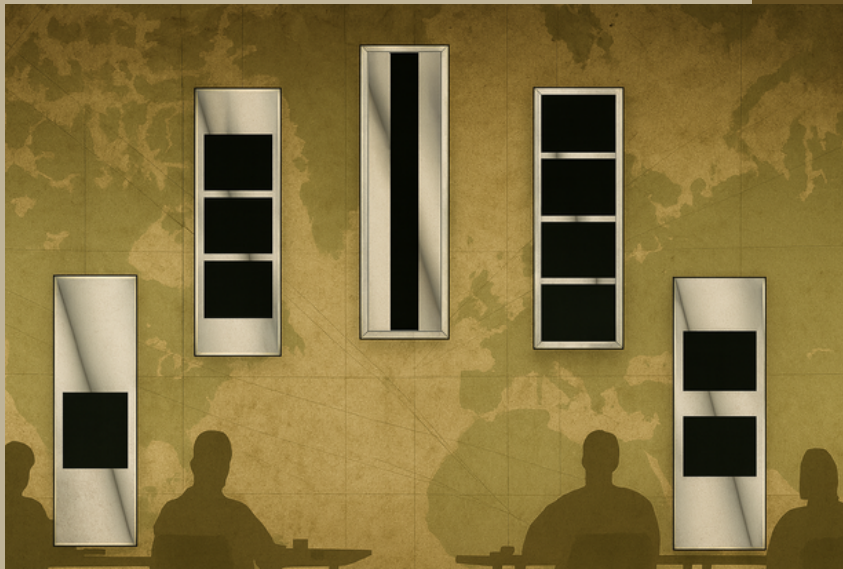




# FORGING AHEAD:

## CHARTING A COURSE FOR WARRANT OFFICER PME

### THE PROBLEM WITH WARRANT OFFICER PME

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**Warrant Officer Professional Military Education (PME) is critical to professionalizing the cohort and ensuring readiness, yet it remains inconsistently enforced, poorly scheduled, and culturally undervalued. This part examines the historical background, challenges, and cultural barriers undermining PME for Warrant Officers.**

### THE PME GAP NO ONE TALKS ABOUT

Despite their critical role as technical experts and advisors, Warrant Officers in the U.S. Army face a PME system that is not on par with that of their Officer counterparts. Since the birth of the Warrant Officer Corps in 1918, the U.S. Army has consistently sought to adapt Warrant Officers to meet the challenging demands of tomorrow's battlefield, providing its experts with the knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSA) to serve as technical advisors

to commanders across formations and echelons. On July 9, 2004, coinciding with the 86<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warrant Officer Corps, Warrant Officers officially began wearing branch-specific insignia, signaling a major identity and cultural shift. This transition formally integrated Warrant Officers as a cohort within the Officer Corps, implying an alignment with the Officer Corps' PME standards, yet the reality of Warrant Officer PME has not kept pace.

21 years later, PME for Warrant Officers remains inconsistently scheduled and suffers from unacceptable rates of intentional non-attendance, lacking clear ties to promotion and updated regulatory guidelines. The 'choose your own adventure' approach to PME, characterized by its lack of standardized curriculum and inconsistent attendance requirements, fosters an environment where Warrant Officers often prioritize immediate operational demands over professional development. The Army, as an institution, would never sacrifice the attendance of PME by its Officers, so why is this normalized for Warrant Officers?



## SCHEDULING ROULETTE: WHY PME GETS PUSHED ASIDE

Today, Warrant Officer PME faces significant challenges. Notably, the Army defines PME consistently for both officers and Warrant Officers. Army Training and Leader Development, AR 350-1, states, "PME is a progressive education system that prepares leaders for increased responsibilities and successful performance at the next higher level by developing the key knowledge, skills, and attributes they require to operate successfully at that level in any environment. PME is linked to promotions, future assignments, career management models, and applies to all officers." While this unified vision is significant, the language of AR 350-1, which states that Warrant Officers are 'expected to complete' PME, rather than mandating attendance, creates a critical distinction. A query run on the Integrated Personnel and Pay System – Army (IPPS-A) on March 20, 2025, showed that 31 out of 104, or approximately 30%, Chief Warrant Officer Three Field Artillery Targeting Technicians attended only the Warrant Officer Basic Course. This statistic highlights the significant disparity between the intended vision of PME and its actual implementation for Warrant Officers, underscoring the urgent need for reforming the Army's regulatory guidance.

