



THE ARMY'S GOT TALENT IN RESERVE(S)

By Robert Gerlach, Andrew Vidourek and Ron Granieri, June 22, 2021
<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/podcasts/reserve-talent/>

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Ron Granieri: Welcome to **A BETTER PEACE**, the War Room podcast. I'm Ron Granieri, professor of history at the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College and podcast editor of the War Room, it's a pleasure to have you with us. Army talent management policies are built around the assessment and evaluation of how well soldiers acquire and display the talents and abilities associated with their duty assignments. But what about the skills that soldiers can bring from their civilian education and training, especially for reservists and members of the Army National Guard, the question of how the Army can or should value civilian acquired expertise is a vital question for the future of the force. Our guests today, Lieutenant Colonels Andrew Vidourek and Robert Gerlach, members of the U.S. Army War College Class of 2021, have both researched this question of how the Army can or should understand and appreciate and integrate civilian acquired expertise into their talent management procedures. And they're here to talk about it today. **Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Vidourek** has been assigned to multiple decorated assignments in the Oregon Army National Guard, including deployments to Iraq. He is a licensed geologist in the State of Washington and Oregon. **Lieutenant Colonel Robert Gerlach**, an Army Reservist, received a direct commission as a medical service officer in 2002 prior to his arrival at Carlisle Barracks, he was assigned to the newly formed Army Enterprise Marketing Office in Chicago, Illinois, where he developed strategic marketing programs. Employed by Sears since 1986, he is now a divisional vice president in charge of various marketing programs. Welcome to **A BETTER PEACE** gentlemen.

Andrew Vidourek: Thank you.

Rob Gerlach: Thank you.

RG: So, Andy, I want to start with you here, but Rob, you can join. And then what in your backgrounds or studies led you to be interested in this topic of civilian acquired expertise?

AV: Sure, thanks Ron. As you mentioned, I'm in the Oregon Army National Guard, I am a traditional M-Day soldier. So I have full time civilian employment outside of my duties as an engineer officer in the Guard. I have 20 years of experience in the National Guard, but I also have 10 years of experience working as a licensed geologist in the state of Oregon, and Washington for a consulting firm that provides engineering and environmental related services. And as you could understand as an officer in the guard, I'm always looking at ways to better integrate civilian employment and guard employment to make it more meaningful or more accommodating for those personnel so that they can potentially get longevity in either career.

RG: Well, and so I want to ask then, I'm going to go to you Rob for a second. I'm going to come back to you Andy, on this but so, for Rob, when we talk about civilian acquired expertise, right? What are we talking about? Andy described his own background, but when we think about this as a broad category, what kinds of expertise are we thinking about that people would be bringing to their Army experiences?

RGerlach: Well, first of all, thanks for having us on and I'm fascinated, I am fascinated by the various skills that our Army reservist and national guardsmen have outside of the Army. I mean, there's just a variety of skills they bring. In fact, just before this podcast with you, I was on the phone with an Army career manager, and he was mentioning somebody who had a master's degree in Cybersecurity and was working in that field but was an E-4 in the Army and was thinking about getting out. And so those roles are from the technical side to the business side. In my case, I work in marketing in my civilian capacity, and I have the privilege of working in marketing on the Army side, but I'm a medical officer.

And so those skills and those roles are various, and they are just untapped and unknown. And so you just go down the list of different jobs that the Army has. Some of those are train only, but to answer your question, preventive medicine, information technology, different types of repair, there's a lot of transferable skills when you're talking about repair for vehicles or different things. So it's all over the board and fortunately they're in the force right now,

RG: Right. Well for both of you and this is for our audience is made up of people of a variety of expertise. So I'm curious about, and they may be curious about the different experiences, say between the guard and the reserves, but to what extent are people assigned positions in the guard or reserve based on skills they bring from their civilian lives or is that just a complete crapshoot when it comes to the unit that you happen to sign up for when you joined the guard or was.

AV: So, that depends Ron and the individual enlisting, they essentially have a choice. Do I want to do a career in the Army where I can transfer my civilian experience into that career? Or do I just want a break from what I'm doing every day in my civilian job? And so they might want to something different, one example of a program that the Army does have is the ACASP or the Army Civilian Acquired Skills Program where you can provide documentation of a training or

certification or schooling of a particular trade or skill that is transferable to the Army. And then you can enlist and get a rank of E-1 up to E-4 based on whatever that experience is. So what we're talking about is beyond that - soldiers that are already in the guard, is there a way to document the civilian acquired training and experiences that they've gained while in the guard that could then be a benefit either to them or the guard? And I can provide an example if you want now, or we can turn it over to Rob.

