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**THE DELTA OF COMMAND: THE INCREASING GAP BETWEEN CHARACTER AND
COMPETENCE IN THE NAVY'S COMMANDING OFFICER SCREENING AND
SELECTION**

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by The Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University or the Department of Defense.

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ABSTRACT

The responsibility, authority and leadership of a Commanding Officer is the foundation of effectiveness for the U.S. Navy, yet many men and women in this position are fired for errors in competence or character each year. The Navy has reduced the number of opportunities for command; however, the number of Commanding Officers fired each year is trending upward. Over the past 14 years, the United States Navy has fired 225 COs, or an average of 15 COs each calendar year. Many of these cases reflect sensational errors in performance, judgment or personal misconduct with significant consequences. Unfortunately, the Navy's actions to reverse the increasing trend of CO firings have not solved the problem.

The purpose of this paper is to examine why Commanding Officer firings are on the rise and determine what the Navy can do to reduce the qualities that precipitate this trend.

This study determines that the Navy's attempts to reduce the number of firings have focused on training and education. The Navy has resisted modifications to its existing fitness report system and Commanding Officer screening and selection process. The Navy's existing fitness report system is optimistic and does not assess or report on character. In order to reverse the increasing trend of CO firings, in particular CO firings for character related issues; the Navy must (1) incorporate character assessment into the Navy FITREP and Commanding Officer selection board process, (2) target character development in the Navy's Commanding Officer training and education pipeline and (3) educate and train Navy leaders to be observers and assessors of character. The role of the Commanding Officer requires individuals of high character; improved Navy character development and assessment programs are necessary to reduce the increasing trend in Commanding Officer firings.

In his Charge of Command, Admiral Roughead's writes: "Command is the foundation upon which our Navy rests." (Roughead 2009) Taken at face value, the increasing number and percentage of fired COs represents an existential threat to the Navy. Yet the Navy's actions to correct the problem have been short-term and superficial. We need not look far to find charges of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and adultery against the senior Army officer Brigadier General Sinclair are fueling a congressional battle over the right of the commander to retain authority over sexual assault and harassment cases. The most significant threat to the credibility of the Naval profession is the character related firings. It is an impossible task to explain to Congress and the American people how the CO of a multi-billion dollar nuclear submarine could be accused of faking his own death to break ties with his impregnated mistress. (Fellman 2012) The Navy cannot afford inaction. This paper has outlined a way ahead, now it is time for the Navy's leadership to move aggressively and protect the Navy's foundation of command.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	3
TABLE OF FIGURES	4

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of Commanding Officer Firings	15
Figure 2. Percentage of Commanding Officers Fired 1999-2013.....	16
Figure 3. Commanding Officer Firings: Character vs. Competence – Conservative Numbers	18
Figure 4. Commanding Officer Firings: Percentage for Character – Conservative Numbers	18
Figure 5. Character Related Firings as a proportion of total firings.....	21
Figure 6. Commanding Officer Firings 2005-2013.....	33
Figure 7. Commanding Officer Firings 2010-2013.....	40
Figure 8. Commanding Officer Firings 2010-2013: Percentage for Character – Liberal.....	40
Figure 9. Commanding Officer Firings 2010-2013: Percentage for Character – Conservative.....	41

Introduction

“ It is cruel, this accountability of good and well-intentioned men. But the choice is that or an end to the responsibility and finally, as the cruel sea has taught, and end to the confidence and trust in the men who lead, for men will no longer trust leaders who feel themselves beyond accountability for what they do. And when men lose confidence and trust in those who lead, order disintegrates into chaos and purposeful ships into uncontrollable derelicts.”

- Hobson’s Choice, Wall Street Journal, May 14, 1952

“Command is the foundation upon which our Navy rests.”

- Admiral Gary Roughead (Ret), Chief of Naval Operations 2007-2011

The responsibility, authority and leadership of a Commanding Officer (CO) is the foundation of effectiveness for the U.S. Navy, yet many men and women in this position are fired for errors in competence or character each year. The Navy has reduced the number of opportunities for command, but the number of COs being fired is trending upward. Over the past 14 years, the United States Navy has fired 225 COs, or an average of 15 COs each calendar year. Figure (1) The Navy’s percentage of COs fired annually has increased from .4% in 1999 to 1.4% in 2013. Many of these cases reflect sensational errors in performance, judgment or personal misconduct with significant consequences. Unfortunately, the Navy’s actions to reverse the increasing trend of CO firings have not solved the problem. Additionally, the Navy does not believe there is a problem with the way it screens and selects COs. *The purpose of this paper is to examine why Commanding Officer firings are on the rise and determine what the Navy can do to reduce the qualities that precipitate this trend.*

While some CO firings are quietly handled outside of the public’s eye, other COs fail spectacularly and raise public concern over the character and competence

of our Navy. For example, the CO of a nuclear submarine with intercontinental ballistic missiles was fired in 2012 for faking his own death to break off an affair with his pregnant mistress (Fellman 2012). CBS News reported on the most recent high visibility scandal with the title "*Navy secrets sold for hookers and Lady Gaga Tickets.*" (Press 2013) Navy Commander Michael Misiewicz, former Commanding Officer of the destroyer USS Mustin and 7th Fleet Operations Officer, was charged with accepting bribes (to include prostitutes and Lady Gaga tickets) in return for providing a contractor classified information on ships movements in the Pacific Ocean. The contractor then overcharged the Navy and invoked false tariffs amounting in tens of millions of dollars in fraudulent charges. Excess charges in ships husbandry services contracts were over \$10 million in 2011 alone. (Press 2013) A review of recent headlines involving Navy Commanding Officer firings brings up additional headlines: "*Scandal sinks sub CO after one week in charge*" (Sam Fellman 2012), "*Navy dismisses 23 Commanding Officers for misconduct,*" (Burke 2011) and "*CO torpedoed career for 'Perfect Woman.'*" (Fellman 2013b)

The sensational, outlandish nature of many firings is overshadowed only by their frequency. In the past decade, the Navy has fired over twenty-two COs within a calendar year four separate times. (Times 2013, General 2010, 2004) Incredibly, the Navy has fired an average of 15 CO's each year since 1999, over one CO every month for the past 15 years! Some years have been worse than others, for example, the Navy fired nine COs the first four months of 2004. That's a CO fired every 13 days! An average of one CO was fired every two weeks in 2012. (Klimas 2013) Three submarine COs were fired within the first two months of 2013 alone. (Times 2013)

While the Navy has not specified what might be considered an “acceptable” number of annual firings, we can presume that the Navy’s goal is zero. We can also assume that the current numbers are not trending in a direction the Navy leadership would like to see. Many of these fired men and women have almost two decades of “sustained, superior performance” in the Navy. They are quite literally the Navy’s all-stars, the top 25 percent of their peers. They have been perpetually screened and assessed over their 20 years of service, and the Navy has identified them as the very best—ready for the responsibility to care for the lives of thousands of sailors, millions of dollars of equipment, and charged with the responsibility to make decisions directly impacting on US national security.

Methodology

This paper will assess the Navy’s reaction to these CO firings and attempt to determine what actions the Navy should consider to reduce the number of exceptional men and women who fail in command each year. Additionally, the paper will examine the impact that “character development” in the CO training and education pipeline and the integration of “character assessment” in the Navy’s CO screening and selection process might have on the number of COs fired annually. This paper will validate the increasing trend in CO firings and evaluate the effectiveness of the Navy’s actions to correct the problem. Additionally, this paper will evaluate the Navy’s CO training, education, screening and selection process. This analysis will lead to an observation that the Navy’s fitness report (FITREP) system does not assess character. This gap between character and competence reporting on officer FITREPs disadvantages the CO screening and selection process.

Officers are selected for command based on an incomplete, character devoid picture presented in their FITREPs. An increasing number of these officers derail under the scrutiny and responsibility of command.

This paper will examine why many of the Navy's corrective actions have not been successful. Because CO firings are an issue concerning the human condition; this paper will examine the dichotomy between the root causes and conditions of CO firings and the Navy's attempts to correct the problem. The distinction between exactly *why* a CO makes decisions that result in his firing and *what the Navy has done* to correct the problem is significant. The data tells us that CO firings have trended upward in number and percentage since 1999. The purpose of the Navy's corrective actions have been to reduce the number of COs fired; therefore, the data proves that the Navy's actions have not been successful. *This paper will closely examine these actions and explain why they failed.* This paper will not attempt to measure or determine the impact that factors like generational differences (X, Y, Z), social media, and the Bathsheba syndrome¹ have had on the number of annual CO firings.

The paper begins with an examination and validation of the data through a quantitative analysis and statistical comparison of the evidence (CO firing data). As part of the due process analysis, this paper describes the data collection and research methodology and defines critical terms. It then reviews the Navy's actions to address the problem of CO firings and compares the actions against the data to determine their effectiveness. Specifically, data before and after each of the Navy's

¹ "The Bathsheba syndrome" is based on the theory that "ethical failure is a by-product of success." Dean Ludwig and Clinton Longenecker coined the term in a brilliant 1993 article in the *Journal of Business Ethics*. In 2012, Wyatt Olson of the *Navy Times* examined the syndrome as a potential cause of Navy CO firings.

implemented policy changes is compared to determine if the action was effective. The Navy's actions to correct the problem of CO firings are then assessed through the lens of existing academic research and theory. It concludes that every Navy action to reduce CO firings has addressed training and education. Changes to the Navy's fitness report system and selection board process have been considered but summarily rejected. This paper also recommends the Navy trains and educates leaders to observe and evaluate character, and to incorporate character assessment in the Navy's CO selection process.

Definition of Terms

Before we continue with the data assessment, it is necessary to define and operationalize some key terms used in this analysis. The term "Commanding Officer" will refer to a U.S. Navy Officer between the rank of Lieutenant Commander (O-4) and Captain (O-6) appointed to Command of an operational or tactical unit through the authority of the Chief of Naval Operations. Commanding Officers may be of varying rank, and their responsibility and authority is generally commensurate with their rank. While there are several Lieutenant (O-3) and Lieutenant Commander (O-4) CO billets, the great majority are Navy Commanders (O-5) and Captains (O-6). Out of the Navy's current 1,229 Commanding officers, 1,134 are Navy Commanders and Captains. (Operations 2014, Director 2013b, a) The Navy screens and selects officers through an annual administrative board. This board selects officers based on their performance, awards and qualifications. While the numbers vary somewhat between the different designations or communities within the Navy, approximately 25% of officers commissioned each year are ultimately

selected for command. Once selected, each officer must accomplish additional tasks to include completion of the Navy's two week command leadership school, a written examination, a 360 degree feedback assessment administered during command leadership school and an oral board. Once these requirements have been met, the officer is officially qualified and validated by the Navy to assume command.

