

Marine Corps Separation Rates: What's Happened Since FY00?

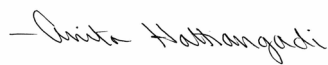
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CAB D0018759.A2/Final
October 2008

Approved for distribution:

October 2008



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Executive Summary

In a message to the Corps in February 2007, the Commandant, General James T. Conway, announced that the President had approved the Marine Corps' request "to grow from the size of its [authorized] endstrength of 175,000 Marines to 202,000" [5]. Increasing an all-volunteer force in wartime was unprecedented.

In order to grow the force, not only does the Marine Corps need to increase accessions, but it also needs to reduce separations. This is further complicated by the fact that the announcement to increase endstrength came in the middle of the fiscal year, well after the Marine Corps Recruiting Command had started executing its FY07 mission.

By all accounts, growing the force to 202K is going to present challenges. In an attempt to help the Marine Corps better understand how to grow the force, and in considering our previous research on separation rates, CNA initiated a study that examines the evolution of these rates since FY00.¹ Specifically, for enlisted personnel we combine end-of-active-service (EAS) and non-EAS (NEAS) separations, looking at the overall enlisted separation rate.² Although it is more common to look at these two types of separation rates individually, we believe that for endstrength purposes it makes more sense to consider all separations together.

As the operational demands of the Long War persist, one might think that servicemembers are getting out of the military—perhaps to use their GI Bill benefits, start a civilian career, or buy a VA-financed home. This has not been the case for active-duty Marines. With a few exceptions, separation rates were lower in FY07 than they were in FY00 or FY01.

¹We selected all active-duty Marines who count as endstrength at the beginning of each fiscal year and divided them into year-of-service (YOS) categories by the number of years of completed service at the beginning of the fiscal year. We then matched these Marines to separation files to see if they separated from the Corps by the end of the fiscal year. The separation rate is the number of separations divided by the number of Marines at the beginning of the fiscal year. Reference [4] describes separation rates through FY06.

²At the end of their enlistments, enlisted Marines either separate (an EAS separation) or reenlist. Thus, a decrease in EAS separations means an increase in reenlistments.

Separation Rates: FY00 Through FY07

- Context
 - High operational tempo
 - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)
 - Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)
 - Marine Corps endstrength increase
 - Stress on the force
- We examine all separation rates
 - End of active service (EAS)
 - Non-EAS (NEAS)
- We look at
 - Enlisted Marines
 - Warrant Officers
 - Commissioned Officers

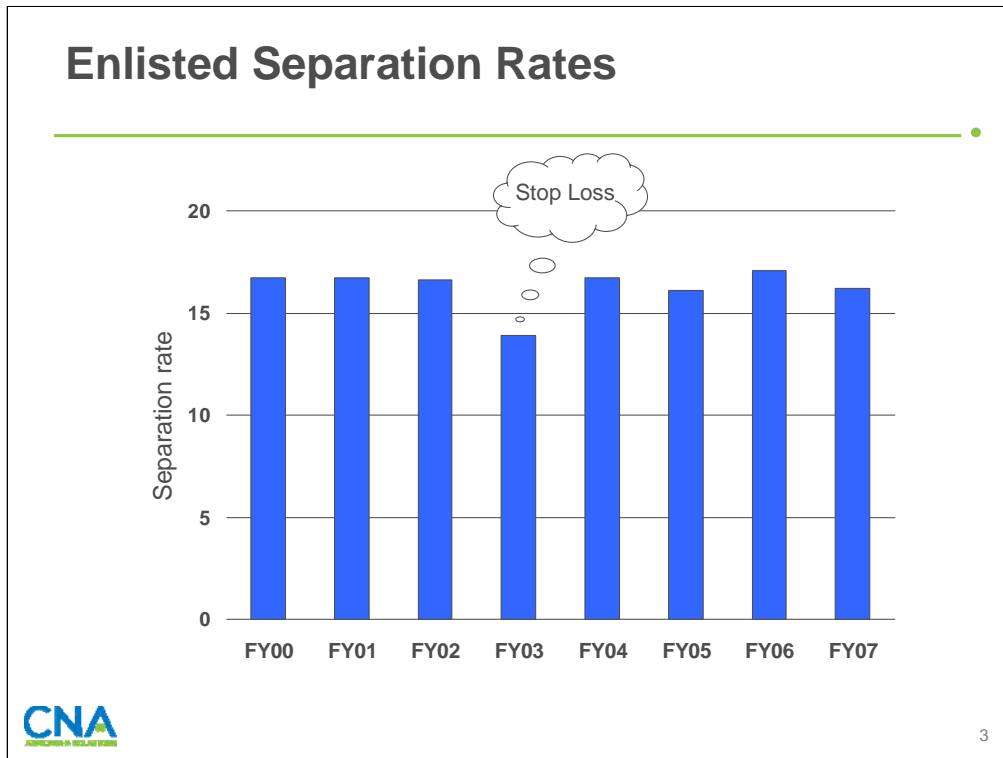


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Previous work analyzed the relationship between retention and both the number of deployed days and the number of deployments to the Iraq/Afghanistan country group through FY06 [1, 2, 3]. For first-term enlisted Marines, we found lower reenlistment probabilities for Marines with multiple deployments to the Iraq/Afghanistan country group. For these Marines, however, the Marine Corps constrained the number of first-term reenlistments as well as the occupational mix. Thus, despite the fact that reenlistment probabilities for first-term Marines were negatively affected by the number of crisis deployments, the Marine Corps achieved its first-term reenlistment goals in each year. For commissioned officers and for career Marines, we found a generally positive relationship: the more they deployed, the more likely they were to continue in the Corps.

However, we recognized that an individual Marine's deployment experience might not determine retention probabilities; it was also possible that the prospect of high future operational tempo was a determining factor. In order to understand the relationship between deployment and retention, we looked at separation rate patterns from FY00 through FY06 to see if retention rates had increased as operational tempo had increased. Our work suggested that they had not [4]. That said, Marine Corps endstrength was relatively constant during the period we examined.

In this paper, we expand that work, looking at separations through FY07.