RGerlach: It's going to be this. Yeah, let me just jump in on that. So, pardon me essentially, you have individuals as Andrew alluded to that join. They may have a particular skill that they are applying for in the Army, because that's what they know or that's where they're comfortable or it's the opposite of what they do because as Andrew alluded to, they want that break, but there are a lot of people who joined the military and early on take a role that's available to them either because that's what the Army needed or that's what they thought they could do, but they develop some other skill in their civilian life. So they get that master's degree in whatever, or they learn some other job, or they get picked up five years after joining the Army for something that we're not aware of. And so to make this very simple, as far as the premise that Andrew and I have is that we should have a database in place similar to Indeed.com or Career Builder that would help track what it is that somebody has from a civilian skill perspective.

Now, there are some tools out there, Army career tracker, but the only people that have visibility to Army career tracker are people that you designate. There's nothing out there today where you can do, have a printout and say okay, we have a need for skill X. How many people in the force today have skill X that perhaps are in a different role? We don't know, we have no idea. We could go out and ask people I suppose, and rely on conversations, but we should be relying on technology, which is out there in the civilian world and is readily accessible.

Readily accessible through these career sites that I just mentioned, that if we just took some of the systems that we have today and converted them or added to them or adjusted them, we could easily turn that into a career management tool that can help and approach people. The example I gave earlier, of the career manager who was speaking to someone who was in the IRR, thinking about getting out and said oh, by the way, I've got this master's degree in Cybersecurity. Wow, you know what? Let's do something with that. And it's those tools that we're talking about.

RG: Well, would there be, and does the idea of there being a board or a place that's currently current members of the service could go to and see, hey, it looks like there's a need for somebody with this skill in a different, either in a different part of the guard that I am in, or maybe even in a different state, what kind of movement would we be talking about here? Would this be sort of something that would be across the entire enterprise that somebody could find, have the chance to... If they were moving from one part of the country to another, or if they were, if they wanted to move from one unit to another, could that work, or would that get in the way of more traditional Army personnel practices? I'm going to go with you Andy, on this one.

AV: Sure, I think it could be and I think the rollout of the new IPPS the Integrated Personnel and Pay System it wasn't developed by military personnel, general industry. So it's able to be updated, adapted, and it's more modern for what we needed. It's a more integrated system that has information and so to be able to amend that with the type of information we're talking about, civilian training, work experience, degrees et cetera.

I think you could integrate it into that and potentially look at that cross-state line integration or not. Either way, it would be a benefit because what we're really trying to capture is that eight-to-13-year individual, that they have a civilian career and they're right at the point where it's probably taking off, but they also have the most valuable training they've had in their military career that we don't want to lose. And so if there's a way that we can find or alter their career path in the military so that we can accommodate both to retain those individuals, that's what we're after. And whether that's within the same state or across state lines, I think it's a win-win for the military and the individual.

RGerlach: I'm going to add to that. So, retention is squarely one of the goals of this as Andrew stated and just to get into the mechanics of it a little bit. So if you think about it, when somebody takes the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), there are indicators of jobs that they should be perhaps thought of for. And so what do we do after that? So what do we do after the ASVAB? What do we do three years later, five years later, 10 years later, based on, again, those civilian skills that you've acquired, or that particular job that you've taken on since joining the military. And so that could go across any lines anywhere. And that provides a lot of flexibility for individuals who maybe want to do something different as well. And as Andrew stated, we've got people that may be looking to get out of the Army because they're bored or because they are, they've got career choices to face, but guess what? It's a career builder or a resume builder to have that civilian-military background combined.

RG: Well, and that seems to be the question here that I think is really interesting. Oh, please Andy go ahead, yeah.

AV: I, was just going to provide one recent example. I was speaking to a recruiter who was speaking with a E-6 Infantry MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) and they were coming up on 20 years and we're going to get out of the guard and they, so they happened to have a conversation. Hey, what are you going to do when you get out? Oh, well, I'm just finishing up my medical degree. And so the recruiter says, oh, have you thought about being a medical officer in the guard or pursuing a medical career? And so just from that happened to have conversation, we're able to retain a soldier that would have otherwise retired. And you'll see a lot of that in the organization and how we fill some of these vacancies that if you just don't happen upon an individual and strike those conversations and learn about these experiences that they have, it can be lost.

