

Clear The Way

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Stepping into the job as the Commandant of the Engineer School and Regiment is an incredible honor...daunting when I look at the character, vision, toughness, and accomplishments of the previous Commandants, from Colonel Jonathan Williams in 1802 to Colonel Bob Tipton today—all magnificent leaders. So, you wonder, how did that happen to Watson? Well, I'm very clear about how I got to these crossroads. It was the Soldiers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and officers that I've had the incredible privilege of serving alongside that got me here. THEIR dedication, THEIR sense of mission, THEIR personal sacrifice, and THEIR willingness to serve...made the difference. As I step into the position as the next Commandant, know that it was your hard work—your coaching—that prepared me for this job. I'm eternally grateful and look forward to living up to your expectations with the same sense of service. My wife Kris and I are elated about returning to our Home of Engineers and serving this tremendous regimental family to our utmost...a family we have come to love as our own.



Recently, during a meeting with senior engineer leaders from across the Regiment, our Chief of Engineers, Lieutenant General Van Antwerp, made the comment that these are historic times for our world, our Nation, our Army...and our Regiment. I had to ponder that for a moment. When I think of the challenges we faced in these past years of conflict and the accomplishments of engineers in the fight, they are beyond historic. The pace of operations at the unit level as we reorganize, field new capabilities, restation, prepare to deploy, conduct full spectrum operations in multiple theaters, and reset to redeploy is...well...unprecedented. The responsibilities borne by young engineer leaders in our small units are without parallel in my career...beyond our imagination only 10 years ago. Yet, they meet the challenge with splendor. Our adaptation of doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) and the rapid fielding of new equipment to meet our dynamic needs in combat is extraordinary by every measure. Finally, the steely resolve of our Soldiers to see "the Long War" through to victory...to repeatedly deploy-redeploy...to get back out on point to clear and build the way! Frankly, it leaves me in absolute awe of today's engineers.

Yes, this is a historic time for our Regiment, replete with *historic challenges* overcome by *historic acts* by *historic-caliber* engineer Soldiers and Leaders in *historic service* to their nation. But don't let your focus on our recent challenges and accomplishments obscure what should be paramount. It is the *historic opportunity* we have to shape our Regiment for the generations of engineers still to join our ranks that makes these critical times. Our responsibility is to harness today's historic experience and use it to forge our future. We must

make today's history matter so we can continue to answer the call of our Army and our Nation with the engineer service it has come to expect.

The question at hand is, *Where should we focus our collective efforts into prudent actions that will guarantee our Engineer Regiment's legacy of service to the Army and Nation into the future?* In my view, there are seven key strategic tasks that must guide us as we navigate the uncertain waters that lie ahead—in priority:

- **Breed the Army's best leaders** by instilling passion for the traditions of engineer service among all ranks and inspiring them to be part of something bigger than self...without passion, this is just a job.
- **Be clear in our purpose:** We exist to provide the full spectrum of engineer capabilities needed to **assure the movement, maneuver, protection, and freedom of action of the force** from theater to tactical-level operations. It drives everything we do; it must guide our priorities.
- **Build Great Engineers through lifelong development opportunities** for officers and noncommissioned officers to ensure that our formations have the technical skills, operational savvy, and physical/mental stamina to continue our heritage of expert service to the Nation in battle or peace.
- **Constantly improve the Regiment's stance at the line of scrimmage** so we can rapidly respond to the commander's audible with the full spectrum of engineer capabilities...and be ready for tomorrow's battle.
- **Extend our view of the engineer team** beyond our regimental formations in all components, to include our sister Services and industry partners; learn to leverage and complement their capabilities.
- **Take immense pride in our Regiment**, never forgetting our purpose to support the force first...**serving as engineers with the heart of a sapper!**

In my estimate, these strategic key tasks are imperatives for the future. Some we do extremely well now, while others represent recent initiatives already underway. We must sustain those efforts! But the list also describes new territory that I believe is vitally important to ensure that we provide commanders with the engineer force they require in future conflicts. They must guide our way ahead and the tough decisions we will face. Overall, they support my personal vision for our Engineer Regiment:

*A **Regimental Family** of the world's finest military engineers who **lead to serve others** and answer the call to **solve the commander's toughest problems**. A Regiment organized into **highly flexible, tailorable, and adaptive units** capable of supporting anyone, anywhere, with the right engineer capability. A Regiment filled with Soldiers **inspiring each other to go beyond** "Let Us Try" and achieve "Well done, engineer!"*

Is this vision of the Engineer Regiment and supporting key strategic tasks carved in stone? No, this is the mark I've personally set on the wall—my estimate of the way forward. I urge you to make your own assessment and come to ENFORCE prepared to be an active participant in the professional debate that will confirm this vision and chart our future. I only ask one thing... come prepared to take your historic experience and help shape the legacy we will pass on to our young engineers who will clear and build the way for our Army in the future.