Commanding Officer tours are generally two years in length. The surface warfare and aviation communities will assign qualified commanding officers to an Executive Officer position where they will eventually assume or "fleet up to" commanding officer. Of note, dozens of these "fleet up" executive officers have been detached for cause over the past decade, but the Navy does not include them in the fired Commanding Officer numbers because they had not completed command leadership school and were not actually in command. Unless the officer has been charged with the authority and responsibility inherent to command, they may not be held to the same level of accountability as an actual CO. (Navy 2009) Officers considered in this data set are also described as "control grade" signifying their authority and responsibility over the members of their command. Commanding Officers are given discipline authority in accordance with their rank and the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). For the purpose of this research paper, the term "fired" means the Commanding Officer has either been detached for cause (DFC) or relieved of their position for cause before their planned date of rotation.

The Navy DFC process releases funding for the fired Commanding Officer and the incoming (replacement) Commanding Officer to change duty stations. The Navy's Military Personnel Manual (MILPERSMAN) outlines four reasons a CO may

be detached for cause: (1) “misconduct,” (2) “substandard performance involving one or more significant events resulting from gross negligence or complete disregard of duty,” (3) “substandard performance of duty over an extended period of time,” and (4) loss of confidence in an officer in command.” (Command 2007) While three of these four reasons for a DFC are straightforward, the term “loss of confidence” deserves some explanation. Loss of confidence in a CO implies the officer in charge of the CO believes the CO incapable of maintaining unit morale, enforcing good order and discipline and completing the command’s mission. (Command 2007) If a qualified officer in the immediate area is available to assume command, the DFC process may be, and frequently is, avoided. (Navy 2010) Again, for the purpose of this thesis, the term “fired” will apply to COs in the rank of O-4 to O-6 and include both DFCs and early reliefs of command.

Data Collection Method

The data for this research paper was collected from three general categories: official U.S. Navy records, public reporting and personal interviews. Official Navy records include transcripts for congressional hearings, Navy Inspector General (IG) investigations, Navy regulations, Navy message traffic, Navy press releases and statements from Navy personnel. Public reporting includes papers published by military officers at the National Defense University, and newspaper articles from publications like the Navy Times, USA Today and New York Times. Personal interviews were conducted with military experts on Navy manpower and Navy leadership, and with civilian experts on character development. The research begins in the year 1999 because it is the first year data was made available to public

record. This leads to the question of whether this problem is a new one or as old as the Navy itself, regrettably, the data simply does not exist to make that determination.

Number of COs fired each year

For many years, the Navy cited personal privacy rights of the individual to prevent the release of information regarding CO firings. Both official and public reporting transparency and detail improved significantly between 2010 and 2013. Based on this lack of reporting and transparency, it is possible that DFCs and early reliefs prior to 2010 may not have been reported and therefore included in this report. For example, in one case, the author had first-hand knowledge of a CO firing that was not reflected in official Navy documents or open source reporting.

It is important to note that on the subject of CO firings, data from the Navy and open source reporting was frequently contradictory. A combination of personal privacy concerns, and Department of the Navy embarrassment and frustration with the firings created an environment where public record and Navy reporting are not always consistent. Most significantly, the actual number of Navy COs fired each year between 1999 and 2013 varied even between official Navy documents including Navy IG investigations and prepared Navy testimony. The numbers of COs fired each year and represented in this paper Figure (1) are based upon the largest number of CO firings reported in official or open source documents validated by name or through corroborating official and open source reports.

The most comprehensive Navy documents regarding CO firings are Navy Inspector General DFC reports completed in 2004 and again in 2010 (NAVIG 2004

and NAVIG 2010). These investigations were both commissioned by the Chief of Naval Operations and the level of access the investigators were allowed to personnel records, commissioning sources, training records and family information cannot be replicated without a commissioned study. These IG reports provided an exceptional foundation for the data analysis. In particular, the 2004 NAVIG included CO firings between 1999 and 2003 and the 2010 NAVIG study allowed for the establishment of a baseline for the numbers of COs fired between 2004 and 2010. The 2010 study presented trend summaries by year, community, commissioning source and leadership training attendance rather than detailed reviews and explanations for each individual fired CO. Press reporting was dominated by the Navy Times.

Percentage of COs fired each year

The author primarily utilized official Navy data from the Navy's Manpower and Personnel office (N1) in Washington, DC in an attempt to determine exactly how many O-4 to O-6 COs were in the Navy each year between 1999 and 2013. Despite engagement with the N1 and N8, the exact number of COs each year between 1999 and 2012 was not available. I turned to the data in the 2004 and 2010 NAVIG reports to interpolate how many COs were in the Navy between 1999 and 2012. The data for 2012 and 2013 was available in policy decision memorandums and other documents (OPNAVNOTES) that specifically designate the billet sequence codes for each CO in the Navy. These documents and the NAVIG information demonstrated that the number of Navy COs has been reduced over the past decade in line with the

Navy's force reduction from roughly 370,000 personnel in 2004 to 323,000 personnel today. (Baldor 2014)

Percentage of COs fired for character verses competence

This data set is the most sparse and problematic. Because the Navy reports and classifies many CO firings using vague or general descriptions such as "loss of confidence in the officer's ability to command," or "poor command climate," it is not always possible to determine from open source material exactly why a CO might have been fired. The author was not granted access to Navy IG reports for each fired CO. Categorization of firings as either character or competency related was based on statistics reported in the 2010 and 2004 Navy IG studies and specific firing details culled from over 20 open source articles written between 2004 and 2011. Despite the painstaking review of dozens of articles and reports, some degree of uncertainty and interpretation between character and competence firings remains. For example, in 2012, the Navy fired 25 COs. Based on multiple source research, the author concluded 15 were fired for character related issues, three were fired for competence, and seven simply remain unknown. This leads to either conservative or liberal interpretation of the unknown data. Based on an observed reluctance for the Navy to release potentially embarrassing criteria regarding CO firings for the past 15 years, the liberal interpretation is likely closer to the truth. However, to prevent speculation, the paper uses a conservative or "worst case" interpretation of the unknown data and places the unknown firings in the *competence* related category. The character related firing numbers and percentages are almost certainly higher than what is reported and graphed in this paper. Figures (3) and (4) Ultimately, the

distinction between character and competence related firings is open to some interpretation and is the weakest link in this research.

Background

Fact #1: The number of COs fired since 1999 is trending upward

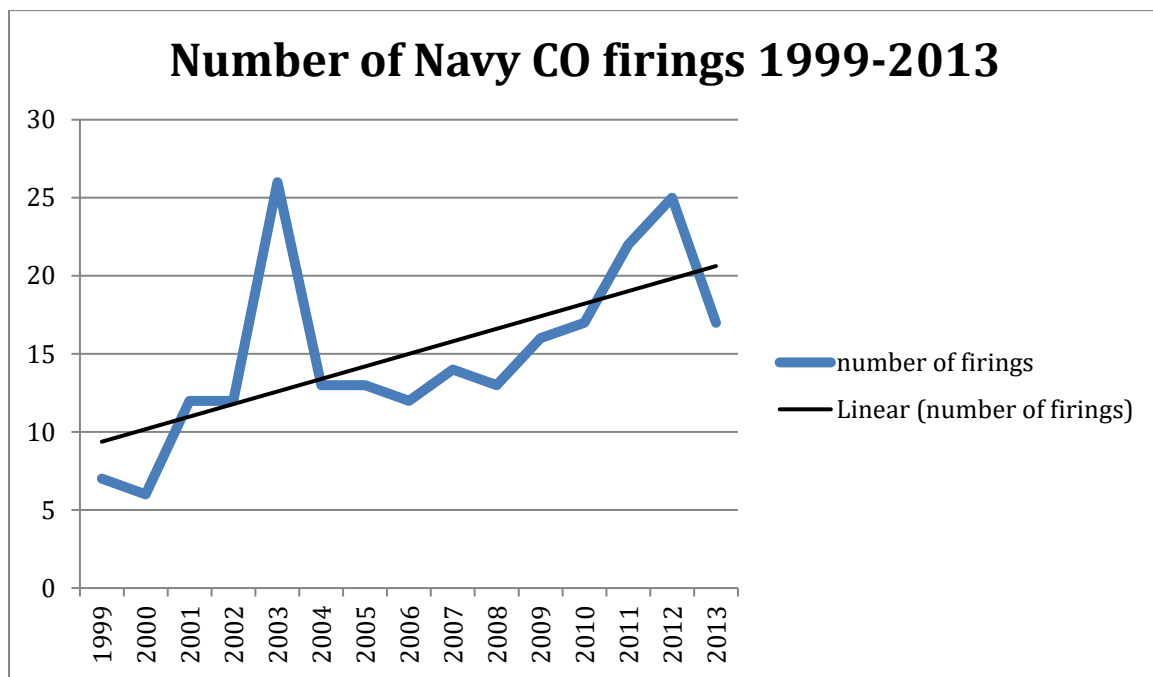


Figure 1

The Navy’s 2010 IG report describes CO firings since 2004 as “fairly consistent but with a slight increase.” (General 2010) With the benefit of additional data now extending to 2013, we can now determine that annual CO firings are not “fairly consistent” as described in the 2010 IG report. Instead, firings are trending upward. Figure (1) Prior to the 2010 report, the average number of CO firings between 1999 and 2009 was 13.1. The average number of CO’s fired in the three following years between 2010 and 2013 jumps to 20.25. This steep increase between 2010 and 2013 reflects 17 firings in 2010, 22 firings in 2011 and 25 firings in 2012. The previous high was in 26 firings in 2003. (Times 2013) A sharp decrease

in numbers of firings after the spike in 2012 may create a sense of hope that the increasing trend might not continue, but the numbers dropped after the 2003 spike as well. While sharp decreases after each spike exist, a review of the data over the past 14 years illuminates the fact that the numbers have in fact trended upward since 1999.

