



# *Building Great Engineers*

## **Mentorship Working Group Update**

*By Lieutenant Colonel Scott C. Johnson*

**T**here is no doubt that the modular Army and engineer force has significant operational advantages. Chief among them is the ability to tailor the maneuver and engineer force to achieve mission success with the right capabilities and resources. Modularity also enables the management of modular unit personnel and equipment readiness within the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) process. However, there are some shortfalls in how our modular engineer force structure is being employed during this protracted war.

### **Universally Recognized Challenge**

**T**he following scenario is a common experience for many of our active duty engineers:

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*In June 2006, a young captain took command of a modular engineer company. In September 2006, his battalion commander and headquarters deployed to Afghanistan. In January 2007, his company deployed to Iraq for what became a 15-month tour. During the combat tour, his company worked for three separate engineer battalions and two different engineer brigades. Upon redeployment, he met his new battalion commander, whose predecessor had relinquished command upon redeployment in March 2008.*

*Within two months, this successful company commander relinquished his command to another young captain. A few months later, this experienced and high-quality officer resigned from the Army. When discussing his decision with his battalion commander, he stated that the lack of continuity in engineer leadership—related to counseling, coaching and inconsistent evaluations due to changing task organizations, and the associated staff assistance that a*

*battalion headquarters normally provides—loomed large as a contributing factor in his decision. While he maintained e-mail and occasional telephone contact with his parent battalion commander, he still felt isolated and alone—cast aside or thrown to the sharks. . . .*

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Brigade combat team (BCT) engineers are also experiencing a similar form of isolation and disconnection from senior engineer leaders and the Engineer Regiment. Light and heavy BCT engineer experiences are different, but with a few exceptions neither has a direct dedicated command relationship with a senior engineer leader. Due to their placement in combined arms battalions (CABs), many of our heavy BCT engineer companies have also become maneuver-centric in terms of capability and employment.

Even when the brigade special troops battalion (BSTB) commander is an engineer and the engineer company is assigned to the BSTB, the situation isn't significantly improved. The BSTB commander must balance the need to treat all the BSTB companies and Soldiers equally to avoid the perception of favoritism within his unit. The rift that could be created by focusing heavily on engineer professional development would degrade team building within the BSTB.

The dislocation from senior engineer leader engagement isn't limited to engineers assigned to modular units. Many junior engineers are assigned to staffs in nonengineer units across the Army—from training support units to CABs to functional and maneuver enhancement brigades (MEBs). Many lack a training readiness authority (TRA), coaching or career-advising relationship with a senior engineer leader, or inclusion in engineer-related professional development opportunities.

These same situations are also occurring within our United States Army Reserve and United States Army National Guard engineer force structure. BCT engineer companies are separated from traditional regimental-affiliated command and control, technical expertise, and professional development. Modular Reserve Component engineer units are deployed without regard to TRA and state relationships, and many engineers working on staffs do not have a direct relationship with an engineer unit with TRA authority.

During the ENFORCE conference in April 2009, senior engineer leaders met to develop a course of action to address this growing challenge. Organized by Colonel Andy Phillips (Great Britain [GBR]), and facilitated by Brigadier General John Peabody and Colonel (P) “Rock” Donahue, the *Building Great Engineers* Mentorship Working Group (MWG) developed a concept to provide engineer-specific career advice and coaching within the Engineer Regiment that enhances and complements the current modular TRA relationships.

### **Engineer Coach and Career Advisor Concept**

**T**he engineer coach and career advisor (ECCA) is a geographically based senior engineer leader who is invested and entrusted with the responsibility of providing a forum for engineer-specific professional development, technical advice and support, and nurturing and growing Engineer Regiment esprit de corps. The ECCA relationship does not directly equate with TRA or a command or support relationship; however, leaders of engineer units have inherent ECCA responsibilities for units under their command.

For example, the engineer brigade commanders at Fort Hood, Texas, and in Germany would have ECCA responsibilities for all units for which they have direct TRA responsibility, whether they were colocated or assigned to another installation or country. Similarly, the engineer battalion commanders at Fort Stewart, Georgia, or in Schweinfurt, Germany, would have ECCA responsibilities for the units over which they exercise TRA responsibilities. Under the ECCA concept, the aforementioned Fort Hood-based brigade commander—once designated as the ECCA for Fort Hood—would be charged with executing ECCA responsibilities for all engineers assigned to Fort Hood, regardless of established TRA relationships.

