



## Defense Primer: Military Officers

### Grade and Rank

The armed forces are hierarchical organizations with clearly defined levels of authority. The different levels for officers are defined in law and called *grades*, while *rank* refers to the order of precedence among those in different grades and within the same grade (e.g., someone who has been a Major for three years outranks someone who has been a Major for two years; see 10 U.S.C. §741). However, it is common for the term rank to be used as a synonym for grade. Pay grade is an administrative classification that determines certain rates of pay, but it is sometimes used to indicate grade as well. For example, a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy may be referred to as an O-4. See **Figure 1**.

### Numbers and Roles

Officers make up about 19% of the armed forces, with enlisted personnel making up the other 81%. Officers outrank all enlisted personnel. **Table 1** below lists the number of active duty officers in each pay grade.

**Warrant officers** (pay grades W-1 to W-5) perform highly technical or specialized work within their career field and also, in the case of the Army, serve as helicopter pilots. Warrant officers constitute about 8% of the officer corps.

**Company-grade or junior-grade officers** (pay grades O-1 to O-3) typically lead units with several dozen to several hundred personnel, or serve as junior staff officers. They make up about 56% of the officer corps. There is no statutory limit on the number of officers in these grades.

**Field-grade or mid-grade officers** (pay grades O-4 to O-6) typically lead units with several hundred to several thousand personnel, or serve as senior staff officers. They make up about 35% of the officer corps. There are statutory limits on the number of officers in these grades (10 U.S.C. §523).

**General or flag officers** (pay grades O-7 to O-10) may lead units or organizations with several thousand to hundreds of thousands of personnel or serve as staff for the largest military organizations. General and flag officers make up just under 0.4% of the officer corps. There are statutory limits on the number of officers in these grades (10 U.S.C. §525-526a).

### Insignia

As shown in **Figure 1**, each officer grade in the armed forces has distinctive insignia, typically worn on the sleeve, shoulder, collar, and/or headgear (caps, berets, etc.).

**Table 1. Active Duty Military Officers by Pay Grade (as of September 30, 2018)**

Pay Grade	Services				Total
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	
O-10	15	8	4	13	40
O-9	44	38	21	44	147
O-8	118	61	27	90	296
O-7	141	107	41	149	438
O-6	3,990	3,125	643	3,241	10,999
O-5	8,793	6,668	1,901	9,764	27,126
O-4	15,077	10,592	3,883	13,593	43,145
O-3	28,421	18,726	6,122	20,851	74,120
O-2	11,259	6,659	3,337	6,995	28,250
O-1	9,881	7,018	3,203	7,900	28,002
W-5	589	87	107	0	783
W-4	2,070	394	297	0	2,761
W-3	3,949	647	629	0	5,225
W-2	5,300	607	830	0	6,737
W-1	2,352	0	287	0	2,639

Source: Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center.

Figure I. Pay Grade, Grade, and Insignia of Officers

Paygrade	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
<b>WARRANT OFFICERS</b>				
W1	Warrant Officer 1	USN Warrant Officer 1	Warrant Officer 1	NO WARRANT
W2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	NO WARRANT
W3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	NO WARRANT
W4	Chief Warrant Officer 4	Chief Warrant Officer 4	Chief Warrant Officer 4	NO WARRANT
W5	Chief Warrant Officer 5	Chief Warrant Officer 5	Chief Warrant Officer 5	NO WARRANT
<b>OFFICERS</b>				
O1	Second Lieutenant	Ensign	Second Lieutenant	Second Lieutenant
O2	First Lieutenant	Lieutenant Junior Grade	First Lieutenant	First Lieutenant
O3	Captain	Lieutenant	Captain	Captain
O4	Major	Lieutenant Commander	Major	Major
O5	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander	Lieutenant Colonel	Lieutenant Colonel
O6	Colonel	Captain	Colonel	Colonel
O7	Brigadier General	Rear Admiral Lower Half	Brigadier General	Brigadier General
O8	Major General	Rear Admiral Upper Half	Major General	Major General
O9	Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral	Lieutenant General	Lieutenant General
O10	General	Admiral	General	General
WARTIME ONLY	General of the Army	Fleet Admiral		General of the Air Force

Source: CRS adaption of Department of Defense webpage: <https://dod.defense.gov/About/Insignias/Officers/>.

**Relevant Statutes**

10 U.S.C. §§101(b), 523, 525-526a, 741, 742.

**Other Resources**

Department of Defense Instruction 1310.01, Rank and Seniority of Commissioned Officers, August 23, 2013.

**CRS Products**

CRS Report R44496, *Military Officer Personnel Management: Key Concepts and Statutory Provisions*, by Lawrence Kapp

CRS Report R44389, *General and Flag Officers in the U.S. Armed Forces: Background and Considerations for Congress*, by Lawrence Kapp

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