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TRENDS IN FLAG SELECTION CRITERIA



AND THEIR EFFECT ON CAREER MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most trying problems that faces any organization, whether civilian or military, is the choice and appointment of top management. Richard Jackson, former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, made the following observation:

There is no important single task than the selection of persons for executive and managerial positions in an organization. The men and women in these positions set the climate for the organization and largely determine its success.¹

The ultimate decision as to who is or is not selected has far-reaching and

lasting effects. In a recent survey of industrial company presidents, more than a third indicated that the worst mistake made last year, and the one that hurt the company most, was either having a man in a key spot who did not fit or failure to get one who did.²

As with any group of ambitious and well-educated Americans, the lower officer grades are quick to perceive any obvious shifts in the leadership characteristics and career patterns of officers selected for top management. These career-motivated officers quickly analyze their own backgrounds in terms of changing promotional criteria in order

to fulfill their professional aspirations. How well they interpret and apply the career guidelines that the top management follow in their selection of executives will ultimately determine an individual's acceptability for selection.

In the Navy, the rank of rear admiral represents entry into the top management level. This paper seeks to examine the criteria for selection to flag officer and assess their effect upon individual career management of future eligibles. To determine a current attitude toward the criteria and the selection process, a questionnaire survey was conducted as part of the research for this paper. The sample for this survey comprised 13.3 percent of the active duty unrestricted line captains and 15.9 percent of the active duty unrestricted line rear admirals and vice admirals.

I-THE NAVAL SELECTION SYSTEM

Evolution of the Naval Selection System. Navy flag rank selection dates back to the year 1775. A Naval Committee, composed of influential colonists, was charged with the responsibility for fitting out, arming, and staffing four merchantmen.¹ To command this force the rank of Commander in Chief of the Fleet was to be established; it was to be a rank equal to Gen. George Washington's. This position was offered to Esek Hopkins who at the time was Commander in Chief of all the land forces in the Colony of Rhode Island. Esek's brother, Stephen, tendered the offering letter 6 November 1775:

Dear Sir:

You will perceive that the Committee have pitched upon you to take command of a small Fleet which they hope will be but the beginning of one much larger. You may be more serviceable to your Country than you can in any other way. . . . Your pay and perquisites will be such as you will have no reason to complain of. . . and you may assure all, that the Congress rise stronger and stronger in the spirit of opposition to the tyrannical measures

of [British] administration.

I am your affectionate brother,
Step Hopkins.²

Esek Hopkins accepted the job and remained in this position (he was addressed as Commodore) until suspended from duty in 1778.³

The next major development came in 1862 when the ranks of commodore and rear admiral were established, and it was then that D.G. Farragut, L.M. Goldsborough, S.G. DuPont and A.H. Foote were appointed to the latter grade.⁴ On 25 July 1866 Congress created the grade of admiral to which Rear Admiral Farragut was appointed.⁵

The selection system that remained in effect until 1916 was based primarily on seniority. Rather than a selection system, it could be more accurately described as a test of survivability. The criteria were mainly the ability to pass occasional examinations and to stay out of serious trouble or, as one author described it, "promotion was based on seniority, and the dullards and indolent, provided they passed occasional examinations of a routine character and were not notoriously immoral, advanced as rapidly as their more capable brothers."⁶ Another writer put it more vividly—"The requirements were: keep your digestion in order and refrain from striking your superior officer."⁷ A modification to the system came in 1899 when a "plucking board" was established. This board weeded out the "bad ones" with the remaining being promoted by seniority.⁸ In 1917 the selection system as it is known today was put into effect, and the plucking board was discontinued.

The progressive and aggressive Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, with the aid of his Assistant Secretary, Franklin D. Roosevelt, successfully sponsored a law that changed promotion criteria from the archaic seniority system to the merit system.⁹ The act, Public Law 241, was passed on 29 August 1916. This charter provided for

a Selection Board composed of nine rear admirals to select the appropriate number of commanders, captains, and rear admirals. These nine rear admirals were appointed by the Secretary of the Navy and convened as early as possible during the month of December. The basic criteria involved in the selection process were:

1. Pass professional examinations proscribed by law for the officers promoted by seniority;
2. Pass a physical;
3. Have 2 years sea duty in the present grade on seagoing ships;
4. Receive a "yes" from six of the nine rear admirals on the board; and lastly
5. Be acceptable to the President of the United States.¹⁰

The essential difference in the system used currently is that the requirement for promotion exams and the 2 years of sea duty have been discontinued.

Flag Selection Criteria. From 1917 until 1966 there was only one written document that was made available to the board. (During the Second World War from 1942 to 1945 the Selection Board records were, and remain, classified.) This document took the form of a legal precept from the Secretary of the Navy to the president of the board containing the following items:

1. The membership of the board by name;
2. The number of flag officers to be selected;
3. When and for how long the board was to meet;
4. The oaths to be taken; and,
5. General guidance for the conduct and disposition of the proceedings.

In 1953 this precept was joined by a personal letter from the Secretary to the president of the Selection Board containing specific and general guidance which the Secretary felt was necessary

for the president and other members of the board. The first guidance letter, from Secretary R.B. Anderson to Vice Adm. R.L. Conolly on 15 July 1953, established a letter writing precedent that has been continued by each succeeding Secretary.

