

# **Overview of Army OCS History**

## **(with suggested edits from Secretary Artillery OCS Alumni (Fort Sill))**

Currently, the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School is a rigorous 12-week course designed to train, assess, evaluate, and develop second lieutenants for the U.S. Army's seventeen basic branches. It is the only commissioning source that can be responsive to the U.S. Army's changing personnel requirements due to its short length and highly focused training syllabus when compared to the Army's other commissioning programs.

The U.S. Army Officer Candidate School is organizationally designated as 3rd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment, 199th Infantry Brigade. It is a subordinate unit of the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) also headquartered at Fort Benning. The battalion has five training companies and a Headquarters Company in operation, designated HHC, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, and Echo, each of which can conduct one class at a time, with a maximum of 160 candidates in each class. Currently, companies Alpha through Delta are active. Echo Company provides the ability to rapidly expand OCS on short notice as necessary.

To ensure the needs of the Army National Guard for qualified commissioned officers, the states also conduct OCS programs. While the timing of the courses reflects the unique demands and structure of the Army National Guard, the officers commissioned reflect the high standards expected of OCS.

### **Pre-WWI**

Before World War II, the Army employed a variety of means to commission officers based on the needs of the time. From its creation, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point provided a small number of officers. This was sometimes sufficient to meet the Army's needs but when large crises developed it proved woefully insufficient. A small number of military colleges such as Norwich University in Vermont, the Citadel in South Carolina, and the Virginia Military Institute offered military training but again the numbers were small. Both the Mexican War and the Civil War saw the Army raising large numbers of "volunteer" regiments with the commander of these regiments appointed by a state governor and with most of the officers elected by the unit's members. Volunteer regiments with largely untrained officers saw service again during the Spanish-American War.

### **World War I**

1916 saw the Army preparing for war and that included planning for officer procurement. The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) was formalized in 1917 and while this provided a means for growing the wartime officer corps the total number of officers remained too small. Highly qualified non-commissioned officers found themselves commissioned as second lieutenants to help fill the void, but the Army required still more officers. Ultimately, the Army created sixteen officer training camps followed by eight officer training schools. Careful selection provided these programs with candidates but even with the careful screening only about 60% of those entering the programs received commissions. These individuals represented the best trained citizen-Soldier officers the Army had seen to date.

## **Inter-War Period**

From 1921 through 1940, the Army supported Citizen's Military Training Camps (CMTC). CMTC found interested citizens undergoing blocks of military training with successful completion leading to commissioning in the Organized Reserve Corps. Over the course of almost 20 years, only about 4,000 officers received commissions. Clearly, the program could not deliver to the Army the number of officers it would need in a national emergency, one which was rapidly developing.

## **WWII**

The idea for the modern Officer Candidate School for Infantry was conceived in June 1938, when Brigadier Asa L. Singleton, Commandant of the Infantry School, submitted a plan to the Chief of Infantry. Action to actually start training candidates began in July 1940, when Brigadier General Courtney Hodges, Assistant Commandant of the Infantry School, submitted a revised plan as part of the Army's protective mobilization plan. The new program went into effect in July 1941, as the Infantry, Field Artillery, and Coastal Artillery Officer Candidate Schools. Other branches later followed with their own officer candidate schools. On September 27, 1941, the first Infantry OCS class graduated 171 second lieutenants out of the 204 men who started the 12-week course. Even with careful selection of candidates the first class had an attrition rate of over 17 percent. Between July 1941 and May 1947, over 67,000 candidates graduated from the Infantry OCS alone.

The man credited with establishing the format, discipline, and code of honor still used in OCS today was General Omar Bradley, then Commandant of the Infantry School. As the Commandant of the Infantry School, General Bradley emphasized rigorous training, strict discipline, and efficient organization. These tenets remain the base values of today's Officer Candidate School. Of note, during the war Bradley retained two officers as his aides, Chester Hansen and Lewis Bridge. Both these officers graduated from Infantry OCS in 1941.