And so we're trying to make bridge the gap on how do we capture more of that. And it's not to make people extend military careers if they don't want to, but more of making them aware of other opportunities that may be available to them if they so desire.

RG: Yeah, and that makes a lot of sense and because the thing that I've been thinking about both in preparing for this conversation and listening to the two of you today is, an older vision of both civilian and military life is you pick a career and you stay in that career and you maybe even stay in that job or even stay with the same employer for your whole life. And that is clearly something that is no longer the case, or is becoming a, let's say becoming decreasingly the case in the civilian world, right? People change jobs, people have to retrain. And so the idea that the Army should recognize that while people are in the civilian world, retraining, rethinking, redirecting their careers, that this can be an enhancement of their contribution to the reserve, to the guard. But it's a better contribution if the Army is able to respond to and accommodate their changes.

And so I guess this gets to a question of the basic idea of what up until now, how has the Army respected or not respected the civilian life circuit lives or careers of members of the guard, members of the reserve? They take the ASVAB at the beginning and they say, that's good, you're going to be assigned to do this. Is there... Is what you're proposing, merely providing more visibility of opportunities, which is a good thing in itself? Or do we even have to rethink within the Army? The idea of you might have somebody who their civilian life has changed to the point where they are a different type of person or have different types of expertise and the Army should adapt to them. I mean, so is, are we just talking about improving technologically, are we trying to think about how the Army should even consider its reservists and guardsmen? I see Rob, I saw your hand up, go ahead then.

RGerlach: Yeah, so Ron I think you've taken it to another level. So the premise that we're proposing is that there'd be a systematic way of knowing that someone has a particular skill that is different than what they do in the Army. So therefore, we can approach them about that skill should the Army have that need. So kind of cut and dry. I think what you're saying is, so somebody has gone through a few career changes or they are, in my case, I've been in the same company for 35 years, but for the person that does change companies which is common, as you stayed. Then say, you know what, you've changed in your civilian career many times, you may have the same appetite in the Army to change career fields, or what have you, which is, I think, where you were going, if you were the, it does lend itself to an interesting question, which is, would people stay in the Army if they were able to change into another role, they were interested in, even if it's not something that they have in their civilian background.

So that's an interesting question, it's a little different than our premise, but I think it's an interesting question. Now, the rules today, the rules today basically say, well, once you get past a certain rank, you really can't change jobs. Or if you're under a bonus, it's hard to change a job. But I do absolutely feel like that could be something to be explored. We should be asking people

when they leave, why are you leaving? What if we were able to give you a different job? Would you stay what if we were able to? So I think that's an interesting question that that could blend into this.

RG: Great, thanks Rob. Andy, I want to bounce this to you, and I also want to get this in there as well as what are the current obstacles to making those kinds of changes? Go ahead Andy.

AV: So to add on to what we were previously talking to, early in my career, I don't remember a whole lot of speaking to peers or consideration or hearing from leaders, higher commanders. Hey, here, there's opportunity for you to change careers but in the last few years, retention was a hot topic in the Oregon Army National Guard. I can speak to that and I'm sure it was elsewhere, but there was a lot of conversations and asking and offering and seeing how we could accommodate soldiers in other careers. So to answer that question on, I think we weren't as concerned with that before that was during Iraq and Afghanistan. Numbers were relatively high, but now that that's stabled off people are getting out, it's just kind of a shift in the culture that I've noticed that we seem to be much more accommodating to that.

As far as obstacles, what percentage of success rate is this going to have? Are, are we going to fill 0.5% of Army vacancies in these technical fields that we wouldn't otherwise be able to fill? Is the reward worth the cost? Who's going to create the database? Who's going to manage the database? Is my civilian employment and experience entry into this database, is it required or is it optional? And I know we talk about the Army as quick to pass down new requirements without taking others away. Is this just another thing where soldiers are going to say, all right, I'll do it. And then are they going to provide useful or factual information or are they just going to provide the bare minimum and leave it at that.

So if you could create some sort of incentive, maybe by entering your information in there, the database populates a draft resume for you that you could use. Maybe it... if you check a block, hey send me Army jobs related to these fields so the Army would then send you job notices similar to Indeed. If we can come up with a benefit, I think for the soldiers use, I think they would be more apt to use it. But those are some of the obstacles that I could think of with implementation.