Fact #2: The *percentage* of Navy CO's fired since 1999 is trending upward

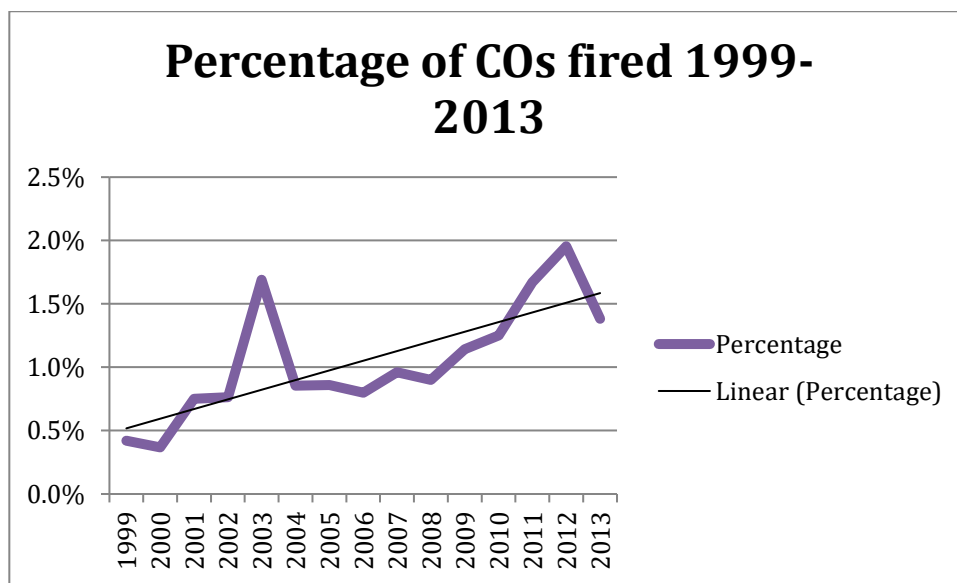


Figure 2

It is important to note that the number of CO's fired annually does not present a complete picture of CO attrition. The Navy has slowly reduced the number of ships, active duty personnel and CO positions since 1999. Navy CO positions have been reduced almost 21% in the past 15 years from 1,665 billets in 1999 to 1,229 billets in 2013. Despite this reduction, the actual number of CO's fired *increased* from an average of 12.6 COs fired annually between 1999 and 2006 to an average of 17 COs fired each year between 2006 and 2013. Figure (2) These CO billets are

divided into 609 operational commands (ships, submarines, aviation squadrons, SEAL teams, etc.) and 629 shore installations (training commands, aviation schools, ROTC units, etc.). (Tilghman 2009, Operations 2014, Director 2013c, b, a) COs have been relieved from a variety of these operational units and shore commands to include fighter squadrons, reserve operations centers, medical facilities, SEAL Teams and nuclear submarines. While the overall percentage of COs fired annually varies, it has never exceeded 2% of the total number of Navy CO positions. As the Navy is quick to highlight, the vast majority of Navy COs successfully complete their tour. (General 2010) For example, the Navy fired less than .8% of COs (12 of 1,500) in 2006 and only 1.4% of COs (17 of 1,229) in 2013. These low percentages provide the Navy with good talking points to downplay the problem of CO firings, however, these percentages are misleading relative to the impact CO firings have on the Navy's mission and personnel.

Fact #3: The percentage of COs fired for character has trended upward between 1999 and 2010

“Competence and character are not mutually exclusive, they are woven together. They must be. And an uncompromising culture of accountability must exist at every level of command.”

- Secretary of Defense Charles “Chuck” Hagel, 2014 (Burns 2014)

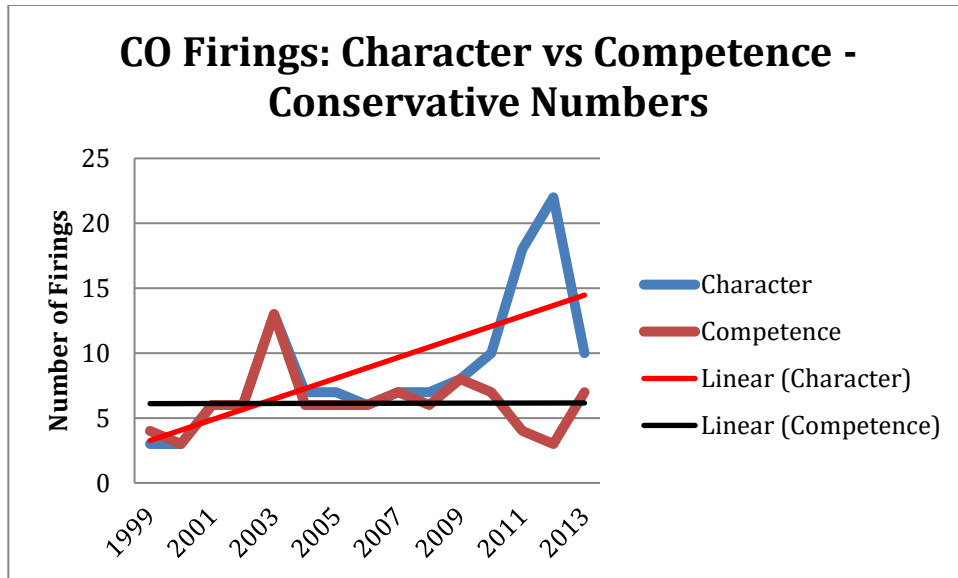


Figure 3

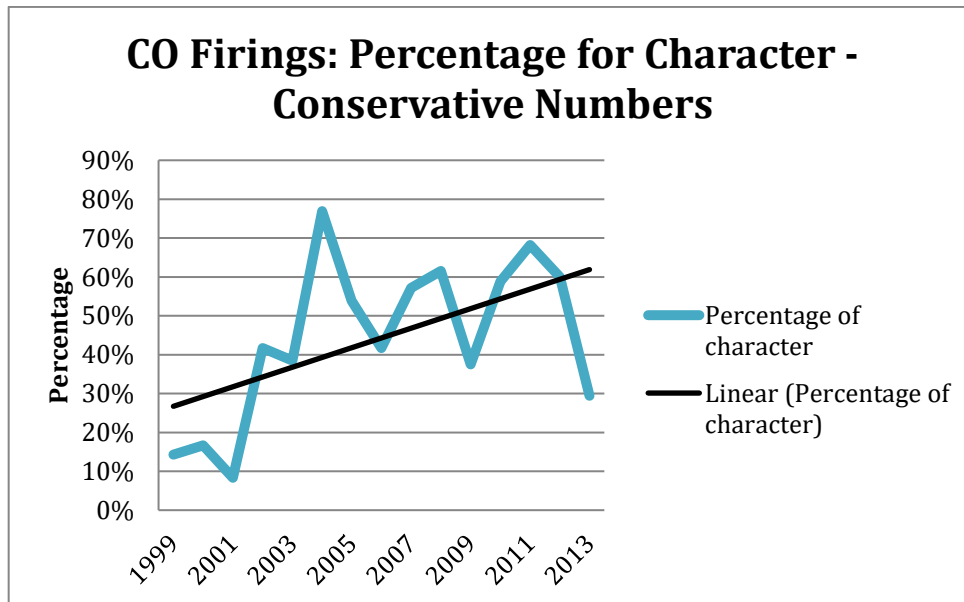


Figure 4

Both the number and percentage of character related firings have trended upward since 1999. Figure (3) and (4) Of note, there has been a statistically significant drop in character related firings in the past year, but this drop is simply

too recent to categorize as a trend. (General 2010, 2004) This increasing trend of character related firings support the current volume of press coverage and senior official commentary on lapses in military ethics and character. However, there is an additional area of particular concern. According to the 2010 Navy IG report, the percentage of firings for character in the ranks of more senior officers increased between 2004 and 2010. Remarkably, each of the ten Navy Captains (O-6) Commanding Officers in 2010 was fired for character related issues. (General 2010) With only 342 total unrestricted line and restricted line O-6 CO billets, 3.7% of the Navy's O-6 COs were fired for character related issues in a single year. (Operations 2014) The majority of firings are for issues of character rather than performance. The number and percentage of performance related firings have actually declined since 1999. The data shows that, with few exceptions, Navy COs are competent and continue to demonstrate the pattern of sustained superior performance that led the Navy to screen and select them for command.

Statistical Analysis

In order to add rigor to the data analysis, I gained the assistance of Gary Larson, a Duke University statistics PHD student. Gary and I reviewed the data with the goal of comparing the average annual proportions of character versus competence firings before and after the 2004 NAVIG. The average proportion of character related firings (conservative numbers) in years prior to and including 2004 (P1) is 32.7%, and the average proportion of character related firings between 2005 and 2013 (P2) is 52.0%. The proportions are calculated as proportion of total firings in each year. This simple comparison shows that there was an observed

increase of about 19.3 percentage points in the average proportion of CO firings for character after 2004.

To test whether this observed difference is statistically significant or whether it is likely to have occurred by chance, we conducted a hypothesis testing by simulation. This technique, also known as a randomization test, randomly reassigns each of the 15 data points to belong to either P1 or P2. Then, a difference in proportions between P2 and P1 is calculated. This reshuffling process is repeated many (~10,000) times to get a so-called sampling distribution of the difference in proportions. That distribution is shown in Figure (5) below and provides an idea of how large a researcher would expect an observed difference in proportion to be under our "null hypothesis." The "null hypothesis" is that there is really no difference in firing rates between P1 and P2 and our observed difference is due to random chance. Next, we draw a vertical line to indicate the actual observed difference in proportion (19.3 percentage points, mentioned above) to illustrate how likely it is under our "null hypothesis."

The distribution of likely values under the null hypothesis is shown in Figure (5), along with a vertical line indicating our actual observed difference of 19.3 percentage points. Note that most of the simulated differences are around 0, reflecting the assumption of our null hypothesis that there is no difference. In fact, only 4% of our simulated values were as large as the difference we observed. (p=0.04, Figure (5)). The p-value of 0.04 means that if there was truly no difference in average annual character-related firing rates between P1 and P2, then there is only a p=4% chance that we would observe a difference of 19.3 percentage points or

higher. Thus it is clear that the difference in proportion of character related firings we saw after 2004 (P2) is rare enough to be considered statistically significant.