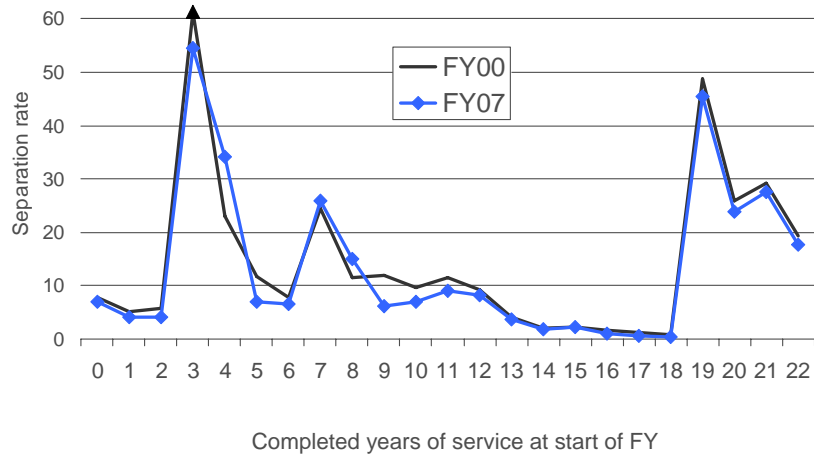
Given high operational tempo since FY03, it may surprise some that Marine Corps enlisted separation rates have not risen. Overall, enlisted separation rates were remarkably steady over the past 8 fiscal years, except in FY03 when many Marines were subject to stop-loss orders.³

Between FY00 and FY02, the overall separation rate varied between 16.6 and 16.7 percent. It was low in FY03 because of stop loss. It then increased in FY04, fell slightly in FY05, and peaked in FY06 at 17.1 percent. In FY07, however, when the Marine Corps got permission to formally increase endstrength, the separation rate fell almost 1 percentage point to 16.2 percent. By FY07, Marines had been at war for 5 years. However, the significantly more generous Selective Reenlistment Bonus program and the work of commanders and retention specialists to encourage Marines to reenlist likely caused the separation rate to fall.

In FY00, enlisted endstrength was 154,745. By the end of FY07—after the push to increase endstrength—enlisted endstrength was 161,400. By the beginning of FY08, endstrength planners in the Manpower Plans and Policies division of Manpower and Reserve Affairs projected an enlisted endstrength of 166,675 by the end of that year. But, by the end of FY08 enlisted endstrength was 178,300—an increase of more than 23,000 enlisted Marines over the levels in FY00!

³Throughout this paper, the effects of the FY03 stop loss is evident in our reported separation rates. In some communities, separation rates rose after the stop loss was lifted in FY04. A Marine under stop-loss orders cannot separate from the Corps unless the order is lifted.

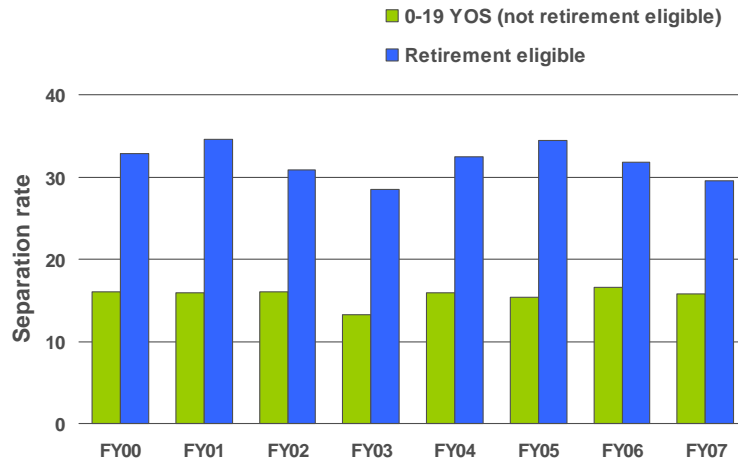
Enlisted Separation Rates by YOS: FY00 and FY07



This slide shows enlisted separation rates in FY00 and FY07, by single years of service (YOS), up to 22 YOS. There are three spikes—the first two correspond roughly to reenlistment decision points and the last spike corresponds to the initial retirement decision.⁴ Overall separation rates are lower in FY07 than they were in FY00 (16.2 versus 16.7 percent), which is most evident in early attrition, attrition between 5 and 6 YOS, and attrition between 9 and 12 YOS.

⁴The majority of first-term Marines (80 percent) have 4-year enlistment contracts, so most Marines, who make first-term reenlistment decisions, will do so in the 4th YOS. Since most reenlistments are for 4 years, most Marines making second-term reenlistment decisions will make those decisions in the 8th YOS.

Enlisted Separation Rates by Retirement Eligibility

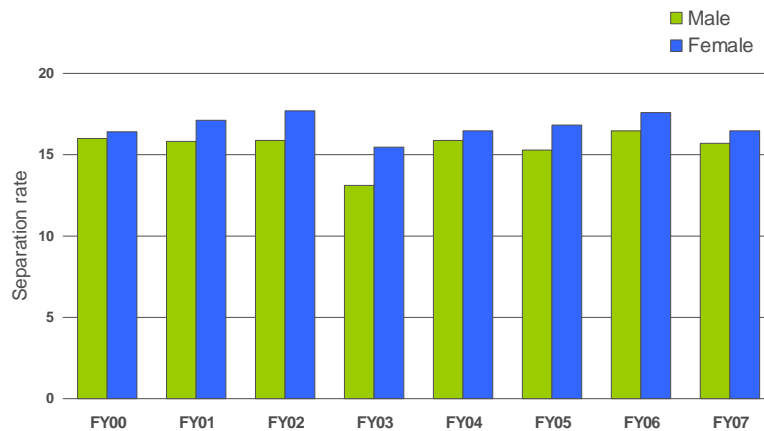


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Here we compare separation rates for Marines who were retirement eligible with those for Marines who were not.⁵ Although separation rates for retirement-eligible enlisted Marines are considerably higher than those for other Marines, the separation rates for non-retirement-eligible and retirement-eligible both follow the same pattern. In addition, both rates declined in FY07.

⁵We used YOS, calculated from the Active Duty Base Date, to determine retirement eligibility. There will likely be some errors in the classification of retirement eligibility since some of the dates in the Marine Corps Total Force System (MCTFS) are reviewed and revised when Marines submit their retirement papers. The vast majority of Marines, however, are categorized correctly.

Non-Retirement-Eligible Marines: Enlisted Separation Rates by Gender

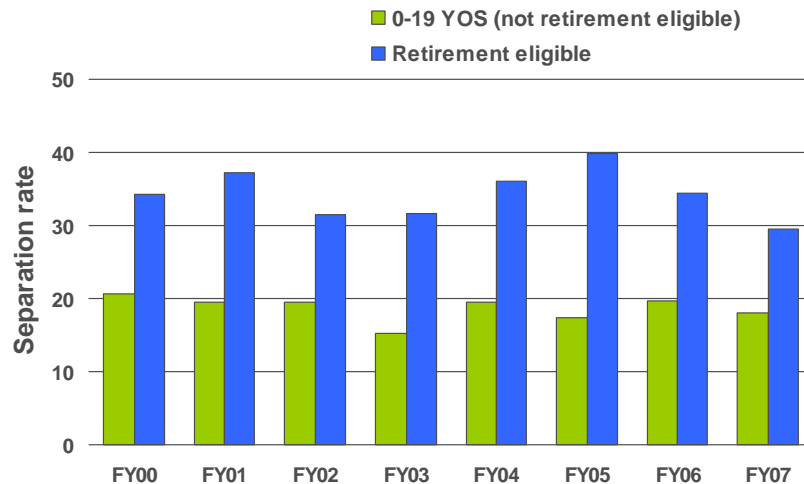


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This slide examines non-retirement-eligible male and female enlisted Marines' separation rates. As we have observed in past work, separation rates for women are consistently higher than those for men.

