

# NCO to Officer

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Capt. Robert L. Shepherd was an NCO for more than 10 years before becoming a commissioned officer through the Army Green to Gold Active Duty program. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Jaewoo Oh)

Noncommissioned officers are the "backbone of the army" for a reason: "In battle after battle, when officers went down, Americans counted on a corporal or sergeant to take charge," said retired Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, 32nd Chief of Staff of the Army.<sup>1</sup>

NCOs have more direct and interpersonal time with their Soldiers. What happens when an NCO becomes an officer? For some Soldiers, becoming a commissioned officer is a goal. For others, it is an unanticipated career turn.

This was the case for Capt. Robert L. Shepherd, detachment executive officer, 574th Quarter Master Support Company, 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, who was an NCO for more than a decade, before enrolling in the Army Green to Gold Active Duty program.

"I really appreciate the time in ROTC because it allowed me to learn a lot of the things about officership and make necessary changes to my 'NCO' ways," Shepherd said.<sup>2</sup>

According to Shepherd, the primary challenge was maintaining his NCO mindset for plan execution while learning a new thought process and focusing on the "bigger picture."<sup>3</sup>

"Shepherd is different from other officers-in-charge because he has the experience to connect with two worlds," said Master Sgt. Parrish Byrd, then battalion operations noncommissioned-officer-in-charge, 70th Brigade Support Battalion, 210th Field Artillery Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division. "He can talk enlisted business and officer business at the same time, which captivates his audience by knowing both sides of the house."<sup>4</sup>

There are several ways for Soldiers to become commissioned officers:

## **Green to Gold ROTC Program**

The ROTC offers multiple enrollment options (<https://www.goarmy.com/rotc/enlisted-soldiers.html>) based on Soldiers' needs:

- *Green to Gold Scholarship Option* - Soldiers leave active duty to attend college on a scholarship, which covers "full tuition or capped room and board, flat rate book

- *Green to Gold Scholarship Option* - Soldiers leave active duty to attend college on a scholarship, which covers full tuition of capped room and board, flat rate book payment and a monthly stipend.<sup>5</sup>
- *Green to Gold Active Duty Option* (<https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/current-and-prior-service/advance-your-career/green-to-gold/green-to-gold-active-duty.html>) - Soldiers attend college while on active duty.
- *Green to Gold Non-Scholarship* - Soldiers leave active duty to attend college and receive a monthly stipend.<sup>6</sup>

All options result in a bachelor's or graduate degree along with a commission. For the active duty option, Soldiers attend college for two years while receiving their current pay, but are responsible for the cost of tuition (e.g., books, room, board, etc.).<sup>7</sup>

Soldiers may receive any Montgomery GI Bill benefits they have earned since joining the military, but tuition assistance is not allowed and MGIB payments, for active duty Soldiers, have limitations.<sup>8</sup> Soldiers are also able to use their Post 9/11 GI Bill to assist with tuition costs as well.<sup>9</sup>

For questions about ROTC options, read the ROTC information booklet

([https://www.goarmy.com/content/dam/goarmy/downloaded\\_assets/pdfs/gtg-ado-application-booklet.pdf](https://www.goarmy.com/content/dam/goarmy/downloaded_assets/pdfs/gtg-ado-application-booklet.pdf)), or visit the ROTC FAQ

(<https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/current-and-prior-service/advance-your-career/green-to-gold/faq.html>) page. For questions

concerning the MGIB, Soldiers should contact the Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Simultaneous Membership Program***

The Simultaneous Membership Program allows Soldiers to attend Army ROTC while serving as officer trainees in the Army Reserve or National Guard.<sup>11</sup> SMP cadets "perform duties commensurate with the grade of second lieutenant," while also gaining additional training and completing a college degree.<sup>12</sup> While in SMP, Soldiers are non-deployable.<sup>13</sup>

Upon graduation and commission, SMP cadets can continue their Army career on active duty or in the reserves.<sup>14</sup>

*SMP Requirements:*<sup>15</sup>

- Be enrolled in college and have completed at least 30 credits
- Have completed Basic and Advanced Individual Training
- Be under 30 years old by graduation. Waivers can be granted if applicants are under 39 by graduation
- Pursue an Army-approved academic major, such as nursing, engineering, business, science, and other majors.<sup>16</sup>
- Must have at least a 2.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale
- Meet physical standards

### ***Battlefield Commission/Appointments***

Battlefield commissions are awarded to Soldiers who conduct exemplary acts of merit and courage in a combat zone. This type of commission promotes an enlisted Soldier to a commissioned officer "for outstanding leadership on the field of battle," by exhibiting merit and ensuring the success of the mission.<sup>17</sup>

There are numerous examples of World War II and Vietnam War battlefield commissions, such as the late Audie L. Murphy, who earned a battlefield commission from staff sergeant to 2nd lieutenant and became the most decorated U.S. Soldier during World War II.<sup>18</sup>

Maj. Richard J. Meadows, who was commissioned from master sergeant to captain on April 14, 1967, is another example of a battlefield commission.<sup>19</sup> During his military career, Meadows risked his life numerous times. He is most well-known for his leadership role in the 1970 Son Tay raid to rescue U.S. prisoners of war during the Vietnam War.<sup>20</sup>

Army Regulation 601-50 states:

Major Army Commands who have been delegated authority per Army Regulation 135-100, paragraph 1-4b may announce temporary appointments as second lieutenants of warrant officers and enlisted personnel on active duty in the Army.<sup>21</sup>

The criteria for such appointments is as follows:<sup>22</sup>

- Must have shown fitness for appointment by actual leadership performance
- A table of organization and equipment and table of distribution vacancy must exist
- The Soldier need not appear before an examining board.
- The commander concerned may waive the mental test and minimum education requirements
- The Soldier must meet the qualifications in section IV, except as stated in bulletin 3
- Battlefield appointments may be tendered to Soldiers for assignment to the Medical Service Corps. They will not be tendered for assignment to any other AMEDD corps

### **OCS**

Active duty enlisted Soldiers and reservists between ages 19 and 32, with at least a bachelor's degree can apply for this option.<sup>23</sup> Officer Candidate School is 12 weeks of tactical and leadership training designed to challenge a Soldier's ability to lead.<sup>24</sup> Upon graduation, Soldiers are commissioned as a second lieutenant.