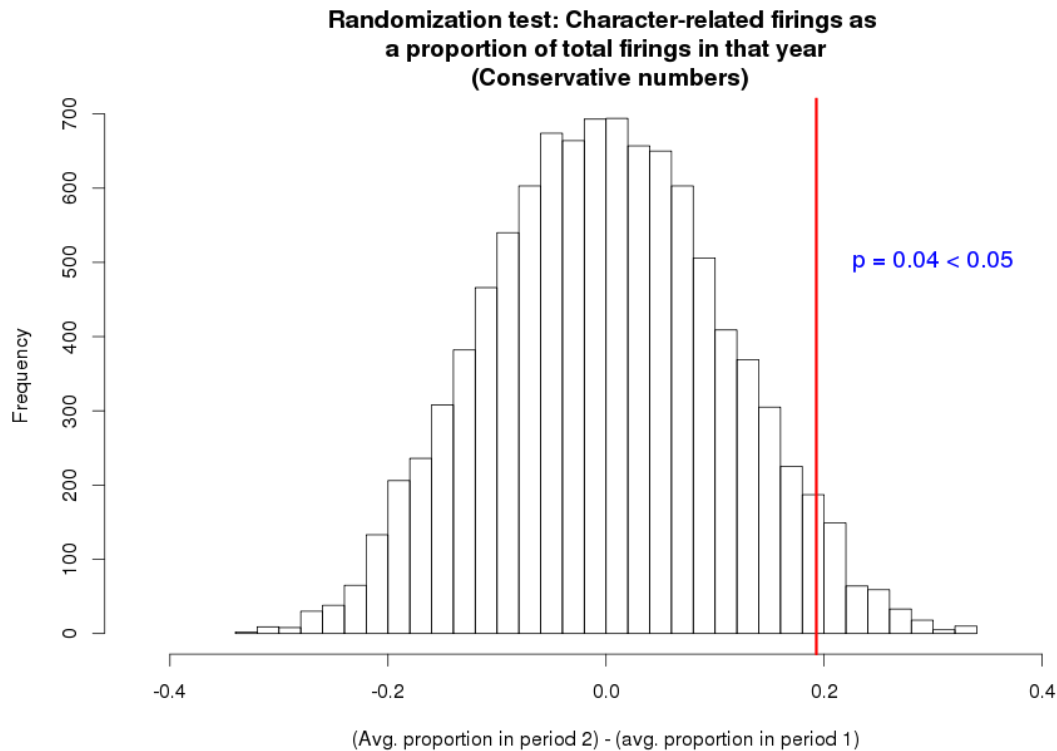


Figure 5

Character versus Competence

As we seek to better understand the data, it is helpful to divide the firings into categories for analysis. In one of the most comprehensive CO firing charts available, the Navy Times separated CO firings into four categories: personal misconduct, command climate, command performance, significant mishap and “reason not known.” (Tilghman 2009) While these distinctions are important, the reality is more straightforward. COs are fired either for issues of character or for issues of competence. While speaking to a group of West Point cadets on leadership in 1991, General Norman Schwartzkopf remarked that “to be a 21st century leader,

you must have two things: competence and character.” (Academy 1991) The current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Army General Martin Dempsey, referenced General Schwartzkopf’s remarks while speaking at Duke University in 2013, and added that “if you could only have one of the two, character or competence, make it character.”(General Martin Dempsey 2013)

Character is generally defined in Webster’s dictionary as “the complex of mental and ethical traits marking and often individualizing a person, group, or nation.”(Merriam-Webster 2014). The author will conduct a more detailed examination into the concept of character in this paper, however, for the purposes of CO firing categorization, character related firings will include CO firings for inappropriate relationships, sexual harassment, driving under the influence / driving while intoxicated (DUI/DWI), alcohol related incidents, adultery, lying, cheating, stealing and lewd or inappropriate conduct. Firings listed as “personal behavior” in the 2004 and 2010 NAVIG will be considered character related. Firings classified as command climate, command performance, significant mishap and “reason not known” may also be characterized as character firings if they resulted from personal behavior rather than technical or technical competence.

Alternatively, competence is defined as “the ability to do something well.”(Merriam-Webster 2014) Competence is of course also required for command. As stated by Professor Sim Sitkin at Duke’s Fuqua School of Business, “The difference between a vision and a hallucination is competence.”(Sitkin 2014) For the purpose of CO firing categorization, competence firings will include those that are not character related and are based primarily on performance in command. Issues

of competence include significant mishaps such as ship groundings, collisions, aircraft accidents, avoidable fatalities and failed inspections. Competence firings also include what the Navy describes as command climate, or the overall environment within a Navy command. A good command climate encourages initiative and mission accomplishment and actively prevents discrimination, bullying or other negative and disruptive behaviors. While command climate firings may fall in either the character or competence category, they are generally the result of poor or caustic leadership. Issues of character may be the underlying cause of the fired CO's style.

Relevance

So outside of bad publicity, why should the Navy care if less than 2% what the Chief of Naval Operations recently described as “a small percentage of the Navy’s Commanding Officers” are fired each year? A study completed by Rice University researcher Yan “Anthea” Zhang reviewed Fortune 500 companies and found that the rate of civilian dismissals, which she defined as leaders departing before 36 months, was slightly over ten percent. (Tilghman 2009). When compared against these numbers, the Navy’s annual rate of firings (below 2%) appears to be insignificant. According to, CAPT John Covell, the Navy Leadership School Commander in 2009, a certain number of firings is not necessarily a bad thing. Instead, he and many others argued, “this is a tough business” and if an officer can’t meet the standards of command he needs to be removed. (Tilghman 2009) Essentially, CAPT Covell presents an argument that the Navy is simply holding itself and its COs more accountable.

CAPT Covell is repeating a theory endorsed in several publications including Tom Ricks's recent release titled The Generals. Mr. Ricks uses the somewhat routine relief of World War II generals to illustrate the point that firing ineffective or incompetent leaders is an example of the system working effectively, and exemplar of the important leadership principle of accountability. (Ricks) However, when applied against the increasing trend in Navy CO firings, this argument fails in both theory and application. Two Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) sailors drowned in a lake in February 2013 due to a lack of supervisor oversight. Their CO was relieved for "a lack of confidence in his ability to command" and faces formal charges of dereliction of duty and involuntary manslaughter. (Fellman 2013a) Of course the Navy would never tell the parents of Navy Diver 1st Class (DSW) James Reyher (28) and Navy Diver 2nd Class (DSW) Ryan Harris (23) that "this is a tough business" and occasionally we have to fire COs. Two percent is a big number when lives and the security of our nation depend on the character and competence of the CO.

When the Navy fires 2% of its COs annually, it is important because this loss is occurring within a *profession*. Character and integrity are sine qua non for the U.S. Navy. Each firing tarnishes that standard and jeopardizes the profession of arms. The comparison between Navy and civilian leadership firing percentages is apples to oranges. It simply does not consider the distinction between a profession and an occupation.

U.S. Navy Regulation states: "The responsibility of the commanding officer for his or her command is absolute." (Navy 2009). These men and women are quite literally responsible for the welfare of their personnel, millions or billions in

military equipment and the effectiveness of the U.S. Navy. The aforementioned relief of three nuclear submarine Commanding Officers within the first two months of 2013 and the Navy diving deaths highlight the significance CO firings. Collectively, these individuals had “absolute responsibility” for hundreds of lives, nuclear reactors, multi-billion dollar submarines and either dozens of non-nuclear tomahawk missiles or several nuclear warheads. A CO’s unremitting responsibility for the lives of other human beings makes these firings significant. The Navy of course cannot ‘hire from the outside’ like a Fortune 500 company. The Navy must grow from within, so when these high-caliber, carefully selected leaders are not successful, we must look to the system that developed these flawed leaders for answers. How many men and women with this extraordinary magnitude of responsibility and authority must be fired before the Navy truly addresses this problem? What type of high-visibility catastrophic problem is required for the Navy to develop a sense of urgency?

The Cost of Firing a Commanding Officer

With few exceptions, the responsibility of a Navy CO for the welfare of their people and readiness of his equipment exceeds that of most Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers. While the cost of firing a Fortune 500 leader will be financial; the cost of firing a Navy CO is multi-faceted. The overall cost of a fired CO falls in four categories: (1) hard costs, (2) impact to command mission, (3) impact on command retention and morale, and (4) impact on civil-military relations. The hard costs associated with CO firings may include death, serious injury, millions in damage to ships or aircraft in cases of collision or grounding, and money wasted on the CO’s

pay, training, relocation, retirement, etc. For example, the CO of a diving and salvage unit was fired in 2013 after two of his divers drowned while training in a lake.

Because the CO is responsible for executing the command's mission, the rapid removal of a commander frequently has a significant impact to ongoing operations, underway periods, inspections, deployments and policy.

The impact of CO firings on command retention and morale and civil-military relations may be visualized using Dr. Cloud's the concept of a "wake" from his book titled Integrity. Dr. Cloud uses the analogy of a boat's wake to assess the impact a leader has on an organization after he or she is gone. (Cloud 2006) In the case of a CO firing, the wake of the outgoing CO is typically corrosive to the people within the command. This corrosive wake also describes the impact a CO firing has on civil military relations. Firing a CO almost every month tarnishes the reputation of the Navy with civilian leadership. Recent high profile cases of misconduct among flag and general officers across the services, two-dozen instances in the past 15 months, put an exclamation point on this issue. President Obama recently wrote General Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the nation's senior military officer, asking the Chairman why there are so many flag and general officer personal misconduct firings when the President was told the problem would be solved. (Whitlock 2014)

While there may be several service common reasons for an increasing trend in CO firings, character related firings pose the greatest threat to civil military relations and Navy retention. Character and ethics are the "sine qua non" (foundation) of the Naval profession. Personal misconduct and lack of character are

anathema to the Navy. They are a violation of the warrior ethic and of the Navy's core values of "honor, courage and commitment." Character related firings severely impact trust throughout the Navy's chain of command. Most significantly, the firings threaten the trust Navy personnel have in their leadership. The violation of a CO's trust with his or her personnel leads to resentment throughout the ranks and disillusionment with the very concept of Naval service.

A review of the Navy's actions to reduce CO Firings

Close examination of this issue reveals that while the Navy has not ignored the problem, it frequently highlights that 98% of Navy COs successfully complete their command tours. As Navy Captain Mark Light asserts in his excellent 2012 *Naval War College Review* article on CO personal misconduct, the Navy lacks a sense of urgency. CAPT Light writes, "beyond public firings, there has been no fundamental effort on the part of senior leadership to elevate the issue to a level that will produce meaningful change." (Light 2012) The Navy's attempt to ameliorate this trend has been inconsistent, haphazard and reactionary. For example, the Navy's first significant effort to understand the issue of CO firings, the 2004 NAVIG study, was initiated only after 26 COs were fired in 2003. Following the 2004 NAVIG, the Navy considered a similar 2009 study by the British Navy, conducted the 2010 NAVIG study and implemented a series of corrections to the Commanding Officer education and training curriculum or "pipeline." Ultimately, the 2004 and 2010 NAVIG studies served as catalysts for change among senior leaders who remains reluctant to label increasing numbers of CO firings a systemic Navy issue.

Despite the NAVIG studies and resulting Navy efforts to understand and reduce the number of CO firings, there is no evidence to indicate that any of the Navy's actions have been successful. Between 2004 and 2013, the Navy took six significant measures to reduce the number of COs fired each year. These measures included (1) the 2004 NAVIG, (2) the 2006 leadership development continuum, (3) the 2010 NAVIG, (4) the 2011 Chief of Naval Operations "Charge of Command" message, (5) the 2012 "Fitness for Command Counseling" requirement, and (6) the 2012 Command Qualification Program message (OPNAV Instruction 1412.14) that lists updated administrative requirements for command. I will begin my analysis with a review of the 2004 NAVIG and discuss each of the remaining five Navy actions listed above in turn.

