

# Maneuver Enhancement Brigade: The Road to Full Operational Capability

By Lieutenant Colonel Joseph M. Eining and Lieutenant Colonel Mark P. Wiesner

In April 2007, the South Dakota Army National Guard (SDARNG) began converting the 147th Field Artillery Brigade to its new formation as the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB). The transformation mission brought with it numerous challenges in personnel, operations, logistics, and leadership. In addition, the MEB was tasked to transform several subordinate units to their new mission sets as a brigade support battalion with its subordinate units and signal company. The MEB received command and control over all engineer units in the SDARNG—as the long-standing 109th Engineer Group transformed to the 109th Regional Support Group—and over all military police and field artillery assets within the SDARNG. This brought the total assigned force structure under the MEB to 2,300 Soldiers. The MEB was further challenged by receiving a notification for training in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, just two years from its stand-up date.

The intent of this article is to share lessons learned and techniques the unit found helpful in becoming a fully operational MEB, capable of meeting its state and federal missions and ready for a pending deployment. The article includes a timeline of events (see table), from inception to the present, and covers the issues that arose in the areas of personnel, operations, and logistics. The article also describes the strong relationship established with the United States Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and the outstanding support provided by that organization.

## Personnel

The process of assigning personnel to the 196th MEB was complicated due to the uncertainties of the continually evolving doctrine, missions, and manning of the MEB. Unit leadership was presented numerous occasions to transform Soldiers from their former positions in the field artillery and engineer worlds to the new MEB force structure. The MEB brought with it new enlisted career management fields (CMFs) and officer branches that the SDARNG had not previously experienced. In conjunction with the transformation process, the joint force headquarters for the SDARNG compiled a transformation catalog that described the new duty positions; Military Physical Profile Serial System factors of physical capacity, upper extremities, lower extremities, hearing, eyes, and psychiatric (PULHES); Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) scores; security clearances; training; and a myriad of additional requirements needed for manning. Once Soldiers identified their desired CMF or branch, the

## Timeline

2006	South Dakota National Guard accepted a combat support brigade—maneuver enhanced.
February–May 2007	Filled key leadership positions and began work on a flag, crest, TACSOP, mission-essential task list (METL), and manning document.
September 2007	Personnel attended the Maneuver Support Brigade Experiment at Fort Leonard Wood. Made initial face-to-face contacts with MANSCEN. Attended 196th MEB Activation Ceremony. Implemented carrier unit identification.
February 2008	Requested assistance visit and forecast training opportunities through MANSCEN.
March 2008	Personnel observed Captains Career Course Warfighter III Exercise at Fort Leonard Wood.
May 2008	Key staff attended MEB Commanders' Conference. MANSCEN trainers gave initial MEB brief at Sioux Falls armory. Unit planned 2-week annual training date for January 2009 at Fort Leonard Wood.
July 2008	Personnel attended the Maneuver Support Seminar at Fort Leonard Wood.
August 2008	MANSCEN subject matter experts (SMEs) assisted 196th MEB staff with military decision-making process (MDMP).
September 2008	196th MEB received notification for training.
November 2008	MANSCEN SMEs assisted 196th MEB staff with completion of MDMP exercise. Unit conducted preannual training coordination visit with MANSCEN exercise personnel.
January 2009	196th MEB conducted two-week annual training at Fort Leonard Wood.
Spring 2010	196th MEB mobilization date is expected.

transformation commands within the SDARNG began selecting lateral applicants and then promotion positions for the remaining vacancies to cross-level and fill each of the transformation units, of which the 196th MEB was a factor.

A particular challenge for the MEB was identifying the specific CMF and branch requirements and idiosyncrasies for changing enlisted CMF and officer branch transfers. Some CMF and branch transfers were easy to identify and accomplish—a short three- or four-week resident Reserve Component (RC) military occupational skill qualification

(MOSQ) course or a combination of distributed learning and resident training. Other CMF and branch transfer qualifications still present obstacles after a year of coordination. The civil affairs (CA) training has limitations to CA units only, even though the MEB modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) has a CA major position listed on the MTOE. The unit's attempt to gain access for branch qualification at the Civil Affairs Officer Qualification Course (CAQC) continues to draw repeated denials of enrollment.