The scope of these guidance letters has increased as has their dissemination. The 1956 letter was the first to be discussed in a nationally distributed publication. It became a subject for comment in the *Navy Times*, and this same publication printed the 1965 letter in its entirety.

These guidance letters were the only publicized criteria for flag officer selection until the Pride Board Report of 1963. The Pride Board study delineated the criteria for selection to flag rank, and it has been the only study of its kind.¹¹ The legal basis for selection, Title 10, *U.S. Code*, states that promotion will be from those officers "best fitted." However, "best fitted" is nowhere defined. The guidance letters, therefore, have generally been the only continuing written criteria for flag selection and have afforded the sole means to observe any minor or major variations in the criteria dictated by the changing needs of the Navy.

Investigation of the flag selection process therefore necessitates a comparative examination of the guidance letters to determine criteria and to weigh the emphasis placed on them by the various Secretaries of the Navy. Through this procedure it may be possible to identify trends in both criteria and rationale for promotion to flag rank.

II--ANALYSIS OF CRITERIA AND TRENDS

Division of Criteria. Selection criteria set forth in the guidance letters may be arbitrarily divided into two categories. The first deals with individual traits while the second relates to the actual

professional performance and development of the officer.

The first category contains qualities that relate to the "whole man" concept. They are physiological, psychological, and educational in nature. To group these qualities under one term such as "personality traits" is neither accurate nor appropriate. However, for ease of reference, the term "personality traits" will be used to include all the qualities of man that are either inherent or developed.

In this first category, 36 descriptive phrases were utilized by the various Secretaries. Because of the similarity of some of these phrases, they can be condensed into 18 groups:

1. Intellect--analytical thought process, flexibility of mind, imagination, technical/scientific knowledge, perception.

2. Judgment--mature policy direction, imaginative and realistic planning, keen discernment of future operational requirements.

3. Integrity--high character, strong moral fiber.

4. Potential.

5. Past performance--demonstrated competence.

6. Progressive--visionary, creativity, originality, resourcefulness.

7. National views (vice parochialism)--integrated Defense picture.

8. Adept in relations with officers of other services, Government officials, and members of Congress.

9. Military statesman--overseas ability.

10. Command ability--command at sea ability, command and executive management ability within the Naval Establishment, management ability, organizational ability, executive management ability.

11. Potential to command in combat.

12. Magnetic personal leadership.

13. Energy--diligence.

14. Strong physical stamina.

15. Youth.

16. Articulate in oral and written communications.

17. Socially adept--cultured.

18. Professional ability--seamanship and naval science proficiency.

The grouping that received the greatest emphasis was number 10--command ability. This occurred because the traditional command at sea concept was merged with the modern management concept under the single term of command. Henri Fayol, the French industrialist and one of the founders of modern management theory, regarded "... the elements of management as its functions [which were] ... planning, organizing, command, coordination and control."¹ He further defined command as "... the operation of organization ... and as [the] direction of subordinates."² The Department of the Air Force notes that "management is an inherent responsibility of command."³ Thus, in this grouping, a "commander" by definition is a "manager" and vice versa.

The second category represents professional performance and development. For simplicity of discussion the factors concerned have been grouped under the heading of "Performance Factors." This category includes 10 groupings listed below:

1. Equivalence of deep draft/major command.

2. Impact of technology on career--subspecialization and retouring.

3. Well-rounded career--broad base of experience.

4. Early selection.

5. Late selection.

6. Washington, D.C. duty.

7. Joint and international staff and agency duty--[Joint/Combined/Allied/OSD duty].

8. Nuclear engineering and operations subspecialty.

9. Communications subspecialty.

10. The ability to function effec-

tively, that is, compete, in a mixed military-civilian environment.

Trend Analysis of the Personality Traits. No meaningful trends could be established for 14 of the 18 groupings. However, there was an observable trend evident for four of them—national views vis-a-vis parochialism, youth, command ability, and potential to command in combat.

The “national views” trait was first emphasized in 1961, approximately 6 months after the Kennedy administration took office with Mr. Robert S. McNamara as Secretary of Defense. The Defense Department of that period was aptly described in an Industrial College of the Armed Forces publication.

This, then was the environment when the Kennedy administration began. The principle of civilian control had been strengthened and clarified; the concept of unified action by the Armed Forces was, as stated before, dogma; and the Congress and the Executive branch had both turned to a strong, centralized Secretary of Defense for management efficiency.⁴

Management efficiency was the quality being emphasized in 1961. It was not mentioned during the succeeding 3 years but reappeared in 1964 when Mr. Paul Nitze came into office. Mr. Nitze has continued this emphasis through the Selection Board in 1966. This trait has also been closely linked with other career criteria which will be discussed later.

Youth as a relevant trait appeared initially in 1964 with increasing emphasis through 1966. It was in response to the problem of having flag officers in the Navy older than their contemporaries of like experience in the other services. This placed the Navy at a disadvantage when it was competing with the other services for the positions of unified commanders in chief and of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A small group of younger flag officers would provide, Mr. Nitze noted,

“several years’ experience in three and four star assignments” and offer a “credible, tangible and persuasive argument in favor of an individual’s suitability for one of these senior unified command positions.”⁵

The trait of “potential to command in combat” has been emphasized after each world crisis: in 1953 following the Korean war; in 1957 following our near involvement in Suez, and finally in the fall of 1965 with the increase in the tempo of operations in Southeast Asia.