RG: Yeah, no that's a really good point though, that since what you described are things that are not uncommon on various civilian job boards and the idea of, I guess, for the Army, the question would always be what would constitute proof of having this skill, right? Do you have to have a certificate or a diploma or something like that?

RGerlach: It depends on what the role is. I mean, just to go into the story of how I ended up at Army marketing, I was in Washington D.C. helping with an event, if you will. And I was approached by somebody worked for me that said, hey listen, I've got a buddy that is going to be at the Dirksen building because there's a mixture with Army leadership and the senators. And I...

Can I get out of some duties tonight if I go, can I go do this? I said, on one condition, you bring me with you. And I said, well there's going to be free food, free drinks. Yes, there will, fantastic. So we go in civilian clothes and next thing I know I'm standing there with my free drink and my pig in a blanket and whatever other little hors d'oeuvres.

And I watched the Secretary of the Army walk in, Chief of Staff of the Army, whole bunch of generals, and then some senators. And I'm like, wow, this is a great party. I mean, I really shouldn't be here kind of a Forrest Gump moment. And so, there I was eating my free food, drinking and then they showed a marketing video and I said, wow. And they spoke, this was in December, 2019. And they spoke about technologies that in the civilian world we've been using for years, but the Army was now adopting for... how to reach out to certain populations and how to use technology to do, I thought, wow, we're really getting on the ball. So I had approached the Chief of Staff of the Army and said, "Hi General, I just wanted to say, I really like this marketing concept you've got" and, cause he presented as long as well as the Secretary of the Army.

And he's like, oh, "well what do you do?" "Well, I'm a reservist." Oh okay, cause I was in a suit so they didn't know as military. "And what are you doing in the reserves?" "Well, I'm medical." "Okay, all right. And what do you do in civilian?" "Well I work in marketing. And so here's my feedback" and he's like, "That's the problem, we don't know what the reservists do." And so, and he had mentioned, okay you should probably bring this up. So I approached the secretary, Mr. McCarthy and said, "I just want to compliment the video. I want to compliment where we're going with marketing." And here's what I do and this is why I appreciate everything I've just heard and saw. He's like, "Oh, you know what? You see that general over there, he's in charge of marketing. I want you to go and help him out and get with him and speak to him."

Okay, sure enough approached him, we had coffee a couple of weeks later, and a few weeks after that I had orders for Army marketing. So it was a privilege, it was a privilege working in that office and bringing some of the business skills into how the Army does business, if you will. And it was a great rewarding experience. And I felt like I, because as a medical officer, I deal in operations and sure there's some operational stuff I do in my civilian job, but the translation is not as much there at sure the leadership skills might be, but it was one of the first times in the Army I felt like I was synthesizing my civilian and Army careers. And so it was, it was pretty rewarding five months. And again, that was just before coming here to the War College. So it was great.

RG: Right, and will you be going back there after your time at the War College?

RGerlach: I will not be out, I will be taking a command in the Army reserve and there were some consideration given, but career path wise, interestingly, Army reservists right now do not qualify for what's called FA 58 or Functional Area 58, which is marketing. So that's only active duty at this point in time. Now, one could go there on special assignment, kind of like what I did, if you will. But if I return there, I'd like to do it formally as an Army reservist, as opposed to in

Army reserves, with that qualifier and of FA 58, as opposed to somebody just on a tour who happens to be there.

RG: Right, that's fair, well then this is the question, right? Is the significance of civilian acquired expertise to make the change that you did, Rob right there the shift that you did as a medical officer working in marketing. I mean, I guess the idea is in the act of service, right? They obviously... A soldier does not have an opportunity to pick up a lot of civilian acquired expertise cause he doesn't have a civilian job or she doesn't have a civilian job. How, in what ways would an openness to this kind of movement based on, or this kind of recognition of civilian acquired expertise also require the Army as an enterprise to rethink the place of the guard and the reserves in the overall enterprise.

RGerlach: So, so from my perspective, there should be some pairing up and I think it does happen where you do have reservists working side by side with some active duty in some capacities. I know the Futures Command does this, I'm sure there's other areas that do that as well, but it should be thought through. I don't know all the details of how the Army does it today, but if I had to guess we could probably do a better job of integrating reservists with specific backgrounds, with our, with active duty, who are expected to perform that function and get that diversity of thought, get those other ideas introduced, you tend to get group think when you've got a group of people in a room doing just kind of the same thing over and over. So I, that blending of skills would, I think be very valuable.

