Captains as S3s: What's the Scoop?

By Captain Mike Brobeck

If you haven't heard discussions about captains (promotable [P]) or captains serving as battalion S3s (Operations and Training Officers) yet, you may. It isn't a program, it's an exception. There are currently more requirements for majors than there are majors available. This is true Army-wide, not just in the engineer branch.

This is not the first time the Army has found itself in a position to place captains in S3 positions. It also happened in the early 1980s.

Ground Rules

Anticipating that it may be necessary to place captains(P) or captains in S3 positions, the U.S. Army Personnel Command (PERSCOM) is ready to guarantee 12-month stabilization for these officers. However, some conditions must be met before exceptions are made:

- There are no majors in the brigade or division or on an installation, regardless of military education level (MEL-4) status, who can fill the position.
- Prior coordination is accomplished with the Engineer Branch of PERSCOM.

Branch Qualification

A concurrent issue is branch qualification. While TRADOC determines what constitutes branch qualification, PERSCOM's assignment policy will be to follow these guides:

- Captains (P) who serve as an S3 for a minimum of one year will be considered as having served their duty with soldiers as a major; they will not be routinely considered for additional duty with soldiers as a junior major. Some may serve again in their senior years as a major.
- Captains who serve in these positions will not be considered fully developed. During their early years as a major, they will be returned to troop units for further development.

Implications

If there is such a shortage, why can't I get to a troop unit? The Army's leadership determines the relative priority of personnel filling an organization. This translates into an officer distribution plan that stipulates the number of officers by grade and specialty who can be assigned to an organization. Due to the shortage of majors this fiscal year, many organizations have a higher priority of fill than do troop units. This translates into fewer opportunities for majors to be assigned to troop unit installations during the fiscal year.

As a major, how do I get to be an S3 or executive officer (XO)? There are two ways to position yourself on or near a troop installation to increase your chances of getting into the queue for an S3 or XO position:

- Seek a short-tour assignment with a follow-on assignment back to a troop installation.
- Seek an assignment to a major command or field operating agency that is collocated on a troop installation (such as the Intelligence and Security Command, Army Materiel Command, Forces Command Active Component/Reserve Component, or Operational Test and Evaluation Command). Once there, contact the senior engineer commander at the installation and your assignment officer at PERSCOM to express your desire to serve as an S3 or XO.

I'm a major who walked right into a branch qualifying job. Will I be reassigned once I have served for 12 months as an S3 or XO and have 12 months on station? This is a possibility, based on other requirements for engineer officers. However, the Engineer Branch will make every effort not to move a major and his/her family after one year on station.

Conclusion

The key to success is communications! The Engineer Branch will continue to strive for that ultimate "win-win" assignment for the officer, the unit, and the Army.

For information or assistance, contact Major Scott Dias, Engineer Majors Assignment Officer, at (703) 325-5697 or e-mail diass@hoffman-emh1.army.mil; or Lieutenant Colonel Dave Ridenour, Engineer Branch Chief, at (703) 325-5693 or e-mail ridenoud@hoffman-emh1.army.mil.

Captain Brobeck is the Future Readiness/Professional Development Officer, Engineer Branch, PERSCOM. Previous assignments include Advanced Civil Schooling Program Manager, PERSCOM; Commander, C/307th Engineer Battalion, 82d Airborne Division; USASOC DCSENG Plans Officer; and PL/XO, 16th Engineer Battalion, 1st Armored Division.