Separation rates were relatively high in FY06, but the rates for both male and female non-retirement-eligible Marines fell in FY07.

Combat/Combat Support Enlisted Marines: Separation Rates by Retirement Eligibility



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In this and the following slides, we take a more detailed look at separation rates, focusing first on enlisted Marines in combat/combat support occupations⁶ who have been heavily deployed. The largest numbers of Marines (by far) in these occupations are in the infantry, where it is not uncommon to have three or even four wartime deployments in the first term of service.

As we saw in slide 5, separation rates for retirement-eligible Marines are higher than those for non-retirement-eligible Marines.

Non-retirement-eligible combat/combat support Marines

Overall, separation rates for these Marines are higher than average. For example, in FY00, the overall enlisted separation rate was 16.7 percent versus 20.6 percent for combat/combat support Marines. By FY07, however, both rates had fallen, and the gap between the average separation rate and the separation rate for those in combat/combat support occupations had narrowed. In FY07:

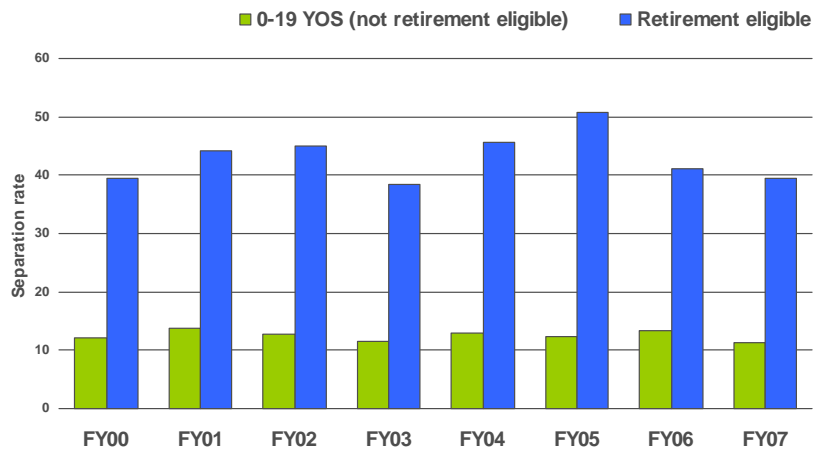
- Average separation rate was 16.2 percent.
- Separation rate for enlisted combat/combat support Marines was 18.1 percent.

Retirement-eligible combat/combat support Marines

In every year but FY07—the year in which the Marine Corps began to increase endstrength—the separation rate for these Marines was 2 to 5 percentage points above the separation rate for all retirement-eligible enlisted Marines. In FY07, however, the separation rate for these heavily deployed Marines fell below the average (29.5 versus 29.6 percent).

⁶We used Occfields 03 (Infantry), 08 (Field Artillery), 13 (Engineer, Construction, Facilities, and Equipment), 18 (Tank and Assault Amphibious Vehicle), and 58 (Military Police and Corrections) for the combat/combat support grouping.

Intelligence Enlisted Marines: Separation Rates by Retirement Eligibility



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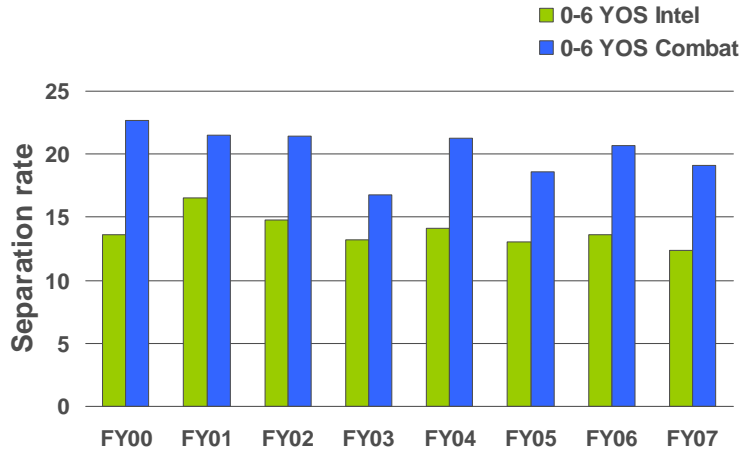
This slide shows separation rates of Marines in intelligence occupations (Occfield 02–Intelligence and Occfield 26–Signals Intelligence/Ground Electronic Warfare). Again, we have divided Marines into two groups: those who were retirement eligible and those who were not.

There are very different separation patterns between those in the combat/combat support and intelligence fields. As the last slide showed, the separation rates for non-retirement-eligible combat/combat support Marines averaged between 18 and 20 percent; for the intelligence field, the comparable separation rate is between 12 and 13 percent.

In sharp contrast, the separation rate for retirement-eligible combat/combat support Marines was between 30 and 40 percent. For those in the intelligence field, the separation rates were much higher.

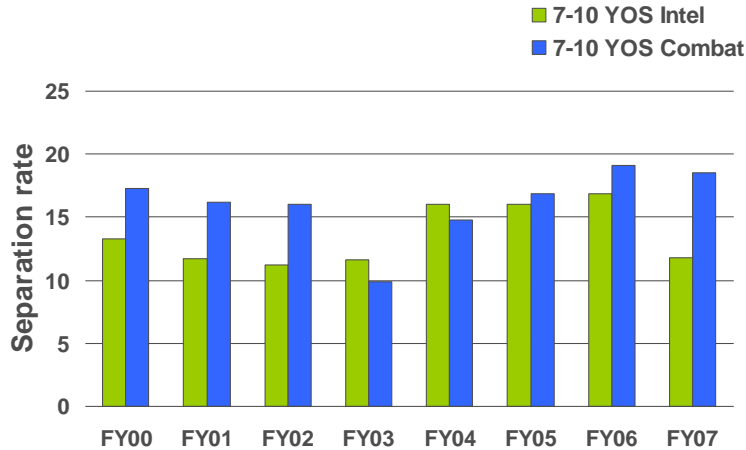
Thus, intelligence field Marines are more likely than combat/combat support Marines to pursue 20-year careers. When intelligence field Marines hit retirement eligibility, however, they are more likely to separate than those in the combat/combat support field.

Combat/Combat Support vs. Intelligence: Separation Rates for 0 to 6 YOS



Here we show other differences between these two occupational groups by comparing separation rates for those who have completed 0 to 6 YOS. Separation rates are considerably lower for those in intelligence occupations than for those in combat/combat support occupations. Both rates, however, fell in FY07.

