



Fort Sill's new garrison command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. David Carr (left) congratulates outgoing Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Miller after a change of responsibility ceremony Aug. 7 at Fort Sill, Okla. Changes announced this week will alter how the Army considers, selects and slates command sergeants major and sergeants major for Command Select List positions. (Photo by Marie Berberea)

# Changes to Improve How CSMs, SGMs Are Selected for Command Select List Positions

*David Vergun*

Army News Service

**T**he Army has implemented changes to how it considers, selects and slates command sergeants major and sergeants major for the privilege of serving in Command Select List positions.

For four years, the Command Select List, or CSL, system has filled the Army's most critical brigade and

battalion-level CSM and SGM key billets with the best qualified senior NCOs. To optimize the CSL system, adjustments are being made so it continues to serve as a key tool in shaping the future of the Army, officials said. These changes are expected to benefit the Army by putting the most senior NCO talent in the right place,

at the right time, said Col. Lane M. Turner, chief of the Command Management Branch at U.S. Army Human Resources Command at Fort Knox, Ky.

Serving as a command sergeant major or sergeant major in a key billet, at any level, any location, in any unit across the Army, is an extraordinary privilege and honor, Turner said. While the nation still faces emerging threats, security-environment uncertainty and budgetary constraints, the need for committed leaders never waivers, he said. He added that the Army continues to need competent and innovative leaders who possess the depth and breadth of character who are committed to Soldiers, while also understanding an ever-changing environment.

The changes will be implemented in the fiscal year 2016 CSM centralized selection list board, which meets Oct. 27, 2014. The changes were announced Aug. 12, in Military Personnel Message 14-221.

### **Opt-In & All-In**

The first two changes are “opt-in” and “all-in.” In years past, an NCO who chose not to opt-in was actually opted in by default, said John H. Heinrichs, chief of HRC’s Enlisted Command Management Branch. In other words, senior NCOs would compete by doing nothing.

The new opt-in policy ensures that those who do not take positive action to compete are not defaulted in and won’t compete for a CSM assignment, Heinrichs said, adding that those who choose not to opt in are also not penalized in any way. However, Heinrichs said he hopes NCOs will consider opting in for the good of the Army and to broaden their own personal development.

Here’s how the opting in mechanism works: An NCO visits the Common Access Card-enabled online Command Preference Designator, or CPD website, and clicks on Soldier Selection Preference. The CPD is an automation system tool that provides NCOs with the ability to prioritize their preferences in those categories for which they are eligible to compete.

The CPD system knows the military occupational specialty of the NCO logging into the system. If he is an infantry Soldier, the system will not even offer other options like signal or field artillery; it will only offer infantry-related or branch immaterial positions from which to choose.

The second change is that all NCOs who “opt in” must now be “all in.” In prior years, NCOs were not required to compete in all CSL categories for which they were eligible. An NCO might have opted in for operations but not generating force positions, Heinrichs said. Now, when an NCO opts in, he or she is “all in.” So now they will be opted into all categories for which they are eligible.

There were times in the past when we left our “best athletes” on the bench, Turner said, meaning that if an NCO who only competed in one category and was not selected as a principal, the NCO sat “on the bench” as an alternate.

### **New Categories Added**

The third change is that in previous years, the only categories NCOs could compete in for assignments were operations and generating.

There are now two more categories, training and key billets, that are being added this year, Turner said. Units under the training category are direct training units, such as the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.; the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La.; with First Army in the United States; and the Joint Maneuver Readiness Center in Germany. These units need the experience that a seasoned, former battalion or brigade command sergeant major brings. In addition, NCO academies are also nested under the training category, as each requires the experience of either a battalion command sergeant major (for academies offering only the Warrior Leader Course) or a brigade command sergeant major (for academies offering the Advanced Leader Course and Senior Leader Course).

Key billets are duty positions at the sergeant major rank requiring specific, highly developed skills and experiences that are deemed critical to a unit’s mission. These key billet positions serve on staffs across the Army.