The War Department's decision to terminate ROTC programs validated OCS's ability to quickly produce high-quality officers. In May 1943, the Army suspended the ROTC advanced course and basic course graduates reported to various OCS campuses for completion of training and commissioning. Among the officers commissioned because of this decision is OCS Hall of Fame member GEN (RET) Frederick J. Kroesen. GEN Kroesen's commands include both the Americal Division, the 82d Airborne Division and the Seventh United States Army in Europe.

The D-Day invasion of France validated OCS's value to the war effort. Most of the company grade officers leading platoons, companies, troops, and batteries were graduates of Officer Candidate School. The heroics of Lieutenant Jimmie Monteith of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division's 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment exemplify this. Lieutenant Monteith landed with his company during the initial assault of Omaha Beach under heavy enemy fire. He led several assaults, led tanks on foot through a minefield and into firing positions, captured an advantageous position on a hill, and defended against repeated counterattacks. When the enemy succeeded in completely surrounding his unit, Lieutenant Monteith died leading the fight out of the situation. Lieutenant Monteith's actions led to a nomination for the Distinguished Service Cross. His courage impressed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who penned a note to his Chief of Staff, Walter Bedell Smith: "I must say that the thing looks like a Medal of Honor to me. This man was good." (*Washington Times*, Editorial: Valor at Normandy)

## WWII OCS Programs

- Adjutant General (Fort Washington, Maryland).
- Armor (Fort Knox, Kentucky) [1941-1945].
- Army Administration (Fargo, North Dakota; Grinnell, Iowa and Gainesville, Florida) Consolidated into a single school at Fort Washington, Maryland in May 1943.
- Army Air Forces Administration (Miami Beach, Florida) [February 1942-June 1944]; (San Antonio, Texas) [June 1944 -June 1945]; (Maxwell Field, Alabama) [June 1945-January 1946]; (San Antonio, Texas) [February 1946-July 1947].
- Army Air Forces Statistical (Harvard University). Candidates completed general administrative training at Miami Beach and completed statistical course at Harvard.
- Cavalry (Fort Riley, Kansas) [1941-1946].
- Chemical Warfare Service (Edgewood Arsenal).
- Coast Artillery OCS started and graduated two classes at Fort Monroe, Virginia in 1941. Five classes were in session and moved to Camp Davis, North Carolina in February 1942. The Coast Artillery split into Anti-Aircraft Artillery and Seacoast Artillery in March 1942. The OCS program at Camp Davis was designated the Anti-Aircraft Artillery OCS and the Seacoast Artillery OCS was formed at Fort Monroe. All graduates from the Camp Davis and Fort Monroe OCS programs were commissioned in the Coast Artillery Branch.
- Coast Artillery OCS (Fort Monroe) [July 1941-February 1942].
- Anti-Aircraft Artillery OCS (Camp Davis) [March 1942-June 1944].
- Seacoast Artillery OCS (Fort Monroe) [April 1942-March 1944].
- Engineers (Fort Belvoir, Virginia) [July 1941-December 1946].
- Field Artillery (Fort Sill, Oklahoma) [July 1941-December 1946].
- Finance (Duke University).
- Infantry (Fort Benning, Georgia) [1941-1947].
- Judge Advocate General (Ann Arbor, Michigan).
- Medical Administration Corps (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania) [July 1941- October 1945] and (Camp Barkeley, Texas) [May 1942-March 1945].
- Military Police (Fort Custer, Michigan).
- Ordnance Corps (Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland) [1941-1945].
- Quartermaster (Camp Lee, Virginia) [1941-1946]; (Schuylkill Arsenal, Pennsylvania) [1941] and (Fort Washington, Maryland) [1942].
- Signal Corps (Fort Monmouth New Jersey) [1941-1946].
- Tank Destroyer (Camp Hood, Texas) [1942-1944, then merged with Armor OCS].
- Transportation (Mississippi State College and New Orleans, Louisiana).
- In Theater OCS (1942-1945) The Pacific Theater of Operations had OCS at Camp Columbia, Australia, New Caledonia and Natambua, Fiji Islands. The European Theater of Operation had OCS at Fontainebleau, France, Shrivenham, England, and Santa Agata Dei, Mediterranean Region.
- Women's Army Corps (Fort Des Moines, Iowa) [July 1942-September 1943]; (Camp Oglethorpe, Georgia) [September 1943-February 1945]; (Fort Des Moines) [March 1945-November 1945].