Combat/Combat Support vs. Intelligence: Separation Rates for 7 to 10 YOS



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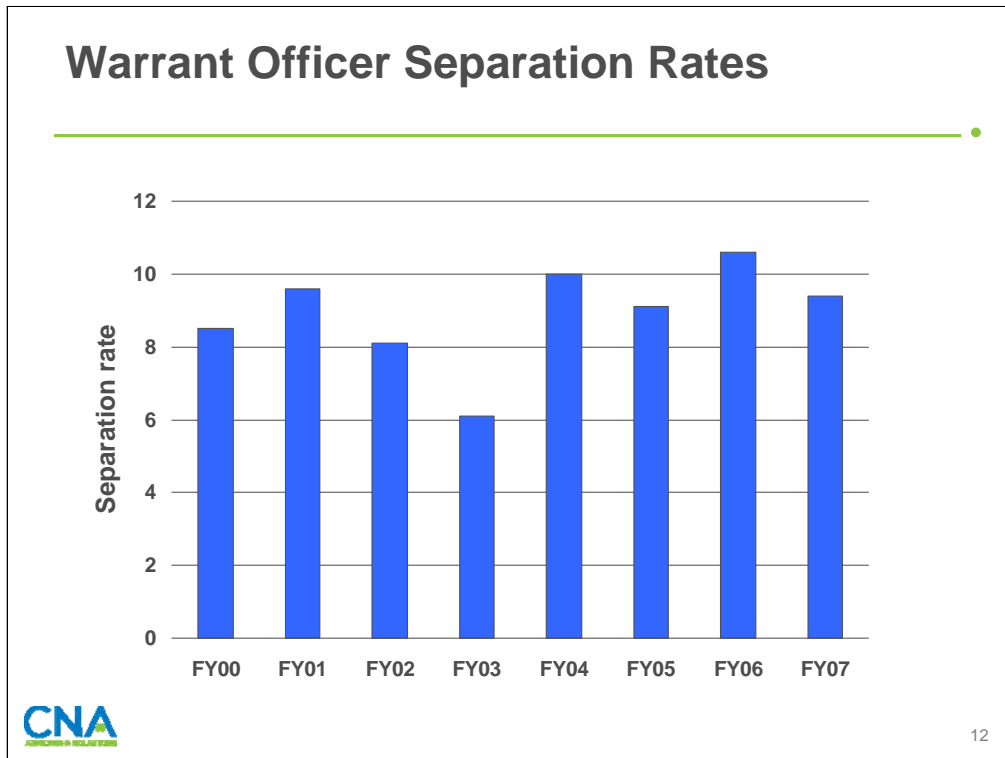
The same pattern holds (although somewhat less strongly) for those who have completed 7 to 10 YOS. Those in the intelligence field are less likely to separate than those in the combat/combat support field. This pattern does not hold in FY03 when stop loss was in effect. In that year, combat/combat support Marines were more likely to be affected by stop loss than those in the intelligence field.

Warrant Officer Separation Rates: FY00 to FY07



In this section, we examine separation rates for warrant officers. The Marine Corps has less than 2,000 warrant officers. Unlike the enlisted force, there was no growth in the warrant officer population between FY00 and FY07.

Because there are considerably fewer warrant officers than enlisted personnel, warrant officer separation rates vary more than those for enlisted personnel. That said, however, we find very little change in warrant officer separation rates before and after 9/11.

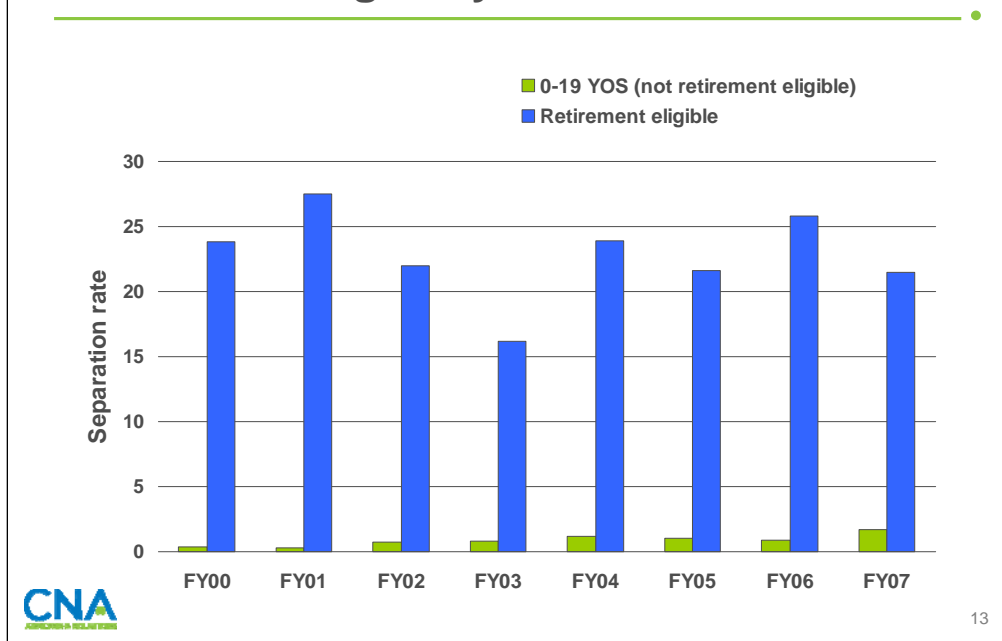


Warrant officer separation rates follow roughly the same pattern that we observed for enlisted personnel (and for commissioned officers, which are discussed below). Unlike the other personnel categories, separation rates for warrant officers were higher in FY07 than they were in FY00. The separation rates fell, however, between FY06 and FY07.

Because warrant officers come from the enlisted ranks, they average more years of service than either enlisted Marines or commissioned officers. Virtually all warrant officer separations are for retirements. Since few warrant officers leave before retirement eligibility, the yearly separation rate for warrant officers is heavily influenced by the proportion of warrant officers that are retirement eligible in a particular fiscal year. In FY00, 35 percent of the warrant officer population was retirement eligible; in FY07, this proportion had grown to 39 percent.

In FY07, the separation rate for warrant officers was 9.4 percent. At the start of FY07, 1,883 warrant officers were in the Marine Corps. During the year, 177 of them separated; all but 19 of them retired.

Warrant Officer Separation Rates by Retirement Eligibility

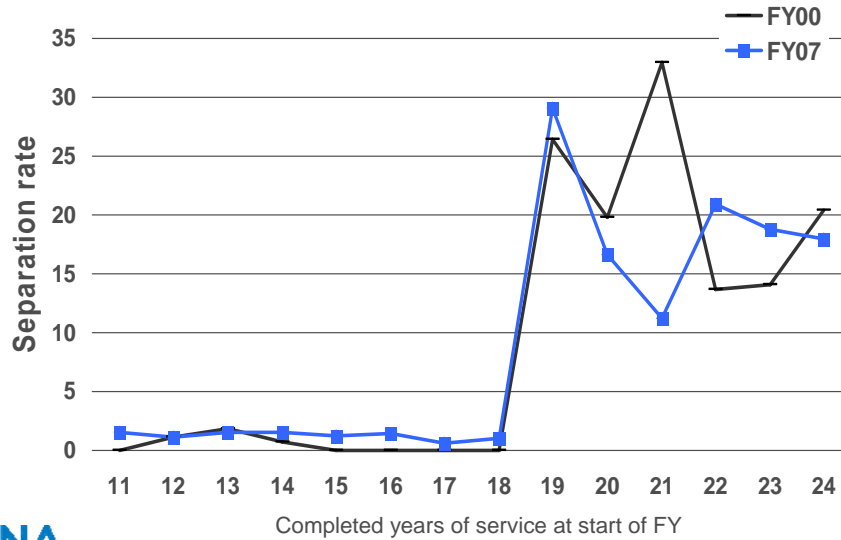


This slide examines warrant officer separations by retirement eligibility. Although separation rates for non-retirement-eligible warrant officers are extremely low, they have more than quadrupled since FY00 (from 0.4 to 1.7 percent). The increase in the number of separations, however, is only 14 Marines.

