

Policy Change Will Force 3,000 NCOs Out Early But Open Promotion Opportunities

By Clifford Kyle Jones - NCO Journal

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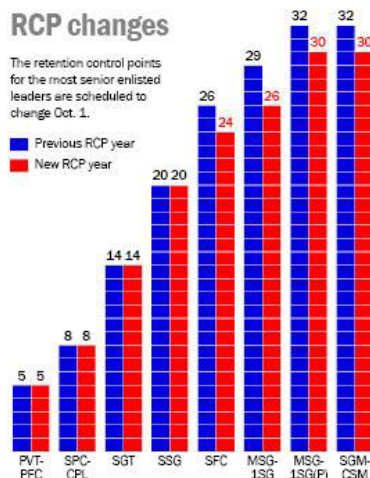


(U.S. Army Photo)

In one of his first major policy changes, Army Secretary Eric Fanning signed a directive to return enlisted Retention Control Points to their 2007 levels.

That will mean about 3,000 senior noncommissioned officers will leave the Army earlier than expected, but it also means increased opportunities for mid-grade NCOs to be promoted.

This is the best course of action to right-size the Army with regards to a readiness perspective for the future," Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey said. "It's the right thing to do. This is not a small decision. It was eight months of running numbers, projections and outcomes.



Dailey told the Army Times that the changes create upward mobility; increase promotion rates for sergeants first class, master sergeants and sergeants major; and reduce the need for Qualitative Service Program boards.




The Army, via QSP, screens for NCOs in overstrength specialties or those who have stagnant promotion opportunities, or both.

"QSP does right-size the Army in regard to numbers, but things like deployability, talent management, they're harder to determine when you're looking at files," Dailey told the Army Times.

The new ETS, or "expiration, term of service" dates for some senior enlisted Soldiers with the new RCPs will begin Oct. 1.

The changes apply to sergeants first class and above who are in the regular Army or serve in the Active Guard Reserve program. Their RCPs, which indicate the upper limit of years of service for each grade, will be shortened by two or three years.

Basic Active Service Date schedule

	1 OCT 1992 and earlier	26 years
	2 OCT 1992 – 1 APR 1994	25 years
	2 APR 1994 and later	24 years
	1 OCT 1989 and earlier	29 years
	2 OCT 1989 – 1 OCT 1990	28 years
	2 OCT 1990 – 1 APR 1992	27 years
	2 APR 1992 and later	26 years
	1 OCT 1986 and earlier	32 years
	2 OCT 1986 – 1 APR 1998	31 years
	2 APR 1998 and later	30 years

*Includes SFC promotable

** includes MSG promotable

Army Secretary Fanning, who was confirmed May 17, will oversee a reduction in force to 450,000 Soldiers by 2018.

Since 2012, when the drawdown began, more experienced Soldiers have been more likely to get the ax from active duty, Federal News Radio reported. Soldiers with more than 20 years of experience who held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel and those in the upper echelons of the enlisted ranks made up the majority of the service's members who were separated, according to a congressional report.

In total the Army involuntarily separated 494 Soldiers between July and December 2015.

The Army let go 238 lieutenant colonels and colonels and 206 sergeants first class and master sergeants. Of the nearly 500 Soldiers let go, all except for 31 had 20 years or more of service, the report states.

The specialties of those involuntarily separated ranged from electronic warfare specialist to public affairs officer. Logistics officers took the biggest hit: the Army cut 33. Other specialties that took the brunt of the layoffs were aviation officers, with 21, Corps of Engineers officers, with 20, and infantry officers with 18, the report states.

"Over 50 percent of those we were asking to separate involuntarily had two or more combat deployments, so these are all soldiers that have answered the call of the nation; they have served admirably and because of the program force structure we must separate [from] them," said Gen. Daniel Allyn, vice chief of staff of the Army, during a March 15 Senate Armed Services Readiness Subcommittee hearing.

Allyn told the subcommittee the Army is doing everything it can through its Soldier for Life program to provide them a seamless transition into civilian life.

