



CAPT G. Mark Hardy III, USN
National VP for Professional Development

Running Up the Flagpole

first screening, only a fraction of the records remain. Even if the OSR cover page is stamped “LETTER TO THE BOARD,” letters and records eliminated in this first pass are not examined. However, interested board members may access the hard copy letter.

Reputation

Remaining records are reviewed and briefed in the same manner as other selection boards. Voting members review records, read letters, and mark up OSR/PSRs before presenting them to the other board members in the Tank. This is where service reputation helps.

A majority, but not all, of the typically eleven flag officers on the panel are reserve component (RC), per SECNAV-INST 1401.3. Thus, high visibility within only the RC may be insufficient to carry all the votes. RC officers who are known to the fleet have an advantage. Most

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records that survive the vote to brief are keenly competitive. Board members look for strong fitness reports (FITREPs), especially as a unit CO, signed by O-8s or O-9s, with recommendations for “FLAG” in blocks 40 and 41. After the first review, brief, and vote, the board may select one or two singularly stellar records for promotion. A large number are removed from further consideration. The handful of remaining records return to the “crunch” to be rebriefed.

Relationships

Remaining records represent officers who would make outstanding choices for flag. However, the board usually is limited to four selections. Flag mentors likely speak up for their protégés. Positive comments based on personal experience of several board members could make the difference between two similar records. Thus, being well-known by flag officers can be immensely helpful. One officer promoted to flag stated nine of the eleven

officers on the board knew him personally. It was his last look before mandatory retirement; and he made it. One cannot predict this; it’s simply a matter of chance.

Traditionally, the unrestricted line board each year selects two surface warriors and two aviators, with a submarine officer selected every other year. But this is not a rule, and has NOT been exactly the case in the recent past. The board is mindful of the needs of the Navy Reserve and makes its choices with “Where can we assign this flag officer?” in mind. An officer’s “assignability” may depend upon civilian career flexibility, geographic location, billet assignment diversity, and special expertise.

The Road Less Traveled

What can one do to prepare better for flag? Years ago, a captain told me his flag mentor called him aside and told him, “You’ve got flag potential, but you need to do certain things.” Most are common sense, but as I recall, the list included Joint Professional Military Education (JPME), selection board experience, policy board experience, meaningful participation in an association (such as NRA or ROA), two successful O-6 operational command tours (ranked as top EP each time), completion of Senior Naval Reserve Officer Orientation Course (SNROOC), a tour as a Deputy Readiness Commander, and significant contributions during extended active duty while an O-6. He followed the advice, and has since been promoted to O-8.

There is no sure-fire way to make Flag; every career path is different. Many officers apply for billets recently vacated by flag-selects like investors buying last year’s hottest mutual fund. Recognize it’s not the billet that creates the flag opportunity; it’s the record that got the officer INTO the billet. Billet diversity is important; don’t “homestead” in one type of billet because you are good at it or get comfortable.

If you wish to be a serious contender for Flag, find and engage a flag mentor now. It’s never too early to start; successful career tracks often begin as a junior O-5 (!). If you’re fortunate enough to make it, never forget the Sailors who worked hard to give you the FITREPs that got you there. Being a flag officer is a sacred trust; fulfill it with the deepest sense of duty and respect. Good luck! 🚩

The acme of a Navy Reserve career is selection to flag officer. Yet less than one in a thousand Reservists achieves this milestone. What does it take to make rear admiral (lower half), or RDML?

First, let me start with a disclaimer. I have never sat on a flag board. This article is speculation; its purpose is to stimulate thought and discussion between you and your flag mentor.

Each year, the Reserve O-7 Line and Staff Selection Boards choose new flag officers (this year, they met 24 October and 2 November). At the line board, nearly 750 unrestricted line (URL) O-6 records were screened to select four RDMLs. Different communities have different requirements, so consult with your flag mentor to see what actually applies to your career path.

Three factors influence promotion to Flag: record, reputation, and relationships. Let’s take a look at each.

Record

The first screening at the O-7 board is a “vote to brief.” All board members view each Officer Summary Record (OSR) and Performance Summary Record (PSR) on the screen for several seconds without any formal briefing. Some discussion may ensue, but usually records speak for themselves. Members vote either 0 or 100, and then move on to the next record. Hundreds of records go by in a matter of a few hours. Like an experienced jeweler, the eyes of board members quickly identify the few outstanding “gems” in the group. Essentially, they are looking for records with strong command experience (especially in challenging assignments) and a history of EPs, ideally in “heavy traffic.” A single MP might not sink a record, but a P at the O-6 level almost certainly will. After this