The Engineer Branch proponent will be responsible for designating geographically based ECCAs within our Regular Army, Reserve, and National Guard force structure and charging them with promoting engineer-specific professional development opportunities, providing engineer technical advice and support, and nurturing and growing Engineer Regiment esprit de corps for all engineer units and personnel within their designated sphere of influence. The ECCA’s responsibilities are designed to complement the direct TRA of physically and geographically separate units. Additionally, the ECCA’s responsibilities are designed to be transferred to a forward-deployed senior engineer leader,

or to another local senior engineer leader if the primary ECCA is deployed forward. From engineer brigade to engineer staff to engineer team or detachment, all engineer leaders should know who their primary ECCA is, whether deployed or at a permanent duty station.

### **ECCA Responsibilities**

The following ECCA responsibilities will be published in Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3, *Officer Professional Development and Career Management*:

- Provide engineer-specific coaching and career advice to junior engineer leaders and/or engineer technical advice and support. For non-TRA units and engineer personnel, this is provided when sought or requested.
- Plan, coordinate, and provide for engineer-specific professional development opportunities for all engineers within the ECCA geographic area of responsibility.
- Promote Engineer Regiment pride, professionalism, and overall esprit de corps.
- Ensure continuity of ECCA effort and services through the designation of alternate ECCAs in the event the primary ECCA is unavailable due to geographic separation resulting from deployments.

### **ECCA Implementation**

Several additional recommendations were developed by the *Building Great Engineers* MWG, and in subsequent discussions, that support the implementation of the ECCA program and improve its goals.

- Align, deploy, and employ modular companies and battalions as units whenever possible. Minimize the practice of deploying modular companies independently from their TRA battalion headquarters. Our United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) and Army Assistant Chiefs of Staff, Operations/Plans/Information Engagement (G3/5/7) engineers who work sourcing issues are our implementing agents. Expect this initiative to occur over time as unit dwell times increase.
- Assign key and developmental majors to the BCT engineer positions—and, when possible, assign former battalion commanders to division engineer positions—until an organizational change is implemented that addresses the engineer command and control challenges within the infantry, heavy, and Stryker BCTs. (The brigade engineer battalion force design update (FDU) concept is one of the proposed solutions.) Once validated and approved, the Engineer Branch, in coordination with the United States Army Engineer School commandant, is the lead in implementing this initiative. Available population, dwell time, and competing requirements for these high-demand officers will have an impact on how this initiative will move forward.

- Develop an implementation plan to reestablish and promote Army Engineer Association (AEA) chapters across the Army to assist and complement the ECCA engineer professional development and esprit de corps missions. This initiative could include reaching out to Engineer Regiment retirees and extended Servicemember families to bolster Engineer Regiment identity—expand the base.
- Empower United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) division and district leaders, with support from both AEA and the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME), with ECCA-like responsibilities to engage the engineers of the future currently in high school and college across the nation.

### The Road Ahead

**T**he first two recommendations will not solve the issues facing the Engineer Regiment. They will, however, position our units and leaders for greater success. Senior engineer leaders embracing and implementing the full ECCA program—coaching and providing career advice, providing engineer-specific professional development and technical assistance, and promoting Engineer Regiment esprit de corps supported by the third recommendation—will have a huge impact over time. Though institutionalizing the ECCA program within DA PAM 600-3 may take a year or more due to the update cycle, we will issue individual charters

within a few months. Expect ECCA concept implementation to start with our active duty engineers, then increase to comprise the Reserve Components. Eventually, this program will expand to include our USACE districts and enable the Engineer Regiment to reach out to engineers assigned to the Regular Army and Reserve Components, recruiting, Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), and joint assignments.

Of course, there is nothing to stop engineer commanders from taking steps now to position themselves for execution within their units or outside their TRA sphere of influence. Socializing this concept with leaders outside the engineer command and control structure (for example, TRA) is deemed critical—ECCA responsibilities do not equate with TRA of nonaligned engineers. What is the strategic message? The ECCA concept will benefit the overall Engineer Regiment, to include the individual technical competence of non-TRA-aligned engineers, and engineer esprit de corps. When implemented by dedicated professional engineer leaders, the Regiment will take a giant step forward. 

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