The thread of “command ability” runs almost continuously through the guidance letters. Frequent reference to this trait is not surprising when it is considered that the recognized objective of a line officer’s career is command. Secretary Korth emphasized the point in his 1963 letter: “The hallmark of the unrestricted line officer is a breadth of experience sufficient to qualify him for command and executive management positions within the Naval Establishment.”⁶

Trend Analysis of Performance Factors. Of the 10 different groupings in this category, only 5 exhibit any continuity that could be termed as an observable trend. These 5 items are: impact of technology on career (channelization and subspecialization), deep draft/major command, duty on joint and international staffs and agencies, ability to compete with civilians in the Defense Department, and early selection.

The growth of science and technology in the last 20 years has been staggering. The extent of this growth was expressed by Dr. Alain Enthoven, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, in an article in *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, January 1964:

Science and technology have gone through a “takeoff” and they are now in a period of rapid, accelerating, and apparently self-sustaining growth. Nuclear weapons, nuclear power, computers, large-scale rockets, and space

flight are but the most spectacular examples of a revolution which has been led by both military men and civilian scientists.⁷

In order to cope with the advances in technology, the personnel planners adopted subspecialization. The emphasis on this concept began in 1955 and has continued to the present with only three gaps--1957, 1958, and 1962. The stress that was given to this concept by Secretary Nitze in his 1966 guidance letter is a measure of its importance:

I am concerned that the development of this concept [subspecialization] has not proceeded with the dispatch which I believe is necessary. Indeed, I have come to the conclusion that many men avoid being so categorized because they feel that it may have an unfavorable impact on their careers. I believe that such a decision on their part is inherently unsound and in my position as Secretary, I am compelled to do everything possible to dispel such notions.⁸

The thrust of the deep draft/major command equivalent proviso was to widen the selection opportunity by increasing command opportunity. However, the necessity of retouring caused by subspecialization has been an inhibiting factor in the process of widening the selection base. By its very nature, retouring demands more of an officer's time and thus allows less opportunity to gain the desired command. It should also be noted that since 1963 there has been no qualifying reference to the deep draft/major command requirement. That is, as its not being mandatory for selection.

The next two factors will be considered together since the first is a causative agent for the second--duty on joint and international staffs and agencies that may place the military officer in a mixed civilian-military atmosphere. In this environment the military officer is required to compete with civilian contemporaries in the Defense Department. In 1964 Secretary Nitze empha-

sized this requirement, and his action substantiated the McNamara influence of an effective and closely coordinated Department of Defense under civilian direction and control.

A final factor to be considered as a significant trend is early selection. This item has been emphasized continuously since 1955. The early justification was, as Secretary Thomas noted in his 1955 guidance letter, "... an assurance to all officers that a career in the Naval service offers recognition for exceptional ability and promise, without prejudicing the normal flow to flag rank for the remainder."⁹ This was the accepted reasoning until 1964 when Secretary Nitze addressed himself to the problem of "older Flag Officers." A response to this problem area was covered in the discussion of "youth," and the implementation vehicle was early selection. This thinking has essentially continued through 1966.

Overall Trend Analysis. When considering overall trend analysis, one will note the patterns that have evolved as a consequence of the technological explosion and the emphasis placed upon centralized management in the Defense Department. This latter is mentioned because of the expansive growth that has taken place in the upper management levels of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and comparable offices of the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations. Specialization has been a natural development of technology and a necessity in managing complex systems in the service bureaucracy. This environment has generated the need for new skills in such areas as systems analysis and program packaging --management tools introduced by senior leadership within the Defense Department. As a measure of the importance of these skills, new educational programs were instituted. The *Naval Training Bulletin* made the following comment:

'Systems analysis' is another way of saying 'cost effectiveness,' which is the analysis of alternatives to produce the best choice for the money or the least cost for choice. Because it is [an] important factor in Department of Defense decision making, and in the military services' resultant need for systems analysts, a Defense Systems Analysis Education Program was established in 1965.¹⁰

The aforementioned evaluation of the Secretary's guidance letters indicates certain trends that can be generalized and enumerated as follows:

1. Increased emphasis on future potential;
2. Equivalence of sea commands, both in unit size and number, as a means of portraying/identifying traditional seagoing skills;
3. The search for youth in the small early selection group;
4. Utilization of subspecialty in duty assignment (retouring) and in increasing technical/scientific knowledge; and
5. Increased participation with Defense Department civilian leadership and assignment on joint-international staffs and agencies.