The RCP for sergeants first class, including those who are promotable, will change from 26 to 24 years. For first sergeants and master sergeants, the RCP will be reduced from 29 to 26 years. For first sergeants and master sergeants who are promotable (upon graduation from United States Army Sergeants Major Academy), the RCP will drop from 32 to 30 years. The RCPs for command sergeants major and sergeants major will also drop from 32 to 30 years.

The changes to RCPs will be applied incrementally to those affected over the course of three years, ensuring all Soldiers affected will have at least a year's notice to plan for their retirement. Every Soldier affected is already retirement-eligible, with more than 20 years of service, and will be able to take advantage of a full military retirement.

The benefit to mid-career NCOs is already evident.

Sergeants first class seeking another stripe saw increased opportunity during the fiscal year 2016 master sergeant promotion board, as the selection rate jumped 35 percent, from 8.4 percent in FY15, to 11.8 percent in FY16.

Those increased opportunities came as a result of projected openings in the master sergeant ranks to come because of the RCP changes.

Similar increases in selection rate to sergeant first class are also expected during the 2016 board. Last year's board selected about 25.4 percent of the staff sergeants considered.

Dailey said the Army hopes to maintain upward mobility for Soldiers in the middle of the NCO ranks by putting the RCPs for senior enlisted back to where they were in 2006-2008.

"You have got to create upward mobility," he said of opportunities for mid-grade NCOs. "These are highly-qualified, very motivated individuals; they are aggressive seekers of further responsibility. That's exactly what we trained them to be. If you don't provide that opportunity, there is a risk you could lose talent."

Dailey said that back in 2007, the Army needed to grow in size to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We were at war, and the Army needed to get bigger, quick, and build more brigades and battalions," he said.

The Army used recruiting and retention tools to help grow the Army. Another tool they used was to increase the RCPs for senior enlisted personnel.

Now that the conflicts in the Middle East have drawn down significantly, and the Army has been told to shrink its force size, the Army is reversing the tools it used almost a decade ago to grow in size, Dailey said.

"Now we are in the inverse," he said. "We were directed to make the Army smaller, historically consistent with every post-war era."

Dailey said the Army is "focused on doing a talent-based drawdown." The changes to RCPs are part of that drawdown.

"We wanted to keep those with the benefits of the wartime experience they gained for the last 10 to 12 years of war, and we wanted to make sure we transitioned our Soldiers appropriately," he said. The Army also wants to "maintain the skills we needed in an Army that was

going to get smaller, and doing it appropriately in regards to mitigating the risk against the Soldier, the family and readiness.”

The 3,000 NCOs required to leave the Army earlier than they expected will not all leave at the same time, said Sgt. Maj. LeeAnn M. Conner, senior Army career counselor. The Army will stagger the RCP adjustment over a period of about three years. Most of the affected NCOs will retire with more than 20 years of service, Conner said.

The senior-most NCOs in the Army, the sergeants major, will be offered the opportunity to serve longer than their RCP requires — provided they are at Headquarters Department of the Army or Army command level, in a nominative position, and are rated by a general officer, member of the senior executive service, or equivalent.

A sergeant major who is serving as the command sergeant major at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, for instance, or as executive officer to the Sergeant Major of the Army, will also be authorized to serve beyond 30 years.

But once they leave those positions, they will need to go to similar jobs if they want to continue to serve beyond 30 years.

“If a sergeant major is past 30, they have to keep competing for a nominative position,” Conner said. “If they are not selected for another one of those positions, it’s time for them to retire. It fits the Army’s promotion modeling system.”

Other NCOs will also get exceptions to the new RCP policy as well, if a command requests an exception to policy and if that request meets the needs of the Army.

“We expect to approve some justified exceptions to policy in the first three years,” Conner said. “We will publish a message that addresses exceptions for reasons such as assignment service obligations and promotions service obligations. For example, if a sergeant first class is on assignment to Germany for a three-year tour, with this change that Soldier may only be able to go for two years and some change.

Human Resources Command will have to decide if they want to give an exception to policy for the assignment, an exception of policy for the RCP, or delete the assignment.”

C. Todd Lopez of the Army News Service contributed to this report.