ENFORCE 2009: Commandant's Senior Leaders Discussion

By Lieutenant Colonel Scott C. Johnson

When Colonel Bryan G. Watson, United States Army Engineer School Commandant, addressed the ENFORCE 2009 attendees midweek of the conference, with the purpose of opening a dialogue within the Regiment concerning its future and direction. Embedded in the discussion were his initial assessment and thoughts on the purpose and unique aspects of the Regiment and objectives and key initiatives that support and improve the Regiment's mission. The following is a summary of that discussion. You can see a video of the entire presentation at the Engineer School Knowledge Network (ESKN) at <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/126> .

Through this article, other ENFORCE articles in the *Engineer Professional Bulletin*, and recent and future engagements with senior leaders within the Regiment, the goal is to expand the discussion, validate the content, and get your input. Additionally, this summary will increase your situational awareness with regard to the issues facing the Regiment and the commandant's priorities. As always, your voice is important in this refinement process, and we welcome your comments.

Summary

The discussion began with the Commandant's thoughts on the Engineer Regiment and its place in the United States Army.

The Engineer Regiment is a subprofession of the larger profession of arms (see Figure 1, page 13). It is a body of people—not just equipment, organizations, or technology—with a passion or calling to serve as Warriors with technical skills. These technical skills set the Engineer Regiment apart via its unique services and knowledge that the Army needs to accomplish its missions. To prepare our Soldiers and civilians to accomplish their missions in support of the Army, the Regiment requires special education, apprenticeships, and practice.

As with any endeavor in the Army, there is a constant tension between being effective and trying to garner efficiencies. For the Engineer Regiment, effectiveness is paramount and must trump efficiency. Likewise, service to the Army (our client) trumps self-gain and advancement of the Regiment. In other words, a decision that negatively impacts the Regiment in terms of personnel, equipment, material, or other measurable element is the right decision if the overall benefit to the Army is positive. This isn't to say that the Engineer Regiment is stepping up to be a bill payer. To the contrary, it simply means that the Engineer Regiment cannot be seen as being parochial in all decisions and actions.

With this type of attitude and approach, the Engineer Regiment will continue to enjoy a special relationship of trust within the Army. In turn, this will allow the Regiment to assess, train, and develop the right people; organize itself to best serve the Army; and hold itself accountable for its successes and failures. This accountability includes the need to regulate and police itself and its personnel via evaluations and administrative actions given and taken by our senior leaders.

A key aspect of the Engineer Regiment's success is its adaptability. The ongoing modification and changes to the modular engineer force that are occurring due to feedback from operations, and the leader development *Building Great Engineers* initiatives are prime examples of our institutional adaptability. Working hand in hand with the United States

Figure 1

Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN), the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), and the Department of the Army, the Engineer Regiment is continuing to look for innovative ways to increase its effectiveness while working within the left and right limits imposed by higher headquarters due to resource constraints on the Army (that's the tension between effectiveness and efficiency discussed earlier).

Commandant's Campaign Plan Framework – The Purpose of the Profession of Army Engineers

It is important for everyone to understand the Engineer Regiment's purpose and its role in the overall military profession within the United States Army (see Figure 2, page 14). First and foremost, engineers bring three unique capabilities that support the overall effort of the Army during operations and drive training requirements during peacetime: combat engineering, geospatial engineering, and general engineering.

These unique capabilities are brought to bear along three to four major lines of engineer support that provide warfighters from platoon leader to combatant commanders with the ability to successfully execute missions and operations. Engineers assure mobility, enhance protection, and enable expeditionary logistics; a new emerging line of engineer support is building capacity.

There is a debate concerning whether building capacity is a line of engineer support or just a role engineers can assume based on the mission and their inherent adaptability, core technical training, and historical affinity to step up and "Let Us Try." Since ENFORCE, we have taken the approach that elements of building capacity should be a line of engineer support. However, there are still major implications that have to be studied to ensure that changes to our doctrine, organizations, training, material, leader development, and all the rest are identified, recognized, funded, and institutionalized to support the Army.

The Engineer Regiment's unique capabilities, combined with its lines of engineer support (current and future), define the reason we exist. Specifically, its combat, geospatial, and general engineering capabilities brought to bear along the lines of engineer support ensure that maneuver commanders have freedom of action and the ability to operate across the full spectrum of conflict, to include peacetime engagement. As a Regiment, we must ensure that our capabilities continue to meet the demands of both our doctrinal missions and the emerging requirements generated during our operational employments.

The commandant noted several key tasks that engineers must do to ensure that the profession is positioned for success. First and foremost, we must—as a Regiment—breed the Army's best and most adaptable leaders inspired with the passion to excel in generating capabilities and employing engineer forces along the lines of engineer support to ensure overall mission success. To do this, we must be and remain clear on the Regiment's purpose and role within the Army.