The first of the Navy's significant corrective actions was a 2004 study completed by the Inspector General that attempted to identify why COs were being fired and what steps the Navy might take to mitigate the problem. The 2004 study failed to identify any factors relating to the 2003 increase in CO firings but made recommended several improvements to the Navy's CO training curriculum. In response to these recommendations, the Navy published a Navy leader continuum. The following 2010 NAVIG re-examined the 2004 NAVIG recommendations and concluded that they did not appear to have an impact on the number of COs fired annually. (General 2010) The 2010 study also failed to identify any factors related to CO firings and recommended additional improvements to the CO training and education pipeline. Based on the 2010 NAVIG recommendations, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead required officers read and sign his 2011 "Charge

of Command” document and the Navy added an additional requirement for “fitness for command” counseling for officers prior to the Navy’s annual commanding officer selection board. The Navy consolidated and published these updated requirements for command in a June 2012 Navy message. Despite these studies and changes to the Commanding Officer training program, the number of CO firings continues to trend upward Figure (1). A close examination of the data reveals that the problem is in fact getting worse; CO firings are increasing in both number and percentage. The Navy has commissioned two detailed manpower studies motivated in part by spikes in CO firings in 2003 (26 COs fired) and 2010 (29 COs fired) (General 2010) and carefully considered a similar Royal Navy study completed in 2009. Following each study, the Navy implemented multiple changes in the prospective Commanding Officer training and education program. In the following pages I will review the 2004 and 2010 Navy Inspector General “Commanding Officer Detached for Cause” studies and examine their recommendations.

The two Navy IG studies in 2004 and 2010 were the most comprehensive and focused Navy efforts to address the issue of CO firings, and their influence can be seen in policy and administrative changes to the Navy’s CO training and education pipeline. For example, after the 2004 study, the Navy formally outlined its Officer Development continuum. After the 2010 study, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Gary Roughead, wrote a letter called “the charge of command” and required each PCO to sign a form to confirm they had read the document before they assumed command. In 2012, the Navy added the requirement for PCO “fitness for command counseling” and released formal guidance on specific administrative steps an

individual must complete before being qualified to command. The two Navy IG studies served as the impetus for each of these administrative policy changes; therefore, I will include and examine each one in the same manner as the specific study recommendations.

2004 Navy Inspector General Detached for Cause Study (2004 NAVIG)

The first significant Navy action to address the issue of CO firings occurred after 26 COs were fired in 2003. The number of CO firings was so egregious that the Navy was essentially forced to address the issue. The Chief of Naval Operations commissioned a Navy Inspector General study to look for trends in the data surrounding the fired COs. The study examined the data to determine if multiple variables including race, sex, age or experience played a role in CO firings. Additionally, the study reviewed officer accession to determine if an individual's commissioning source (Naval Academy, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), or Officer Candidate School (OCS)) correlated to an increased likelihood of firing. The 2004 study, completed by four Navy Captains (O-6), was unable to identify any factors leading to the spike of firings in 2003, but it did make several recommendations. If this study succeeded, we would expect to see a decrease in the number and percentage of fired COs between 2005 and 2013.

The first of these recommendations was to incorporate a "360 degree assessment tool" in the prospective Executive Officer (PXO) training course. A 360-degree assessment generally consists of written feedback from an officer's supervisor, peers and subordinates. A Navy Executive Officer (XO) is generally the second most senior officer in a command after the CO and is responsible for the day-

to-day operations of his or her command. The 2004 NAVIG recommended this task be completed by the Naval Leadership School in Newport, RI where it could simply be added as a new requirement to the existing PXO curriculum. The assessment provides the officer with candid feedback on his or her strengths and weaknesses. By incorporating the 360 assessments into the PXO pipeline, the Navy gained a proven tool for leader development. The Navy implemented the 360 assessments in the CO education pipeline rather soon after the 2004 NAVIG findings were reviewed and the process remains in place today. (General 2004, 2010) Significantly, the prospective CO reviews their 360 evaluation feedback with a faculty member from the Navy Leadership School, but this evaluation data goes no further and has no impact on the PCO's screening or selection for command. By the time the PCO reviews the 360 assessment data, he or she has already been selected for command.

The second 2004 NAVIG recommendation called for the development of a Major Command leadership course. The Navy defines the term "major command" as Captain (O-6) command. Major command is designated as such by the Chief of Naval Operations and requires an additional screening and selection board after the officer has successfully completed Commander (O-5) command. Prior to the 2004 NAVIG, the CO training and education pipeline ended with an O-5 prospective Commanding Officer (PCO) course taught by the Navy Leadership School in Newport, RI. The significant increase in the numbers of major commanders fired in 2003 highlighted the need for additional CO education and the major commanders course was quickly designed and implemented as part of the CO training and education continuum. Of note, the majority of major commanders were fired for

character related issues and the major commander's course uses case studies to address issues of character, integrity and common ethical pitfalls. As with the 360 assessments in the PXO course, the major commanders course remains in operation today. While the major commanders course is likely helpful, its value as a behavioral change mechanism 24 years into an individual's career is questionable.

Seven of the 26 COs fired in 2003 were fired for significant mishaps. These mishaps generally took place aboard navy ships (groundings, collisions, etc.) and resulted from a CO's dereliction of duty to perform "operational risk management" prior to the mishaps. The term "operational risk management (ORM)" is defined as the constant re-assessment of risk during an activity as conditions or factors change. A civilian analogy would be a driver choosing to reduce the speed of her car when faced with conditions of reduced visibility such as snow or rain. As a result of the increased firings for mishaps, the 2004 NAVIG recommended ORM training be improved upon in the surface warfare officer (Navy surface ship force) pipeline. This recommendation was also implemented shortly after the study and remains in effect.

The final recommendation from the 2004 NAVIG was for the Navy to institute "self-assessment training" for all department heads (mid-level managers typically the rank of Lieutenant (O-2) or Lieutenant Commander (O-3)) and XOs. Additionally, the study called for a review of the adequacy of self-assessment training for PCOs. Presumably, the concept of self-assessment training consisted of an individual's personal evaluation of his performance and could generally be categorized as training in self-awareness. Because the Navy never implemented this

recommendation, the exact structure or end state of the intended education and training is unknown.

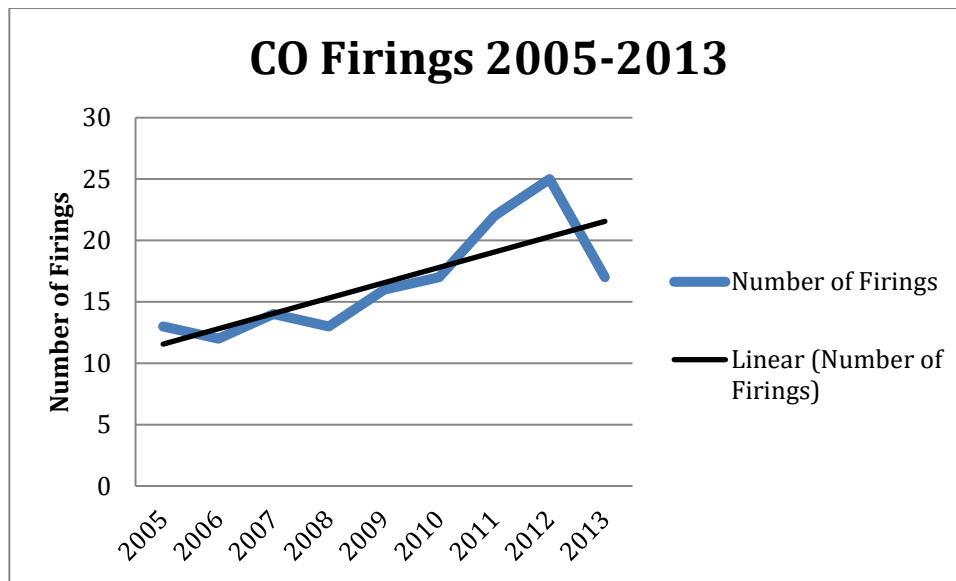


Figure 6

An examination of the CO firing data between 2005 and 2013 Figure (6) demonstrates a consistent upward trend in CO firings after the 2004 NAVIG. Despite the Navy’s implementation of three of the study’s recommendations, the 2004 NAVIG does not appear to have succeeded in reducing the number or percentage of COs fired each year. The Navy appears to have implemented education and training activities without a clear understand of what needed to be educated/trained.

A follow-on action derived from the 2004 NAVIG was the development and publication of the Navy’s officer and enlisted leadership continuum. The document, published by the Navy in January 2006 as an administrative message, begins by saying “leadership is the cornerstone of our Navy and the key to our continued success.” (Operations 2006) Incredibly, despite the critical nature of leadership in the Navy, this message was the first of its kind ever released. The leadership

continuum describes the concept of “position based” leadership development. The concept consists of targeting specific leader development training and education for specific jobs in the Navy. For example, the continuum begins with a course of instruction aimed at the lowest levels of officer and enlisted leadership. As a sailor advances in rank, they progress into increased positions of leadership. At each critical level of leadership, what the Navy refers to as a “milestone” tour, there is a required course of instruction to enable the sailors’ success in their next position. The 2004 NAVIG identified a lack of clear education and training requirements in CO development. The Navy’s subsequent development of a formal continuum signified a long-term approach to eventual reduction in the number of fired COs. Like the other 2004 NAVIG recommendations, with the establishment of a leadership continuum, we would expect to see CO firings trend downward. The Navy implemented this program in 2006 and the first class of junior officers to completed the entire continuum through the position of CO will not be selected for O-5 command until approximately 2020. The data does not demonstrate any impact from the published leadership continuum; however, it is simply to soon to tell if it will eventually play a role in the reduction of fired COs.

2010 Navy Inspector General Detached for Cause Study (2010 NAVIG)

The 2010 NAVIG study constitutes the Navy’s most comprehensive and informed analysis on the issue of CO firings. The Navy’s stated purpose for the study was to “determine if there are any systemic causes for recent DFC cases and to determine if measures to mitigate these causes could be implemented.”(General 2010) This study was completed by three Navy Captains (O-6) and a Navy

Commander (O-5) and had a sample size of approximately 1,500 COs who commanded between 1 Jan 2005 and 30 June 2010. The team began with the 2004 NAVIG and accumulated data on gender, commissioning source, age, sex, race, personality traits, etc., to determine if any of these variables might be connected with the likelihood of a CO being fired. Like the 2004 study, the 2010 NAVIG team determined, "There was no correlation between CO DFCs and career paths, personality traits, accession sources, time in command, or year groups." (General 2010) The 2010 NAVIG team's interpretation of the 2004 NAVIG's effectiveness is worth noting for context at this point in the analysis. Despite an admitted lack of "empirical data" to validate their conclusion, the 2010 team still insisted that the 2004 NAVIG recommendations were effective in reducing the number of CO firings between 2005 and 2010. (General 2010) The manner in which the team reached that conclusion was not based on data and is not specifically described anywhere else in the 2010 NAVIG document.