## **WAC**

Congress created The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) on May 14, 1942, permitting them to serve in uniform, but not as Soldiers. At that time, women did not have military status. Their ranks, pay, administration and benefits differed from the Army. This created a requirement for training officers for service with the corps. To satisfy this requirement, the Army created WAAC OCS. The first WAAC OCS class of 440 candidates stood up on July 20, 1942, for a six-week course at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. Those candidates who graduated received commissions as third officers (equivalent to a second lieutenant). The Army soon realized the WAAC failed to provide an effective means of allowing women to serve as Soldiers and replaced it with the Women's Army Corps (WAC) on July 1, 1943. Unlike its predecessor, the WAC made women Soldiers with the same responsibilities and benefits as their male counterparts.

## **EARLY COLD WAR**

After World War II, the Army transferred Infantry OCS to Fort Riley, Kansas, as part of the Ground General School and discontinued all other officer candidate schools. On November 1, 1947, the Army ended the Infantry OCS program. The final class graduated only 52 second lieutenants.

## **KOREA**

The North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950, in a narrow sense was only an escalation of a continuing civil war among Koreans that began with Japan's defeat in 1945. In a larger sense, the invasion marked the eruption of the Cold War between the United States and the USSR into open hostilities because each of the Great Powers backed one of the competing Korean governments. The war that followed would devastate Korea, lead to a large expansion of the U.S. armed forces and America's military presence around the world and frustrate many on both sides by ending in an armistice that left the peninsula still divided. By October 1952, most of the junior officers with World War II experience had returned home as their tours expired and their replacements usually had little or no acquaintance with the battlefield. Many of the troops sent over from the United States lacked field training and had to learn the hard way under combat conditions. Initially the Army requested reserve officers to volunteer for active duty, but this effort failed forcing the Army to initiate an involuntary recall program. Manpower sustainment requirements soon included the National Guard. Even with ROTC, the officer numbers were inadequate to sustain forces in Korea and the expanding Army presence in Europe. Many combat companies were operating with a single officer. The shortage of officers during the Korean conflict caused the Department of the Army to re-open Infantry OCS at Fort Benning on February 18, 1951, and lengthen the course from 17 to 22 weeks. The Infantry Officer Candidate School became the First Officer Candidate Battalion, Second Student Regiment. The strength of OCS increased rapidly. As one of eight branch programs, Infantry OCS included as many as 29 companies with a class graduating every week. During the Korean War, OCS commissioned approximately 7,000 Infantry officers. On August 4, 1953, the Department of the Army reduced OCS from eight to three programs: Infantry, Artillery, and Engineer. In Korea, as in other wars, OCS graduates led from the front.

Just as in WWII, during the Korean War small unit leaders were in demand again. Many from WWII received recalls to active duty while others, who had stayed in the Army, found themselves again deploying to combat. Lieutenant Don Carlos Faith represents their commitment and competence. Colonel Faith's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 32d Infantry held the northern flank at the Chosen Reservoir allowing the Marines to fight to the rear. His heroic service resulted in a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Korea was the forgotten war, but we are still there. Many OCS officers have served multiple tours in Korea through the years. Korean service distinguishes one of our Hall of Fame members and the most decorated OCS officer, Lieutenant General David Grange who served six years in combat in three wars. General Grange dropped out of high school out of a fear World War II would end before he could graduate and served as an enlisted airborne Soldier during that conflict. During the Korean War he served as both a platoon leader and company commander. Serving three tours in Vietnam first as an Advisor and later he commanded a battalion, the DISCOM and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade all in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Infantry Division. He returned to Korea to take command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division from 1977 to 1979 before assuming command of the Sixth US Army at the Presidio of San Francisco in 1981. His last official duties included overseeing the planning of the official ceremonies commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D-Day landings in 1984.

