

*The*  
**Commander**  
*Assignment*  
*Guide*



**July 2005**

**Purpose**

The O5 assignment process is slightly different from what most of you have experienced at the lower grades, therefore we have created this guidebook to:

- demystify the commander assignment process;
- pass along some of the rules of engagement we follow; and
- provide information that will help everyone involved in the process manage expectations.

While we have targeted the information in this guidebook at Commanders and Commander (selects), we hope that others will find it useful for their own use or in counseling others.

**The Key Elements**

The O5 assignment process is, to a large extent, not much different from what you've experienced in the past, in that the key elements are the Shopping List and your E-Resume (formerly known as the ADC and affectionately called a "dreamsheet"). The additions to your assignment are actually made at the O5 Assignment Panel and the level of engagement we undertake with the Program and/or receiving unit in developing our assignment recommendations. What the Assignment Team does is make recommendations to the Commander Assignment Panel; it's the Panel that makes the assignments, albeit based on our recommendations. This year the panel convenes 02 February 2005.

**The Shopping List**

The Shopping List of all the O5 billets expected to be available in the upcoming assignment season is initially published in August via DIRECT ACCESS. As a starting point, the list includes all those billets where the incumbent will be tour-complete the following summer, billets where we have approved separation requests on file, O5 billets currently filled with an O6, and those O5/O5(select) sitting in an O4 position one year from being tour complete. Commanders tour complete who are one time non-selected for Captain will usually be involuntarily extended in their current billet, therefore their billet will not be shopped. Commanders in this category who are in a command cadre position will be treated on a case-by-case basis.

In the months and weeks leading up to the Commander Assignment Panel, we publish every billet we believe will be acted upon by the Panel. In addition to updating the DIRECT ACCESS Shopping List, we issue updates via message traffic, right up until the Assignment Panel convenes. In this way the entire Commander/Commander(select) population is kept informed of billets likely to be open. Changes are announced in ALCGOFF message updates to the Shopping List. The greatest number of changes normally occurs after the results of the Captain selection board and the Captain Assignment Panel. Other changes will likely occur as members evaluate career and personal goals and billet growth due to Service needs.

Shopping List updates, especially late in the process, are intended to give potential candidates a chance to consider new alternatives, and frequently are issued to develop contingency plans that may never be implemented. Please don't subject the Assignment Officer or the incumbent in an advertised billet to questions regarding why the billet will be vacant or what is happening with the incumbent.

**The E-Resume**

The E-Resume is your primary – and for the majority of cases can serve as the only necessary method of communicating with us. Please do not view submitting your E-Resume as an entering position to begin an extensive, iterative dialogue. Give us complete information so we can best serve you. Updates along the way – based on Shopping List changes or other new information – are welcome. The bottom line is that your E-Resume should accurately reflect your personal preferences. In that regard, let us give you a reality overlay.

Please use the Shopping List when developing or updating your E-Resume. If you are

tour complete or desire a transfer in the current assignment season, we need your E-Resume by the date listed in the AY kickoff message.

### **E-Resume Craftsmanship**

A well-crafted E-Resume should allow flexibility and acknowledge possible outcomes. If your E-Resume lists five commands and nothing more, that tells us you haven't considered the possibility of not being assigned to command. The same applies to E-Resumes that list only an extension, or only billets in a single geographic area. If you have an established specialty, but you prefer an out-of-specialty assignment, tell us. But, also consider telling us what your specialty preferences are in the event the Panel can't accommodate your desire. A very narrow E-Resume makes our work almost as easy as a blank E-Resume, because we will presume you'll be equally thrilled with any assignment after the few preferences listed. A broad E-Resume tells us your preferences and addresses alternatives that you believe the Service will consider you for, given your specialty background and/or experience. We have received E-Resumes from commanders with 15 - 20 diverse billets identified. We have also received E-Resumes with just one billet listed.

Use the comments section to provide amplifying information. Let us know of your career desires, special considerations you want us to consider, etc. This is the vehicle to advise us of your desires and express your concerns. Use it!

### **Extensions and Early Rotations**

Extensions are assignment decisions made by the Panel. A request for extension is viewed by the Panel as one assignment preference.

