

ENGINEER OPPORTUNITIES ON THE

BY MAJOR ALLISON DAY

SOUTHWEST BORDER



Real-world homeland security support engineer missions abound for United States Army engineer units looking for additional training opportunities that are directly related to their mission-essential task list (METL). The missions have been useful for units preparing for and returning from overseas deployments.

The homeland support missions are offered by Joint Task Force (JTF) North, the Department of Defense organization that coordinates and manages the engineering support provided to the United States Border Patrol along the Southwest border. The training missions give Regular Army and Army Reserve engineers the opportunity to plan, deploy, execute, and redeploy as platoon-, company-, or battalion-size elements to the Southwest desert via self-deployment, military or commercial airlift, or a combination of both.

Of special interest to commanders facing limited training funds is the fact that JTF North funds all mission-related costs, to include travel, per diem, and other associated expenses. All costs for materials used on engineer support missions are paid for by the supported law enforcement agencies. As an added benefit, JTF North issues contracts for—

- Most of the heavy equipment.
- Required equipment maintenance and training.
- Support vehicles.
- Billeting at local hotels or military support facilities.
- Ration support.
- Commercial air.

Engineer projects range from building personnel and vehicular barriers to installing lighting and constructing drainage structures and service roads for the Border Patrol along the U.S.-Mexico border. Depending on their scope, missions can last from two weeks to 179 days. The majority of the engineer support missions are long-term operations that the United States Army Corps of Engineers and the Border Patrol plan one to two years before execution and can consist of multiple-phase operations that may take several months or years to complete. Units generally volunteer and enter the planning process six months before deployment. JTF North executes approximately 14 engineer support missions each year.



Joint Task Force North Background Information

Joint Task Force (JTF) North, based at Biggs Army Airfield, Fort Bliss, Texas, is a joint service command composed of Regular Army and Army Reserve Soldiers, as well as Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Department of Defense civilians, and contracted support personnel. All military support for homeland security is based on support requests and threat assessments submitted by the federal law enforcement agencies assigned to the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice. Assuming the support is appropriate and in compliance with the statutory guidelines for the domestic employment of military forces, JTF North seeks military units to volunteer to provide the requested operational support. Once a unit volunteers, JTF North facilitates mission planning and execution with the unit and the supported agency. According to Department of Defense policy, missions must have a training value to the unit or provide a significant contribution to national security.

Navy Seabees construct drainage structures for the Border Patrol.

The primary reason that units volunteer for the missions is that they typically get to train on 90 percent of their METL, to include individual and collective training. In their after-action reports, many commanders have commented that these missions resulted in the best engineer training they had ever conducted. Units also train on technical and project management skills that are difficult to practice in a combat training center environment. Overall, JTF North helps round out unit readiness.

For more information on JTF North and its engineering support missions, visit the command's website at: <http://www.jtfn.northcom.mil>, or contact the JTF North engineer planners at (915) 313-7787/7688 or DSN 666-7787/7688. 

Major Day is an engineer planner with JTF-North. She has had command and staff experience in topographic and combat mechanized engineer battalions. Her most recent assignment was teaching in the Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. She holds a bachelor's in forestry from the University of Missouri-Columbia and a master's in remote sensing and geospatial information management from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She can be contacted at JTF North, Building 11603, Staff Sergeant Sims Street, Fort Bliss, Texas 79918-0058; by phone at (915) 313-7787; or fax at (915) 313-7687.