### **Korean War OCS Programs**

- Army Officer Candidate (AOC) Course (Fort Riley, Kansas) [1947-1953].
- Armor (Fort Knox, Kentucky) [1951-1953].
- Anti-Aircraft Artillery (Fort Bliss, Texas) [October 1951-July 1953].
- Engineers (Fort Belvoir, Virginia) [September 1951-July 1954].
- Field Artillery (Fort Sill, Oklahoma) [February 1951-July 1973].
- Infantry (Fort Benning, Georgia) [1951-1973].
- Ordnance Corps (Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland) [1951-1952].
- Signal (Fort Monmouth, New Jersey) [1951-1953].
- Women's Army Corps (Fort Lee, Virginia) [1949-1952] Fort McClellan, Alabama [1952-1954].

On August 4, 1953, the Army reduced OCS was from nine to four programs: Infantry, Artillery, Engineer and WAC. The later elimination of Engineer OCS left only three programs: Infantry Field Artillery and WAC.

### **VIETNAM**

Once again most of the company grade officers who fought the Vietnam War were OCS graduates. Here at Fort Benning over 13,000 graduated from the "Benning School for Boys" with most serving as rifle platoon leaders in Vietnam. Other OCS graduates were tank platoon leaders, scout platoon leaders, engineer platoon leaders, battery fire direction officers, forward observers, and helicopter pilots. The demands of Vietnam, however, did not mean all graduates served in Vietnam as the Army retained requirements in Korea, Europe, Alaska, and elsewhere.

With the onset of the Vietnam War the OCS program again expanded with officer candidates undergoing a grueling 23-week program of instruction designed to prepare young officers to be platoon leaders in a demanding Vietnam jungle environment and with an extremely high attrition rate as one of its defining characteristics. During the height of the Vietnam Conflict, Infantry OCS produced 7,000 officers annually from five battalions, all located at Fort Benning. Towards the end of the conflict, the Army re-established WAC OCS at Fort McClellan, Alabama. The Army also reactivated other OCS programs at Fort Gordon, Georgia (Signal Corps); Fort Lee, Virginia (Quartermaster), Fort Eustis, Virginia (Transportation), Fort Knox, Kentucky (Armor), Fort Belvoir, Virginia (Engineer) and Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland (Ordnance). The OCS relation to the Vietnam War was significant. At the small unit levels (company and platoon), OCS commissioned officers comprised the majority. The Medal of Honor ranks from Vietnam included more than a dozen OCS graduates – Joe Marm, Bruce Crandall, Chuck Kettles, Stephen Doane (posthumous), Roger Donlon, Douglas Fournet (posthumous), Loren Hagen, Robert Leisy (posthumous), Gary Miller (posthumous), Ronald Ray, Ruppert Sargent (posthumous), Charles Williams, Robert Poxon (posthumous), Harold Fritz, James Michael Sprayberry. As in WWII and Korea OCS graduates tended to lead from the front.

Lt Harold (Pinky) Durham, Class 1-67 Field Artillery Officer Candidate School embodies the spirit of the OCS graduates of the period. Serving in Vietnam was a Forward Observer in Battery C, 6th Battalion, 15th Artillery Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. During the Battle of Ong Thanh, Durham repeatedly exposed himself to hostile fire to direct artillery fire. Despite his numerous severe wounds, he continually positioned himself about the battlefield, fighting, assisting soldiers, and calling artillery fires on the enemy. He died still grasping the radio handset. A posthumous Medal of Honor recognizes LT Durham for his actions.