The United States Army Human Resources Command (HRC) currently serves as the central authority for scheduling Warrant Officers for PME. In contrast, while also under HRC, officers in the control grades of O2 (Lieutenant), O3 (Captain), O4 (Major), and O5 (Lieutenant Colonel) follow a distinctly different PME coordination process. Officer career managers (CM) work in concert with the Force Alignment and Development Division (FADD) and Force Shaping Directorate (FSD) to align these individuals. The diverse opportunities available, including foreign military school attendance and fellowships, provide a strong justification for this approach. However, the focus here is on the procedural differences, not the specific educational opportunities.

In contrast to officer schooling, which is coordinated annually post-promotion selection board (PSB) through collaboration between officer career managers (CM) and the Force Alignment and Development Division (FADD), Warrant Officer scheduling necessitates the processing of a Personnel Action Request (PAR). This process also requires prior command approval, based on operational tempo and availability.

At Army People Seminar (APS) session six, the HRC Commanding General Major General Rampy and LaCinda Glover of the well renowned global HR organization, Mercer, emphasized the importance of people's experience and the need to remain behaviorally, systems, and process focused. This perspective, while valuable, must be integrated with a structured PME framework for Warrant Officers to ensure consistent professional growth. The current scheduling disparity highlights the need for a more standardized and equitable approach to Warrant Officer PME.

Currently, there are no incentives, recognized penalty system, or direct ties between PME and promotion for Warrant Officers. Warrant Officers often cite a commitment to lifelong learning and professionalism as reasons for PME attendance. However, this is voluntary, as there is no requirement for Warrant Officers to achieve a specific level of PME prior to promotion to any pay grade, beyond attendance at the branch-qualifying Warrant Officer Basic Course. This lack of requirement contributes to the observed low PME attendance figures.

Recent fiscal year (FY) 2024 Field Artillery Targeting Technician PSB analysis revealed distinguishing identifiers for those selected merit-based and below-the-zone (BZ). However, given the nascent implementation of MB and BZ selections, it is difficult to determine whether this favors eligible officers or serves as a significant motivator for PME attendance.



This is further complicated as the Field Artillery branch witnessed near 100% promotion rates over the course of the last several FYs. The lack of a clear, standardized link between PME and promotion undermines the professionalization of the Warrant Officer cohort and impacts the Army's overall readiness.

Finally, future-proofing one's career is essential. In *Adult Learning: Linking Theory and Practice*, Merriam and Bierema illustrate the importance of career preparation using a Hewlett-Packard observation. The two cite, "Hewlett-Packard has estimated that what one learns in a Bachelor of Engineering program is outdated or "deconstructs" in 18 months (about one and a half years), and for technology related fields the half-life is even less." Although this quote focuses on college graduates in technical fields, it has significant parallels to the situation of U.S. Army Warrant Officers. This rapid obsolescence of technical knowledge underscores the urgent need for continuous PME, yet the current system lacks the incentives to ensure Warrant Officers remain current. This reinforces the importance of lifelong learning for technical experts to remain relevant in an era of persistent instability and to maintain their professional development. Neglecting this continuous education jeopardizes individual careers and undermines the Army's ability to maintain a technically proficient and adaptable Warrant Officer cohort.

## THE CULTURAL BLIND SPOT

Although the main purpose and argument to this point have mostly centered around the shortfalls and challenges of Warrant Officer PME and its design, it is likely there are additional perspectives, and that directly hints towards the current cultural norms of the United States Army Warrant Officer cohort. In addition to the systemic issues within the PME structure, it is crucial to acknowledge the influence of cultural norms within the Warrant Officer cohort.

CW5 (Retired) Robert Huffman stated it best in his article titled 'Cultural Change and the Army Warrant Officer,' "Many Army WOs then and even now believe themselves to be separate from the rest of the Officer Corps; they frequently operate on the fringe of Army officer culture. They feel that they are technical experts who also perform many of the duties and functions of branch officers, but are not accorded the same consideration, compensation, and quality of education as the branch officers. This false belief in some separate and distinct service results in a negative effect upon many aspects of WOs' service."

