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Warrant incentives warranted

The Army has for years been running short of warrant officers. But now, personnel officials are urgently trying to fill up the ranks.

To do so, they're pushing a package of new incentives designed to make the leap to warrant more attractive. Pay hikes, expanded training opportunities and increased integration with the rest of the officer corps are at the heart of the plan.

Last year, 1,203 soldiers traded in their stripes for warrant bars, joining a community of nearly 11,000 aviators, technical experts and other specialists. Yet today, the Army remains more than 400 warrants short of authorized strength.

Why don't more noncommissioned officers pursue warrant careers? Simple: For many, the benefits don't outweigh the risks.

To be sure, warrant officers can look forward to excellent promotion rates, greater leadership responsibilities and more pay. For those who earn retirement, the value of their retired pay is greater than had they remained an NCO.

But many senior NCOs nevertheless balk. For them, the additional pay is not great enough to overcome their concerns about job security.

By the time a soldier makes staff sergeant, he's locked in tenure – that is, as long as he or she performs, a 20-year career and retirement is guaranteed.

That guarantee, however, disappears as soon as that soldier goes warrant. Instead, the new warrant officers have joined an "up or out" promotion system that offers little in the way of career protection. Fail twice to get promoted from one warrant pay grade to the next and, unless you've reached the 18-year mark, your career could be history.

That's enough to give anyone pause.

Another hitch for some senior NCOs: a dip in take-home pay they must weather for a year or two when they give up certain allowances by going warrant at a point where warrant base pay alone does not compensate for those losses.

Over the long haul, going warrant promises to be rewarding in terms of take-home pay, retirement pay, promotion rates and professional responsibility. **Army leaders can better sell this opportunity by building in job security and better pay.** The service also needs to get soldiers to go warrant earlier. Younger soldiers clearly have more to gain than lose by switching career tracks.

That's a vital move; the key is making it ASAP. If the Army is serious about erasing the shortfall in the warrant officer ranks, it should fast track the incentives for the soldiers to make the leap.

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USAWOA Note – this article refers to the initiatives in the ATLDP-WO Study recommendations. Also the article makes reference to the Active Army only. The Army National Guard and Army Reserve are also short warrant officers and the ATLDP-WO recommendations equally apply to them.

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