The overall separation rate for retirement-eligible warrant officers is about 2 percentage points lower in FY07 than it was in FY00.⁷

⁷There was, however, an increase in the *number* of warrant officer retirements in FY07 because the number of retirement-eligible warrant officers increased. In FY00, 640 warrant officers were retirement-eligible; in FY07, 736 warrant officers were retirement-eligible. Thus, although separation rates for retirement-eligible warrant officers were slightly lower in FY07, the difference in the number of separations is small because of the larger population in FY07 (158/736 versus 152/640).

Warrant Officer Separation Rates by YOS: FY00 and FY07



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The general pattern of warrant officer separations by completed YOS has remained relatively stable since FY00—particularly for the years before retirement eligibility. It is noteworthy, however, that a slightly higher percentage of warrant officers chose to retire at their first opportunity in FY07.⁸

Despite year-to-year changes in YOS separation *rates* for retirement-eligible warrant officers (those with 19 or more years of completed service at the start of the FY), the impact on the size of the Corps is relatively small because these rates apply to relatively few warrant officers.

⁸We graph separation rates through 24 YOS only. After that point, the number of warrant officers is quite small, and the YOS separation rate can be misleading.

Commissioned Officer Separation Rates: FY00 to FY07



The following slides examine commissioned officers' separation rates. We find a similar pattern over time to that found for other groups; separation rates decreased between FY00 and FY03 (when stop loss was in effect), rose fairly sharply in FY04, and have since stabilized.

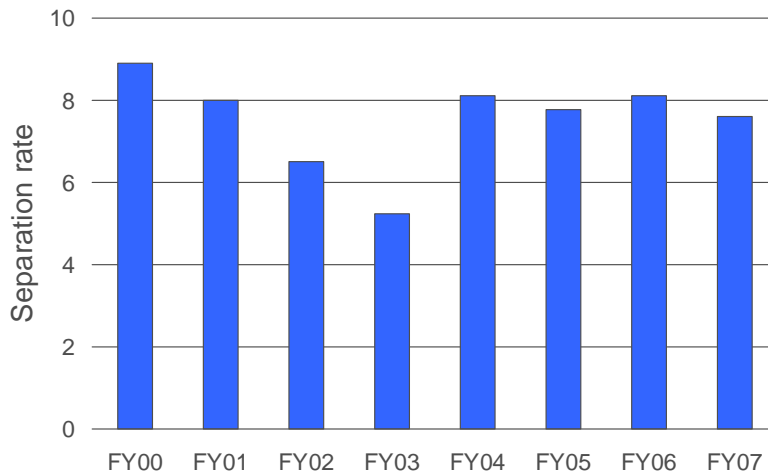
There are a few exceptions:

- Separation rate fell more sharply than average in FY07 for:
 - Ground officers with 0 to 6 years of completed service
 - Aviation officers with 0 to 10 years of completed service

- Separation rates rose in FY07 for:
 - Female officers
 - Retirement-eligible aviators
 - Ground officers with 7 to 10 years of completed service

Overall, however, we find that separation rates for commissioned officers in FY07 are lower than they were in either FY00 or FY01.

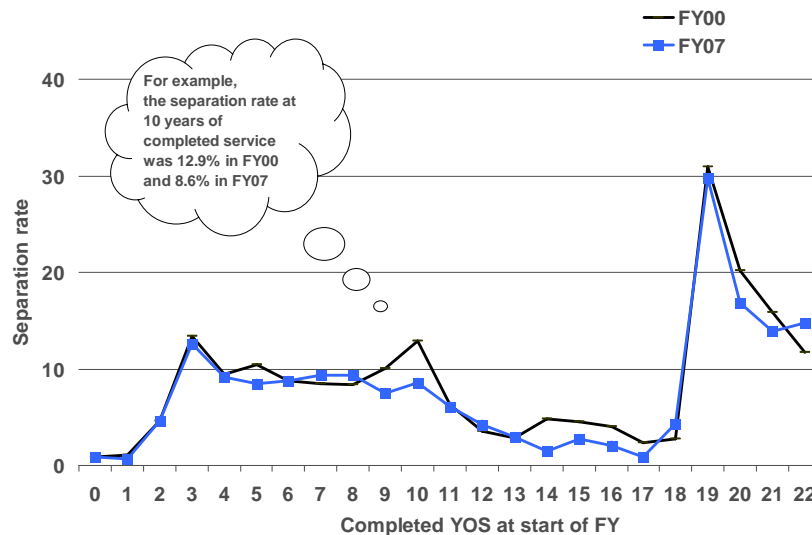
Commissioned Officer Separation Rates



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We start by looking at Marine Corps commissioned officers' overall separation rates. Officers' separation rates were the highest in FY00 (8.9 percent) and fell steadily through FY03 (when stop loss was in effect). The rates rose in FY04 and then remained relatively stable. The separation rate was 7.6 percent in FY07 (compared with 8.9 percent in FY00).

Commissioned Officer Separation Rates by YOS: FY00 and FY07



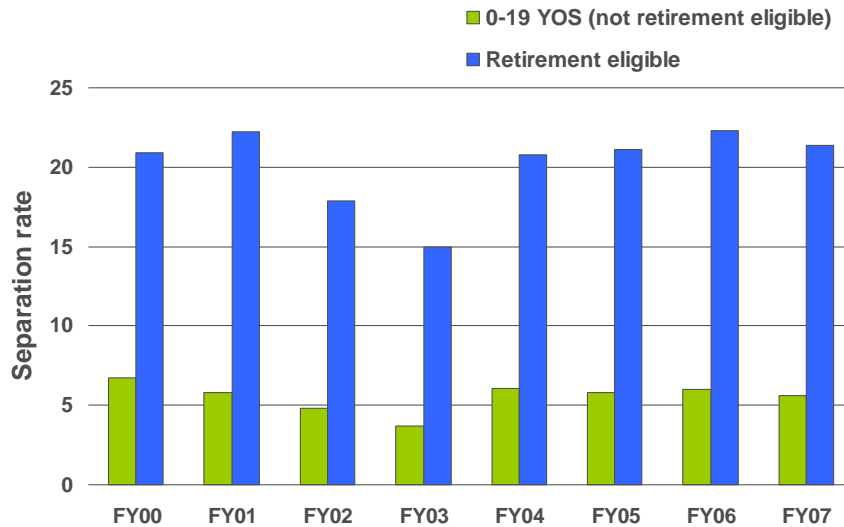
17

Here, we look at overall commissioned officer separation rates for FY00 and FY07 by YOS.⁹ The overall separation rate was lower in FY07 than in FY00—particularly for non-retirement-eligible Marines who had completed 8 or more years of service.

