

CIVILIAN OPS

Why corporate America needs military talent to make its operations run better, and how you cash in.

BY SARA HODON

If you're looking for a career that requires many of the skills you've developed throughout your military service and offers advancement opportunities and great pay, you may want to consider operations.

"Operations" doesn't fit neatly into a single category. Companies in just about every industry – from manufacturing, energy, warehousing and logistics to technology, health care and finance – rely on operations professionals to keep their businesses running, with the right people doing the right jobs with the right equipment while delivering their products or services on time and at the right price. ▶



MITCHELL MULLICAN, Operations Analyst, Patterson-UTI Energy
 Age: 33 Military Service: Staff Sergeant, Marine Corps (1999-2008)
 MOS: Airframe Technician (6252)

What's the coolest thing about your job?

I get to be involved with the company's operations at the ground level. I always knew what I was going to do because I'm third generation oil field. It was just a matter of getting a job.

What surprised you most about the civilian workforce?

It's not quite as structured as the military.

What's a typical day like?

Usually, I have three types of days, and I serve in three different roles depending on the day.

- #1 I facilitate Patterson-UTI's Introduction to Successful Rig Management course for new rig managers. There are usually two to 25 rig managers in a class.
- #2 I perform regional audits to evaluate how our different regions are performing.
- #3 I can get involved with all the functional groups involved in our business: HR, HSE, marketing, learning and development, technical services, and operations.

What the Heck Does an Operations Manager Do?

To sum up, operations management is the management of:



... Through to delivery of a useful product or service

It's the recognition/realization of improvement opportunities in the areas of:



Content source: *The Institute of Operations Management (IOM)*

▶ THE MANPOWER BEHIND THE OPERATION

So just what is "operations," and what kinds of jobs are available? The job's definition is as varied as the companies that hire these professionals.

"Our managers are on the floor leading teams as large as a hundred or more employees," says Crystal Ashley, military recruiting programs specialist with Amazon. "Managers have complete responsibility for inbound operations, outbound operations and/or a functional process responsibility within

the fulfillment centers. Our managers set and communicate team goals, expectations and priorities. They must be able to effectively delegate, gather data and offer ideas for continuous improvement."

In oil and gas drilling, operations managers are at the center of the action. "Our operations managers make the business work, and for us, they manage the day-to-day activities of a rig," says Brent Hollenbaugh, manager of human resources for Patterson-UTI Energy and a Navy veteran. "Our managers have a lot of responsibility and ▶



CHRISTOPHER CASTILLO, Branch Manager, New Orleans, Dunbar Armored
 Age: 29 Military Service: Lance Corporal, Marine Corps (2002-2006)
 MOS: Rifleman

Coollest thing about your job?

I like the challenge. I was a team leader in the military so I was used to having people under me. I have my own branch, so I can influence the culture more now.

What's a typical day like for you?

It's very hectic. My branch is not very big, but in a way that's good because I'm learning more about the business operation.

I'm responsible for the billing, invoicing, payroll, answering sales questions, administrative duties, and sometimes I'll go out on a route if I'm short-staffed. I come in every morning in my uniform prepared to go on routes, and if all my driver guards are in, I'll put my shirt and tie on. I have about 30 employees, and I think dealing with employees and customers is the most stressful part of the day. I put out a lot of fires.

► must have a broad depth of knowledge.”
 At Patterson-UTI, a company that provides onshore contract drilling and pressure pumping services to exploration and production companies throughout North America, managers are called analysts.

They oversee a team of employees and use problem-solving, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills to tackle HR performance, and safety and compliance issues every day.
 Sound familiar?

Hollenbaugh says veterans are particularly suited for Patterson-UTI's working conditions.

“A drilling crew will work a rotation – 7 days on, 7 days off, or 14 days on, 14 days off – in remote locations. Vets are used to being away from home, working in remote locations with small groups of people,” he explains. “And veterans are drug-free and come on time. Another plus is that many have technical backgrounds and understand our equipment.”

Dunbar Armored is another company that recruits veterans for their unique skills and experience. Better yet, veterans can move up the ladder quickly.

“I've been with Dunbar for 16 years, and I targeted veterans early on,” says Lynne Cassell, Dunbar's director of recruitment. “For our armored division, we look for applicants who know how to use firearms or have security experience. This is why veterans are a good fit. Veterans are disciplined and always keep themselves neat and clean and they know how to wear a uniform. I've also found that if you take two candidates – one who is a veteran and one who is a civilian – the veterans are usually just more impressive; perhaps a little more mature.”

Amy Fossum, staffing manager with Polaris, says operations managers have a variety of functions in their company.