The MOSQ courses for CMFs 11, 15, and 68 have grade limitations for attendance. For example, the CMF 11 course does not allow for enrollment above the grade of E-7, making sergeants major and master sergeants targeted for CMF 11 positions in the MEB unable to enroll in the CMF 11 MOSQ course, unless they take a reduction to E-7. CMFs 15 and 68 have similar policies that limit attendance to E-5s or lower. Other low-density military occupational specialties (MOSs) and officer branches have presented challenges in counseling officers and noncommissioned officers on the opportunities afforded by transferring to a new career field. Such transfers sometimes carry a heavy cost of branch qualification in terms of time and school attendance. These career fields may be valid for only one grade before Soldiers need to transfer to new career fields to continue with their military career. In South Dakota, those career fields are not predominant in numbers in the state and have no lower-ranked positions to fill from normal progression.

The final hurdle for unit manning is induced by the pending mobilization within the next year. With the limited time and knowledge of the various career field requirements, not all schools are offered on a routine and continual basis for RC units. This means that some courses may have limited enrollment for RC Soldiers, and if school availability does not align with other military and civilian requirements, Soldiers selected for certain positions do not have the opportunity to become MOSQ- or branch-qualified prior to the mobilization of the unit, thus impacting unit and individual readiness. In addition, Soldiers have also gone through the multiple steps required for additional skill identifiers and clearance requirements not needed in their former career paths or units.

However, the 196th MEB has had numerous successes in the personnel arena; officers and enlisted members took on the challenges to reclassify and move forward in their new careers. More than a third of the 196th MEB Soldiers have gone through MOS or branch transfers to pursue their new career paths and are now continuing with their individual contributions to the collective MEB mission as the unit prepares for mobilization.

## Operations

**W**hen the 196th was alerted, there was limited doctrine available. Select staff attended conferences and other events at MANSCEN, where they were exposed to MEB doctrinal principles that were then shared with the unit. With the absence of a field manual (FM)—and with very few magazine articles or publications to

reference—the development of training was difficult. In April 2008, a draft of FM 3-90.31, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations*, was published. This was the unit's first opportunity to really understand how the Army envisioned the applicability of the MEB. After this, FM 3-90.31 went through several more drafts and was finalized in February 2009.

In January 2008, the MEB S-3 began to develop the METL. There was no mission training plan manual for an MEB, so the unit's METL was built using FM 7-15, *The Army Universal Task List*, and basing it on FM 3-90.31, as well as on information obtained from MANSCEN. This first METL allowed the unit to begin its initial training program. Eventually, the 196th obtained a copy of the Combined Arms Training Strategy (CATS) for an MEB, which helped considerably because it broke out the missions, tasks, and supporting tasks for each section. The unit then revised its METL to reflect the CATS data, in conjunction with the Army Universal Task List. Its current METL is the product of several revisions after various pieces of data became available.

The 196th does not have a directed mission-essential task list (DMETL) in its predeployment training, but is moving forward by anticipating what its DMETL might look like. The 196th knows the types of missions being conducted by MEBs in-theater and knows the projection of the MEB it is scheduled to replace. If that mission set remains the same through the next rotation, the 196th feels confident of what its DMETL will comprise.

To build its own tactical standing operating procedure (TACSOP), the 196th obtained TACSOPs from two established MEBs, as well as one from a rear operations center (ROC), since an MEB seemed to inherit missions similar to those performed by ROCs. And since South Dakota has a strong history with engineer and field artillery units, the 196th used those brigade-level TACSOPs in its development of a new draft document.

It was a somewhat difficult process to put together a draft TACSOP because of the diversity of staff sections. The 196th knew that communication and staff integration would be critical. Every section contributed to the draft so that it captured the diversity of the MEB's staff sections. Two staff members monitored the construction of the base document and developed timelines, guidance, and monitoring techniques to ensure completion and assembly of the document.

## Logistics

**W**hen looking at the overall logistical mission associated with transforming from a field artillery brigade to an MEB, the 196th identified four major tasks that needed to be accomplished:

- Develop an all-inclusive, brigade-wide, cross-leveling plan.
- Develop a turn-in plan for all excess equipment.
- Prioritize and order stock-funded items.
- Establish and execute a new equipment fielding plan.

Although these tasks had to be addressed in sequential order, at times some of them overlapped.