How likely is it that you may be extended in your current billet? That depends on several factors...in some cases the Service need may be best met by extending you in a billet; at other times the Service need is best met by moving you to afford others the opportunity to serve in a desirable or developmental billet. There is no golden rule of thumb. Each case is different and is based accordingly.

For early rotations, it is required that your command endorse your e-resume. The purpose of the command endorsement is not to give an opinion of your suitability for the requested billet(s), but rather to address the effect your early departure would have on unit continuity or the overall skill/experience level of the unit staff. "Conditional" positive endorsements (e.g., "I support early rotation for billet X but not for billet Y") are not appropriate. Early rotations most often occur in no-cost transfer circumstances or when a specific specialty or Service need cannot be adequately satisfied using officers that are tour complete.

### **Special Needs**

Many officers have "special needs," but remember that in this context, a Special Need is a specific term defining types of situations involving an officer and/or family that must be approved to be accepted into the Special Needs Program. Any officer with a Special Need must register it in this mandatory program in accordance with COMDTINST 1754.7 (series). This will result in a special flag in DIRECT ACCESS that is visible to the AOs. It tells us only that you have a Special Need, not the details. When we see that indicator, we work closely with

the program administrator in G-WKW to ensure potential assignment outcomes are compatible with the Special Need. Please don't wait to introduce this consideration until after you've received orders; you make it more difficult for us in our attempts to accommodate your circumstance. Enrolling is not optional, the Service requires active duty personnel to enroll in the Coast Guard Special Needs Program. This ensures early identification of families with Special Needs, maximizes the provision of quality service to reduce family stress and undue hardship, and minimizes costly, disruptive mid-tour reassignments and early return of family members from outside the continental United States.

Being enrolled in the Special Needs Program does not give anyone the advantage for any particular job. Having access to a specific health care professional is not required if the medical care can be met elsewhere.

Familiarize yourself with Work Life policies. We find many people who should be enrolled in the program are not. The reason given most often is the member doesn't want to bother the Coast Guard, or they don't want special treatment. If you have a situation that qualifies as a Special Need, you must register. Once enrolled, it helps us to accommodate your needs. Whatever the medical condition or other situation, the Work Life staff can tell us where your needs can be met. It may not be somewhere you believe you should be, and you may not be able to stay in an area just because you like the doctor you have now, but we will strive to locate an assignment area where the Special Need can be met. That's the key. The worst thing you can do is nothing. If you have a Special Need, get enrolled!

#### **Other Concerns**

Aside from Special Needs, among the most prevalent concerns many of us have relate to children in high school, caring for aging parents, and spouse employment issues. We are sympathetic to those concerns, but you need to know that these issues are often so common they become the norm, not exceptions. As such, it becomes impossible to accommodate everyone's desires.

#### **Collocation**

The collocation policy allows married active duty members the opportunity to reside jointly whenever possible. However, couples should realize that the Service might not be able to collocate them throughout their careers depending on Service need and professional development. In cases where tour lengths are not aligned, assignment officers may adjust the tour length of one member to allow for both to transfer in the same assignment season.

Both married members desiring collocation should tailor comments in the e-resume to address desire for collocation with spouse. We recommend that couples work together on their E-Resumes, and give the assignment officers reasonable geographic and billet options. Further information on this policy can be found in the PERSMAN, Article 4.A.8.

**E-Resume Due Date**

Please submit your E-Resume according to the timelines advertised by the AY05 kickoff message. Why so soon? That's when we begin a broad assessment of program and unit needs across paygrades, evaluating tradeoffs, and taking a vertical look at workforce issues before moving forward in our horizontal (by paygrade) assignment panels and decisions. We try to take timely soundings and adjust to changes as we progress. Delayed submission of an E-Resume will reduce your assignment choices.

**The Assignment Process**

Armed with the Shopping List and your E-Resume, we can then begin to develop all the information we will need to develop assignment recommendations and explain them to the Assignment Panel.

**Strategizing and Forming the Lists**

In October, we contact Programs and units concerning their O5 billets expected to be opened in the upcoming assignment season. The dialogue normally covers special concerns, priorities regarding billets, and information with which to reconcile questions on billets and the broad population of officers meeting specialty/billet needs.