During Vietnam, our WWII and Korea-era graduates were battalion and brigade commanders. WWII OCS graduate and Medal of Honor recipient Keith Ware rose to the rank of Major General and commanded 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam. He lost his life when enemy fire downed his helicopter during the Battle of Loc Ninh in 1968. General Ware was one of two Army division commanders killed while commanding their divisions in Vietnam and the most senior officer to die in the Vietnam War.

### **Vietnam War OCS Programs**

- Armor (Fort Knox, Kentucky) [July 1966-February 1968].
- Branch Immaterial (Fort Knox, Kentucky) [December, 1965-September, 1966] Fort Knox briefly ran a Branch Immaterial course that trained officers for the Armor, Quartermaster, Transportation, or Ordnance Corps. Classes performed Phase I (13-week basic officer's training) at Fort Knox and transferred together to complete Phase II (10-week advanced officer training course) at either Fort Lee (Quartermaster), Fort Eustis (Transportation), or Aberdeen Proving Ground (Ordnance Corps).
- Ordnance Branch (Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland) [1966-1968].
- Quartermaster Corps (Fort Lee, Virginia) [July 1966-February 1968].
- Transportation Corps (Fort Eustis, Virginia) [1966-February 1968].
- Engineers (Fort Belvoir, Virginia) [November 1965-January 1971].
- Field Artillery (Fort Sill, Oklahoma) [July 1951-July 1973].

- Infantry (Fort Benning, Georgia) [1951-1973].
- Signal Corps (Fort Gordon, Georgia) [1965-1968].
- Women's Army Corps Center and School (Fort McClellan, Alabama) [1952-1976].

With the Vietnam conflict drawing down, the Army recognized the need to retain OCS but also recognized the need to abolish the branch specific courses in response to decreased requirements. In April 1973, a new 14-week long Branch Immaterial Officer Candidate School replaced the branch specific courses for males. OCS for female officer candidates remained at Fort McClellan, Alabama until December 1976, when it merged with the branch immaterial OCS program at Fort Benning, Georgia. With WAC OCS closing its doors, all active-duty candidates received the same demanding training and assessment at Fort Benning.

## **VOLAR and the Army of Excellence**

The period immediately following the Vietnam War is known as VOLAR or the Volunteer Army and subsequently known as the Army of Excellence, The Cold War with the Soviets was at a critical point and military service was not a popular career choice. Technological advances in weaponry and organizational atrophy from institutional focus on Vietnam required an across-the-board overhaul of the Army. This overhaul led to performance-oriented training for individuals and units. It also led to Air Land Battle Doctrine, Division 86 reorganization, and weapons modernization that produced the Big 5 (M1 Abrams Tank, M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle, AH-64 Apache Helicopter, MIM-104 Patriot Surface to Air Missile System, and the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter). The establishment of the Army's training and exercise program and its crown jewels--the combat training centers at Fort Irwin, CA; Fort Polk, LA; and Hohenfels, Germany—expressed the Army's commitment to a new approach to training that saw empowered commanders creating more capable units.

During the VOLAR period (1973-1982) OCS produced between 800-1000 officers a year running two companies each running three classes. During the Army of Excellence period OCS produced 500-600 officers a year.

During the VOLAR and Army of Excellence periods, OCS officers guarded the inter-German and Czech borders, guarded the Korean DMZ, served as part the of the Multinational Observer Force in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, protected the Panama Canal, and assisted in the resettling of Cuban refugees at Fort Chaffe, AR. OCS officers conducted exercises like Return of Forces to Germany (REFORGER), Team Spirit, Balikatan, and Bright Star. REFORGER validated the Army's ability to reinforce Europe in the event of a crisis with the Soviet Bloc. Team Spirit demonstrated the Army's ability to rapidly deploy to the Republic of Korea and, in concert with Ulchi Focus Lens—the theater's major command post exercise—ensured the Army's ability to deter North Korean aggression. Bali katan provided the Army recurring training with our Filipino allies. Conducted in Egypt, Bright Star both gave the Army experience in the Middle East and assisted in the professionalization of the Egyptian Army. OCS officers developed the tactics, techniques, and procedures for modern warfare at places like the National Training Center, Joint Readiness Training Center, Grafenwoehr, Hohenfels, Rodriquez Range, Empire Range, and during countless live fire and gunnery training exercises conducted at home station and during external evaluations as part of the Army Training and Evaluation Program.

