

Technical Engineering Skills Improvement Initiative

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The 1st Armored Division (1AD) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) European District teamed up to create a Technical Engineering Skills Improvement Initiative (TESII) that temporarily placed junior officers from 1AD's Division Engineer section in the European District to develop the officers' technical engineering skills. Experience in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) 07-09 in Multinational Division-North demonstrated that our maneuver "customers" required this technical engineering expertise from their supporting engineers. This experience also clearly illustrated that our current junior officer professional education and developmental assignments are insufficient to provide the officers the required technical skill set, necessitating initiatives such as the one outlined here.

The objective of the 1AD/European District TESII is to provide engineer captains the opportunity to learn and practice technical engineering with an emphasis on hands-on project, program, and construction management work. These skills can then be carried back to the Division Engineer section for use during overseas contingency operation deployments.

This program is ideally conducted during the training period before a unit's deployment in order to train engineer captains on the skills required in both Iraq and Afghanistan. To initially test the program concept, the authors—who had deployed with 1AD during OIF 07-09—were placed with the European District as a proof-of-principle exercise to see if the developmental opportunities in the District were indeed applicable to the technical engineering requirements they experienced during the deployment. During this trial run, the 1AD engineer captains worked with multiple sections within the District, but spent the majority of their time working within the District's Installation Support Branch (ISB).

The ISB is a subbranch of project management within the European District that provides project management support for particular types of fast-order contracts to expedite those smaller, regularly occurring projects. It is the responsibility of the project manager to receive the project request from the client; manage planning and design; coordinate with the contractor; develop a project scope of work (SOW) and complete project packet; submit for bidding; award and monitor project construction; and follow each project through to completion. The project manager is the overarching coordinator on each project. The ISB acts as an extension to the Department of Public Works (DPW) for garrisons in Europe, supplementing them on projects beyond their capabilities; when the DPW cannot handle a project, they pass it off to the ISB. The ISB

specializes in the implementation of projects through job order contracting (JOC) and multiple-award task order contracting (MATOC). These are large blanket contracts similar to indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity (ID/IQ) contracts, which are intended to cover repetitive projects. Beyond the benefits of learning project management skills, the District has a multitude of other sections that can provide relevant experience for deploying engineers: contracting, large-scale project management, environmental management, engineering and construction, program management (not to be confused with project management), and work in the various area and resident offices.

At the end of the initial four-month trial run, the authors were convinced that the skills and experience they gained while working in the European District would have been excellent preparation for the missions and tasks they executed in support of Multinational Division-North as part of 1AD's Division Engineer section during combat operations. They found that the fast-paced work that the ISB performs was the ideal working environment in which to train the technical engineering skills junior officers need. Given this, as the summer cycle of officer moves took place, the new 1AD commander gave approval to formally continue the program by placing two new engineer captains, fresh from the Captains Career Course, into the TESII program in preparation for 1AD's next deployment.

Overall, we strongly advocate that other divisions employ a similar strategy to train their junior officers. The technical engineering skills they gain and the understanding of USACE operations will serve the division well during a deployment. It is a "no-cost" or "low-cost" solution to fill a capability gap in the professional education of our junior officers. Although the close proximity of the 1AD headquarters to the European District headquarters in Wiesbaden, Germany, greatly simplified the logistics of this initiative, it is our belief that a similar arrangement between the CMS officers of a Division Engineer staff section and a local USACE area or residence office could take place at many posts, even where the District headquarters is located beyond a typical commuting range. 

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