At this time we also start developing a list for each billet that includes the name of every officer requesting the billet on his or her E-Resume. We may place your name on a list for some billets even though you didn't include them on your E-Resume, and even when we know you may not have requested them. We do this in cases where we find you meet the needs identified by the command/staff office exercising cognizance over the billet, and an adequate pool of qualified officers was not obtained from those requesting the billet.

In filling most commander billets, we normally talk directly with the supervisor of the billet. For most commander billets we continue to work through the incumbent's principal supervisor, under the assumption that for the principal supervisor will coordinate and validate input with the commanding officer, office chief or flag officer as necessary.

**Who's in Play?**

Who is really in play during an assignment season? The short answer is every commander and commander(select), unless scheduled for retirement. But, of course, we aren't really going to transfer everyone, so there is a general hierarchy. If you're tour complete, you will get orders, even if the Panel elects to extend you. If you're not tour complete and you ask for orders, you may be reassigned... fleet-ups or reassignment to another billet in the same location are common examples. If you're a commander(select), not tour complete, and serving in an O4 billet, you are normally more susceptible to an early transfer than a person already in an O5 billet. If you're not tour complete and you don't want to move, we may still propose to move you if a Service need requires it. Examples of this situation would be where we have a billet need for your specialty (operational or technical) or experience that we can't satisfactorily meet with the pool of tour complete officers—this is why we tell you to keep a current E-Resume on file. Yes, fiscal constraints do come into play, but not so much that they overwhelm our mission to best staff the Service for success.

**Hierarchy of**

Generally, assignments are considered "top down" to ensure the most robust candidate

**Assignments**

pools of officers are considered for the highest priority billets. Command cadre assignments and high profile billets requiring interviews, e.g., Military Aide to the President, Congressional affairs, etc. are the first to be completed, and so on. If you are requesting these types of billets, be sure to review current ALCGOFF message traffic as well as the opm-2 website to ensure you submit an e-resume to meet these deadlines.

**Pecking Order?**

Does all this mean that commander(selects) and newly promoted commanders get assigned to billets after more senior commanders are assigned? No. The process is the same for all, and it's a process that has placed selected commanders in O5 commands afloat and ashore, as well as in other desirable positions. We do issue orders to fill every billet for which there is a vacancy, however, including those billets for which no one asks.

**What is Revealed?**

Here's the information we pass to the principal supervisor: your year group; specialty code; assignment history; and relevant training, education or experience (e.g., assigned to a special study, involved in a certain operation, geographic familiarity with X area, graduate degree in Y). We provide general answers to questions regarding your record of performance.

**What Kind of Say Does the Billet "Owner" Have?**

Are all billet assignments treated the same? No. For the billets that are the principal assistant to the flag officer/SES — the flag officer/SES's preference is usually accommodated, except where there is competition between principals for the same commander. If the Panel was considering an assignment other than what the flag officer/SES expected for such a billet, the Panel President would normally discuss the matter with the affected billet "owner" before finalizing the assignment to ensure the flag officers'/SESs' input is considered as an advisory element among the various considerations the Panel takes into account in making the assignment.

**The Feedback Loop**

As the process takes us into December and January, the interest level (and the anxiety level) is understandably heightened among the commanders and commander(selects) in play for reassignment. You're certainly welcome to call and check on things, but we appreciate your patience if the answer you get is "we don't know yet" or "it's too early to tell." Certain parts of the slate are worked out before others, but there is usually some collection of billets for which the most likely outcome isn't known until just before the Panel. We try to strike a balance between getting information to you sooner and providing you with information that is not likely to change. We'll make every effort to keep you informed on where we are in working the slate via SITREPS and our website.

Approximately early January we start to get a sense of the billets for which you may be most competitive. One caution: saying you are "competitive" is not an indication of what we may eventually see before the Panel convenes. Being competitive normally means you are among the pool of a few candidates from which we think the billet will be filled. Remember, we are telling the same thing to a few other people. Will we tell you who? No. We do not discuss your E-Resume with anyone but you, and we don't

discuss other officers' preferences with you either

**Career  
Progression**

Officers should have a good idea of a desired career path going into their second tour – it is difficult (and sometimes impossible) to be “entry level” in any career path as a LT, so early goal setting and forethought, as well as good mentoring, are extremely important. Depending on this path and career goals, progression within a community is gained by seeking positions of greater responsibility while acquiring the skills and qualifications that will make the officer competitive for future positions within that community. Officers should generally plan to return to their community every other tour; this enables you to maintain proficiency while gaining valuable out of specialty experience. Available number of officers with your specialty background will determine if you are able to compete for assignments out of specialty. Some specialties do not have enough officers to fill the billets in specialty, e.g., aviation and marine inspectors, therefore out of specialty opportunities are difficult to arrange.