OCS officers participated in multiple contingency operations. Combat characterized operations Urgent Fury in Grenada, Just Cause in Panama, and Restore Hope in Somalia. Uphold Democracy in, Haiti, Desert Fox in Kuwait and the Implementation and Stabilization Force missions in Bosnia and Kosovo were large-scale peacekeeping/peace enforcement operations. Citizens of Pakistan benefitted from American humanitarian assistance operations following a devastating earthquake in 2005. Success in these broad-ranging operations demonstrated the abilities of American Soldiers enabled by tactically and technically proficient leadership.

OCS officers developed skill in the operational level of war during exercises like Ulchi Focus Lens, Lucky Sentinel, Golden Saber, Millennial Challenge, and Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) warfighter exercises. All of these exercises, contingency operations, and training events over a 30-year period led to the US Army's decisive victories during Operations Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

OCS graduates from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam were culminating successful military and civilian careers during this period. This includes:

- Senator Bob Dole (Infantry OCS Class 360-44) who ran for President of the United States.
- Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger (Infantry OCS Class 14-42) who was responsible for implementing the defense reforms of the Reagan administration.
- Secretary of the Army John Marsh (Infantry OCS Class 508-45) who was the longest serving Army Secretary and oversaw the aforementioned Army Division 86 overhaul.
- Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili (Artillery OCS Class 4-59) who was the "Father of the Balkans peace plan."
- CENTCOM Commander Tommy Franks (Artillery OCS Class 5-67) who led the Joint and combined forces in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

In September of 1989, The Infantry School Brigade (TSB) became the 11th Infantry Regiment and OCS was no longer the 5th Student Battalion. It was re-designated the 3rd Battalion 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

## **Global War on Terror and Overseas Contingency Operations**

In the decades since the OCS branch immaterial program was implemented in 1973, it continues to provide commissioned officers to the total force for all basic branches of the Army. The demand for well-trained junior officers has expanded and contracted during those decades, which included major conflicts such as the 1991 Gulf War, peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, the Iraq War, and continuing operations in Afghanistan. The War on Terror is still underway as U.S. forces continue to be a vital part of the intervention against the Islamic State. Since its inception 75 years ago, through major wars, the Cold War, and participation in numerous operations and conflicts all over the world, the Officer Candidate School continues to demonstrate uncommon flexibility, professionalism, and the unmatched ability to provide the U.S. Army with competent, well trained, and fearless officers in the shortest and most responsive time.



Since 9-11 and the beginning of the global war on terror, OCS has had between three to five companies and produced between 800-1200 lieutenants a year. The Army has been in continuous combat since 2001 and OCS graduates have served in every capacity to support that effort. Two OCS officers received the Medal of Honor during this period, Captains Florent Groberg and William Swenson. In addition to combat service in the Middle East, OCS graduates have served in Africa, the Philippines, and other locations.

The demands of these conflicts meant large scale reserve component deployments with many state OCS graduates leading a variety of units. Major General Joseph J. Taluto, a graduate of New York's Empire Military Academy, commanded the 42nd Infantry Division in Iraq. General Taluto's deployment marked the first time since World War II a National Guard officer commanded his division in combat.

## **OCS TODAY**

Today's OCS continues to provide officers to all 17 basic branches of the Army. Candidates come from throughout the force and from college campuses across America. Currently, Active-duty OCS is a 12-week-long school, taught at Fort Benning tasked with providing highly qualified officers for the Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve.

