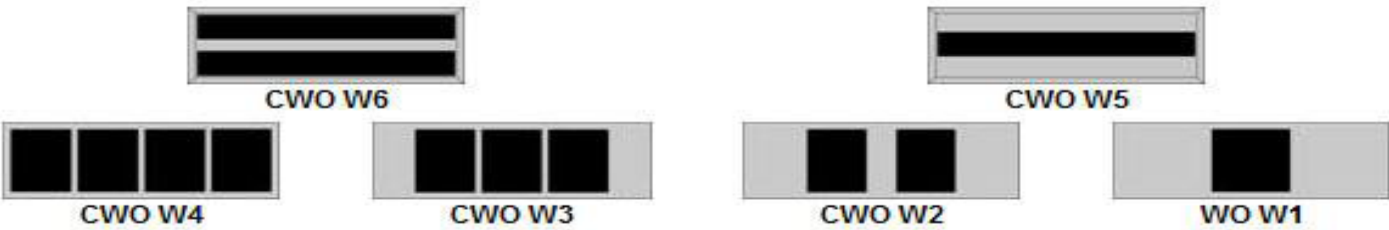
that warrant officers’ offer. This growth, however, leads to a stove pipe at the highest echelons of Warrant Officer leadership. As of today, about 1,215 individuals wear the rank of CW5 (Department of the Army, 2025) representing the peak of their technical expertise and leadership within a specialized field (Department of the Army, 2019).

At times, this concentration of talent presents a challenge in terms of upward mobility and strategic influence. A strategic opportunity presents itself by converting approximately 10% of existing CW5 billets at the two-star command and above. This innovative shift would place highly experienced Senior Field Grade Warrant Officers in positions to advise senior leaders and commanders on operational impacts and technical matters, influence policy decisions, and shape long-term strategic planning and integration.

This approach recognizes the value of Senior Filed Grade Warrant Officers and incentivizes career progression, minimizing the number of those looking to retire or ETS to join the civilian sector. This, in turn, would strengthen the entire force by ensuring that the most experienced voices contribute to strategic decision-making at the highest levels as the Department of the Army faces the Large-Scale Combat Operations dilemma.

**Cost**

Considering a fiscally constrained environment, when each dollar spent is imperative, the conversion of approximately one hundred twenty CW5 billets to CW6 presents a cost-effective solution to combat retention challenges and leverage senior Warrant Officers’ experience. The projected annual cost of converting roughly 120 billets is less than \$2.5 million. This investment is a fraction of the hundreds of millions of dollars associated with losing personnel to the civilian sector and offers a high return on investment. CW6 will see a monthly increase of \$1,500 in base pay (see Figure 1).



Warrant Officer Grade Insignia approved by Chief of Staff of the Army, 10 June, 1970. CW5 was approved by Congress in 1991. CW6 was not approved by Congress.



Pay Grade	2 or less	Over 2	Over 3	Over 4	Over 6	Over 8	Over 10	Over 12	Over 14	Over 16	Over 18
W-6											
W-5											
W-4	5,273.10	5,671.50	5,834.40	5,994.60	6,270.60	6,543.60	6,820.20	7,235.40	7,599.90	7,946.70	8,231.10
W-3	4,815.60	5,015.70	5,222.10	5,289.00	5,504.40	5,928.90	6,370.80	6,579.00	6,819.90	7,067.40	7,513.80
W-2	4,260.90	4,663.80	4,787.70	4,873.20	5,149.20	5,578.50	5,791.80	6,001.20	6,257.40	6,457.80	6,639.00
W-1	3,739.80	4,143.00	4,250.70	4,479.60	4,749.90	5,148.30	5,334.30	5,595.30	5,850.90	6,052.20	6,237.60
Pay Grade	Over 20	Over 22	Over 24	Over 26	Over 28	Over 30	Over 32	Over 34	Over 36	Over 38	Over 40
W-6	10,875.60	11,351.10	11,705.70	12,097.20	12,097.20	12,628.20	12,628.20	13,183.50	13,183.50	13,769.10	13,769.10
W-5	9,375.60	9,851.10	10,205.70	10,597.20	10,597.20	11,128.20	11,128.20	11,683.50	11,683.50	12,269.10	12,269.10
W-4	8,508.30	8,914.50	9,248.70	9,629.70	9,629.70	9,821.70	9,821.70	9,821.70	9,821.70	9,821.70	9,821.70
W-3	7,814.70	7,994.70	8,186.10	8,447.10	8,447.10	8,447.10	8,447.10	8,447.10	8,447.10	8,447.10	8,447.10
W-2	6,856.20	6,998.70	7,111.80	7,111.80	7,111.80	7,111.80	7,111.80	7,111.80	7,111.80	7,111.80	7,111.80
W-1	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90	6,462.90

Figure 1. Example Military Pay Table with CW6 (based on 2025 Military Pay Table).

The Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) with dependents of \$110 and BAH without dependents of \$164 (see Figure 2) serve as powerful retention incentive, encouraging these highly skilled professionals to continue their service and contribute to national security at the highest levels.

W5	
with DEPENDENTS:	without DEPENDENTS:
\$2,190.00	\$1,986.00
W6	
with DEPENDENTS:	without DEPENDENTS:
\$2,300.00	\$2,150.00

Figure 2. Example BAH Table (based of BAH Table for Birmingham AL in 2025).





## ***Requirements and Restrictions***

To attract the most qualified individuals, all positions converted should be strictly nominative. Warrant Officers should not be able to achieve Chief Warrant Officer Six (6) through the traditional time-in-service or time-in-grade requirements. Eligible CW5s who are interested will be vetted and selected based on their performance, leadership, and strategic knowledge. Furthermore, each CW6 CCWO position should be designated as an “up-or-out” assignment, requiring the selected warrant officers to either progress to higher roles or transition out of the military. This approach will prevent stagnation and ensure a constant flow of highly qualified Senior Field Grade Warrant Officers at the highest levels, mitigating the risk of the “stovepipe effect” discussed earlier and reducing the chance of complacency and adaptability.

## ***Structural Changes***

The Department of the Army should intentionally assign the proposed CW6 positions to key leadership and operational units across the Army, including each of the 54 states and territories within the Army National Guard, the National Guard Bureau, and the Office of the Chief of the Army Reserve. Additionally, each of the 11 Combatant Commands and the 17 Chief Warrant Officers of the Branch positions will have dedicated CW6 positions. Understanding the importance of Professional Military Education (PME), the US Army Warrant Officer Career College and other TRADOC entities requiring Command Chief Warrant Officers or Commandants must also establish these positions. Finally, the Chief Warrant Officer of the Army and select positions within the Warrant Officer Council ensure representation for strategic input at the highest level.

## ***Professional Military Education***

In 2023, TRADOC mandated the modernization of Warrant Officer Professional Military Education. (J. Young, personal communication, March 7, 2025). The US Warrant Officer Career College has reorganized and developed a new curriculum from the Warrant Officer Candidate School through the Warrant Officer Master Course, specifically designated for Senior Field Grade Warrant Officers for those identified to serve in select nominative positions. Feedback from over a dozen current and former CCWOs from the O6 – O10 level provided valuable insight on topics they would have benefited from, including Defense Planning Guidance; Budget Estimate Submission; Program, Planning, Budget Execution, Manning; and recruiting/retention (J. Young, personal communication, March 7, 2025). The Warrant Officer Master Course will function as PME for these executive level CW6 positions and, if required, be modified to add additional content.

## ***Conclusion***

Congressional approval of the Chief Warrant Officer Six (CW6) rank represents a practical solution to retain our military’s technical experts while strengthening leadership at strategic levels. This straightforward change would help prevent the exodus of experienced warrant officers to civilian corporations, provide commanders with specialized expertise, and acknowledge the critical contributions of our warrant officer cohort—all at minimal cost to taxpayers. We must engage in meaningful dialogue about this opportunity at upcoming leadership forums, professional development sessions, and branch conferences as military professionals dedicated to force readiness. I urge you to share your perspectives on implementing the CW6 rank with your chain of command and congressional representatives, as collective advocacy from

those who understand the operational impact will ultimately drive this long-overdue advancement for our warrant officer corps and the military's technical leadership capabilities. Strength in Knowledge. This We'll Defend.

*Author Note: Phillip J. Hall is a Chief Warrant Officer Four (CW4) in the Alabama Army National Guard and currently serves within the G3 division of the Joint Forces Headquarters (JFHQ). He has 27 years of experience, 22 of which in Special Forces, and has worked at the ODA, Company, BN, Brigade, Division, and TSOC levels.*

## References

- Cronk, T. (2022, April 27). DOD's Great Strength Is its People, Undersecretary Says. US Department of Defense News.
- Goozner, M. (2004). Higher skills, fewer jobs: with advanced technology and skilled workers, America can keep a strong manufacturing sector, but rising productivity equals a smarter--and smaller--work force. *The American Prospect*, 15(1), 42+.
- US Army. (2023, July 7). Fort Liberty celebrates the 105th anniversary of the Army Warrant Officer Corps. US Army. [https://www.army.mil/article/268200/fort\\_liberty\\_celebrates\\_105th\\_anniversary\\_of\\_army\\_warrant\\_officer\\_corps](https://www.army.mil/article/268200/fort_liberty_celebrates_105th_anniversary_of_army_warrant_officer_corps).
- US Army. (2019). Office Professional Development and Career Management (DA PAM 600-3).
- Winkler, D. (2022, January 6). AFC warrant officer achieves CW5 rank. US Army. [https://www.army.mil/article/263117/afc\\_warrant\\_officer\\_achieves\\_cw5\\_rank](https://www.army.mil/article/263117/afc_warrant_officer_achieves_cw5_rank)

