

The Armor Soldier Assignment Process During Army Transformation

by Sergeant First Class Michael S. Clemens

As the Army continues to transform, changes affect armor soldiers. This is not only relevant in day-to-day operations in platoons and companies, but can also be seen at the assignments process level. After serving as a 19D professional development NCO for the past 6 months, I realize there are several assignment issues that should be discussed to help soldiers better understand the assignments process.

The Professional Development NCO and Assignments Manager

Each armor military occupational specialty (MOS) has a two-person team consisting of an Armor NCO and a civilian assignments manager. This team works hand-in-hand to ensure that the assignments process runs smoothly; however, each has different responsibilities. The civilian assignments managers oversee soldier assignments, but do not manage NCO assignments. They coordinate all assignments for the Married Army Couples Program, Exceptional Family Members Program, and specialized training, and they maintain a career management information file (CMIF) on all staff sergeants (SSGs) and above. This file contains copies of NCO evaluation reports (NCOERs), service school academic evaluation reports, enlisted records briefs, official DA photos, and all DA Forms 4187 (Personnel Action). CMIFs are for assignment purposes and are not official files. The professional development NCO is tasked with balancing Army readiness requirements and NCO career development. He makes recommendations and decisions on all requests and assignments for Armor soldiers. He nominates soldiers for special duty assignments, conducts briefings and personal interviews, and spends the majority of his time responding to field inquiries. These inquiries include e-mail messages, telephone calls, and DA 4187s. Armor branch NCOs respond to every inquiry with a researched and informed answer.

Assignment Process Influences

Needs of the Army. The first priority during the assignments process is Ar-

my readiness. The U.S. Army Chief of Staff's manning the force guidance outlines this process. The first step in this plan is to fill the 10 divisions and two armored cavalry regiments (ACRs) to 100 percent. This ensures that our war-fighting units are prepared to deploy, fight, and win. As professional development NCOs, our requirement is to ensure we assign soldiers to modification table of organization and equipment (MTOE) units so that they can accomplish their mission. Additionally, Active Component (AC) positions, Reserve Component (RC) positions, observer controllers, drill sergeants, and recruiters will be filled and maintained at 100 percent. Second phase of the plan is manning the early deploying units such as the 75th Ranger Regiment. The third phase of the plan is manning the table of organization and equipment units such as the 11th ACR. The final phase of the plan is filling table of distribution and allowance (TDA) units such as those at Fort Knox.

In addition to the priority assignments discussed above, other TDA assignments include tactical NCOs at the U.S. Military Academy, military science in-

structors for the Reserve Officer Training Corps, equal opportunity and inspector general advisors, and instructors at various installations. Most important is supporting the home of Cavalry and Armor at Fort Knox. Staff sergeants are nominated for drill sergeant, recruiter, and instructor positions. There are a very limited number of AC/RC assignments for this rank. Every nominative assignment has a unique set of prerequisites. Soldiers nominated for drill sergeant and recruiting duty undergo a thorough screening and background check before being placed in these positions. A soldier will not be placed on a nominative assignment if he is not branch certified for MOS and rank, does not have 24 months time on station, has a record of demonstrated poor performance, has prior UCMJ action, has a GT score of less than 100 (95 is now acceptable for drill sergeant duty), or does not have a high school diploma (GED with 1 year or more of college is acceptable). Remember, we are entrusting the future of not only the Armor branch but the Army to these soldiers.

Branch Certification. Armor branch assigns soldiers to Army requirements



that allow the soldier to develop and refine warfighting skills, taking into consideration the soldier's preferences. The guidelines for MOS and branch certification can be found in the Enlisted Professional Development Guide. This guide is a tool to ensure that NCOs focus on improving warfighting skills, and on expanding doctrinal and leadership competency by serving in key leader positions at each rank. Troop assignments in MTOE units are the premier assignments for developing these skills. Though the minimum time to become branch certified is 18 months, NCOs should strive to remain in these positions at least until they show trends of success or excellence with two or three NCOERs. Soldiers are responsible for managing their careers and must seek to become MOS certified by taking advantage of every opportunity to expand their military and civilian education and maintain warfighting skills. Nominative assignments are important, but soldiers must stay current in their MOS and strive to return to MOS-certifying assignments as soon as possible. Before any NCO is placed on assignment instructions (AI) for a nominative or TDA position, they must be branch certified. The professional development NCO will review the NCOERs by checking rank, duty position, and the number of months served to ensure the soldier meets this certification before issuing AI. Soldiers are discouraged from serving in back-to-back TDA assignments, unless there are extenuating circumstances. If a soldier is currently serving in a TDA assignment and is selected for promotion, he can expect to be reassigned to an MTOE unit to give him the opportunity to serve in an MOS-certifying position.

Soldier preferences. As part of the Army's transformation, the Enlisted Personnel Management Directorate (EPMD) has developed several programs to provide soldiers with assignments of choice. The Assignment Satisfaction Key (ASK) is a virtual link to PERSCOM. Soldiers may access this site using their Army Knowledge Online name and password. Once they are linked to the site, they have an opportunity to update their personal information, as well as choosing three CONUS and OCONUS preference locations (the first two must be to one of the 10 divisions/ACRs). Soldiers may also volunteer for assignments, airborne training, drill sergeant duty, and ROTC and recruiter duty. Every soldier's preference and volunteer locations (if listed) are taken into considera-

tion and supported as much as possible during the assignments process.

The Drill Sergeant Assignment Preference Program and the Detailed Recruiter Assignment Preference Program allow soldiers to be assigned to one of their three CONUS preferences or OCONUS volunteer locations if the assignment supports Army readiness requirements. The soldier must have preferences listed using the ASK. If Armor branch is unable to support one of the soldier's choices, then we will make every attempt to contact him and offer him three choices that we can support.