Overall separation rates were 8.9 percent in FY00 and 7.6 percent in FY07.

⁹To calculate YOS, we used Active Duty Base Date for officers with enlisted service and commissioning date for officers without enlisted service. We show separation rates through 22 YOS only. After 22 YOS, the population thins, and the YOS separation rates may be misleading. References to overall separation rates, however, include all YOSs.

Commissioned Officer Separation Rates by Retirement Eligibility

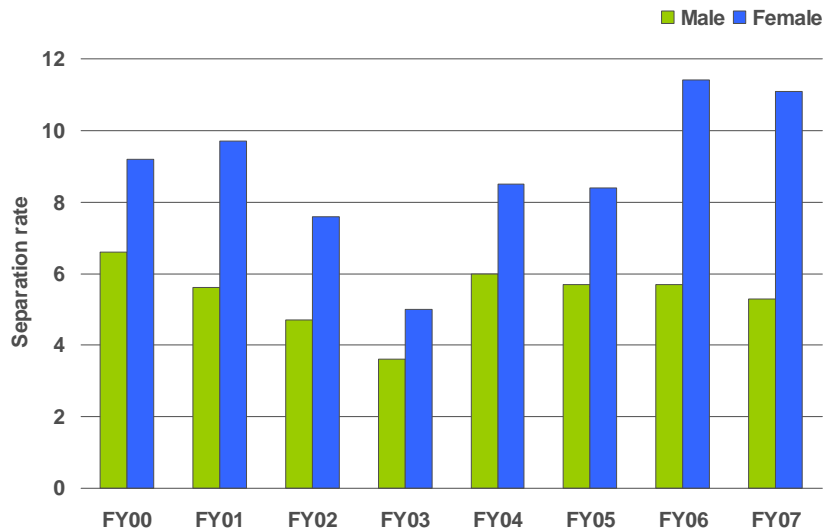


18

On this slide, we separate Marine officers so that we can examine those who were retirement eligible and those who were not. Separation rates for both groups of officers follow a similar pattern: they generally fall through FY03, rise in FY04, and then remain relatively stable.

For non-retirement-eligible officers, separation rates were higher in FY00 than in any other fiscal year. In our previous work looking at the relationship between operational tempo and retention [1, 2, 3], we found that commissioned officers—both non-retirement eligible and retirement eligible—were more likely to be retained if they had deployed. Thus, overall, high operational tempo has reduced separation rates for commissioned officers.

Non-Retirement-Eligible Commissioned Officers: Separation Rates by Gender

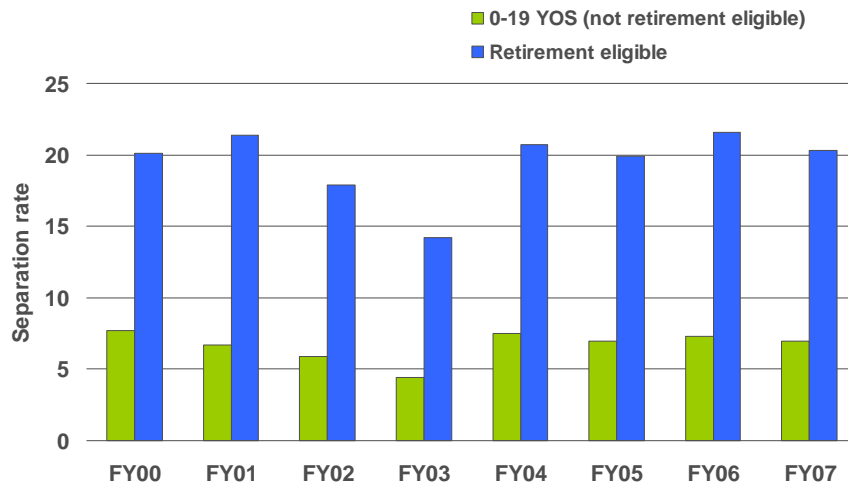


19

Here we compare the separation rates of non-retirement-eligible male and female officers. In general, the separation rates for female officers are higher than those for male officers. Separation rates for both male and female officers were at their lowest point and closest together in FY03. Since then, the separation rate patterns have diverged. Between FY06 and FY07, the separation rate for female officers increased, whereas the separation rate for male officers decreased slightly.

The separation rates for male officers follow the general overall pattern. For female officers, however, we observe a sharp rise in separation rates in FY06 and FY07. These separation rates are the highest observed in this 8-year period.

Ground Officer Separation Rates by Retirement Eligibility

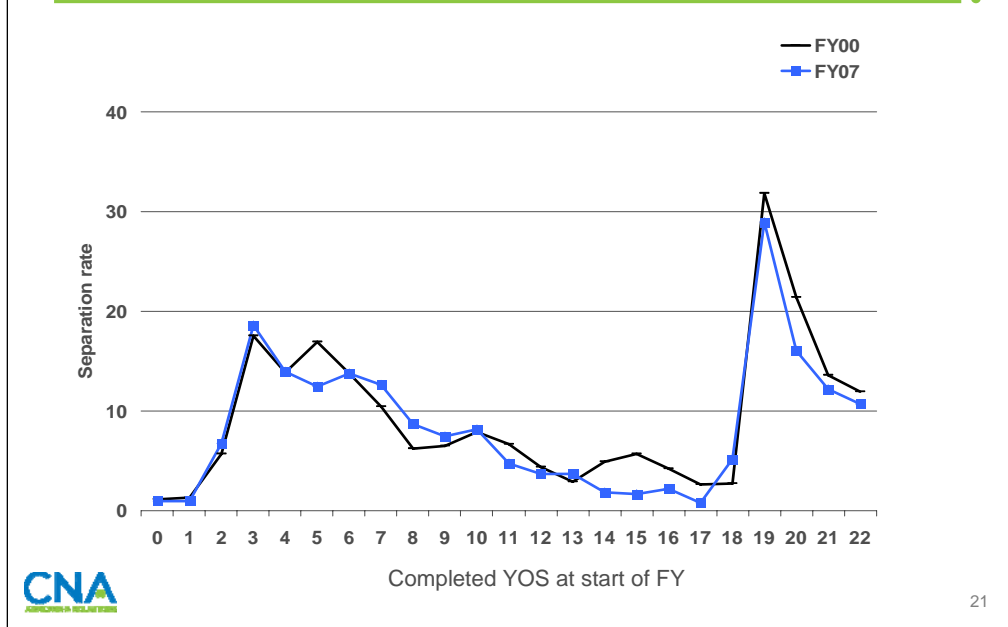


20

Here we look at ground officers¹⁰ and separately examine those who were retirement eligible and those who were not. We observe the same pattern: separation rates generally fall through FY03, recover in FY04, and then remain fairly stable from FY04 through FY07.