**Out of Specialty  
Tours**

Most officers have a primary specialty (e.g., operations afloat/ashore, marine safety, aviation, engineering, etc.) that they pursue through tours with increasing responsibility. However, many also acquire a sub-specialty through advanced education or training (e.g., financial management, operations research, etc.) and often desire to rotate between their specialty and sub-specialty. This is a desirable career track that allows an officer to maintain proficiency in two areas. It is possible, and even encouraged, to obtain and maintain this career track. Occasionally, officers request to rotate between two specialties; this is normally not possible because the significant investment in training necessary to maintain both specialties would not allow for those officers to complete necessary staff tours, which enhance their professional growth.

Additionally, many officers desire tours outside of both areas (e.g., congressional affairs, aide, CGLO, etc.). These are encouraged and often competitive. Officers desiring to complete these rotational tours should review their career progression; it is generally best to apply for these positions when completing a tour in their primary specialty. This will enable you to go out of specialty and then return while still current. Out of specialty tours enhance an officer's professional expertise by giving him/her a broader understanding of the CG and how it fits into the national government.

**Assignment  
Priority  
Considerations**

Unlike enlisted assignments, the officer assignment process does not include formal recognition for officers who have completed tours of duty in hard-to-fill or particularly arduous assignments. As such, there is no automatic assignment preference afforded these tour complete officers like there is for enlisted personnel as outlined in PERSMAN Chap 4. This is not to say that completion of a tour of duty in an arduous duty assignment or hard-to-fill billet won't be taken into consideration- it will. It will simply be included in the mix of other factors such as career progression, performance, skill sets and Service needs, officer's paygrade, other personal desires of the member, and so on. It should also be noted that there is no formal Humanitarian Assignments program for officers. Cases involving severe family hardships that do not fall under the Special Needs program (as discussed previously) will be considered as yet another factor in any given assignment.

**Prior to  
Assignment  
Panel**

During the week or so prior to the Panel convening date, we attempt to notify each person who is tour-complete or likely to be reassigned what we think the outcome of the Panel will be. Our forecast is usually accurate. That means most will have a good sense of what the future holds before the Panel convenes. However, the Panel is the final authority, and they have no obligation to stay with the OPM-prepared slate, so some officers may see something different come out in the message.

We normally stop communication the day before the Panel convening date, and do not return or make calls while they are in session. If you do get a call from us during that time frame, it's at the Panel's direction. After the Panel recesses and reports out, we do not discuss their deliberations...those remain confidential.

**The Panel**

The Commander Assignment Panel convenes each year in early February, usually on the first or second Tuesday. Panel membership consists of one flag officer and four Captains; the only other people in the room are Chief, Officer Assignment Branch and the Assignment Officer who prepared the assignment recommendation and another Assignment Officer who supports us as Executive Assistant in the Commander Assignment Panel. The Panel typically meets for two to three days before issuing the initial report and recessing for two weeks during the Retirement In Lieu of Orders (RILO) period. The post-RILO session is much shorter, and yields the final report. Assignment decisions made after the final report are made under the off-season process.



## **Behind Closed Doors...**

Our proposals to the Panel are our assessment of the best match of Service needs, unit needs and your personal needs—quite frankly, in that order—based upon all the information we have available. We’re trying to weave a matrix that best accommodates all the various concerns in filling every vacant billet. We don’t pretend that there is a “right” answer; we simply try to achieve the best balance possible in filling every billet.

Besides our proposals, we make available to the panel letters from members to the Panel President, source documents such as screening panel results, your assignment history.... and a characterization of your record. We specifically note what the billet is on your E-Resume, and what choice that billet preference is. If it’s not on your E-Resume, we say so. If we know you specifically do not desire an assignment, we note that and believe we make your best case in stating your reasons. Similarly, we present divergent views when they may arise between a program director and a field flag officer. We explain our rationale for the assignments we propose and note alternatives as requested. Please understand that alternatives are not usually one for one replacement, but are rather a daisy chain of moves.