The remaining personality traits and factors do not provide substance for selection criteria. The Pride Board made a like observation with the following comment:

The Board concludes that much of this counsel is valuable and valid but that its variety of viewpoint and frequent inconsistency over a period of years . . . does not materially assist the members of the selection board in making the many difficult decisions which normally confront them.¹¹

The majority of these traits/factors have not only been the traditional prerequisites for flag officers, but also for naval officers in general and for civilian management. They have been publicized in a variety of ways—letters, definitions, fitness reports, management texts, newsletters, et cetera, and over a considerable time span. The most noted naval

source is John Paul Jones' famous "Qualifications of the Naval Officer." The following are portions that are analogous to a large number of the guidance letters criteria:

It is by no means enough that an officer of the navy should be a capable mariner . . . as well as a gentleman of liberal education, refined manners, punctilious courtesy, and the nicest sense of personal honour. He should . . . be able to express himself clearly . . . both with tongue and pen, [and] . . . also . . . in French and Spanish . . . [and also] be familiar with the principles of International Law, and . . . Admiralty Jurisprudence. He should also be conversant with the usage of diplomacy, and capable of maintaining, . . . diplomatic correspondence.¹²

In the management arena the issuance of these criteria has been prolific. Henri Fayol covered the subject very appropriately, writing that:

. . . the qualities required [are] . . . physical [bealth, vigor, address], mental [ability to understand and learn, judgement, mental vigor, and adaptability], moral [energy, firmness, willingness to accept responsibility, initiative, loyalty, tact, dignity], qualities of general education [general acquaintance with matters not belonging exclusively to the function performed], those of special knowledge [that peculiar to the function], and of experience [knowledge arising from the work proper].¹³

Accordingly, the vast majority of the criteria enumerated in the guidance letters do not provide a cogent trend. In addition, as previously illustrated, they are not necessarily unique qualities. These guidance letters too often eloquently present previously recorded platitudinous personality traits. This practice dulls the emphasis that may be desired for a particular trait, and obscures the identification of any trends within these traits. However, since 1963 there has been a shift from this "shot-gun" tendency to the more utilitarian form that does indeed supply criteria

guidance and indicates discernible trends.

III-EFFECTS OF TRENDS ON CAREER MANAGEMENT

In the following discussion the author will seek to evaluate selection criteria trends as they affect contemporary career management. Much of this analysis will involve data that was collected through the questionnaire survey. Comments received in this survey will provide an insight into the current awareness and attitudes of eligibles with regard to their assessment of selection criteria.

The Trends. The significant trends that were a product of the 15 guidance letters are listed below in shortened form:

1. Potential
2. Equivalence of sea commands
3. Subspecialization
4. Youth
5. Defense Department participation

The first three have been in existence throughout the issuance of the guidance letters. The only change has been in the degree of emphasis. Equivalence of sea command and subspecialization continue to receive heavy emphasis in order to overcome the inertia of naval tradition in adopting new ideas.¹ Official recognition of the subspecialization trend came to fruition in 1965. This provided the appropriate coding of all officers with subspecialties that were gained by education, experience, or both. This coding provided a practical means of detailing personnel with applicable skills to repeated tours of duty in their subspecialty.

Implication of Trends on Career Management. What is the effect of these trends on career management for an officer aspiring to flag rank—future eligibles? The shift is in the area of recognition. There are essentially no esoteric or glamorous skills required of

the unrestricted line officer. He must possess the traditional executive traits. These must be refined and honed to use the newly defined management skills, i.e., systems analysis, cost effectiveness, et cetera. "McNamara Management" does not require a naval officer of unique qualities to understand and apply his concepts. The observations made by the Hartman Board in 1948 concerning the acquisition of new weaponry expertise is equally valid when applied to the new management skills.

... new weapons either produce or tend to produce dominant groups of officers. During the 19th century the advent of steam engineering and the iron clad... the torpedo boat threatened the battle line... From 1920 to 1940 the "gun club"... Now aviation... submarines... in the future... guided missiles, atomic energy or whatever else science introduces as a new weapon. The importance of each new weapon, if only because it is new, gives prestige to the officers skilled in its use that acts as an incentive for that group to seek special privilege, authority and autonomy. This is natural and normal... incumbent that the Navy establish a training and educational system which... emphasizes... importance of high command relative to any speciality... insure an opportunity for a nonspecialist to acquire knowledge of the new weapon...²

What has changed, then, is the professional environment for the observation of desired flag officer qualities. As the trends have shown, the environment has come ashore.

Centroid Theory--Defense Department Participation. The "sea to shore" environmental shift gives rise to this author's theory. Until about 13 years ago the preeminence of command at sea performance was unchallenged. By tradition it was in this environment where the naval officer could demonstrate those qualities that identified him as flag officer potential.³ Duty ashore provided the opportunity to inject some "salt" into the Shore Establishment and

to continue to stress that the mission of the Shore Establishment was indeed to support the Fleet. Thus, the centroid for the naval officer was primarily a sea environment. His performance ashore obviously had meaning and thrust, but it could not compare with his command at sea.

Size, centralization, and technology have altered this former concept. These three factors have formed a background for the evolutionary shift of emphasis from sea to shore.⁴ The effect of this evolution on the naval officer has been primarily a decreased emphasis on sea duty and an increased emphasis of duty within the high visibility of the Washington arena. However, to gain admission to this arena the traditional seagoing qualities must be met. This admission is in the form of completion of standard afloat duties which will permit entry to the Washington scene. The standard afloat duties are outlined in the *Officer Fact Book* in the form of "Professional Development Pattern for Code—." These patterns contain the appropriate sea and shore billets as a function of grade and, of course, the officer code (surface line, submariner, aviator, et cetera).⁵ Obviously these traditional naval officer duties are still required; however, they are now merely a prerequisite for entry into the most important environment for performance evaluation—the Washington environment.

