Military Enlisted Personnel

Grade and Rank
The armed forces are hierarchical organizations with clearly defined levels of authority. These different levels are called grades, while rank refers to the order of precedence among those in different grades and within the same grade (e.g., someone who has been a Sergeant for three years outranks someone who has been a Sergeant for two years). However, it is common for the term rank to be used as a synonym for grade. Pay grade is an administrative classification that determines certain rates of pay, but it is sometimes used to indicate grade as well. For example, a Staff Sergeant in the Army may also be referred to as an E-6. See Figure 1 on reverse. The Service Secretaries manage the accession, promotion, and assignments of enlisted members under broad statutory authorities.

Numbers and Roles
Enlisted personnel make up about 82% of the armed forces, with officers making up the remaining 18%. Enlisted personnel rank below all officers. Table 1 lists the number of active duty enlisted personnel in each pay grade.

Junior enlisted personnel (pay grades E-1 to E-4) typically work in small units across the DOD. Individuals normally serve in these grades during their first enlistment term (usually 4 years). More senior enlisted personnel supervise them. Junior enlisted make up about 53% of the enlisted workforce.

Mid-level Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) (pay grades E-5 to E-7) have significantly more responsibility than junior enlisted personnel. They lead small units, typically ranging from a few to several dozen personnel, and serve as technical experts in their occupational specialties. NCOs at this level translate orders from their superior officers into action. They make up about 43% of the enlisted workforce.

Senior Noncommissioned Officers (pay grades E-8 and E-9) typically serve as senior enlisted advisors to commanders or as staff NCOs. They also serve as a channel of support for the enlisted force in general. By law, enlisted personnel in pay grades E-8 and E-9 may not be more than 2.15% and 1.25%, respectively, of the number of enlisted members of a given Service who are on active duty (10 U.S.C. §517).

Insignia
As shown in Figure 1, each enlisted grade in the armed forces has distinctive insignia, typically worn on the sleeve, shoulder, collar, and/or headgear (caps, berets, helmets, etc.)

### Table 1. Active Duty Military Enlisted by Pay Grade (as of September 30, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay Grade</th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Navy</th>
<th>Marine Corps</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-9</td>
<td>3,379</td>
<td>2,571</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>2,515</td>
<td>9,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-8</td>
<td>10,778</td>
<td>6,441</td>
<td>3,751</td>
<td>4,995</td>
<td>25,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-7</td>
<td>35,212</td>
<td>21,410</td>
<td>8,322</td>
<td>24,484</td>
<td>89,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-6</td>
<td>54,189</td>
<td>47,059</td>
<td>13,483</td>
<td>39,677</td>
<td>154,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-5</td>
<td>64,861</td>
<td>63,838</td>
<td>26,202</td>
<td>59,395</td>
<td>214,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-4</td>
<td>114,509</td>
<td>52,855</td>
<td>35,340</td>
<td>59,550</td>
<td>262,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-3</td>
<td>47,289</td>
<td>49,548</td>
<td>43,073</td>
<td>43,852</td>
<td>183,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-2</td>
<td>26,699</td>
<td>14,130</td>
<td>20,146</td>
<td>7,021</td>
<td>67,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-1</td>
<td>21,862</td>
<td>7,864</td>
<td>10,997</td>
<td>11,273</td>
<td>51,996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center.
**Figure 1. Pay Grade, Grade, and Insignia of Enlisted Service Members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paygrade</th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Navy</th>
<th>Marine Corps</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Seaman Recruit</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Airman Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>Private First Class</td>
<td>Airmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Private 1st Class</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Lance Corporal</td>
<td>Airmen 1st Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>Petty Officer 3rd Class</td>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>Senior Airmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Petty Officer 2nd Class</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant</td>
<td>Petty Officer 1st Class</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant</td>
<td>Tech Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>Sergeant 1st Class</td>
<td>Chief Petty Officer</td>
<td>Gunnery Sergeant</td>
<td>Master Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E8</td>
<td>Sergeant Major</td>
<td>Command Sergeant Major</td>
<td>Master Sergeant</td>
<td>First Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E9</td>
<td>Sergeant Major of the Army</td>
<td>Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy</td>
<td>Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps</td>
<td>Chief Master Sergeant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** CRS adaptation of Department of Defense webpage: https://www.defense.gov/About/Insignias/Enlisted/

**Relevant Statute**
Chapter 31 of Title 10, U.S.C.

**Other Resources**
Army Regulation 600-20, Army Command Policy, November 6, 2014.


**Other Resources (continued)**

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