## **RILOs**

When the Panel’s initial assignments are approved, an ALCGPERSCOM message is released and the 15-day RILO period begins.

It is important to understand the RILO parameters...not everyone is eligible to RILO.

- If you have 20 years of service, you have no obligated service requirements, and you prefer to retire instead of accepting orders, your request will normally be granted.
- If you are a selected Commander, eligible to retire, and request to retire in lieu of orders, you must also ask to voluntarily have your name removed from the list of Commander selectees.
- If you are a newly promoted Commander, our personnel regulations require you to serve in grade for two years prior to retiring. If your two years of obligated service isn’t up by 1 August, or if you have other obligated service (advanced education pay-back, OUTCONUS transfer, etc.), you are not eligible to RILO.

Please also note that all RILOs must take place by 1 August. You can ask to retire earlier. If you prefer a later retirement date (perhaps to be eligible for a longevity pay raise or to better meet your personal needs), then you need to submit your voluntary retirement request in time for us to act on it prior to the Panel convening date.

## **Post-RILO**

Shortly after the 15-day RILO period expires, the Panel reconvenes, usually with one or more members participating via phone conference. By that time we have had time to consider RILO-caused vacancies and other new developments, and have worked out alternative daisy chains for each new vacancy. We present recommended solutions to the Panel, providing information on each officer involved in the same way as in the initial session.

Panel decisions are announced in an ALCGPERSCOM message which

constitutes the final report.

Those officers who are reassigned during the post-RILO session are also afforded a 15-day RILO period. Backfill actions resulting from post-final report RILOs are addressed as off-season transfers.

## **Orders**

Approximately the end of February we start transmitting orders, starting with OUTCONUS transfers and other officers known to have early reporting dates. Usually all commander orders are issued by the beginning of March.

## **DIRLAUTH**

The majority of officer orders are issued with the following paragraph, "Firm reporting date to be coordinated between transferring and receiving commands. DIRLAUTH." While the CGHRMS system requires that an estimated report date be entered into the system in order to cut orders, typically 01July200X is entered as a default, commands are authorized to arrange exact dates, i.e., direct liaison authorized/DIRLAUTH.

## **Security Clearances**

Another timely issue involving orders once cut is security clearance. Some positions require an increased security clearance that has long lead times to complete. It is in your best interest to start the ball rolling at the earliest possible opportunity. The responsibility to start this process rests with the departing command.

## **Off-Season**

Although the vast majority of Commander assignments are handled through the Panel process described above, each year circumstances arise which require off-season transfer decisions not contemplated by the Panel. While a panel of flag officers is not involved in off-season assignment decisions, we follow many of the same steps.

When we become aware of an upcoming off-season vacancy, we advertise the billet in an ALCGOFF message, along with any other billets that stand a good chance of opening as part of a daisy chain (unless advertised extensively during the regular assignment season). We consider the names of officers who respond to the solicitation, along with others we might have identified who also have the right seniority, skills and experience. We consider the cognizant billet owner's input, current command endorsements, and our ability to minimize a chain reaction of assignments.

Commander off-season recommendations are developed by opm-2 and approved by OPM-a.

## **Off-Season Retirements**

Under Personnel Manual policy, eligible officers may submit a request for retirement a minimum of six months and no more than twelve months in advance of the desired separation date. We can normally approve a request made within those parameters, but in some cases Service need or circumstances at a unit do not permit approval of the

requested date. One important consideration is our ability to backfill the retiring officer's billet. There are usually no easy backfill options when a vacancy occurs outside the annual assignment process. For that reason, command endorsements on retirement requests must address backfill requirements. Retirement requests which would cause an O5 vacancy off-season may face disapproval if an acceptable backfill arrangement cannot be found and the command is not willing to absorb a gap.

Of course, any officer who is reassigned to a new permanent duty station by the Panel, and who takes no action during the RILO period, is obliged to execute orders and serve at the new permanent duty station for at least one year (two years OUTCONUS.)

**GOOD LUCK!**

We hope you find this information useful in understanding your assignment process and that it helps reduce the associated anxiety. We recognize how important the outcome of assignment decisions is to each individual and to the Service. We look forward to serving you and hope that our messages, voice mail, website, as well as personal contact, keep you well informed.