This centroid concept has significant implication in career management for future eligibles. A most important consideration is obtaining the Washington jobs that provide an opportunity to build and project a desirable image. Should an officer orient himself principally towards afloat jobs, both staff and command, he will have difficulty in obtaining the high visibility Washington job. Thus, an officer who has approached his career planning from the traditional viewpoint of the paramountcy of command at sea may lack

the prerequisites to compete for the good visibility assignment, and, like time, the prerequisites are irretreivable. Therefore, the career-motivated officer must be cognizant of the current prerequisites for admission to the visibility arena. This fulfillment of the requisites has been eased by the "equivalence of sea commands" trend which stated that the requirements for a deep draft or major command may be satisfied in many ways, i.e., a smaller unit, a squadron command, et cetera. In addition, the requirement of a finite amount of sea duty for promotion was abolished 8 April 1964 by Executive Order 11157. Conversely, the requirement for duty on a joint or international staff or agency has not received the same equivalence. Therefore, it has been presented as practically a "sine qua non" for selection to flag rank.

It is apparent that once an officer has fulfilled the minimum sea duty requirements within each grade, he should seek all his shore duty in the Washington arena. The earlier in his career he obtains this Washington duty, the more Defense Department management ability and expertise he will acquire. At the rank of captain this will enhance assignment to the prestige jobs in Washington that offer high visibility necessary for promotion to flag rank.

Subspecialization Trend. The requirement for line officers to acquire a specialization was officially documented in 1919 in the Knox-King-Pye Board Report which said in part:

... provision must ... be made ... for the specialization of all officers in at least one branch of the profession, in order to insure that full knowledge and use may be made of the constant progress in all of the arts, industries, and sciences, which can in any way contribute to the advancement of efficiency in naval warfare in any of its manifold aspects and requirements. Some of this specialization can be accomplished by instruction and some of it by suitable assignments to duty.⁶

As noted previously, official implementation of this trend occurred in 1965 with the approval of the 1964 Combs Board Report. The SecNav guidance letters have also stressed this subspecialization almost continuously since 1955. However, the unrestricted line officer corps has not embraced the subspecialization concept. This fact was pinpointed in the 1962 Dillon Report which was a Review of the Management of the Department of the Navy with the following statement:

Navy career patterns are not always designed to meet the future needs of increased specialization. Many of our personnel who have the basic qualities for successful technical careers are not sufficiently motivated to pursue such careers. There is no longer a sufficiently attractive appeal for officers to obtain a postgraduate technical education. The view that tours of duty in key technical positions in bureaus and shore activities adversely affect promotional opportunities to flag rank is widely held among officers. These problems are most serious.⁷

What effect does the present implementation of a subspecialization program have on future eligibles? First, it will utilize the technical postgraduate training that perhaps had not been applied in the appropriate field. Second, it will stimulate increased attendance in the technical academic areas. Third, an

officer with an identified subspeciality, having previously avoided assignment in the applicable technical billets (as the Dillon Report indicated) would find himself at a disadvantage in comparison to those officers who had utilized their technical subspecialities. It would appear that in the light of present policy, future eligibles will be criticized if they do not fulfill and seek billets that involve their particular subspeciality.

Survey Questionnaire Information.

The survey questionnaire was directed towards the future eligibles (captains) for selection to unrestricted line rear admiral and the unrestricted line rear admirals and vice admirals.

The population sampled was 2,273 and 220 respectively. Three hundred and fifteen surveys were mailed to the captains (13.3 percent of the population) and 35 mailed to the admirals (15.9 percent of the population). The names of the captains were randomly selected by the Bureau of Naval Personnel and the names of the admirals were randomly selected by the author. There were 236 captain responses and 29 admiral responses. This represented a return of 75 percent for the captains and 82.8 percent for the admirals for an overall return of 75.6 percent.

The discussion of the survey contained in this section will be limited to:

	CAPTAINS		ADMIRALS	
	#	*	#	*
SecNav Guidance Letters to Selection Board	161		19	
Conversations with Senior Officers	86		2	
Information promulgated by the Bureau of Personnel	63		5	
Personal observations	52		10	
Review the records of those selected	48		7	
No sources of information	12		1	
Pride Board Report	2		0	
Title 10, U.S. Code	0		1	

*No percentages may be determined since those responding indicated on this question from one to n+1 sources. It is notable that all responding answered this question.

1. The current awareness and attitudes of what the selection criteria are, and

2. Comments concerning the sea to shore subspecialization trends.

Selection Criteria. Both captains and admirals were asked what, if any, were the sources of information regarding the selection to flag officer. As the table above indicates, the vast majority (captains 161 and admirals 19) noted that the SecNav guidance letters were the primary source. It is interesting to note that there were only two references to the Pride Board Report, which has been the only official report that addressed itself to the question of flag officer selection criteria.⁸

The question dealing directly with a determination of the criteria asked, "What do you understand to be the current criteria for selection to flag officer?"