With the additions, the CPD now has four main categories: operations, generating, training and key billets. Within each of those categories are subcategories, such as infantry operations, infantry generating and infantry training. Then within each of those subcategories are actual projected unit vacancies. The NCO selects the subcategories he or she is eligible for based on military occupational specialty criteria and then clicks on desired units within each subcategory.

### **Nco Preference & One Score**

The fourth change is NCO preference. Preference refers to the ability of NCOs to prioritize both the subcategories for which they are eligible and the units available within each subcategory. In the past, NCOs did not have the ability to prioritize their subcategories, Heinrichs said, therefore NCOs had no ability to communicate their subcategory preferences. They could only rank unit preferences within each subcategory for which they were eligible. Now they can prioritize both the subcategories and the projected unit vacancies in each subcategory.

The fifth change is known as one score. In the past, the CSL board would vote on the NCO in every subcategory in which they competed, Heinrichs said. If the NCO’s scores were high enough, he or she became a principal. If not selected as a principal, the NCO could have been an alternate in multiple subcategories.

Beginning this year, the CSL board will not vote every subcategory, he explained. Instead, they’re going to first review the NCO’s record and then establish a single score for that NCO. The Department of the Army

Secretariat will place the NCO on the Order of Merit List, based on his or her score. The Order of Merit List is then used to place the NCOs into subcategories as designated by their CPD preferences.

## Alternates

The sixth change has to do with the way alternates are managed. In the past, NCOs who were not selected as principals but chosen as alternates, could have remained on the alternate list without being activated, Turner said, leaving that talent “on the bench.”

This year, if an NCO isn’t selected as a principal, that NCO will be placed on an alternate select Order of Merit List by functional category. This change helps ensure the Army maintains a balance of talented NCOs across its spectrum and allows it to get its “best athletes” on the field. Turner explained that alternates can be activated for a variety of reasons, such as an un-forecasted position vacancy, retirement or medical board.

“This new way of managing alternates may also take you out of your comfort zone and put you into an assignment that diversifies your experience,” Heinrichs promised. It also demonstrates selfless service showing the NCO’s willingness to serve where the Army needs him or her.

## Slating & Merging Functions

The seventh change, slating, takes place post-board. Slating has to do with assigning NCOs to specific units within their subcategories. In prior years, HRC’s Sergeants Major Branch did slating, Heinrichs said. On occasion, they may not have had the background needed to understand the nuances associated with assignment.

Now, the enlisted assignment branches within the career divisions at HRC will do the unit slating. Specifically, it will be the enlisted branch chiefs and branch sergeants major.

The last change has to do with greater efficiencies and streamlining of processes within HRC itself. The Command Management Branches within the Officer Personnel Management Directorate and the Enlisted Personnel Management Directorate are in the process of merging the functionality of the CSL processes and procedures into a single branch.

Although the command management processes of the two branches are similar, they don’t quite mirror one another, Turner said. The change should result in greater synchronization and efficiencies and provide a single-point office to manage all CSL issues.

“In the past, officers would slate for officers and the enlisted would slate for enlisted — the two processes were never integrated,” Heinrichs said. “We were de-linked entirely.” He said the integration will create a more collaborative environment.

## Incremental Changes

There are strong indications that the desired results will be achieved, Turner noted, since similar changes went into effect last year for the lieutenant colonel and colonel CSL boards. Those went well, he said, with around 80 percent of the officers opting in, which was a percentage that’s fairly commensurate with the previous years-old system opt-out rate. He hopes the NCO percentages will stay the same or even increase.

One of the most successful changes was the opt-in system which requires officers, and now NCOs, to take a series of positive actions to compete for the privilege of CSL. The Army is looking for those who truly desire the privilege of serving in these incredibly important and responsible positions.

Turner added that the officer CSL boards last year were valuable in that lessons learned and the after-action reviews were given close scrutiny before this year’s launch of the redesigned CSM CSL program. ■



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