RG: Andy, what do you think about that? This idea of rethinking the relationship of the guard reserve to the active service within the overall enterprise?

AV: I think it's great, it's out of the box, it's not the norm. What we're used to, we tend to be in our active-duty silos and our guard silos and you don't cross, and we want more COMPO 1 COMPO 2, and 3 integration into our training and into our deployments, it's good for the force, it's good for everyone. So if this is just another mechanism to provide additional opportunities for integration, even if it's just on an individual basis, I think it's a great opportunity for the force, for the individual and for others on the receiving end to learn from these active-duty personnel or reserve or guard personnel that may have an experience that they don't otherwise have. And it just broadens our perspective, the more we know, the better decisions we can make.

RG: For sure, well and as we approach the end of this conversation, right, that's a very, it's a very optimistic way to view it. And I think that's seems to be the big message we want to get across here, right? The ideas, more understanding of what soldiers bring will help us to understand how this, how everybody works together. Andy, what are you going to be doing after your time at the Army War college?

AV: So I will back to Oregon, I live in Camas, Washington, and I will resume my civilian career and proceed with a M-day job in the Oregon Guard, to be determined.

RG: Right, okay. Well as both of you think about, I mean, do you, have you gotten much, I mean, hopefully after this podcast, we'll, you'll of course be flooded with approaches from the outside world to talk about your brilliant ideas, but I am, are you planning, do you have any plans to present your thoughts about this use of civilian acquired expertise in the service? Do you have...do you imagine becoming as for want of a better word becoming evangelists for this approach going forward, how do you expect to, to keep this idea going after you leave?

RGerlach: I had the privilege of working with the Office of the Manpower and Reserve Affairs, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) for my SRP, and so my goal is to bring it up with that office since that would be squarely in their wheelhouse. So in the course of closing out my SRP with the M&RA, I will be floating the joint article that Andrew and I did back to them.

RG: Great, and the article is now being circulated, it's going to be you're trying to get it placed as we speak.

RGerlach: That's correct. So if there are any publishers out there that was like to pick up our article, we are available at this time.

RG: Outstanding.

AV: Yeah. It's very early in the conceptual stages, but we do have a draft article that we would like to get out there. And get feedback, I do know from the conversations I have had from peers and recruiters just briefly describing hey, what a system or a database like this be useful. And the responses have been very positive. Heck yeah, that would be awesome because as we mentioned, a lot of what we do find out that's valuable information is just, we just happen upon it.

RG: Right, well-

RGerlach: One more thing I'm going to add, is this is not a bridge too far. So if you think about it and you log into your records page or on your ORB (Officer Record Brief) or ERB (Enlisted Record Brief), it states on their occupation is, and I know I've given it a couple of different times and it's kind of canned like manager or whatever why they asked that, I don't know, but it's not a bridge too far with the systems that Andrew described or the systems that are in place today to just synthesize. When you say I am a whatever, we can easily take again, the attributes of a particular role, and then match those, just a matching exercise, so the attributes of what we're already trying to dig for when someone takes the ASVAB or whatever jobs there are.

So today, most roles in the Army have attributes assigned to them. Now we're just talking about the other, half putting attributes against the civilian jobs, and then that matching exercise. So this is absolutely doable and if there's anybody out there, again, that has any programming skills, we would be looking for your help, but this is an absolutely doable thing. And there isn't anybody that disagrees in concept or principle that should happen, it's just a matter of making it happen.

RG: All right, well that is as simple and as complicated as it can be, right. It's just a matter of making it happen. Well, certainly it's been very good to get your insights into this story today. And we hope that this is getting this will get the ball rolling further, but I want to say thank you to Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Vidourek and Lieutenant Colonel Robert Gerlach for joining us today on **A BETTER PEACE** to talk about your work. Thanks a lot, fellas.

AV: Thanks, Ron.

RGerlach: Thank you.

RG: And thanks all of you for listening in, please send us your comments on this program and all the programs and send us your suggestions for future programs. Please, if you have not already subscribed to **A BETTER PEACE** on the podcatcher of your choice, and after you have subscribed, please rate and review this podcast, because that is how other people can find us as well. We're always interested in hearing from you in broadening our conversations in broadening our community. And so until next time from the War Room, I'm Ron Granieri.