“Our operations managers can support any piece of the company. Right now we're filling a lot of these positions in our international groups, corporate procurement, and the manufacturing side, ►

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SARAH RHOADS, Senior Operations Manager, Amazon

Military Service: Lieutenant Commander, Navy (1999-2011) Navy Reserve (2011-Present)

Designator: Naval Aviator (F/A-18 E/F Pilot)

Coolest thing about your job?

There are many things I appreciate in my role at Amazon that are similar to traits in my previous career. For example, my team and I use checklists and specific procedures on a daily basis to ensure we have standardization, consistency and that no task is left unfulfilled.

What surprised you most about the civilian workforce?

I am very happy to be in an environment where safety is stressed as much as it was in my previous career – I did not necessarily expect this.

What's a typical day like?

I focus on leading my teams – ensuring they have the tools they need to be successful. Just like leading teams in the Navy, we are connected by a common mission. In my day-to-day role, my performance is based on my team's success so the leadership skills I learned in the Navy are invaluable to my civilian career.

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where they're focusing on things like lean," she says.

Fossum says she generally looks for applicants with five to seven years' experience in the field and some supervisory or engineering experience. But there are exceptions.

"For some of our new hires who are veterans, I'll look at their problem-solving, project management and related skills and experience rather than their job history," she says. "We like to hire veterans because they have an understanding of how to lead people under adverse conditions, they have experience creating and conducting training, and we also look for adventurous, outdoor types. When we look at Polaris as a whole, where we find a good crossover is hiring a good entry-level to mid-level position."

ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Because the job responsibilities vary from company to company, it's a side of business that's constantly growing and changing as the company's needs change, so flexibility is key.

If you show that you've got what it takes to get the job done and you're not afraid to take on additional duties, you'll

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MATTHEW KLOBUCHER, Operations Manager, Bremer Manufacturing
 Age: 31 Military Service: Captain, Marine Corps (2004-2013)
 MOS: Weapons and Sensor Officer for the F/A-18 fighter

What do you do?

First, I manage the products. Bremer Manufacturing is an aluminum foundry that makes sand castings – the automotive and lighting industries are our biggest customers. Second, I manage people. Third, I manage supplies and maintenance of equipment. Fourth, I manage plant operations.

Cooler thing about your job?

Taking a difficult casting and making it work. Often, that means working with the guys who make the products, figuring out how they can do it better, working with the equipment to see how it can perform better.

What surprised you most about the civilian workforce?

How many civilians don't want to work. Recently we've had some jobs open on the night shift, and it'll take a week or two to fill them. A lot of people would rather not work than work night shift.

ON THE JOB WITH MATTHEW KLOBUCHER

OPERATIONS MANAGER BREMER MANUFACTURING

I arrive around 7 a.m.

I spend a lot of time on the floor in the morning – I usually go out two or three times.

My first time out I go through every process in the plant and note the amount of product being made.

On my second trip I pick a process to observe – usually something I've had a concern with, and I'll want to see how it's working. I'll talk to employees about different processes and issues, or else I'll just talk to them and try to get to know them.

On my third trip I just go back out and make sure everyone is still working until lunch. Between trips to the floor, I take care of administrative tasks, answer e-mails and work on my agenda for our production meeting.

In the afternoon, I run the production meeting.

After this, our ad hoc meetings happen. We go over any samples that need to be discussed or talk about any personnel issues.

The end of the day, around 2:45, is dedicated project time until I leave at 5 p.m.

We run two shifts. Once every two weeks I'll stay until 8 or 9 at night and observe our night shift.

► find that one of the best things about working in operations is the advancement opportunities.

Marine Corps veteran Christopher Castillo went from being a route driver/guard with Dunbar Armored to branch manager for the company's New Orleans location. When he got out of the military, he says, his infantry skills didn't translate to many civilian jobs besides law enforcement. But he found that companies either weren't hiring or the jobs he was applying for required much more training. Then Castillo interviewed for a job as a route driver with Dunbar.

"I fell into this, but I'm good at it," he says. "A lot of my military training translated – things like being vigilant and task-oriented."

Castillo moved from his job as a route driver to branch manager by "making myself available to do things," he says. "I was always very efficient and got my job done, and I applied for other positions that opened up. I've also tried to build good relationships with my supervisors and co-workers along the way."

Castillo has stayed with Dunbar mainly because the company gave him a chance to prove himself.

"It's not that I couldn't do the jobs I applied for, but all I needed was someone to give me that chance. I had so many interviews but there was no mutual fit. Dunbar gave me a chance. They've given me a lot of opportunities to advance, and I've stuck around. A lot of guys will leave a place after a year, but this company has been good to me so I've been loyal to them." ►

"Our operations managers can support any piece of the company. Right now we're filling a lot of these positions in our international groups, corporate procurement, sales and service, and the manufacturing side, where they're focusing on things like lean."

