

# Enlisted PERSCOM Notes



By Lieutenant Colonel Jack Smith

On behalf of the staff here in Alexandria, Virginia, greetings from the Engineer Enlisted Branch, Total Army Personnel Command (PERSCOM).

## Health of the Regiment

Overall, the Engineer Regiment is very healthy with a major exception of our flagship military occupational specialty (MOS), 12B (combat engineer). Today our Regiment is manned with 16 of 21 MOSs at or above 100 percent, with three more at 99 percent (see Table 1).

Our biggest challenge continues to be the 12B MOS. Manning levels in units throughout the Army have resulted in the addition of this MOS to the Army's top ten critical shortage MOS list. There are several reasons for this. The primary reason is the very low accessions for 12Bs in FY01 and early FY02 in order to decrease the MOS, which at one point reached 111 percent manning levels. This low influx of new combat engineers now has units in the field at or below 90 percent manning for skill level one soldiers. The fix to this problem is already in place. In October 2002, we raised the number of new soldiers that we will recruit into the combat engineer field. It is comforting to know we are taking action to bring manning strengths to appropriate levels; however, we also know that it will take almost a year to get the MOS healthy.

Several actions taken over the past fiscal year have dramatically improved our low density MOSs: 00B (diver), 52E (prime power production specialist), and airborne 62E/J (construction equipment operator). The largest issue for the diver community is the requirement to be diver-certified before being promoted to E5 and E6. The lack of progress in the certification process can slow promotion rates to a crawl. The good news is that the diver community can solve its NCO shortage problems by aggressively pursuing the certification process. The bad news is that we still have many promotion-eligible diver soldiers who are waiting to be certified.

Our prime power community will get healthy this spring with the graduation of the next advanced individual training class. We can fully expect this MOS to come off the Stop Loss Program at that time. Airborne construction equipment operators are always in short supply. These MOSs offer very attractive reclassification bonuses under the Bonus Extension and Retraining (BEAR) Program. Call this office if you are interested in reclassifying into these specialties.

Recruiting and retention have been well above historical averages across the Army and in the Engineer Regiment. Our FY03 recruiting program is at 103 percent, year to date, for the engineer career management fields, and we have recruited 71 percent of FY03s total engineer recruiting mission.

On the reenlistment side, all but one of our 21 specialties is well above the five-year historical trend. Current trends indicate this success rate will continue. Note, however, that in December 2002, a message was published that dramatically decreased the selective reenlistment program for the Army. More than 200 MOSs were removed from the bonus program, and the remaining few experienced decreases in the amount of money in the bonus program.

The long-term projections for the Regiment are very good. We can expect our shortage MOSs (12B10, 00B, and 52E) to improve dramatically in the next 12 months. Meanwhile, other

Engineer Enlisted Operational Strengths*		
MOS	Authorized Strength	Strength (percent)
12B	8,161	96
12C	672	103
12Z	234	91
00B	129	102
51B	881	118
51H	433	106
51K	115	103
51M	247	94
51R	127	148
51T	257	127
51Z	116	100
52E	183	89
62E	1,326	103
62F	278	103
62H	102	101
62J	673	105
62N	466	102
81L	233	112
81T	469	100
81Z	19	95
82D	109	110
Total	15,240	98.5

\*As of 6 December 2002

Table 1

specialties (51B, 51R, 51T, and 81L) will experience decreases in overall strength to bring them in line with authorized manning levels. The 51R, 51T, and 81L each have some soldiers enrolled in the Fast Track Program, where they are required to reclassify into another MOS due to overstrengths in those particular fields.

### Assignment Process

**T**he assignment process is simple:

- The Army defines where soldiers are authorized.
- PERSCOM identifies those authorizations that have no soldiers assigned to them.
- PERSCOM requisitions the branches for soldiers to fill those authorizations.
- An assignment manager goes into the personnel data base and identifies those soldiers who are eligible to fill the requisitions and nominates them to be slotted against those requisitions.
- The nomination process can end with the assignment manager's direct supervisor, depending on the complexity of the assignment, or the process may have to go all the way to the director of the Enlisted Personnel Management Directorate for approval to place a soldier on assignment instructions. In the case of specialty assignments like recruiting and drill sergeant, the files also have to go before administrative boards to ensure that only the best NCOs are slotted into those critical billets.