As the below table shows, the trait of performance was noted more often both by captains and admirals than any other criterion. Yet this trait had not been stressed by SecNav since 1960. The companion trait, potential, has been heavily stressed by SecNav from 1960 on, yet it was noted only 32 times by captains and seven times by admirals. The two factors of duty in Washington and duty on a joint and international staff and agencies were next in order of preference for the captains. This was in accord with the guidance letters, particularly those which Mr. Nitze authored. With regard to Secretary Nitze, captain respondent no. 20 made an observation which appeared to be typical:

I think the policies and selection criteria changed when Mr. Nitze became SecNav. I think he's the finest we've ever had but as a highly educated and erudite civilian, does not have an

	CAPTAINS		ADMIRALS	
	#	*	#	*
Performance	128		10	
Washington, D.C. duty	84		4	
Duty on a joint and international staff and agencies	60		1	
Well rounded career	56		10	
Attaining a subspecialty	46		4	
Excellence in command at sea	44		1	
Major command	43		0	
Deep draft command	15		0	
Youth	37		1	
Potential	32		7	
Education	30		0	
Sponsor/"Friends"	28		1	
Skilled naval executive	21		1	
Unknown	16		1	
Service college attendance	14		1	
Articulate in oral and written communications	13		0	
Previous SacNav Guidance Letter	11		7	

*No percentages may be determined since those responding indicated on this question from one to n+1 criteria. It is notable that all responding answered this question.

appreciation for the responsibilities, preparations, and requirements for command at sea.

In addition to the performance-potential difference, the other most significant difference between the guidance letters and the survey was in the area of proficiency at sea. The factors of excellence in command at sea and deep draft/major command required received an above-average number of votes from the captains (102) but only a scant one vote from the admirals. This difference in outlook between the captains and admirals was further demonstrated, as the table below indicates, when 64.4 percent of the captains and 37.9 percent of the admirals said a "major command" should be a mandatory prerequisite for flag selection.

	CAPTAINS		ADMIRALS	
	#	%	#	%
Yes	152	64.41	11	37.9
No	76	32.2	16	55.2
No response	8	3.39	2	6.9
TOTAL	236	100.0%	29	100.0%

The initial and one of the continuing purposes of the guidance letters has been to stress that a deep draft/major command is not mandatory and, additionally, that the importance of command at sea has diminished. This was illustrated by the statement of admiral respondent no. 25:

[The] Battleship is dead! Its philosophy still persists that in order to command a fleet one must first have a major combatant ship to handle many ships. NOT so.

As previously noted, the preponderance of both captains and admirals indicated the primary source of selection criteria was the SecNav guidance letters. And, furthermore, when asked if they read guidance letters, 94.4 percent of the captains and 96.6 percent of the admirals said they did, as the table

below shows. Yet, there is a difference between the criteria delineated by the

	CAPTAINS		ADMIRALS	
	#	%	#	%
Yes	223	94.49	28	96.6
No	13	5.51	1	3.4
No response	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	236	100.0%	29	100.0%

respondents and that covered in the guidance letters. This was overwhelmingly true in the captains and only moderately true within the admiral respondents. One rationale for this "criteria lag" may be attributed to the reluctance to accept a "Real Time" orientation of present Defense Department management policy due to a clinging traditionalism of the battleship days. The reverse of this school of thought and a realization of the significance of the guidance letters were borne out by the statement given by admiral respondent no. 17:

I think we all must remember that the nation--and thus the Navy--is undergoing rapid social and technological changes. Flag selection must change also--and the Secretary's annual precept letter [guidance letter] to the President of the Board should remain the source of guidance and policy leadership.

Sea Duty to Washington Trend. The survey showed concurrence with the guidance letters in the trend of increasing importance of Defense Department participation (duty in Washington) and a lessening of importance of sea duty. In response to the question, "If a captain is preparing for selection to flag officer, in which area would a 'head and shoulder' performance carry the most weight?," as shown below, 69.9 percent of the captains and 62.14 percent of the admirals selected the Washington area.

	CAPTAINS		ADMIRALS	
	#	%	#	%
Washington area	165	69.92	18	62.14
Command at sea	22	9.33	4	13.76
Both*	37	15.66	6	20.65
No response	12	5.09	1	3.45
TOTAL	236	100.0%	29	100.0%

*This category was a write-in.

Admiral respondent no. 8 illustrated the former with the following "high visibility" philosophy, "command still [is] a most significant factor, but Washington duty is the showcase for displaying your wares." Captain respondent no. 17 further expanded on this point:

Washington duty is becoming increasingly important, especially billets associated with various aspects of the new defense management techniques or billets with a "high degree of visibility," in which the officer is seen by and performs for the higher ranking admirals and/or civilian Secretariate.

With regard to the importance of sea duty, the following was asked, "Do you feel that the traditional command at sea concept has been lessened in its impact?"

	CAPTAINS		ADMIRALS	
	#	%	#	%
Yes	175	74.21	22	75.9
No	59	24.94	5	17.2
No response	2	0.85	2	6.9
TOTAL	236	100.0%	29	100.0%

As indicated in the above table, 74.2 percent of the captains and 75.9 percent of the admirals agreed. The prevalent feeling of those disagreeing with this question is displayed by captain respondent no. 27:

The senior uniformed echelon must insure that qualification and demonstrated outstanding ability as a sea-going Naval Officer in the tactical control and day-to-day operation of Naval ships continues to be recognized

as a primary requirement of a line officer and a skill (art? talent?) that stands on its own merit and requires many years to develop to its full meaning. If this is lost the Navy will cease to be the effective organization it is today.