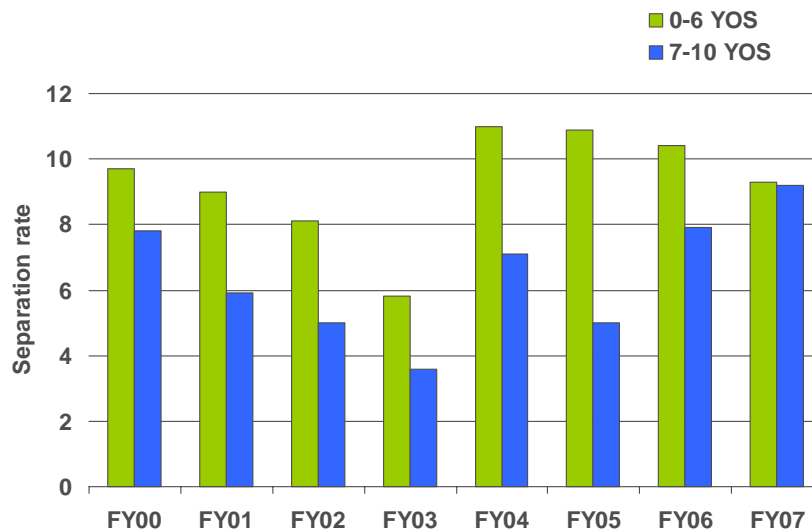
¹⁰This group includes all officers except aviators (Occfield 75xx).

Ground Officer Separation Rates by YOS: FY00 and FY07



Separation rates for ground officers were 10.0 percent in FY00 and 9.0 percent in FY07. Separation rates were particularly low in FY07 as compared with FY00 for ground officers with 14 to 17 years of completed service.

Ground Officer Separation Rates by YOS Category



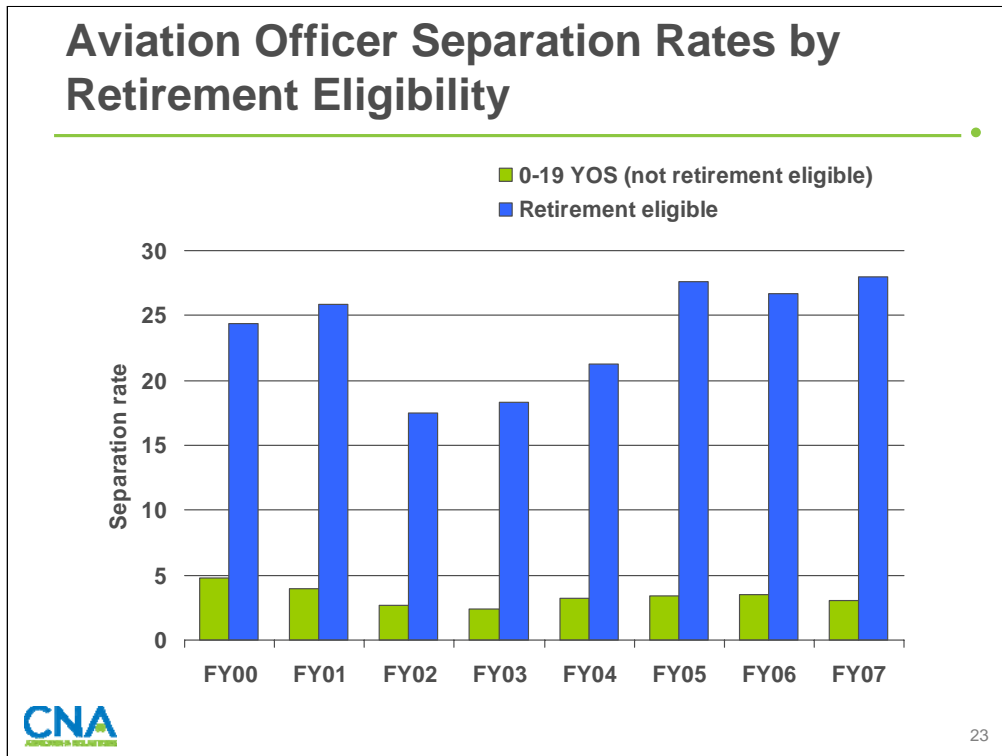
22

In this slide, we look at ground officer separation rates in two YOS categories—those with 0 to 6 years of completed service and those with 7 to 10 years of completed service. The first category should include the period when ground officers are finishing their initial service obligations.¹¹

Separations for ground officers finishing their initial service obligations are particularly high between FY04 and FY06. By FY07, however, they fall below FY00 levels (9.3 percent in FY07 and 9.7 percent in FY00).

Of more concern are the separation rates for ground officers with 7 to 10 years of service. FY07 shows the highest separation rate of the period—9.2 percent.

¹¹Despite considerable effort, we have not been able to identify precisely when officers finish their initial service obligations. We suggest that the Marine Corps create a new field in MCTFS that identifies exactly when an officer's obligation ends. This field should be updated if the officer incurs additional obligations because of such things as schooling or permanent change of station moves.



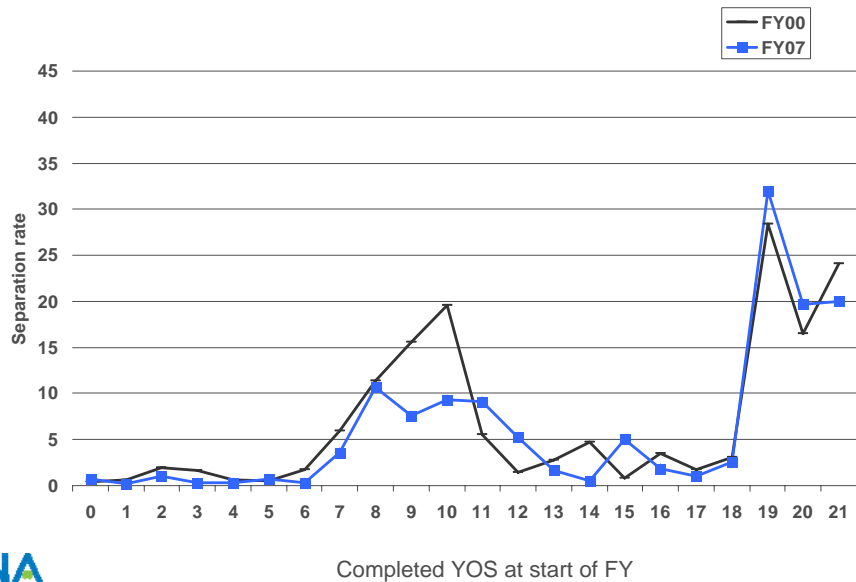
Next, we examine separation rates for aviation officers. Separation rates for non-retirement-eligible aviation officers are considerably lower than those for ground officers. Undoubtedly, some of the reason is that the initial service obligation is longer for aviators than it is for ground officers. When officers finish their initial service obligations and are free to separate, aviators have more invested in the Marine Corps because of their longer service. In addition, for this decade at least, competition from the civilian sector has not been strong because the airlines have not been hiring as aggressively as in the past. In FY07, for example, separation rates for non-retirement-eligible officers were:

- 3.0 percent for aviators
- 7.0 percent for ground officers (see slide 20).