The Army's Officer Candidate School teaches basic leadership and Soldier tasks, using the infantry battle drills found in Army Field Manual 3-21.8 as a framework for instruction and evaluation of leadership potential. A total of 71 tasks are taught and tested while at OCS. A candidate should expect to be under constant observation and evaluation by their cadre. Controlled methods subject candidates to mental and emotional stress to test problem solving and moral resolve. Additionally, the course is physically demanding, with numerous tactical road marches, timed runs of varying distance from two miles to five miles. In 2008 the Army reduced the program of instruction to 12 weeks. This did not lower the standards a candidate had to meet, but it allowed the Army to increase the number of officers commissioned through OCS by increasing the number of classes conducted.

Officer Candidate School consists of three phases: Basic phase, Intermediate Phase, and Senior phase. Students transition from Basic Officer Candidates (BOCs) to Intermediate Officer Candidates (IOCs) to Senior Officer Candidates (SOCs) as their classes progress. Upon arrival, the candidates in-process with HHC and compete via a physical fitness test to enter an OCS company. Candidates should expect to arrive at Fort Benning in top physical condition as the cutoff has historically been an APFT score of 240-270. Once assigned to a class, the candidates enter into a highly controlled environment similar to Basic Training. The fundamental difference lies in the expectation to act like leaders and take charge and responsibility immediately. As they progress through the course, they may earn some limited privileges. Their bearing, deportment, and behavior, both individually and collectively, will affect the return of their privileges.

Basic Officer Candidates (BOCs) are identified by a black ascot. The Basic phase tests candidates both academically and physically with all events scored. Scoring determines the order of merit list used for branch selection. Basic Officer phase culminates with branch selection and phase

over to Intermediate phase. A light blue ascot identifies the Intermediate Officer Candidates (IOCs). The intermediate phase continues with more difficult academic training including field and tactical instruction with students receiving grades on land navigation, tactics, and leadership. A white ascot identifies Senior Officer Candidates (SOCs). Senior phase is the last phase and includes final exams in academics, physical fitness, peer evaluations, final TAC (Training, Advising, and Counseling) officer assessments, interviews, and preparation for graduation and follow-on basic officer branch courses. Graduates may receive 'walk-on' slots in Fort Benning's Airborne or Air Assault schools since they are under the same higher training command as OCS.

In September 2010, OCS implemented a policy of total immersion. This system removes the possibility of candidates earning on- or off-post passes and using their vehicles during the first 6 weeks of school, restricts the consumption of alcohol to two designated days during the course, and prohibits students to carry cell phones while in uniform.

## **Army National Guard OCS**

The Army National Guard is the Army's combat reserve. Organized and equipped in the same manner as the Regular Army, it has the same need for quality small unit leaders. Following World War II, the Army National Guard, recognizing the immense benefits of OCS, developed OCS programs to provide those leaders. The first OCS programs started in 1946 and by the start of the Korean War four states had such programs. During the 1950's, a special 10-week Reserve Components OCS program of instruction commissioned hundreds of officers into the Army National Guard and Army Reserve. By the 1960s each state had its own program. Like their Fort Benning counterpart, these programs have undergone significant changes since their first classes were commissioned.

Today, Army National Guard Regional Training Institutes offer programs in two different formats to accommodate reserve component soldiers. The traditional OCS program is a 16-month course of instruction conducted from April to August of the following year conducted in four phases.

- Phase Zero – is four drill weekends and designed to prepare Officer Candidates for the OCS program.
- Phase I – is a 15-day annual training period held in the Summer.
- Phase II – is conducted one weekend per month for a period of 13 months.
- Phase III – is a final 15-day annual training period, culminating with graduation and commissioning.

The Army National Guard also offers an accelerated OCS program, which is a 56-day, full-time program. The accelerated program is the most physically and mentally demanding program and while the majority of candidates for the accelerated program are already enlisted soldiers, the failure rate is consistently over 40%. Notable graduates of this program include former Member of Congress Tulsi Gabbard. Gabbard received her commission as a Military Police officer and served in Iraq.

