

“My goal is to find a way to continue this plan for the next two or three years and then to do a follow-up survey to evaluate its effectiveness.”

— PCINC COL James Elmer, USAF (Ret), *Officer Review*, April 2008

Lessons Learned

A Review of MOWW’s Membership Scholarship Program

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Membership! We all know how important this issue is to our Military Order. We all know it is vital to recruit, retain and involve new members. We know we must recruit our replacements—MOWW’s next generation. Our predecessor Companions knew that, which is why they recruited each of us. All of us, every one of us, must continue this essential tradition.

In the years I was a national officer, every CINC had membership as one of his major goals. Almost without fail, two additional sub-goals were included: (1) Reduce NPDs (non-payment of dues) for annual members and (2) recruit younger members. Our record of retaining annual members was atrocious.

We recruited like mad, and at the end of each year, we were only able to remain close to our current membership levels. It would be nice if every new member were a perpetual member; but many military officers will not become Perpetual Members until they check out the organization, are embraced and become involved.

Being against free memberships that bring no commitment, I pondered how we could increase the number of young officer members. I soon faced a dilemma: we don’t want members who are just warm bodies. Instead, we want members with good potential who will be involved in, if not lead, chapter programs.

We also faced another issue: no one had proposed a way to recruit newly-commissioned O-1s.

Convinced we had to try something even if it was wrong, I devised a concept, a test, to be tried and then evaluated. The guidelines were:

- *Select one outstanding new O-1 from every Senior ROTC (Army/Navy/Air Force) unit nationwide by asking the PMS, PNC or PAS to identify the graduating student most supportive of MOWW patriotic goals.*
- *Local chapters present the selected O-1s a free one year membership at an award or commissioning ceremony.*
- *The chapter provides \$20 of the annual \$40 membership fee, and they waive chapter dues for a year. (Impressively, a few chapters even paid the entire \$40 from local funds!)*
- *The recruiter, sponsor, mentor or chapter commander maintain contact with new O-1s. If realistic, a chapter closest to the new officer invites the new member to a meeting.*

Unfortunately, few chapters participated—which was not surprising given the sustained follow-up effort required. Consequently, results were not encouraging. It appears this program’s record was no better than the retention rate for other new annual members. Candidly, it is easier to convince local annual members to renew. This is not so for new O-1s since they PCS everywhere.

Since there was relatively little participation, chapters were then authorized to get one or two O-1 memberships per university. The free membership program increased memberships, but not retention. Early on I failed to get

renewals—for the same reasons. Although I was recruiting 9-12 students per year, I still was not adequately keeping in contact with them. A luke-warm effort generated a luke-warm result.

I stepped back and rethought the program. I decided to incorporate lessons learned and make the 2011-2012 program a better test by taking the time needed to stay in contact with every one of the new O-1s. Plus, I emphasized another option—one that already existed—new O-1s are authorized to become Perpetual Members for \$200. MOWW HQ will accept quarterly \$50 payments—perfect for a cash-strapped newly commissioned officer. I emphasized that.

I could never find effective ways to present this opportunity to a new lieutenant. Then it hit me: add an enticement! This year, I recruited nine new O-1s. I told each of them what a Perpetual Membership was, and that for them, it was only \$200 to be paid prior to the first anniversary of their commissioning. I also said they had a free one-year membership with no questions asked.

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In 2011, six of nine officers chose Perpetual Memberships and three chose annual membership. The six Perpetual Member candidates assured me they will pay the remaining \$150 (some already have) and become Perpetual members. Learning my lesson, I have remained in contact with the three annual members—and all three are planning to renew when their memberships become due.

Using that experience, I next contacted officers who had expired memberships from previous years and some are renewing or re-joining. We recruited the right people, but we didn't follow up properly, and we didn't help them become and remain involved in MOWW—regardless their location. Although it took some effort, this experience shows the



program can work. I challenge any chapter to match the 2011-2012 Central Arkansas Chapter's 100% renewal rate for new officers.

Here's the bottom line: do you *really* want more young members in your chapter? If so, you will have to make a commitment. You will have to be committed over the long haul and actually remain connected, and help keep them involved.

I will fund the program for one more year. In doing so, I will expand the initial program and pay \$30 toward a Perpetual Membership for the students you recruit. There are three requirements: (1) Pick a top student or two (2) stay in personal contact with the student(s) and, (3) the student may choose to be an annual member, but a proposed Perpetual Member must express a desire to become a Perpetual Member.

If you truly wish to make a contribution to the Order's future, try it. These young officers are the future leaders of our Order just as we were when we were recruited. The program works—if we each establish contact, *if* we remain connected and *if* we help them be involved. If you have any questions, please contact me at jimelmer@swbell.net or call me at 501-771-4106. Together, we *can* do this! ★

From 2009:
LTC Michael Wilgen,
USA (Ret), presented
2LT Meaghan Locke,
USA, with a certificate
from the Wilmington,
(137) Chapter, DE,
congratulating her
on commissioning.
LT Locke was the Cadet
Battalion Commander
for the Fightin' Blue Hen
Battalion (University of
Delaware). The MOWW
pin is on her upper
lapel.