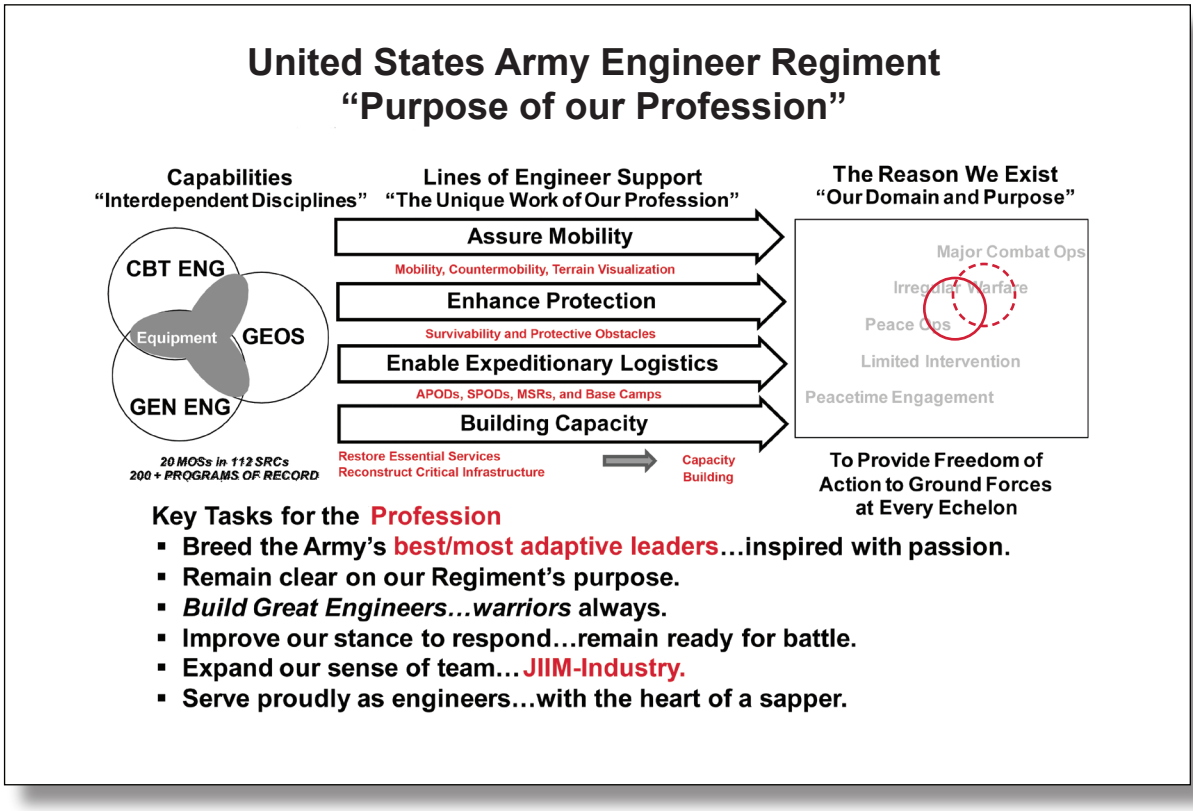

Figure 2

Furthermore, our leaders must be the military engineering subject matter experts. At the same time, as members of the greater military profession, engineer leaders must be warriors who can walk the walk and talk the talk to ensure that engineer units fully support our maneuver brethren. Our leaders must be inspired by our purpose as an Engineer Regiment and inspire their fellow sappers to serve proudly as engineer warriors.

Additionally, engineer units must be trained and equipped to execute their unique missions as engineers and be able to adapt to perform other missions that the operational situation demands. Modularization and modernization must continue to ensure that engineers remain ready for battle and are continuing to improve their stance to respond to their nation's call.

Along the same lines, engineer leaders and planners must reach out to other Services, agencies, and nations to access the right resources (such as capability, knowledge, and capacity) at the right time to accomplish the mission. At times, the right organization to execute a particular mission may be an industry partner. Our leaders expand our sense of team to include our joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) partners and industry experts.

It is essential that engineer leaders know and understand how to quickly and effectively tap into these JIIM and industry resources and use them to enhance mission success. Not only is it imperative that we train and work with our partners during predeployment and mission preparation exercises, but engineer leaders must also be trained and educated on how to bring our JIIM and industry partners to bear on the challenges of the future.

Commandant's Vision – Initial Components

"Engineer warriors leading to serve ground forces: A Regiment inspired to answer the commander's call"

Regimental Family of Families. The Engineer Regiment is a family composed of both military Servicemembers and civilian employees—the Regiment cannot afford to ignore one or the other group. Likewise, the families of our sappers and civilians are part of our regimental family. Engineer leaders must be cognizant of the impact their decisions have on our families and the impact our families have on our sappers' service.

World's Best Military Engineers. The Engineer Regiment must establish itself as the world's best military engineers.

Warriors Always. Sappers must be warriors in their own right while being the experts in bringing military engineering capabilities (combat, geospatial, and general engineering) to bear.

Leading to Serve Ground Forces. Tied back to our purpose and the unique calling of the subprofession of military engineers, the Engineer Regiment is a regiment of service. We execute our missions to enable the Army to execute its mission. We are leaders who are dedicated to service.