The report documented 80 CO firings between 2005 and 2010. As with this paper, CO firings were defined as DFCs or early reliefs from command, but only included COs in the rank of Commander (O-5) through Captain (O-6). The 2010 study divided the 80 firings as 12 significant event (collision, death of a crew member at sea, striking a buoy or colliding with a pier), 14 firings for command performance (failure of major inspections or poor performance of at-sea maneuvers), eleven firings for poor command climate, and an extraordinary 43 CO firings for personal misconduct. The report also determined that 44% of the COs

fired between 2005 and 2010 did not attend command leadership school as was directed in the 2006 navy leadership continuum message.

The 2010 report developed several conclusions based upon their review of the data. On the topic of numbers of COs fired, the 2010 report stated that CO firings since 2004 were “fairly consistent but had a slight increase and held annually at about 12 firings plus or minus 4.” (General 2010) Additionally, the team concluded that the majority of the CO firings were for misconduct and 100% of the Captain (O-6) reliefs in 2010 were for inappropriate relationships. While the 2010 NAVIG team based their conclusions on their data, they still remained optimistic. The team concluded that the “2004 study recommendations did not appear to have an impact on DFC rates,” and “DFC rates between 2004 and 2010 have remained fairly constant.”(General 2010) Yet the writers then wrote, “Although there is no empirical evidence to support our conclusion, The 2004 study’s recommendations may have contributed to fewer DFCs,” (General 2010)

Perhaps the most significant of the 2010 study’s conclusions from a research perspective was: “The very low rate of approximately one percent of COs being relieved annually for cause coupled with the relatively large sample size (approximately 1,500 COs) and the small variance in the number of DFCs on a year-to-year basis *prevent making statistical inferences with any significant degree of confidence.*” (*Italics added for emphasis*)(General 2010) Essentially, the research team argued that there simply was not enough data to determine there were systemic causes for the DFCs. Despite this conclusion, the 2010 study made three primary recommendations to lower the number of fired COs.

The first recommendation was for the Navy to develop an officer leadership training continuum from initial accession in the Navy through Major command. The goal of this training continuum would be to develop the skills required to be a successful CO. While the 2010 study did not mention the Navy leadership continuum published in 2006, this new continuum would presumably build upon the existing training and education requirements for officers at each career milestone position. This new leadership and training continuum would require 360 degree assessment and psychometric personality testing. Most significantly, the study recommended the continuum focus on character development through the “development of interpersonal skills and character, self awareness and self correction training.” (General 2010)

While the Navy has not yet released an officer leadership and training continuum or published any changes to the 2006 Navy leader continuum, the Navy has increased its requirements for command screening eligibility. In June of 2012, the Navy released a message titled “The Command Qualification Program (OPNAV 1412.14)” which outlines the minimum standards for an officer to be screened for command. The first requirement for eligibility is for the officer to attend the Navy’s Command Leadership School (CLS) in Newport, RI. Additionally, the officer must complete a written examination, complete a 360 degree feedback assessment at CLS, be certified as “professionally qualified” by his or her community within the Navy, and successfully complete an oral board administered by a group of command screened officers senior to the officer being interviewed. (Operations 2012) These new requirements are less than two years old and their effectiveness in reducing the

number of CO's fired annually may be difficult to accurately assess. Additionally, they were implemented in an episodic nature rather than immersed within a larger cohesive context of character development.

The second 2010 NAVIG recommendation was to “improve immediate superior in command (ISIC) oversight of COs.” (General 2010) ISICs for O-5 COs are generally referred to as “Commodores.” A Commodore is typically a Navy Captain who has successfully completed O-5 command. Examples of O-5 ISICs include destroyer squadron commanders and SEAL group commanders. ISICs for O-6 COs generally hold the rank of Rear Admiral. Examples of O-6 ISICs include an Aircraft Carrier Battle Group Commander and the senior leader of the Navy SEAL community. While the Navy has not published specific guidance directing ISICs to increase their oversight of their subordinate COs, several new ISIC oversight duties and responsibilities are included in Navy guidance released in response to the 2010 NAVIG. Examples include those described earlier in this paper from the Navy's new Command Qualification Program such as ISIC participation in an oral board. The ISIC will also be involved in the prescribed establishment of a professional qualification standard validation process. (Operations 2012)

The third recommendation called for “the enforcement of existing requirements for command climate assessments.” (General 2010) Command climate assessments are a Navy survey tool designed to identify positive and negative trends in morale and readiness. Each CO is required to initiate a command climate assessment within 90 days of assuming command. The command climate assessment process requires each member of the command to complete an online survey that ask questions on a

variety of subjects including sexual harassment, equal opportunity, command leadership effectiveness and command morale. The results are collated and presented to the CO as findings. Upon receipt of the results, the CO is required to take action to address each negative finding. (operations 2011) The Navy has adjusted its command climate assessment review procedures based on the 2010 NAVIG recommendation. COs are now required to conduct a face to face debrief with their ISIC to review their command climate assessment findings. The CO must review each finding with his or her ISIC and then describe what actions he or she will take to correct problem areas or build upon successful programs identified in the assessment. According to the Navy, this new command assessment debrief requirement provides the ISIC an opportunity to mentor the CO. (Command 2014b) These last two 2010 NAVIG recommendations appear to acknowledge that many of the CO firings, particularly those involving command climate and personal misconduct, may have been prevented by increased mentorship, involvement and attention from the fired CO's senior commander.

The 2010 NAVIG resulted in an additional, significant action outside of the recommendations. The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Gary Roughead, commissioned the 2010 NAVIG and served as the CNO from 2007 through 2011. Admiral Gary Roughead took the first step in response to the findings when he released his "Charge of Command" memorandum and signing requirement on 9 June 2011. In this document, Admiral Roughead explains the responsibility of the CO to "serve as a good example of honor and virtue." (Roughead 2009) Additionally, Admiral Roughead emphasizes the critical nature of building and sustaining trust

while in command. He concludes the memo with a reminder for the PCO to “conduct yourself everyday in a manner worthy of the responsibility you have been given.”

(Roughead 2009) Admiral Roughead’s memorandum addressed the connection between character and command and remains required reading for all PCOs.