Now that I have been a part of PERSCOM for six months and have explained the assignment process, I am even more aware of some critical information that needs to be reviewed and updated periodically:

- Unit commanders, first sergeants, battalion S1s and S3s, and personnel managers at all levels must periodically review their modified tables of organization and equipment (MTOEs) or tables of distribution and allowances (TDAs) for completeness. These documents define the authorizations, and it is only these authorizations that can have soldiers requisitioned.
- Unit manning reports are the next important documents. The data in the reports is a direct reflection of what soldier inventory your unit has assigned against its authorizations.

Because I was a company commander for more than three years and a battalion S1, executive officer, and commander, I am familiar with the frustration that arises from trying to manage a unit manning roster. However, I cannot overemphasize that this data must be accurate so PERSCOM will have the opportunity to assign the right person to the right billet.

The most common mistakes in the database include improper grades for enlisted soldiers; soldiers spending an inordinate amount of time with a "gain" code, even after they have been working in a position for months; and soldiers not being placed on a loss roster. Improper grades for your soldiers have the impact of not getting the proper rank structure assigned to your organization. Remember that promotables are counted against the next higher grade for assignment purposes. The loss roster is perhaps the most important data at the unit level. If a soldier is not carried as a loss, the personnel system will never identify a soldier to replace that loss until after the soldier has left. In the case of retirements, this can result in a billet going empty for over 18 months since the unit will not have the soldier available during transition and/or on terminal leave.

In the last PERSCOM Notes, I provided a detailed discussion on how to get your assignment preferences to us. The preferred method is your Army Knowledge Online account. The next best way is to submit a DA Form 4187 *Personnel Action*. Also key is to contact your assignment manager at least every six months. Our Web site, listed at the end of this article, has all the phone numbers and addresses you need. It will have information that can help you make career decisions and set you up for future success in the Army. I highly encourage you to visit our Web page at least monthly. We are updating it every month with information pertinent to the engineer enlisted force. We also have a new site that lists critical billets throughout the Engineer Regiment that most soldiers do not even know exist. If you are an E6, E7, or E8 and are due for a new assignment in the next 8 to 18 months, visit this page on a monthly basis, and contact your assignment manager when you see a billet that piques your interest.

### Promotions and Training

**T**here is nothing more frustrating here at PERSCOM than reviewing readiness reports every month that complain about the shortage of NCOs across the Army. At the same time, we see monthly reports that lay out the thousands of soldiers who are eligible for promotion but have not yet been boarded. A look at the engineer star MOSs provides a clear example of how we could solve our own NCO shortages (see Table 2).

Fully understanding that not all board-eligible soldiers are worthy of consideration for promotion, I also know that most are worthy. The chain of command needs to aggressively pursue the promotion board program. There are thousands of reasons and excuses that make it hard to implement the promotion program, but it has to be done well for our great soldiers in the field. It is usually the combat units, the forward deployed units, and the units in the field that have the hardest times meeting the promotion board process because they are simply working so hard at their missions. But it is exactly these soldiers who deserve the promotions. I will never stop publishing the simple message to all the soldiers in the field. "If your unit

Engineer STAR MOSs			
MOS	Rank	Number Needed	Number Eligible
00B	SSG	22	26
51K	SGT	7	31
51M	SGT	13	51
51M	SSG	19	26

**Table 2**

has you working or assigned to a billet that requires the next higher grade, go to your first sergeant and/or command sergeant major and request to be put before the next board if you are eligible.” If the chain of command wants to work you at the next higher paygrade, then get promoted and paid for the level of responsibility that they are demanding of you.

Conditional promotions have been on the street for some time, but they require attendance in the requisite Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) course (Primary Leader Development Course, Basic and Advanced Non-commissioned Officer’s Courses) within one year of the conditional promotion. Failure to meet this requirement can result in a demotion. There are exceptions to policy for operational and hardship reasons; however, it is imperative that the soldiers attend the NCOES courses as soon as possible. Do not hesitate to contact this office if you have questions about NCOES attendance or conditional promotions.

For information on pending selection boards, visit the PERSCOM Web site ([www.perscomonline.army.mil](http://www.perscomonline.army.mil)) for the latest news. It’s up to you to review your Official Military Personnel File. You can obtain a copy by following the procedures posted at the PERSCOM Web site.

### **Contacting Us**

**T**he sole function of Engineer Branch is to support soldiers and commanders in the field. I encourage you to contact your assignment manager, professional development NCO, branch sergeant major, or me with any questions you have about assignments or professional development. The PERSCOM Web site has information on how to reach us. Remember, the only thing in the assignment process that does not have to be a variable is your preference. Take the time to let us know your preference.