Captain respondent no. 29 made the following rationale for the lessening of importance of command at sea:

An officer's performance at sea in command is far less a measurable quantity than is a tough shore billet simply by virtue of relatively little opportunity for surveillance by the reporting senior. By doing a few things well, others not at all, and avoiding trouble you can complete the successful sea tour.

Finally, captain respondent no. 197 presented the following views and reasoning for the decline of significance of command at sea:

I find the shift in emphasis from 'command at sea' to 'management effectiveness' both realistic and proper. Our long standing (and perhaps exaggerated) philosophy that commanding a ship is the only comprehensive training ground for future Flag Officers is slowly giving way to overdue recognition that certain management assignments are at least as challenging and certainly more useful in preparing officers for similar Flag Officer billets. The increasing complexity of ships and tactics has been evolutionary in nature and most line officers can deal competently with progressive improvements in hardware and systems--experience and energy are the principal requirements. Changes in management responsibilities, however, have been profound and have demanded the highest order of broad imagination and adaptability.

In short, both command and management skills are essential Flag Officer ingredients but, since the latter quality is currently in shortest supply, it is likely to be weighted more heavily until naval officers become as facile and confident in management roles as they are in ship handling and operations.

Let us now force this evolution, however, by artificial detailing policies which will give all officers a chance at a multitude of assignments, at the expense of uniformly weakening our already low standing in the area of management. A mediocre officer in command of a ship can lower the combat effectiveness of that ship but the same officer, in certain management or strategic policy making positions, can disrupt the Navy and hazard the Nation.

Subspecialization. Evidence of the increased emphasis on subspecialization is implicit in an examination of the advanced training of the respondents as the following table shows:

	CAPTAINS		ADMIRALS	
	#	%	#	%
M.S./M.A.	72	30.5	4	13.8
LL.B	6	2.54	0	0
Ph.D	2	.84	0	0
No advanced Degree	142	60.2	25	86.2
No response	14	5.92	0	0
TOTAL	236	100.0%	29	100.0%

Nearly three times the number of captains, 33.8 percent have advanced degrees as compared to 13.8 percent of the admirals. With regard to attaining a subspecialty, admiral respondent no. 3 made the following comment:

Now a Captain has only the need to demonstrate that he is a capable or qualified Commanding Officer. After this, selection depends on his future use to the Navy—which means specialization and subspecialization.

The traditional concept of attaining any subspecialty was voiced by admiral respondent no. 22:

Pragmatically speaking, advanced education, particularly in a specialty, is a handicap since a feeling exists that a specialist 'owes' the Navy several tours of duty in his specialty, which usually will conflict with good career planning.

This attitude was outlined even more explicitly by captain respondent no. 175:

The major weakness of the selection system—and this is applicable to all ranks—is that as soon as an officer has had sufficient experience in a particular field to become a valuable 'specialist,' he is dead as far as promotion is concerned. Regardless of what the Secretary's guidance letter says, the Board has over the years tended to concentrate in its selection on those who are not 'specialists' or 'experts' in a particular field.

Finally, captain respondent no. 234 aptly summarized the attitude that Secretary Nitze has been desirous of achieving within the Flag Selection Boards: "Flag selection must permit selection within certain specialty areas to permit successful prosecution of Navy programs."

General Comments on Questionnaire.

The previous statements from the various respondents were gleaned from the prolific comments made to the last question on the questionnaire which stated: "Please place below any comments you would like to make regarding selection criteria and policies." The number of respondents making comments on this question was most gratifying: 200 captains and 25 admirals, which was 84.7 percent and 86.4 percent respectively of all those responding. Unfortunately, these numbers preclude any compilation of the comments into a separate appendix. However, the statements used in this chapter were selected to reflect the more consistent response within the particular question or area that was examined.

IV--CONCLUSIONS

Guidance Letters. The guidance letters written by the Secretary of the Navy to the president of the selection board from 1953 to 1966 contain some guidance and criteria for selection to flag rank. These letters prior to and since their inception in 1953 are the only continuing source of criteria for selection to flag officer. This criteria for analysis purposes was arbitrarily divided into categories:

1. Personality traits, and
2. Factors that deal either with duty assignments or with general career policy guidance.

In the delineation of the criteria dealing with the vast majority of the personality traits, the letters are necessarily vague and platitudinous. The traits are those that traditionally apply to top management--civilian or military--and are recorded in a variety of available documents. They are also the same traits that had substance and thrust in John Paul Jones' day and still do today. The two traits that do exhibit trends are potential and youth. Potential has been in existence in the letters since 1954; only the emphasis has altered. Secretary Nitze initiated the youth trend in 1964 and has stressed it each succeeding year. The criteria dealing with factors have produced three noteworthy trends: equivalence of sea command, subspecialization and a quantum jump in increased Defense Department participation. The implications of these five trends are an increase in importance of Defense Department participation (Washington duty), a lessening of importance of command at sea, and, finally, a new appreciation and vigorous utilization of subspecialty skills.