For soldiers en route to a dependent-restricted tour, there is the Homebase and Advanced Assignment Program (HAAP). This program provides eligible soldiers with advanced notice of their follow-on assignment on completion of the restricted tour. To the extent possible, a HAAP will be made to one of the three CONUS preferences listed in ASK. However, the guidelines for HAAPs are the same as with all assignments — needs of the Army, professional development, and soldier's preference. Soldiers may request to have their HAAP changed. To change your HAAP, you must submit a properly endorsed DA 4187, listing three locations in order of preference to which you are requesting assignment.

Many soldiers request to attend professional development schools en route to their next assignment. The general rule for any temporary duty en route to school is that the unit to which the soldier is being assigned must have a valid requirement for that particular skill identifier. For example, if a soldier wishes to attend pathfinder school, his gaining unit must have a valid pathfinder coded (F7) position for him to fill. Once our office has verified that there is an authorized position, we can then reserve that soldier a seat in the class.

PERSCOM Guidance. There are several other PERSCOM specific rules that factor into the assignments process, including time on station requirements, 12-month notification, "fences" and stabilizations, retention control points (RCP), and reenlistment/extensions. Eligibility criterion for a CONUS-to-CONUS move is 48-months time on station. For a soldier to move with less than 48 months on station, the appropriate authority at EPMD must approve the move.

Currently, PERSCOM is testing the feasibility of giving senior NCOs a 12-month notification before moving on

permanent change of station (PCS) orders. The minimum notification time for all soldiers is 150 days. Senior Armor NCOs should understand that a 12-month notification might not be practical in all situations. Armor branch attempts to give every soldier the maximum notification time possible before their actual PCS date.

Many units are currently "fenced" and their soldiers are stabilized for an operational deployment, force modernization, or transition to a brigade combat team. A "fence" is a PERSCOM-imposed code that prohibits soldiers from leaving a certain unit unless PERSCOM coordinates with the unit before reassigning soldiers. Soldiers are stabilized for various reasons, such as reenlistment, pre/post-deployment recovery, identified for deployment, drill sergeant/recruiter duty, and many others. Stabilized soldiers generally cannot be moved until 60 days after the stabilization has been terminated. These 60 days allow the soldier time to out process or take leave before he reports to the gaining unit.

PERSCOM EPMD assigns soldiers based on their RCP. For example, a sergeant first class with 20 years in service may be placed on assignment with the assumption that he will remain in the Army until his 26-year RCP. Soldiers at this stage in their careers should ensure that their preferences in ASK are correct and reflect a final tour decision. We do take soldiers' preference into consideration, but there are no guarantees that the needs of the Army will match that preference.

Reenlistment also impacts the availability of certain assignments. PERSCOM does not allow career branches to make changes to reenlistment assignments or changes on soldiers in the bonus extension and retraining program. Any change to a reenlistment assignment or stabilization must be pursued through the unit career counselor to the retention division at PERSCOM. Essentially, Army readiness determines what locations will be available as reenlistment options. The retention division is the approving authority on all actions involving reenlistment contracts.

NCO Education System scheduling and conditional promotions. This is an area that needs to be understood by each individual soldier and leader. Armor branch schedules all scouts and tankers for basic NCO courses (BNCOC) and advanced NCO courses (ANCOC).

PERSCOM maintains an Armywide order of merit list for 19Ds and 19Ks who are promotable to staff sergeant and eligible to attend BNCOC. Soldiers are scheduled for BNCOC if they are conditionally promoted staff sergeants, have made the cut-off score in their primary MOS, and then according to points and date of rank. Prior to releasing the sergeant first class promotion list, Armor branch sends out e-mail messages to unit commanders and command sergeants major requesting a date to schedule their soldiers for ANCOC. This allows the chain of command an opportunity to review their long-range training calendars and have input as to when soldiers will attend ANCOC. This works extremely well and we will continue to request chain of command input on scheduling ANCOC. Armor branch schedules soldiers for ANCOC based on feedback from the soldiers' chain of command, PCS dates, special duty assignments, and sequence numbers.

Conditional promotions continue to be a topic of concern at PERSCOM and for Army leaders. Sergeant first class promotions are accepted under the condition that soldiers will attend and graduate from ANCOC within 12 months of

promotion. Soldiers who are denied enrollment, declared a no-show, fail, or otherwise do not meet graduation requirements prior to their sequence number will be removed from the promotion list. Unless otherwise ineligible, soldiers removed from the promotion list will be considered for promotion at the next scheduled board. Staff sergeant promotions are accepted under the condition that soldiers will attend and graduate from BNCOC within 12 months of promotion. Failure to attend will result in administrative reduction. Soldiers who are conditionally promoted to SSG and fail to attend, or fail to graduate from, BNCOC will be administratively reduced and must appear before, and be recommended by, a local promotion board to regain promotable status. Soldiers who are released from BNCOC or cannot attend due to medical or compassionate reasons, as determined by PERSCOM, will not be reduced in grade. Those promotions will remain conditional.

We have a dedicated team at Armor branch with extremely talented NCOs and civilians whose primary mission is to ensure the health of career management field 19, while professionally de-

veloping the force. As discussed in this brief article, there are many factors that influence the assignments process, and we have only touched on a few of the major issues. We encourage every soldier with a question concerning current assignment instructions, future assignment considerations, or branch certification issues to contact us. Everyone who works at Armor branch is dedicated to ensuring that the right soldier is in the right place at the right time.

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