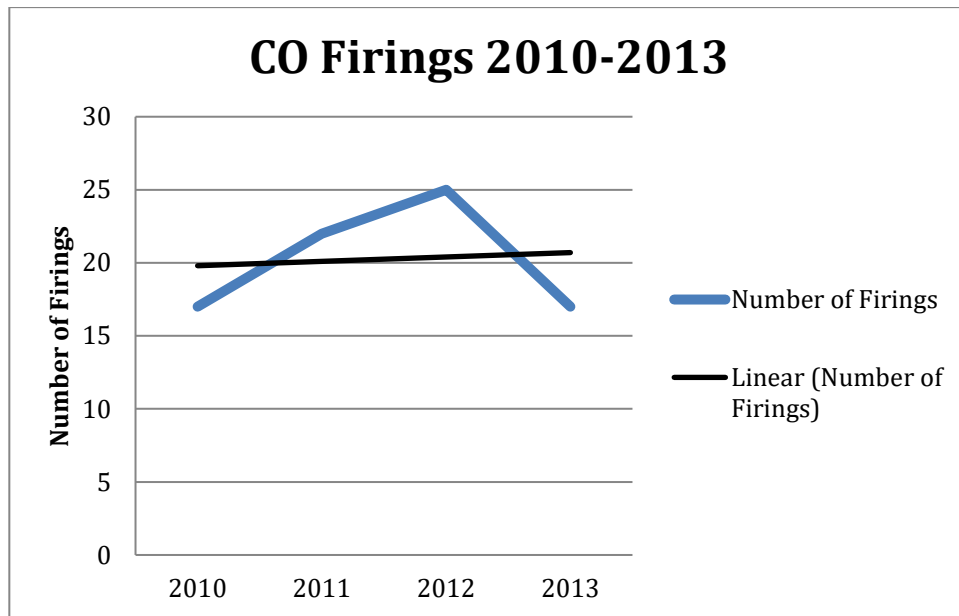


Figure 7

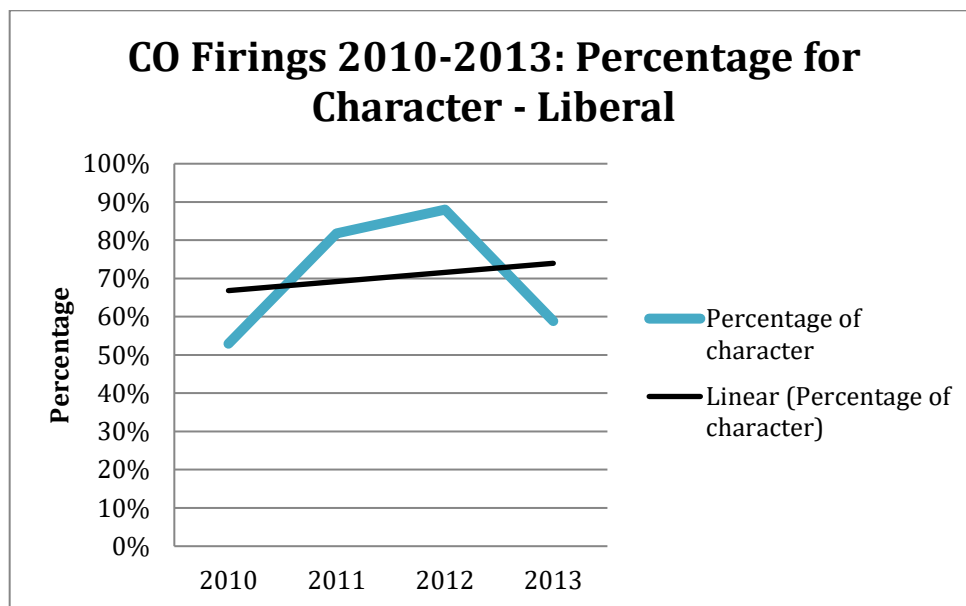


Figure 8

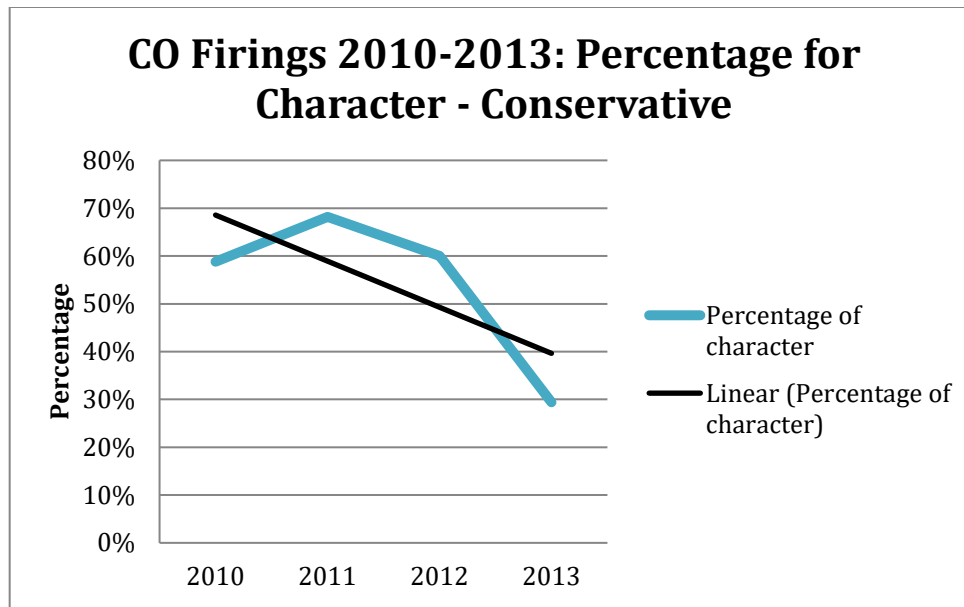


Figure 9

If these recommendations and follow-on actions were effective, we would expect to see the decreasing trend in the number of firings between 2011 and 2013 we see in the conservative interpretation of the data. Figure (9) versus the increasing trend displayed in the liberal interpretation of the data. Figure (8) As a reminder, I was not able to determine exactly why several COs were fired using open source data. There were three unknown firings in 2011, seven unknown firings in 2012, and five unknown firings in 2013. The liberal interpretation is that all of these unknown firings were character related. The conservative interpretation of the unknown firings is that none were character related. An examination of the firing data in Figures (7), (8) and (9) shows the firing trends in firing numbers remains positive and the trend in firings for character is essentially unknown. The Navy fired a total of 63 COs between 2011 and 2013, an average of 21.3 COs a year or 1.7 COs each month. Despite the slight increase in CO firing trend lines between 2010 and 2013,

the short time period between the Navy's actions and this report simply does not allow for an accurate assessment of the effectiveness of the Navy actions to reduce CO firings taken after the 2010 NAVIG.

Discussion

Should the Navy target character development in the CO training and education pipeline to reduce CO firings?

"This is hand to hand combat."

- Gus Lee, Author of Courage, the Backbone of Leadership, describing the behavioral practice required for character development, 2014

While the Navy's Command Leadership School is a tremendous institution, you can't teach character the way you teach a subject like mathematics or science. Character is taught through practice, much in the same way a student learns to play an instrument. (Hartman 2013) Specifically, character is taught through practicing the behaviors and habits of courage. The term *behavioral practice* describes the process and content required for character development. Gus Lee describes behavioral practice as "more like learning piano or conducting airborne operations" than classroom instruction. (Lee 2014) Character development comes from practicing the behaviors and habits of courage." (Lee 2014) One has to look to the Navy's culture, and the behavior that is reinforced throughout the Navy; that is overlooked because of a "failure to get it right; vice just getting along." (LeBoeuf 2014)

The progression for character development is first behavior, then habit, then disposition. (Lee 2014) The change in an individual's disposition is *advancement*. Advancement is the end state or goal of character development. Therefore,

developing leaders of character requires training, education that result in advancement. CLS techniques are must be reviewed. The Navy's actions to reduce CO firings have certainly been positive, however, the techniques may be refined and improved. While most Naval Officers would consider themselves students of character development, their education is through the school of hard knocks verses behavioral practice. Currently, character development is not even listed as a CLS PCO school objective. (Command 2014a) As Gus Lee states, "This is a tough mission. Most of us simply don't know how to do it." (Lee 2014)

The Navy's actions have been focused on training for compliance rather than on character based leading. Gus Lee's review of this situation from the perspective of a prior Army officer and character development expert is enlightening and passionate, "We simply don't get this. We look at the numbers, wave our arms around and issue orders for more case studies, PowerPoint lectures and inspirational speakers." The Navy's Command Leadership School (CLS) PCO two-week curriculum consists of almost exactly what Mr. Lee dismissively describes above: seven case studies, six or seven guest speakers, 360 degree assessment counseling, over a dozen PowerPoint presentations, a Myers Briggs personality indicator test, two socials and a trip to visit the Navy's boot camp at Great Lakes. (Command 2014a) It is outside the scope of this paper to review and assess the CLS PCO course of instruction. However, the data indicates that the trend in number, percentage and characterization of CO firings is increasing under the current curriculum. *There may be value in the Navy examining the CLS PCO program to*

determine if true character development education and training, to include significant behavioral practice, can be utilized at CLS to reverse the trend in CO firings.

Should the Navy consider character assessment in the CO selection process?

“A cardinal principle of cognitive psychology is that once we form a belief, or are predisposed to believe something, we are loath to qualify let alone discard it.”

- Historian Richard H. Immerman (Immerman 2008)

Perhaps deficiencies in the Navy’s established CO training and education pipeline are not ultimately responsible for the increasing number of fired COs. The quote from Mr. Immerman’s on cognitive psychology serves as a good segway into the second hypothesis on why the Navy’s attempts to reduce the number of CO firings have failed. While the Navy has made adjustments to its training and education pipeline in an attempt to reduce CO firings, the Navy’s solutions have not addressed the CO screening and selection process. In other words, while the Navy has placed important attention on CO training and education, it has ignored CO screening and selection. In order to reduce the number and percentage of COs fired annually, the Navy should consider changes to the core elements of the CO screening and selection process, the Navy fitness report and CO selection board systems. The current system does not include character assessment as a qualification standard for CO selection.

The Navy is a profession that places tremendous value on tradition and structure. The Navy’s leadership is a product of the current CO screening and assessment process system. These Navy leaders have succeeded; therefore, they are predisposed to believe in the effectiveness of a system that rewarded them for their performance and enabled their success. This predisposed, cultural belief in the

sanctity of the existing fitness report (FITREP) and Millington CO selection board process has stymied the Navy's efforts to reverse the increasing trend in CO firing numbers, percentages and characterizations. As mentioned in the introduction, *The Navy does not believe there is a problem with the way it screens and selects COs.* However, the CO firing data suggests that the CO selection process is somehow flawed.

The Navy's CO screening and selection process is primarily based on an officer's FITREPs. Reporting seniors (senior officer in a subordinate officer's chain of command) complete FITREPs for each Navy officer annually, upon a change in duty stations, or upon the relief of the officer's CO. (Personnel 2011) The subordinate officer reviews the FITREP signs the report before it becomes part of their permanent military record. The Navy's CO selection board consists of a rigorous and efficient annual board process in Millington, TN. The selection board members are senior Navy officers who have successfully completed CO tours at the level of command they are selecting. This board makes their decisions on an officer's potential for command based primarily on patterns of sustained, superior performance reflected within an officer's FITREPs. Because the Navy's FITREP system is performance based, the Navy's CO selection board process is unable to incorporate character as a variable for CO selection. Essentially, the lack of character assessment data may create flawed results from within what is an otherwise effective Navy CO screening board process.

The 2010 NAVIG team reviewed the records of 80 COs fired between 2005 and 2010 and concluded that "without exception, we found no record that

documented misconduct or substandard performance.” (General 2010) How is that conclusion possible if the Navy’s performance evaluation system provides an accurate assessment of an officer’s potential for success in command? The answer lies in a quote from Phil Quast, a retired Vice Admiral who serves as the Navy’s Executive Learning Officer, a key advisor on professional development matters and a lecturer at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA. “Screening the best future leaders is made difficult by the fact that fitness reports *rarely include candid comments and thoughtful insights about an officer’s performance and potential.*” (Italics added for emphasis)(Tilghman 2009) This is essentially a ‘garbage in, garbage out’ kind of perspective. If the fitness reports do not provided the right information for making character based decisions, then the outcomes will be flawed. Additionally, the zero defect mentality that still permeates our wartime military and creates “optimistic” FITREP reports will grow stronger as we return to a peacetime force.

A recent, high profile example of Vice Admiral Quast’s theory is the ongoing sexual assault trial of Army Brigadier General (BG) Jeffrey Sinclair. While the Army and Navy use different formats, both services lack a method for incorporating character assessment into their fitness reports. A recent article in the New York Times examining the Sinclair sexual assault case quoted several lines from BG Sinclair’s past fitness reports. The Times included a line from a 1998 evaluation by then Commander of the 75th Ranger Regiment, Stanley A. McChrystal, that described Sinclair as “one of the most talented majors in the Army.” Another quoted a 2005 fitness report written by Maj. Gen. John Batiste that described Sinclair as “the top

battalion commander in his division and the best of 57 lieutenant colonels he was responsible for rating.”(Jr 2014) The Times article highlights the dichotomy between BG Sinclair’s fitness reports and his predisposition to “exchange emails of a sexual nature with female junior officers.”(Jr 2014)

The potential for dichotomy between fitness reports and an officer’s character described by the New York Times in the case of BG Sinclair is a systemic problem within the Navy’s CO screening and selection process. BG Sinclair is just one of hundreds of examples of senior officer derailment. The Navy FITREP and CO screening board process encourages a Navy climate of “willful blindness.” A senior officer may be aware of an officer’s character issues but choose not to document the problems in the officer’s FITREP. The senior officer understands that the FITREP documentation will negatively impact their subordinate’s ability to promote, so the senior officer may tolerate or even passively enable the negative behavior. A senior officer may engage in willful blindness and rationalize the negative behavior as isolated or simply a matter of immaturity that will take care of itself over time.

Ultimately, fitness report input may be based as much on an officer’s time in position and relative seniority as on performance. As previously discussed, many senior officers subscribe to a do-no-harm mentality when they report on their subordinates. An officer will generally continue to receive positive FITREPS if their performance is acceptable and not impacted by the officer’s behavior outside of the work environment. Reporting seniors typically do not include observations on an officer’s underlying problems with drinking, integrity or even immoral behavior. Such remarks would immediately arrest the junior officer’s opportunity for

advancement. A senior Naval officer within the Navy's Bureau of Naval Personnel in Millington, TN, eloquently described reporting seniors as "optimistic" in their assessments of junior officers."² The 2010 NAVIG highlighted this issue with their conclusion that there was no documentation of misconduct in any of the fired CO records. (Operations 2012, General 2010) While it is unlikely the COs fired for character issues such as personal misconduct or inappropriate relationships began that behavior in command, the Navy continues to ignore the "optimistic" nature of the FITREP system. The Navy instead attempted to solve the problem through additional screening requirements such as an oral board and professional qualification standards. (Operations 2012) Not one of the Navy's actions to reduce CO firings modify or change the Navy's entrenched manpower process for CO screening and selection.