**Develop a Cross-Leveling Plan.** When the 196th MEB developed a cross-leveling plan, it examined projected MTOEs for the new subordinate units and filled as many shortages as possible from the legacy unit property books. The changes in MTOE between activation date and effective date presented a challenge. The cross-leveling plan was prioritized based on filling the higher equipment readiness code first, as well as looking at the current Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) Model to prioritize one unit over another. Once the cross-leveling was accomplished throughout all the brigade units, property book reconciliation occurred at the state level to ensure that all shortages were filled before excess equipment was identified.

**Develop a Turn-In Plan.** After cross-leveling occurred, the 196th developed a plan in which it conducted normal turn-in procedures for all excess equipment. The plan was executed two full years from the effective date of the MTOE. This ensured that the MEB had accomplished the turn-ins prior to being overwhelmed by receiving new equipment being fielded. A shortcoming the 196th encountered during the turn-in of equipment was the failure to identify the number of man-hours required to properly condition-code all the equipment for turn-in.

**Prioritize and Order Stock-Funded Items.** The logistics section worked with other staff sections and unit commanders to develop a list of priorities for using its budget as it ordered stock-funded items. The money spent on these items was prioritized according to the current ARFORGEN Model. A serious issue encountered was that the transformation to an MEB occurred more than two years prior to the effective date of the MTOE, causing major delays in the ability to order MTOE equipment.

**Establish and Execute a New Equipment Fielding Plan.** The concern with this plan, developed through coordination with the state headquarters, continues to be the time constraints imposed due to a pending mobilization. There is a massive amount of fielding associated with the creation of an MEB and a large number of hours training on, and issuing, the equipment. This, combined with the premobilization training requirements, makes time the most valuable commodity.

Prior planning and organization of tasks are essential to this mission, due to the many individual transactions required to successfully complete the process. Troublesome issues were avoided during the transition, since there was good communication with subordinate units and higher headquarters, as well as an exceptional plan that was well-thought-out and flexible enough to change with the situation.

## MANSCEN Team and Facilities

The 196th MEB made the decision early in the transformation process to contact and use the MANSCEN team for resources at home station and at Fort

Leonard Wood. The team responded with excellent training, mentorship, and advice for MEB operations. The support staff and resident experts provided excellent technical and tactical support to facilitate training for an MEB that illustrated numerous examples of how an MEB staff would handle real-world situations. The Warfighter Exercise conducted during the 196th's two-week annual training at Fort Leonard Wood brought its diverse staff team together into a solid MEB staff group. The MEB Soldiers acquired knowledge in other functional areas and gained respect for the technical skills of their peers. The MANSCEN team worked hard to ensure that the 196th received the best training possible while at their facility and continues to be a valuable asset to the unit.

## Summary

The road to becoming a fully operational MEB was a demanding and rewarding experience for the Soldiers of the 196th MEB. This period of time was intense as the unit manned, equipped, and trained for future mission deployment—working in uncharted territory with limited resources and a short time frame. The efforts of the 196th MEB to transform from a field artillery brigade to an MEB in the midst of a transforming Army at war provides a sound methodology for other MEBs facing the same endeavor. The areas of MOSQ, CMF, and branch requirements; doctrinal principles; equipment fielding; and, most important, time will prove to be critical factors to readiness. The progress made in each of the sections of personnel, training, and logistics—coupled with a working relationship with MANSCEN—will surely set the conditions for success for any MEB to be fully operational and ready when facing future deployments.



*Lieutenant Colonel Eining was the executive officer of the 196th MEB during the development of this article and has since assumed command of the 153d Engineer Battalion. He deployed as the S-3 for the 153d Engineer Battalion in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004–2005, and is projected to assume command of the 153d. He is a graduate of the United States Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) Intermediate Level Education (ILE), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and holds a bachelor's in sociology from Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota.*

*Lieutenant Colonel Wiesner is the civil affairs officer in the 196th MEB. He deployed as an embedded training team mentor S-1 with the 147th Field Artillery Brigade in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2006–2007. He is a graduate of CGSC ILE and holds a bachelor's in business administration from the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.*

---

**Note:** The authors would like to thank the following individuals for their input to this article: Lieutenant Colonel Rodney Burmeister, Major John Breyer, Major Jason Kettwig, and Major Aaron Schultz.