Upon successful completion of either Army National Guard OCS program, graduates receive commissions as second lieutenants in their respective state National Guard. Upon completion of the Basic Officer Leader Course II these officers receive federal recognition as second lieutenants and are indistinguishable from their Federal OCS, ROTC, or Military Academy graduate counterparts.

On June 12, 1998, to further integrate the Army, the Army National Guard OCS Phase III candidates began training alongside their active-duty counterparts at Fort Benning. Officer candidates from the National Guard and Army Reserve conduct the final phase of training before commissioning during their two-week annual training period. The Army trained over 650 future officers in the first year, with similar numbers completing training in subsequent years.

## **Conclusion**

OCS has continued to grow and adapt to meet the needs of the Army. This OCS operational structure reflects the OCS' ability to transform and execute its mission to meet the needs of a fast paced and changing Army. The mission of OCS remains constant: train selected personnel in the fundamentals of leadership, basic military skills; instill professional ethics, evaluate leadership potential, and commission those who qualify as second lieutenants in all 17 basic branches of the Army. Every three weeks a class graduates and another one starts. In 2016 the Officer Candidate Schools program celebrated its 75th year of training and commissioning the finest young men and women in America to be officers in the United States Army. Hundreds of thousands of OCS graduates have been instrumental in meeting the U.S. Army's leadership requirements during peace and conflict. Today, OCS continues to produce more than 30 percent of today's newly commissioned Army requirements. They continue "standards with no compromise."

The legacy of OCS is also maintained by the United States Army Officer Candidate School Alumni Association (USAOCSAA). The Association is a non-profit, national organization, representing all Army officers commissioned through the Officer Candidate School, regardless of previous school locations and branches. The USAOCSAA contributes to the national security; promotes love of country, appreciation of the military, and better public understanding of the Army. It fosters fellowship, highlights the history of OCS and memorializes OCS graduates who have lost their lives in service of their country. The Association, at [www.ocsalumni.org](http://www.ocsalumni.org), is an advocate for the ongoing OCS program and a source of information for all related interests. The USAOCSAA invites new members and wants to hear from active, retired, veterans, and family members. It offers a great way to reconnect with OCS classmates and those affiliated with the program. It also conducts meetings, activities and reunions throughout the year at Fort Benning, GA.

The mission of OCS remains to train selected personnel in the fundamentals of leadership; basic military skills; instill professional ethics; evaluate leadership potential; and commission those who qualify as second lieutenants, fully qualified to lead Soldiers under all condition, in all seventeen basic branches of the Army. Standards! No Compromise!

**NOTICE: This is an edited version of “Overview of Army OCS History” from the US Army OCS Alumni Association (TUSAOCSAA) attributed to Colonel (Retired) Frank Harman. A list of the suggested corrections and additions contained herein was provided to TUSAOCSAA VP-Administration and VP-Operations on June 20, 2023. No reply has been received. A follow-up with additional information and corrections contained in this (draft) version was provided to the Secretary on January 18, 2025.**

**Most of the changes were to the original list of OCS programs during World War II, Korea and Vietnam based on extensive research over the past 20 years. The inclusive dates of the various branch programs were updated for the sake of accuracy. The OCS location and correct class numbers for Artillery OCS graduates GEN John Shalikashvili and GEN Tommy R. Franks have been added for the same reason.**

**A copy of the original unedited version of the document is available upon request. It seemed counterproductive to contribute to the spread of inaccurate information by posting the original document.**

**This edited version of the Overview of Army OCS History is posted on the Artillery OCS Alumni website because I believe it is worth reading. It is important to preserve the history of the Army Officer Candidate Schools and do what we can to make it as complete and accurate as we can.**

***Randy C. Dunham, Artillery OCS Class 10-69.  
1/18/2025***