

# Pentagon Assignments: A Plea for a New Way of Thinking

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**A**fter a year of reflecting on the time we spent serving on the Army Staff before rejoining the “field Army,” we feel compelled to address some common misperceptions about working at the Pentagon. We believe that these misperceptions lead some of the best military police officers and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to steer clear of a Pentagon assignment, even though that may be where their talents could be of most value to the Military Police Corps and the Army.

Following our assignments as battalion executive officers and operations and training officers (S3s), we arrived at the Pentagon expecting what many other officers had warned us about—a giant, unyielding bureaucracy incapable of adapting to change and impervious to the efforts of individual field grade officers, no matter how hard they worked. Many of these officers claimed that they “would never work at the Pentagon.” But now that we have actually worked there, we would like to share our completely different insight in an effort to encourage other officers to consider a Pentagon assignment.

We quickly realized that, with genuine persistence and people skills, rocks *can* be moved uphill and officers *can* get things done in the Pentagon. We were able to pursue a number of important actions and projects—some of our own initiative (based on operational experience) and some directed by our leadership—and we were able to see them through to completion. We are proud to have been a part of the various action officer teams that shaped Army decisions to expand the military police force structure by 47 percent (the largest military police growth since the Vietnam “ramp up”); build deployable internment/resettlement units at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Fort Lewis, Washington, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and initiate the Expeditionary Forensics Program, among many other significant projects.

Good Pentagon action officers have a big impact on major decisions. Senior leaders really do listen to action officers. In fact, they depend on action officers to provide the best information and analysis possible for shaping significant decisions. The complexity of the problem sets faced by the Pentagon requires that action officers conduct comprehensive research to determine the core issues. Quality research and analysis have a significant impact. Good action officers often find themselves working with the Joint Staff, sitting at the desk of the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans (G-3) and preparing him for a meeting in the “tank,” or serving as subject matter

experts in briefings to the Vice Chief of Staff or Secretary of the Army.

Working at the Pentagon offers the opportunity for unique professional and personal experiences that provide a solid foundation for future leadership positions. Action officers are often called upon to brief members of Congress and the professional staffs of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. They may also interact with the media by providing background information or being interviewed. In addition, action officers attend numerous meetings with senior leaders that force action officers to thoroughly prepare and develop situational awareness on many levels. We can honestly say that we never left a meeting with a senior Army leader without learning something about senior level leadership, the Army, or a wide variety of other important issues. Our experiences have made us better Army officers.

Most importantly, we can attest that exceptional people work at the Pentagon. The best officers, senior NCOs, and civilians from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps work there. They are positive team players who are willing to help anyone who needs assistance. Simply stated, they are great people to be around and you can learn from them.

After leaving Washington, D.C., and reflecting on the time we spent serving on the Army Staff, we recognize that our tenure there was professionally and personally rewarding. We encourage all leaders to seek opportunities to serve at the Pentagon—on the Army or Joint Staff or within the Department of Defense. It is essential that we build a solid bench of military police officers and senior NCOs with successful Pentagon tours to help shape future decisions of our Military Police Corps and, more importantly, our Army.

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