The Navy is aware of the seam between performance and character in the FITREP and CO selection board process. In 2012, Fleet Forces Commander Admiral John Harvey was tasked by the Vice Chief of Naval Operations to assess the feasibility of including 360-degree assessments in the CO screening and selection process. Admiral Harvey reviewed the issue as directed but his recommendation rejected the inclusion of 360 assessment results in CO selection boards. Admiral Harvey's reasons for not recommending 360-degree assessments highlighted the difficulty of coordinating the assessments with the CO selection board annual

² This Navy officer has successfully completed multiple tours as a CO and multiple tours on the Navy manpower staff. His observation of reporting seniors as "optimistic" has tremendous credibility based on his previous experience. The Navy remains understandably sensitive on the issue of CO firings and this officer requested to remain anonymous.

periodicity.³ This paper will not prescribe methods to incorporate character assessment into the Navy's CO screening and selection process. However, the Navy may reduce the number of CO firings for character related issues if it effectively observes and reports on character in officer FITREPs.

Should the Navy train its leaders to observe and evaluate character?

Only two of the Navy actions discussed in this paper attempt to address character development and assessment outside of the Navy's Command Leadership School. The first is Admiral Roughead's 2011 "Charge of Command" document and the second is the 2012 "Fitness for Command" screening board, now referred to as the "oral board" in the Navy's 2012 "Command Qualification Program" instruction (OPNAV 1412.14). After the 2010 NAVIG, Admiral Roughead understood that an officer's official record was not always an accurate assessment of their character. His Charge of Command document and signing requirement targeted the demonstrated gaps in self awareness and character demonstrated by many of the fired COs. In 2012, the Navy introduced fitness for command counseling (oral board) as a last ditch attempt to assess an officer's character before he or she was allowed to screen for command. While well intended, these actions have thus far not reduced an increasing trend in CO firings. While Admiral Roughead's Charge of Command document is powerful and eloquent, the number of CO firings continued upward after it was introduced as a pre-requisite for command.

³ This information was taken from a series of non-attributable e-mails. However, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations' tasking of Fleet Forces Command to assess the potential of including 360 assessments in the CO selection board process is documented in classified Navy communication.

While it is simply too early to determine the success of the fitness for command counseling, the process is inherently and fatally flawed. Fitness for command counseling calls for one O-6 major commander and two post-O-5 commanders to pre-screen officers for command through an oral board.(Operations 2012) Essentially, the Navy deems the counselors qualified to determine an individual's readiness for command screening based on the fact they have successfully completed an O-5 level CO tour. Each of these officers was selected for CO based on a pattern of sustained superior performance in their FITREPs. This paper has previously demonstrated that an officer's selection to CO does not include an assessment of their character. The fitness for command counselors were not trained to assess character, or required to understand character development in command, yet the Navy relies on them to observe and assess an officer's character in an oral board. The Navy may want to re-consider relying on these un-trained and un-assessed post O-5 CO counselors for last-ditch PCO character assessment and screening. Instead, character assessment should be completed during each milestone tour using one of several existing tools (360 assessments for example) and this assessment should be included as part of their FITREP. By the time the officer is eligible for CO screening, the Navy will have a record of the officer's character, and the officer's character development will have benefitted from the process. Fitness for command counseling would be superfluous.

Admiral Harvey's previously mentioned rejection of 360 assessments in the CO screening and selection process was likely the correct decision at the time. Dr. Joe LeBoeuf (Colonel, USA (ret)), a professor at Duke University's Fuqua School of

Business, identified this issue during an interview when he stated, “the services (Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines) do not train and educate their officers to be observers and evaluators of character.” It therefore stands to reason that before the Navy races to include some form of character assessment (360 degree assessments, fitness for command counseling, etc....) in the CO screening and selection process, *it must first train its personnel to become observers and evaluators of character.* The inclusion of character assessment in the CO screening and selection process will not be effective without accurate data from trained personnel.

Recommendations

1) Incorporate character assessment into the Navy FITREP and selection board process. The Navy recognizes the importance and associated risk of the Commanding Officer’s authority but has not seriously confronted the lack of character assessment in the CO screening and selection process. The Navy appears to assume character and integrity are prerequisites, or at the very least by-products of sustained superior performance. In order to more accurately screen officers for CO and reverse the increasing trend of character related CO firings, the Navy should modify the existing FITREP and selection board process. Potential methods for character screening in the CO selection process include 360-degree evaluations at each level of command and additional requirements for command climate assessments. The Navy might consider moving the existing CLS 360-degree evaluation process from CLS to the operational commands. Each of the Navy’s senior leaders is a product of the existing performance based system; therefore, external academic or consulting assistance in method development is essential for

real change. Additionally, the Navy should consider a review of the U.S. Army's recently updated Officer Efficiency Report (OER) process.

The Navy is not the only service experiencing an increase in character related firings. As was illustrated in the case of Brigadier General Sinclair, the Army's OER system did not provide an accurate or complete assessment of an officer's character. The Army acknowledged the shortfall and recently made significant changes in their officer evaluation process to prevent "optimistic" reporting and to include character assessment. "Raters will be asked to write about an officer's character; "presence," which includes professional conduct; intellect; leadership ability; ability to develop subordinates; and ability to achieve their mission." (Lopez 2013) The Navy may also consider transition to a web based system of evaluation in order to seamlessly integrate selected character assessment tools such as the CLS web based 360 feedback report process into officer evaluations.

2) Target character development in the CO training and education pipeline.

Character development behavioral training resulting in advancement should be the goal of the Navy's programmatic leadership education and training activities. It should be included in the mission statement of the Navy's Officer education and training continuum to include the Command Leadership School's PXO, PCO and Major Command courses. There are several effective methods to develop character including consistent behavioral practice and events that incorporate physical and mental adversity. The Navy will be well served by enlisting the assistance of character development experts in academia, and industry to provide an educated,

external perspective and recommendations for incorporating improved character development techniques into the CLS curriculum.

3) Educate and Train Navy Leaders to be observers of character. Character education, training and assessment ultimately depend on an individual's ability to observe and evaluate character. Without training Navy officers to become observers and evaluators of character, the character data may be flawed and the Navy's performance based reporting system could be replaced by CO selection based on popularity. This training should begin with the commissioning sources and continue as part of the Navy leader training continuum at each phase of an officer's career.

4) Commission an annual study to review and assess CO firing rates, but use the right tool (external analysts). The effectiveness of the navy's actions to reverse the increasing trend in CO firings will require accurate metrics. While the 2004 and 2010 NAVIG studies succeeded in framing the issue of CO firings, the authors are not professional statisticians or data analysts. The authors were Naval officers operating outside their field of expertise. Additionally, these officers were challenged to provide unbiased feedback because they were products of the very system they were tasked to critique. As CAPT Light emphasized in his article, the Navy must demonstrate a sense of urgency and seriously address the increasing trend in CO firings.(Light 2012) In the case of CO firings, getting serious requires the leverage of external perspective and expertise. The Navy should consider commissioning the next CO DFC study using both management consultant organizations and civilian university research faculty. Additionally, close monitoring of CO firing data is essential to determine if many of the Navy's post

2010 DFC study will be effective. With attention to detail, outside assistance and Navy leader oversight, the number of COs failing in command may be reduced.

5) Commission a study to conduct a careful examination of the Navy's culture.

As in the other services, the Navy has a “getting along” and not a “getting it right” culture. (LeBoeuf 2014) This is reflected in the willful blindness and reporting senior optimism discussed earlier in this paper. Demonstrations of poor character may be overlooked and not reported in a system where poor marks on a FITREP early in an officer's career could end an individual's chances for advancement and command. Bad behavior may also be overlooked in the performance based Navy culture as long as the person in question achieves the desired results. Character is directly influenced by culture and an examination of Navy culture is essential for placing character development front and center at every level of Navy leadership.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Navy currently faces an increasing trend in number and percentage of CO firings between 1999 and 2013. Figures (1) and (2) Additionally, the percentage of CO firings for issues of character is also trending upward between 1999 and 2013. Figures (3) and (4) These increasing trends are quite simply a threat to the Navy's mission. Each CO firing erodes the trust and confidence of the Navy's civilian leadership and ultimately places at risk the continued authority and accountability civilian leadership affords Navy COs. *If the Navy fails to reverse the increasing trend of CO firings, the authority of command may be put at risk.* The Navy's public affairs theme that 98% percent of COs successfully complete their command tour insistence that “this is not a systemic problem” (Light 2012) ignores

the fact that the Navy is a profession and derails the Navy's sense of urgency. Several excellent articles written by current Naval officers have described CO firings as a "cause for alarm" and stated "alarms should be sounding at the highest levels of Navy leadership." (Drennan 2013) Implementation of this paper's five recommendations will initiate a sense of urgency critical to the Navy's long term reduction in COs fired annually.

Unlike the 2004 and 2010 NAVIG, this paper did not attempt to answer the "why" of CO firings or identify factors that may cause COs to derail in command. Instead, this paper reviewed the six significant actions the Navy took to address the problem of CO firings: (1) The 2004 NAVIG study, (2) The 2006 establishment of a Navy Leader Continuum, (3) The 2010 NAVIG study, (4) the 2011 required reading of Admiral Roughead's "charge of command," (5) The 2012 requirement for "fitness for command" counseling of officers prior to command screening by post-COs, and (6) the 2012 publication of the Navy "Command Qualification Program." (OPNAV 1412.14) Further examination of the Navy's actions to address the issue of fired COs highlights a Navy focus on modifications to training and education verses modifications to this well established board process in Millington, TN. This review determined that the Navy's actions have failed to reduce the increasing trend of CO firings because they don't address the underlying causes of the problem: (1) character development is not a stated goal in the CO training and education pipeline, (2) character assessment is not included in the CO screening and selection process, and (3) Navy leaders are not trained to observe and assess character.

In his Charge of Command, Admiral Roughead's writes: "Command is the foundation upon which our Navy rests." (Roughead 2009) Taken at face value, the increasing number and percentage of fired COs represents an existential threat to the Navy. Yet the Navy's actions to correct the problem have been short-term and superficial. We need not look far to find charges of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and adultery against the senior Army officer Brigadier General Sinclair are fueling a congressional battle over the right of the commander to retain authority over sexual assault and harassment cases. The most significant threat to the credibility of the Naval profession is the character related firings. It is an impossible task to explain to Congress and the American people how the CO of a multi-billion dollar nuclear submarine could be accused of faking his own death to break ties with his impregnated mistress. (Fellman 2012) The Navy cannot afford inaction. This paper has outlined a way ahead, now it is time for the Navy's leadership to move aggressively and protect the Navy's foundation of command.

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