– Amy Fossum, Staffing Manager, Polaris



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United States Army, 1989-2000, Sergeant
Electronic Equipment Test Facility Supervisor



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HARRISON DRAPO, 2nd Shift Welding Supervisor, Polaris
 Age: 28 Military Service: Captain, Army (2009-2014)
 MOS: Battalion S-4

What appealed to you about operations?

I was pretty open when I got out of the military. I felt I had a lot of skills that could translate to a lot of areas. But it was Polaris itself that sold me – it’s a toy company for adults.

What surprised you about the civilian workforce?

It’s harder to get people on board with tasks. In the military, you know exactly what you’re supposed to do and you do it.

What’s a typical day like?

I get into the office around 2 p.m. and look for any pressing issues. I’ll talk to the first shift supervisor to see if there are any issues from that shift. Then I’ll talk to my leads to see who is doing what.

A lot of my job is putting out fires – if a part is broken, I have to fix it. I make sure the employees are happy, productive and keeping everything on track.

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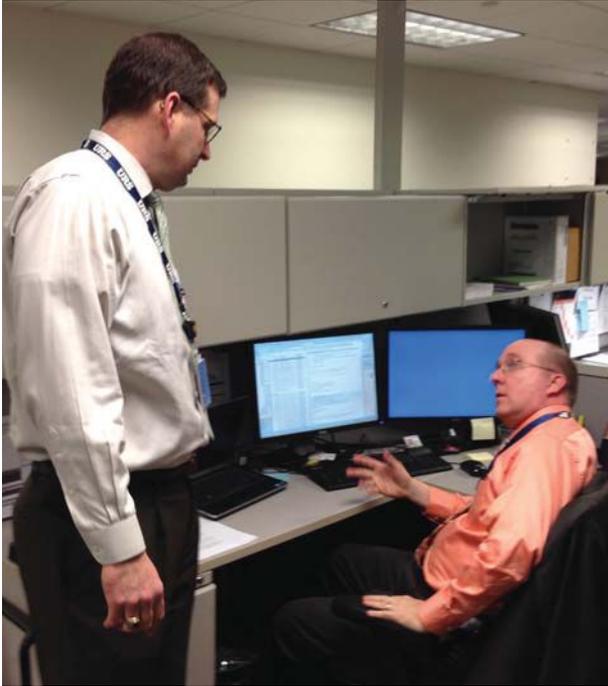
If the advancement opportunities and level of responsibility weren’t enough to convince you to consider this field, the earning potential might. It depends on the company, industry and job duties, but most entry-level positions pay a starting salary between \$40,000 and \$50,000. The average pay for operations managers in the U.S. is \$80,339, according to Payscale, and the top pay potential is well over \$100,000.

But this generous salary comes after you’ve established yourself and have shown your supervisors that you have what it takes to advance – don’t expect that six-figure salary right away.

LEARNING CURVE

Your military experience might help to set you apart from other candidates or even secure the job, but expect a learning curve, says Dalton Pierce, director of operations at Polaris’ Roseau, Minn., manufacturing facility and an Army veteran.

“Veterans are going to be looking at starting out behind their peers from an age group standpoint because they’ve spent the last three to four years defending their country, while their peers spent three to four years learning manufacturing,” Pierce says. “But in my experience, vets quickly ▶



JIM BARRINEAU, Program Manager, URS
 Age: 53 Military Service: Colonel, Army (1983-2010)
 MOS: Signal Corps, IT branch

What surprised you about the civilian workforce?

It wasn't a surprise as much as I had to get used to how things are done in the civilian business world. After being in the service for 27 years, you learn how certain things are done. In the civilian workforce, it's really like starting all over again, because you don't know how things work.

What are some highlights of your typical day?

It's very busy. I'm usually up before 4:30 and checking my e-mail pretty early. I check the weather status often because that affects how the government comes to work, and how we come to work because we work for the government. I arrive at work at 8.

Daily tasks: Check calendars, talk to my team leads. Check on the deliverables that are needed, check on the status of invoices. Then if there are positions that need to be filled I work with our recruiters.

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▶ outpace the typical college graduate.”

A big part of your success will be determined by how you handle the learning curve. In other words, Pierce says, expect to pay your dues and be willing to learn what you need in order to move through the ranks.

This is how Marine Corps veteran Mitchell Mullican worked his way up to become an analyst with Patterson-UTI. He started out with the company as a floorhand on a rig in East Texas, then became a rig manager in 2011. Mullican works with other department heads in the company and describes his current position with a special projects team as “kind of like Special Forces in the military — each member of the group has a very specific function. I report to a director and have two direct reports. As an analyst, it’s my job to analyze different situations and come up with solutions.”

If you’re still not sure if this field is for you, Mullican says, “Go for it. There are wonderful opportunities in this field. There aren’t many jobs that give you this type of responsibility, and there are many different directions you can go into.”