The thrust of the foregoing on individual career management gives rise to the centroid theory and a new appreciation of subspecialties. Command at sea

performance has traditionally been the high visibility area. However, with the advent of the Defense Department participation trend, performance in Washington has preempted command at sea as the high visibility environment. Therefore, successful completion of required command at sea billets now serves as the entrance requirements to the Washington arena. Thus, career-wise, after an officer has fulfilled his minimum sea duty requirements in each particular grade, he should actively seek Washington duty. The earlier in his career he obtains this Washington duty the more Defense Department management ability and expertise he will acquire. This, at the captain plateau, will enhance assignment to the prestige jobs in Washington that offer high visibility. The new appreciation of subspecialties will prompt the following career management moves:

1. An increased stimulus to obtain technical academic training, and
2. An active seeking of billets to utilize existing identified subspecialty skills.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Lt. Comdr. Thomas R.M. Emery, U.S. Navy, is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, holds a degree in electrical engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey and an M.S. in International Affairs from The George Washington University. He has served as Engineering Officer of U.S.S. *Cotton* (DD 669), as Flag Lieutenant and Aide to Commander Cruiser Division ONE, as Executive Officer of U.S.S. *Lorain County* (LST 1177), as commissioning Weapons Officer of U.S.S. *Richard E. Byrd* (DDG 23), as Executive Officer of U.S.S. *Sampson* (DDG 10), and is presently Commanding Officer, U.S.S. *Hartley* (DE 1029). He graduated from the School of Naval Command and Staff, Naval War College, Class of 1967.

Survey Questionnaire. The guidance letters provide the overwhelming source to both captains and admirals for selection criteria. The vast majority, 94.4 percent of the captains and 96.6 percent of the admirals, said they read the guidance letters. However, there was a marked deviation between the criteria delineated by these respondents and that covered in the guidance letters. This deviation was considerably more evident with the captains. The areas of most significant disagreement with the guidance letters was too much emphasis on performance and the requirement for major command and too little emphasis on potential. However, the respondents did agree on the rising importance of Washington duty and an overall lessening of importance of command at sea. This is somewhat at variance with the feeling towards the major command question and can perhaps be attributed to the reluctance to accept an erosion of the last and most significant embodiment of the seagoing naval officer-command of the major combatant ship.

Recommendations. The discrepancy between the officers' assessment of selection criteria and the actual selection criteria indicates a number of officers tend to place themselves in positions where their experience and expertise were not being utilized nor noticed to the maximum. It appears that more attention should be given to communicating the criteria so that officers could effectively plan and implement their career objectives. To this end the guidance letters as presently constituted should be modified. In their stead the Secretary should initiate management directives that relate selection criteria and/or policy. These directives should be written on a yearly basis and, in addition to containing the guidance for

selection, should assess and identify present and future trends in the Navy and projected policy for these trends. These directives should be given wide official distribution, i.e., *The Officer Personnel Newsletter*, SECNAV Instructions, et cetera, to afford availability to all levels within the officer structure.

Epilog. The question that has been implicit throughout the discussion of selection criteria and its effect on career management is, "What can any officer do to enhance his selection to flag rank?" The answer to this was either implied, addressed, or sidestepped in the voluminous comments contained in the survey questionnaire. Obviously, there is no one answer--there are many. One philosophical approach outlined by captain respondent no. 15 appeared to this author to be an apt and realistic assessment of the question:

Since there is an excess of potential flag performers over those selected, the nod goes to those whose backgrounds and capabilities most nearly match service needs at the time. Of course, some officers have frustrated, outsmarted, or even embittered themselves by failing to realize (or realizing too late) that service needs can shift more quickly than individuals can adjust career patterns. The element of chance is inescapable.

So, what is the role for the individual officer? It should be the utmost development of his unique capabilities. He may then hope, but not naively expect, that a demand for his capabilities will exist at selection time. A flaw in many contemporary attitudes towards flag selection is the assumption of a single career model and that the 'prize' goes to the closest approximation to this ideal. In my opinion, the role of the Navy in this era has become so complex and sophisticated that the widest range of individual capabilities should be found among the flag officers of the Navy.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

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11. U.S. Dept. of the Navy, *Criteria for Selection to Flag Rank in the Navy*, SecNavNotice 1412 of 1 May 1963 (Washington: 1963).

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6. Letter from SecNav Fred Korth to Admiral James S. Russell, USN, 7 May 1963, p. 1.

7. Alain C. Enthoven, "Choosing Strategies and Selecting Weapons Systems," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, January 1964, p. 152.

8. Letter from SecNav Paul H. Nitze to Admiral Horacio Rivero, USN, 7 May 1966, p. 3.

9. Letter from SecNav Charles S. Thomas to Admiral Jerauld Wright, USN, 29 June 1955, p. 3.

10. "The Defense Systems Analysis Education Program," *Naval Training Bulletin*, Summer 1966, p. 1.

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12. Leland Lovette, *Naval Customs Traditions and Usage* (Annapolis, Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute, 1939), p. 372.

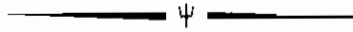
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III--EFFECTS OF TRENDS ON CAREER MANAGEMENT

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There is a great deal of talk about loyalty from the bottom to the top. Loyalty from the top down is even more necessary and much less prevalent.

George S. Patton, Jr.: War As I Knew It, 1947