Although the separation rates are lower, the pattern of separation for non-retirement-eligible aviators is similar to that observed for other groups (falling until FY03, rising in FY04, and then remaining relatively stable through FY07). In FY07, separation rates for non-retirement-eligible aviators were lower than they were in either FY00 or FY01.

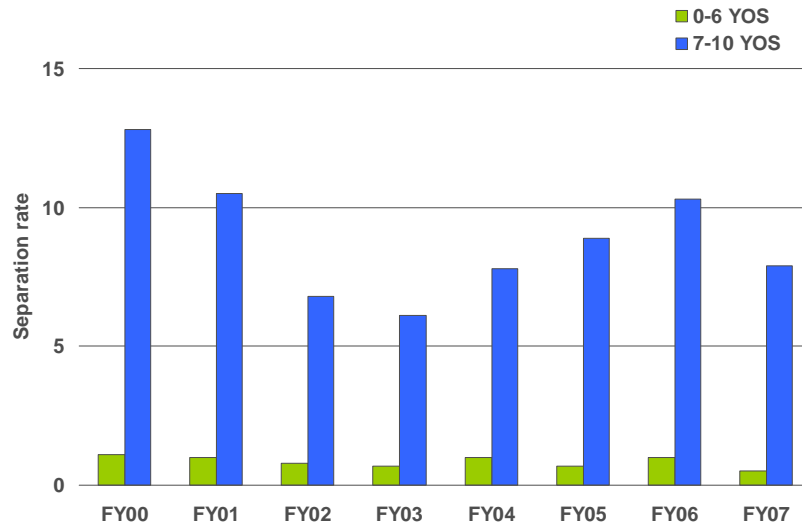
Separation rates for retirement-eligible aviation officers follow a slightly different and more erratic pattern: they rise from FY00 to FY01, fall sharply in FY02, rise until FY05, and then become stable. In FY07, separation rates for retirement-eligible aviation officers were higher than in FY00.

Aviation Officer Separation Rates by YOS: FY00 and FY07



Aviation officer separation rates were considerably lower in FY07 than they were in FY00 (4.5 percent versus 6.4 percent). The largest differences were for officers who had completed 9 to 10 YOS.

Aviation Officer Separation Rates by YOS Category



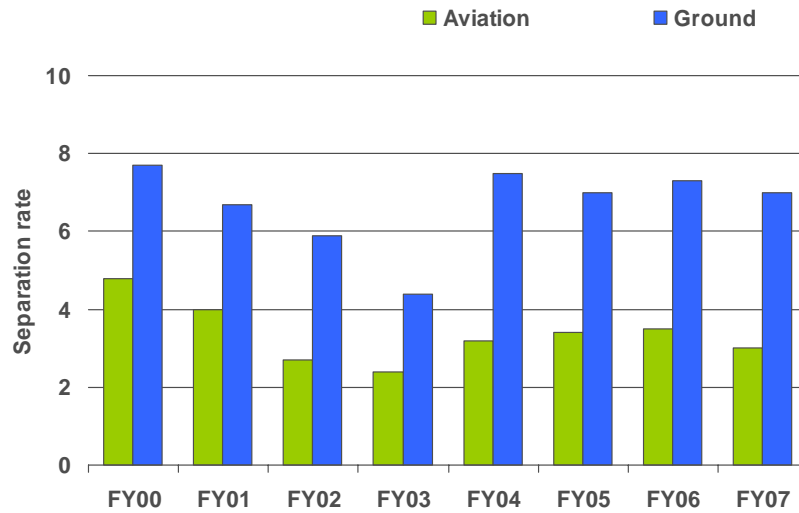
25

Aviation officers should finish their initial service obligations when they attain 7 to 10 years of completed service. As is obvious from the very low separation rates, aviation officers with 0 to 6 years of completed service are still under their initial obligations.

Separation rates for officers who had completed 7 to 10 YOS were generally higher in the pre-9/11 versus the post-9/11 period. For example, separation rates for aviation officers who had completed 7 to 10 YOS were:

- 12.8 percent in FY00
- 7.9 percent in FY07.

Non-Retirement-Eligible Commissioned Officers: Ground vs. Aviation



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Because separation rates for ground and aviation officers are so different in the years before retirement eligibility, we show them side by side.¹²

¹²Remember that we have put all commissioned officers except Pilots/Naval Flight Officers (Occfield 75) into the ground category.

Summary: Little Change in Overall Separation Rates

- Enlisted personnel
 - 16.2 percent in FY07 and 16.7 percent in FY00
- Warrant officers
 - 9.4 percent in FY07 and 8.5 percent in FY00
- Commissioned officers
 - 7.6 percent in FY07 and 8.9 percent in FY00



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Through FY07, we detect no worrisome overall trends in separation rates for Marines. Although separation rates show year-to-year variation, reductions with stop loss in FY03, and increases in FY04, there are no overall trends, and the rates in FY07 are usually lower (or similar to) what they were in FY00.

Specifically, despite high operational tempo, comparing FY07 and FY00 rates:

- The overall separation rate for all **enlisted Marines**, Marines in combat/combat support occupations and Marines in intelligence occupations were lower in FY07 than they were in FY00. This is true for both retirement-eligible and non-retirement-eligible Marines.
 - There were small increases in enlisted female separations.
 - There were small increases in separations for those in combat/combat support occupations with 7 to 10 YOS.
- The separation rate for **warrant officers** was up slightly in FY07, but this was caused entirely by the proportion of the yearly population that were retirement eligible. Virtually no warrant officers separate before retirement eligibility.
- Separation rates have decreased overall for **commissioned officers**. Exceptions to the overall trend include female officers, retirement-eligible aviators, and ground officers with 7 to 10 years of completed service. Rates for these subgroups were higher in FY07 than in FY00.

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- [3] Aline O. Quester, Anita U. Hattiangadi, Lewis G. Lee, and Robert W. Shuford. *Marine Corps Deployment Tempo in FY05*, Mar 2006 (CNA Research Memorandum D0013786.A1)
- [4] Aline O. Quester and Julianne B. Nelson. *Separation Rates: What's Happened Since FY00?* Jan 2007 (CNA Annotated Briefing D0015602.A1)
- [5] ALMAR 008/07, *Marine Corps End Strength Increase*, 2 Feb 2007

