Early Engagement Strategy at Norwich University

By Lieutenant Colonel Richard A. Pratt and Brigadier General (P) Gregg F. Martin

Field Manual 3-0, *Operations,* states that the Army's operational concept is full spectrum operations:

Army forces combine offensive, defensive, and stability or civil support operations simultaneously as part of an interdependent joint force to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative, accepting prudent risk to create opportunities to achieve decisive results. They employ synchronized action—lethal and nonlethal—proportional to the mission and informed by a thorough understanding of all variables of the operational environment. Mission command that conveys intent and an appreciation of all aspects of the situation guides the adaptive use of Army forces.

The role of the engineer force is critical in all four elements of operations—offense, defense, stability, and civil support. Our current operations challenge our deployed engineer units daily with a myriad of missions across the full spectrum of operations. The need for an Engineer Corps capable of meeting these challenges and providing America's Army the engineering expertise required to defeat our enemies and build infrastructure has never been more apparent. Further, the need for young officers—capable of demonstrating the Sapper Spirit in high-intensity conflict balanced with the technical know-how required during stability and civil support operations—has never been more significant to our Regiment.

Lieutenant General Robert L. Van Antwerp, the United States Army Chief of Engineers, is investigating a theory that indicates our engineer leader technical competency has declined over the past several years. Some examples include—

- United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) performance prior to, and response during, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.
- Comments from senior military engineer leaders regarding engineer support to the War on Terrorism.
- Increased emphasis placed on construction engineering skills highlighted by a presidential directive placing stability operations on par with offensive and defensive military operations.
- Current engineer force structure that does not facilitate senior engineer mentoring of junior engineer officers.
- Known decreases in military engineering developmental assignments and a shift toward sapper (mobility and countermobility) focus in the Engineer Regiment.

Each of these contributory factors indicates that there is a possible technical competency decline that potentially crosses multiple levels of both civilian and military leadership.

The Chief of Engineers asked Brigadier General Martin, then Commandant of the United States Army Engineer School, to lead an investigation and resolution of the decline. The Commandant formed a coalition from within and outside the Department of Defense to investigate and implement solutions that reverse engineer leader technical competency decline. The intent is to develop and implement an integrated, sustainable National Engineer Leader Technical Competency Strategy that accesses, develops, employs, and retains world-class engineer leaders who are technically and tactically capable and competent to deliver full spectrum engineering in the 21st century.

LTG Van Antwerp also charged the Regiment's senior leaders to focus their strategic communications towards the concept of *Building Great Engineers*. BG Martin did some quick analysis to determine where he'd be able to make the "biggest bang for his buck." He concluded that he would engage several military colleges at the strategic level—the university president, the Dean of Academics, and the Commandant of Cadets. Further, he'd engage at the operational level—with department heads and instructors—and also at the tactical level, where he would emphasize the need for engineering students to answer the Nation's call, putting their newly acquired engineering skills to work across the full spectrum of operations in support of the Army and the Nation.

BG Martin and I visited Norwich University, a private school that houses approximately 1,900 cadets, traditional students, and commuters from more than 40 states and 20 foreign countries. The university combines nearly two centuries of military tradition and a broad range of traditional undergraduate degree programs in the rugged Green Mountains of Northfield, Vermont. Founded in 1819 by Captain Alden Partridge, it is the first private military college in the United States and is the birthplace of the nation's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program. The David Crawford School of Engineering (DCSE) at Norwich University is the oldest private engineering school in the nation, with undergraduate programs that include civil, environmental, computer, electrical, and

BG Martin and LTC Pratt emphasize the importance for engineering students to put their newly acquired skills to work in support of the Army and the Nation.

mechanical engineering, and Norwich also offers a master of civil engineering degree.

Norwich graduates and commissions officers through Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force officer training. Participation in ROTC, including military labs and physical training, is mandatory for all members of the Corps of Cadets and is an integral part of the Corps leadership experience.

During our visit to Norwich, we met with the staff and faculty of the university, as well as cadets (seniors) from Army, Navy, and Air Force ROTC programs. BG Martin gave them an overview of what Army engineers do and what our joint capabilities are and provided examples of where officers from different Service components can often meet on the modern battlefield—such as in assignments with the Gulf Region Division (GRD) of USACE. His personal experiences in Iraq emphasized full spectrum operations, including route clearance operations, bridging, and base camp development. He also emphasized the opportunities for cadets and students to participate in the summer hire program in USACE Districts located throughout the United States—great developmental opportunities for future officers in the Regiment.

The results of the trip indicated that there is a need for the Engineer Regiment to develop a working relationship with the Norwich University Engineering Department. This will facilitate access and information flow to current engineering students, both civilian and military, with the intent to encourage future civil service as military officers or Department of the Army civilians in USACE Districts. The trip also indicated the need for the Engineer Regiment to play an integral role during the ROTC summer training called "Warrior Forge" at Fort Lewis, Washington, where ROTC cadets get a snapshot of each of the branches prior to completing the accession packet and branch requests in the early fall. The Norwich University Professor of Military Science emphasized an early engagement strategy to ensure that the future officers were making informed selections.

A second trip was recently conducted that was designed to engage more at the operational level. The New England District Commander represented the USACE presence in the New England area—home to many Norwich cadets. We met with the Commandant of Cadets, the Dean of the Crawford Engineer School, and several Engineer School professors to further exchange ideas and develop the emerging partnership. We also conducted tactical engagements with cadets to emphasize common opportunities afforded to engineer officers including—

- Assignment opportunities ranging from tactical units assigned to brigade combat teams to USACE Districts.
- Graduate school opportunities.
- The potential to attain professional engineer certification with Army experience.
- Attendance at Sapper School.

Future meetings aim to further integrate the faculty members and students at Norwich University with the Army Corps of Engineers, including the orientation of some Norwich faculty members at the Engineer School at Fort Leonard Wood and invitations to attend the annual ENFORCE Conference.

With our need to develop the technical competency required to execute the full spectrum of operations, we must reach out to the commissioning sources and future officers to recruit the capabilities we need. What we discovered is that both the Corps of Engineers and Norwich University can benefit from an increased dialogue, and we must encourage similar relationships to develop with other academic institutions. The process starts with successful Army officers reaching back to their alma maters and opening a dialogue with the college or university administration. The process of *Building Great Engineers* for America's Army starts with us.

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