

PERSCOM Notes

By Sergeant Major Teresa Fillmore

The Assignment Process

"I've done what the Army has asked of me, now I need the Army to do something for me." "I plan to retire in that area." "He/she is the only one with the necessary background to do the job." "Why am I moving instead of SGT Jones? He has been here two months longer than I have."

Do those statements sound familiar? We hear those and similar comments daily in the Engineer Branch. Many soldiers need to know just how assignments are made. Believe me, we don't use a dartboard with installations listed on it! Our primary mission at PERSCOM is to fulfill the needs of the Army. The major factors affecting how soldiers are selected are unit-fill priorities and available personnel.

The Army's fill priority has three levels. *Fill Priority 1* is to fill units to 98-100 percent by military occupational specialty (MOS) and grade. These are the Army's highest priority units or assignments. Assignments are Personnel Priority Group (PPG) 1 and 2 units/duties, such as recruiters, drill sergeants, National Training Center-Operations, and Active Component/Reserve Component positions. *Fill Priority 2* units are filled 98-100 percent in the aggregate (meaning total numbers; matching MOS and grades are not required). These are the PPG3 assignments such as Korea; 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood; 82nd Airborne, Fort Bragg; 101st Air Assault, Fort Campbell. *Fill Priority 3* units are the remainder of the force. Some of these PPG 4-9 assignments are the 1st Armored Division, Germany; 1st Infantry Division, Germany; and the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), Fort Drum.

This information means that when you (an E712B soldier) want to be assigned to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and you know that installation is short seven E712B soldiers, you may not necessarily be assigned there. This could be because Fort Leonard Wood (except for instructor and drill sergeant positions) is a *Fill Priority 3* installation. Instead, you may be assigned to Fort Hood because the 4th Infantry Division is a *Fill Priority 2* organization—even though it has a shortage of just two 12B40 soldiers.

The bigger reason why you may not be assigned where you want or why you are reassigned is the "available personnel inventory" (faces to spaces). Just because you and another soldier are the same primary MOS and grade doesn't mean that the soldier with longest time on station will PCS first. That is because, at any time, a large number of soldiers are not available to move. Reasons why follow:

- Deployment or redeployment. Units/soldiers are "fenced" prior to deployment and "stabilized" after redeployment. Redeployment stops us from placing a soldier on unaccompanied tours for a 12-month period.

- Reenlistment options that prevent the branch from moving a soldier for as long as two years.
- Stabilization for compassionate reasons or schooling (Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course, 1st Sergeant's Course, etc.).
- Uniform Code of Military Justice actions.
- Retention control points, mandatory retirement dates, or Declinations of Continued Service.
- Enrollment in the Married Army Couples Program. We try to keep soldiers stationed together when possible.
- Prerequisites of an assignment, such as a security clearance or specialized training/background.

The Homebase Advance Assignment Program (HAAP) is another vital program. Most soldiers regard HAAP as a "promise" of assignment location upon return from a short-tour area. While this belief is justifiable, sometimes we must notify a soldier that his HAAP assignment has been changed. This decision usually is based on the strength of the HAAP installation or, more accurately, the overstrength of the HAAP installation. A 12-month tour is a long time, and soldiers at the HAAP installation get promoted or soldiers are assigned there for compassionate or other reasons. Actions such as these affect the strength of the installation and may require us to change the HAAP of an inbound soldier. We know that changing a HAAP can create a hardship or change in plans for the soldier and his family, and we strive to make HAAP changes as infrequently as possible. We notify the soldier in ample time of the requirement to change the HAAP and offer at least three alternate assignments.

Another issue is retirements, both mandatory and voluntary. Many soldiers wish to be assigned to a particular location based on their plans to retire in that area. A major problem with this is that often the soldier is not close to his mandatory retirement date, and unit strengths do not support sending the soldier there. We cannot make assignments based on a soldier's "intent to retire," especially when the soldier may serve two or more years. When a soldier returning from overseas is within one year of mandatory retirement, we give full consideration to a request for assignment in the retirement area. Even then, we cannot always fulfill their request.

I hope that this information explains the many challenges you face when requesting a specific assignment. You can do your part by ensuring that your personnel records are accurate and by notifying the Engineer Branch (in writing) of significant changes in your situation that may affect assignments. The Engineer Branch is committed to fulfilling the needs of the Army and taking care of soldiers and their families. For additional information, call commercial (703) 325-4824 or DSN 221-4824.

Sergeant Major Fillmore is sergeant major of the Engineer Branch.