To see a full list of OCS requirements, go to <https://www.goarmy.com/ocs.html> (<https://www.goarmy.com/ocs.html>).

### ***West Point***

Every year, the U.S. Military Academy has 170 positions for prior-service Soldiers, up to 85 are reserved for active duty Soldiers.<sup>25</sup>

"We are always seeking future leaders for our officer corps," said West Point admissions director Col. Deborah J. McDonald. "Nearly 15 percent of each West Point class can come from prior service."<sup>26</sup>

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Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey, also strongly encourages enlisted Soldiers to apply to West Point.

"When we have a high number of Soldiers admitted to the U.S. Military Academy, it adds to the diverse composition of the Corps of Cadets. This diversity invaluablely increases the overall educational and leader development opportunity for those who attend. In short, experienced Soldiers who join the Corps of Cadets help strengthen our future officer corps from within."<sup>27</sup>

Soldiers can apply to West Point through the Rapid Application Completion Exercise program or regular admissions. RACE founder and former U.S. Military Academy Directorate of Admissions, Maj. Jason C. Dupuis, entered West Point as an enlisted Soldier in 2001 and found the application process difficult. He found that many enlisted Soldiers simply gave up because the application process was so long and difficult that it interfered with enlisted duties."<sup>28</sup>

As a result, Dupuis created RACE to assist Soldiers with the West Point application process, such as completing paperwork and exams, while also having their questions answered by experienced coaches.<sup>29</sup> RACE cuts the months-long process to a single day.

A brief video with examples of Soldiers at Camp Casey, South Korea participating in the RACE program and completing USMA application packages is available at <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/454661/race-west-point> (<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/454661/race-west-point>).

Before attending a RACE session, candidates are encouraged to take the ACT or SAT and have a recommendation from their commanding officer or officer-in-charge.

After completing RACE and being accepted to West Point, Soldiers participate in West Point's 10-month preparatory school, which prepares them for an academic environment.<sup>30</sup>

Read West Point's FAQ ([https://www.usma.edu/admissions/SitePages/FAQ\\_Soldiers.aspx](https://www.usma.edu/admissions/SitePages/FAQ_Soldiers.aspx)) for additional information or contact Capt. David S. Mason, West Point soldiers admission officer and RACE program manager at [David.Mason@usma.edu](mailto:David.Mason@usma.edu) (<mailto:David.Mason@usma.edu>) or 845-938-5780.<sup>31</sup>

Enlisted Soldiers also have the option of applying to West Point on their own. However, if a Soldier is not accepted into West Point, he or she is automatically considered for the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School with a nomination from the company commander.<sup>32</sup>

West Point admission requirements are as follows:<sup>33</sup>

- Strong ACT and SAT scores (competitive scores for USMA are SAT 1100 and ACT 23)<sup>34</sup>
- Must be at least 17 but not 23 years old on July 1 of the year admitted
- Not married
- Not pregnant or with any legal obligation to support a child or children
- Must have a recommendation from first-line commander
- U.S. citizen

### **Army Medical Department of the U.S. Army Active Duty Programs**

The U.S. Army Health Care Enlisted Commissioning Program is available to Soldiers interested in a nursing degree and becoming commissioned officers in the medical field. Soldiers attend college full-time and receive a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Qualified Soldiers receive full pay and allowance while also maintaining promotion eligibility. Other benefits include financial assistance up to \$9,000 per year for tuition and \$1,000 per year for books.

*Requirements:* <sup>35</sup>

- Able to meet prescribed medical and moral standards for appointment as a commissioned officer
- U.S. citizenship
- E-4 grade or above with a minimum of three years (waiverable) and a maximum of 12 years (non-waiverable) of active federal service at time of commissioning
- Between 21 to 41 years old
- 110 General Technical score or above on the ASVB test
- 450 verbal and 450 math or above on the SAT within the last 5 years
- GPA of 3.0 or above

For more information, visit the Army Medicine's Currently Serving Programs (<https://www.goarmy.com/amedd/education/currently-serving-programs.html>) page.

The Interservice Physician Assistant Program is a two-year program for Soldiers interested in a master's degree in Physician Assistant Studies. Qualified Soldiers have the option of attending as an active duty officer or full-time student. Soldiers "receive full pay and benefit allowances as an active duty enlisted or officer status, based on grade."<sup>36</sup>

About 150 Army Soldiers are accepted to train in the Army Medical Department Center & School in Joint Base San Antonio - Fort Sam Houston, Texas per year.

Soldiers who complete the program graduate with a Master's degree and receive the rank of 1st lieutenant in the Army Medical Specialist Corps.<sup>37</sup>

*Requirements:* <sup>38</sup>

- At least 60 semester hours of prerequisite undergraduate work
- Active duty status

## Conclusion

From Green to Gold programs to direct commission, the Army provides various opportunities for active duty Soldiers to become commissioned officers. When considering your options, be sure to take the time to conduct research and consult your mentors and commanders, who can provide additional resources and support.

## Notes

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