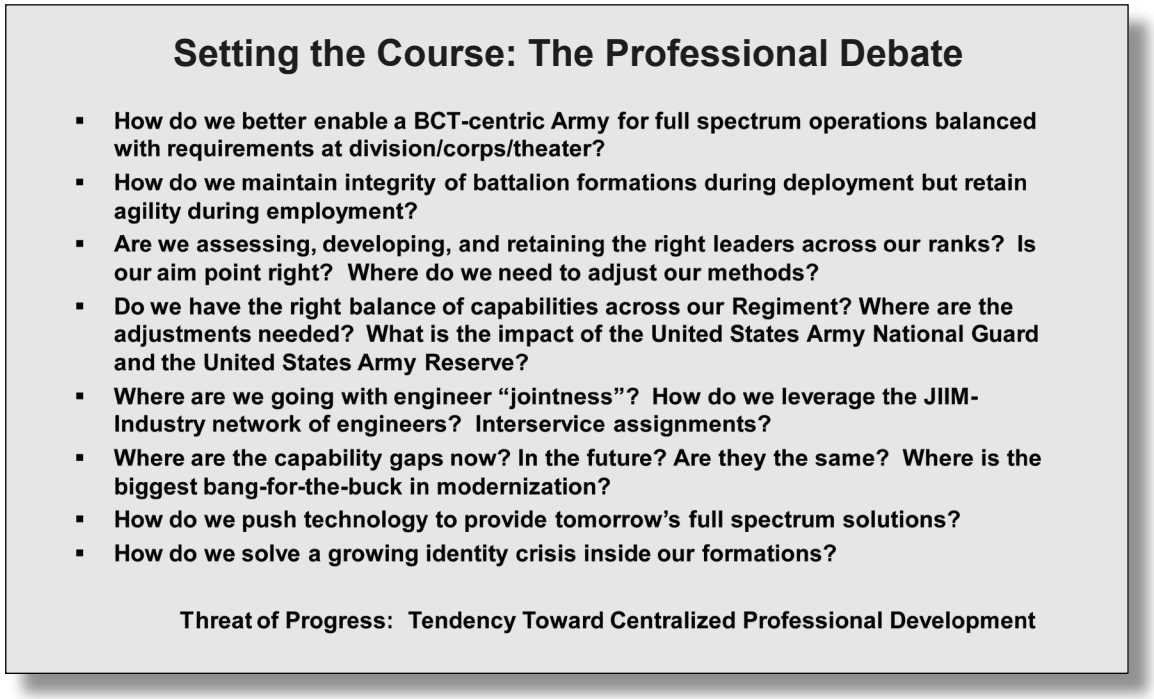

Figure 3

Answering the Commander's Call. As always, the Engineer Regiment has a history of taking on seemingly impossible missions and executing them beyond expectation. This standard of excellence sets us apart as an invaluable member of the Army team.

The Most Flexible and Adaptive Units. Engineer units also have a history of assuming new roles and missions as they arise during combat operations. This is a direct reflection of the trust Army leaders have in the ability of engineer units to adapt to changing requirements and the flexibility of our leaders. The legacy of flexible and adaptive units must continue.

Soldiers and Civilians That Inspire Each Other. A key characteristic of the Engineer Regiment is the trust and confidence its civilian and military leaders have in each other. The inspiration gained via the mutual respect of skills and competencies generates an enormous amount of synergy when solving complex problems and is a key trait of the Regiment.

Soldiers Who Dare to Demand "Let Us Try." From junior Soldier to senior leader, the Engineer Regiment is known for its continual drive to achieve the impossible. When others have tried with limited success, engineers have routinely stepped up and achieved success. No matter how difficult, no matter how dangerous, no matter how complex and daunting, engineers past and present step into the breach and clear the way.

Setting the Course – The Professional Debate

In the near term, the commandant identified several key issues to focus the Engineer Regiment on resolving many of the issues it is currently facing. While there are many issues, the eight listed in Figure 3 are currently at the top of the list and have broad and far-reaching impacts. It is critical that we as a Regiment keep the dialogue and discussion open and professional to ensure that we identify issues that will impact the Engineer Regiment in the future.

The Engineer School and Regiment as a whole are working many of these issues now. The brigade combat team engineer battalion, *Building Great Engineers*, total army analysis processes, engineer coach and career advisor, future combat system developments, and JIIM and industry partnership developments are all ongoing initiatives that will address our issues.

The commandant is prepared to expand the debate and address issues across the Engineer Regiment. Your thoughts, ideas, and proposals are essential to this process. Keep the cards and letters coming.

Perhaps more important, it is essential that we as a collective professional organization embrace our heritage, our purpose, and our reason for being. If we all internalize the concept of unselfish service with a heart of a sapper, it will be a simple thing to inspire our junior sappers to step up and say, "Let Us Try." Developing and promoting this attitude within and across the Engineer Regiment can and will make a difference.

Lieutenant Colonel Johnson is the United States Army Engineer School Chief of Staff. He commanded the 1-3 Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, from 20 June 2006 to 17 June 2008.He holds a master's in administration from Central Michigan University and a master's in military arts and sciences from the School of Advanced Military Science.