While the preceding analysis has focused on PME structure and cultural norms, it is important to acknowledge that some may attribute the challenges in Warrant Officer PME to factors such as perceived limitations in career progression or a historical emphasis on technical expertise over formal education. However, while these factors may play a role, they do not fully explain the deeply ingrained cultural norms that perpetuate a separation between Warrant Officers and the Officer Corps as highlighted by Huffman. Ultimately, addressing the PME structure and cultural norms is essential to creating a sustainable solution, regardless of other contributing factors. Therefore, while acknowledging these other potential influences, this analysis maintains that reforming the PME structure and addressing the cultural norms within the Warrant Officer cohort are paramount to achieving meaningful change.

**Reforming Warrant Officer PME is a strategic imperative. This next section outlines concrete recommendations to mandate PME attendance, improve scheduling, tie PME to promotions, and align the system with the Army People Strategy to prepare the cohort for 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.**



## **CLOSING THE GAP: MAKING PME MANDATORY (PROMOTION = PME)**

To align with the Army People Strategy's Line of Effort – Develop, which clearly outlines its expectations and goals for servicemember development, stating that it will "in collaboration with each Army professional identify employment, education, and training opportunities which will extend their talents, close talent gaps, and maximize their contributions to the total Army," the U.S. Army must make several key changes to improve the professionalization of PME in today's modern Army.

Foremost, the Army must commit to updating the language in AR 350-1 to mandate PME attendance for all Warrant Officers. This update should include specific requirements, clear consequences for non-attendance, and standardized curriculum guidelines to remove ambiguity and establish new professional development standards.

Next, the Army must seek creative and effective approaches to scheduling PME for its professionals. Given the operational tempo and demands of a rotational Army, a viable approach may involve centralized scheduling and dedicated PME periods, with the decision authority to decline or defer a request held at the highest levels of each organization or even HRC.

Furthermore, promotions must be tied directly to PME attendance and completion. Drawing from civilian sector best practices and Mrs. Cardwell of the Cardwell Group, professional organizations utilize mandatory training, performance-based development, and career advancement linked to education.

Implementing similar practices within the Army will incentivize PME participation and ensure a highly qualified Warrant Officer cohort.

By implementing these recommendations, the Army can transform Warrant Officer PME from a voluntary endeavor to a cornerstone of professional development, ensuring a highly skilled and adaptable Warrant Officer cohort ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

## **REFORM OR FALL BEHIND**

The reform of Warrant Officer PME is not merely a tactical adjustment but a strategic imperative for the United States Army. Echoing General Perkins's warning against complacency and adherence to outdated practices, stating, "We must continually challenge our leaders to think, adapt, and thrive in uncertain environments.

The most dangerous phrase in the military is, "We've always done it this way," and this article argues that the Army must embrace the recommendations outlined herein to create a Warrant Officer PME system that fosters lifelong learning, values professional development, and incentivizes Warrant Officers to reach their full potential. This long-term investment in human capital will yield significant returns, ensuring a highly skilled, adaptable, and integrated Warrant Officer cohort capable of leading the Army into the future.

## **WAY AHEAD**

By embracing these reforms, the Army can ensure its Warrant Officers remain technically proficient, professionally developed, and fully integrated as leaders within the Officer Corps, ready to meet the challenges of the future fight.



## ENDNOTES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**CW5 Micheal "Todd" Franklin** participated in the Army People Seminar during the 2024-2025 academic year. He currently serves as the Field Artillery Warrant Officer Career Manager at Human Resources Command, located in Fort Knox, Kentucky. With nearly 26 years of distinguished service, CW5 Franklin has undertaken a diverse array of operational assignments. Most notably, he recently served as the Division Targeting Officer for the 10th Mountain Division (LI).

CW5 Franklin is a graduate of the Warrant Officer Senior Service Education (WOSSE) program. He is also pursuing a Master of Science in Human Resources and Organizational Development at the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville.

