



Assignment Opportunities in the Far East District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

By Major Richard T. Byrd, Jr., and Sergeant First Class Carl L. Lindsay II

Military assignments in Korea are many and varied. Among them are opportunities for active duty Army engineers to serve in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Far East District (FED). Both non-commissioned and commissioned officers can serve here. This article describes two possible assignments—that of project engineer and construction inspector.

Project Engineer

Most officers assigned to the FED come through the Advanced Civil Schooling Program. This is usually an 18-month program in a specified engineering discipline or in construction management. (See the engineer Web site for more information: https://www.perscom.online.army.mil/OPeng/advanced_civil_schooling.htm).

Another way to be eligible is to already have your master's, perhaps through the University of Missouri-Rolla program at the U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, or through the Degree Completion Program. You must also have completed a successful company command. If assigned to the FED, you will have the option of serving in a two-year command-sponsored tour or a one-year non-command-sponsored tour. If you select a one-year tour, then you will return to the states to complete your three-year commitment to the Corps. Currently there are seven engineer officer positions authorized at the FED, two of which are the commander and deputy commander.

As a captain or major you will probably be assigned as a project engineer, working in one of six resident or project offices. Project engineers serve in a position similar to an area construction manager in a civilian construction company. You will supervise civilian quality assurance representatives whose responsibility is projects ranging in cost from thousands to multimillion dollar contracts. Your job as a project engineer will include several types of contracts, to include military

construction and host-nation-funded projects. The FED supports the United States Forces Korea (USFK), and therefore, our customers cover every service component and other agencies such as the Army and Air Force Exchange Service and Department of Defense Dependents' Schools.

Some of your responsibilities as a project engineer will include—

- Verifying and processing contractor payment applications.
- Visiting project sites to monitor safety, quality, and progress.
- Corresponding with contractors and customers.
- Interpreting contract drawings and specifications.
- Attending periodic progress meetings with contractors.
- Managing quality assurance representatives.
- Being involved in military exercises.

As a project engineer, you will also be appointed as a contracting officer's representative. This gives you the authority to administer contracts and direct contractors as they execute projects.

This job is an excellent opportunity to use your engineering skills/education that you may not have exercised in most troop units. You will manage projects of varying scope—from dining facilities and fire stations to barracks upgrades and airfield runway pavements. In managing these projects, you will interface with contractors, customers, facility users, Directorate of Public Works personnel, base civil engineer personnel from the Air Force, and a variety of other people involved in the construction process. This also includes a large USACE team. The FED maintains a staff of technical experts—to include designers and mechanical, civil, electrical, architectural, structural, environmental, and geotechnical engineers. You can also “reach back” to USACE labs, Centers of Expertise, or

any other USACE district for assistance if you need to. So, although you may not have much experience in construction, you are surrounded by other people who do. It's just like being a platoon leader again; if you're smart, you keep quiet and listen to your NCOs. The same principle applies here; you listen and learn from those around you with the experience, and you'll be up and running in no time. The learning curve is initially steep, but you will catch on quickly and be on your way to being a successful project engineer.

Another responsibility you will have is working with the service components in Korea during contingencies. As the only USACE maneuver district, we have the added task of assisting with the development and maintenance of the contingency construction list—a list of construction projects to be executed in the event of a contingency. The major work for this list occurs during two exercises held each year: Ulchi Focus Lens and Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration. The FED provides liaison officers or teams to each service component, USFK, and the Republic of Korea army during these exercises. The entire FED team—as well as reach-back capabilities to the Centers of Expertise in the states—is utilized during these exercises.

Other duties during contingencies for military members include leading facility damage assessment teams, performing staff officer duties, or deploying as a member of a deployable forward engineer support team-advance (FEST-A) as part of the USACE field force engineering doctrine.

Construction Inspector

Noncommissioned officers assigned to the FED as construction inspectors are usually staff sergeants who have completed their squad leader time and are

close to promotion to sergeant first class with military occupational specialty (MOS) 51H, construction engineer. Construction inspectors work for a project engineer and are delegated authority and responsibility to monitor and administer the contractual provisions for assigned projects.

About 10 percent of your time will be spent on—

- Reviewing plans and specifications during the design and/or bidding phase, paying special attention to existing field conditions.
- Preparing comments for possible changes to plans and specifications.

About 80 percent of your time will be spent on—

- Monitoring on-site contractor supervision and inspection of construction activities.
- Ensuring that construction quality is achieved by enforcing the quality control provisions of the contract. This includes ensuring that the contractor's field staff makes periodic inspections and tests.
- Reviewing and evaluating construction progress, quality assurance findings, and recommended field and office engineering changes for consistency with contractual provisions, specifications, and cost estimates.
- Discussing problems and recommendations with the project engineer and providing input for solutions or courses of action based on knowledge and experience with the contract and from observations made at project sites.
- Reviewing the contractor's construction schedules, safety program, and quality control plan and initiating field changes.



A project engineer inspects a standing seam metal roof.



A construction inspector checks roofing materials.

- Informing the project engineer of progress and other significant contract administrations.
- Ensuring that contractor as-built drawings are kept up to date.
- Participating in joint occupancy and final transfer inspections.
- Furnishing field information for construction progress and feeder information for other reports.

About 10 percent of your time will be spent on—

- Enforcing the project safety program.
- Supervising the contractor's efforts in the implementation of Engineer Manual 385-1-1, *Safety and Health Requirements*.

There are also exercises that the FED participates in that transition the soldier from the duties of construction inspector to those of a liaison officer for one of the service components. In this, you help the component complete the contingency construction list by offering the design and construction services the FED has as well as the ability to "reach back" for a vast amount of technical information. In addition, there are the daily soldier duties of physical fitness training, weapons qualification, etc.

This assignment is definitely a career-enhancing assignment. The number of construction projects, methods, and techniques that NCOs will be exposed to during an assignment with the FED is unequalled in the average Army construction engineer's NCO career.

Conclusion

If you come to Korea with the right attitude and are willing to learn, you'll have a great tour. Things have changed since some of you were here. The commander has really worked hard to improve the quality of life all around the peninsula. Not only does this equate to more work for USACE but also to a better way of life for all of us here. This job is definitely unique and, no, you are not stuck behind a desk all day. Getting out and seeing the construction projects allows you to experience new things every day. It is a very rewarding assignment, knowing that you play a major role in improving the quality of life for all service members in Korea. 

Major Byrd received a master's in construction management from the University of Oklahoma through the Army's Advanced Civil Schooling Program before serving two years with the Far East District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a project engineer in the Central Resident Office at Osan Air Base, Korea. He is currently a staff officer for the 8th Army Engineers, Korea. MAJ Byrd's next assignment will be the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Sergeant First Class Lindsay was a construction inspector with the Far East District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers when this article was written. He is currently the platoon sergeant of 1st Platoon, Alpha Company, 46th Engineer Battalion, Fort Polk, Louisiana. SFC Lindsay holds an associate in general studies and is working on a bachelor's in business and management.