OPMS XXI AND THE ENGINEER CORPS—WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

By Captain Matt Zajac

Since July 1996, PERSCOM's Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) XXI Task Force has been analyzing the challenges facing the management and development of the Army's officer corps of today and tomorrow. After aligning these challenges with requirements posed by Force XXI, the task force formed a new vision and set of characteristics and established objectives for the officer development system.

First and foremost, the task force focused on creating a system that allows officers to remain in key developmental jobs for longer periods of time. Reduced personnel turbulence increases unit effectiveness and results in an officer corps with a greater depth of experience in each branch and functional area (FA).

Career Options

Relying heavily on input from the field, the task force created four career development system options for evaluation. The options range from merely adjusting today's system to severing it into four separate career fields (CFs) that will align with the Army functions in 2010. In June 1997, the Army Chief of Staff directed the OPMS XXI Task Force to implement an officer development system structured around four career fields: operational, operational support, institutional support, and information operations. Figure 1 shows how today's system transforms to a four-career-field development system.

The Operational Career Field includes the basic branches, FA 39 (Civil Affairs), and the Special Forces Branch. They focus on functions associated with fighting and training the force. The Engineer Branch, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), remains in this career field.

The Operational Support Career Field contains the Army Acquisition Corps and FA 48 (Foreign Area Officer).

The Institutional Support Career Field produces officers skilled in obtaining and managing resources that the Army requires. FA 45 (Comptroller), FA 47 (U.S. Military Academy Professor), FA 49 (Operational Research and Systems Analyst), FA 52 (Nuclear Weapons), and two new

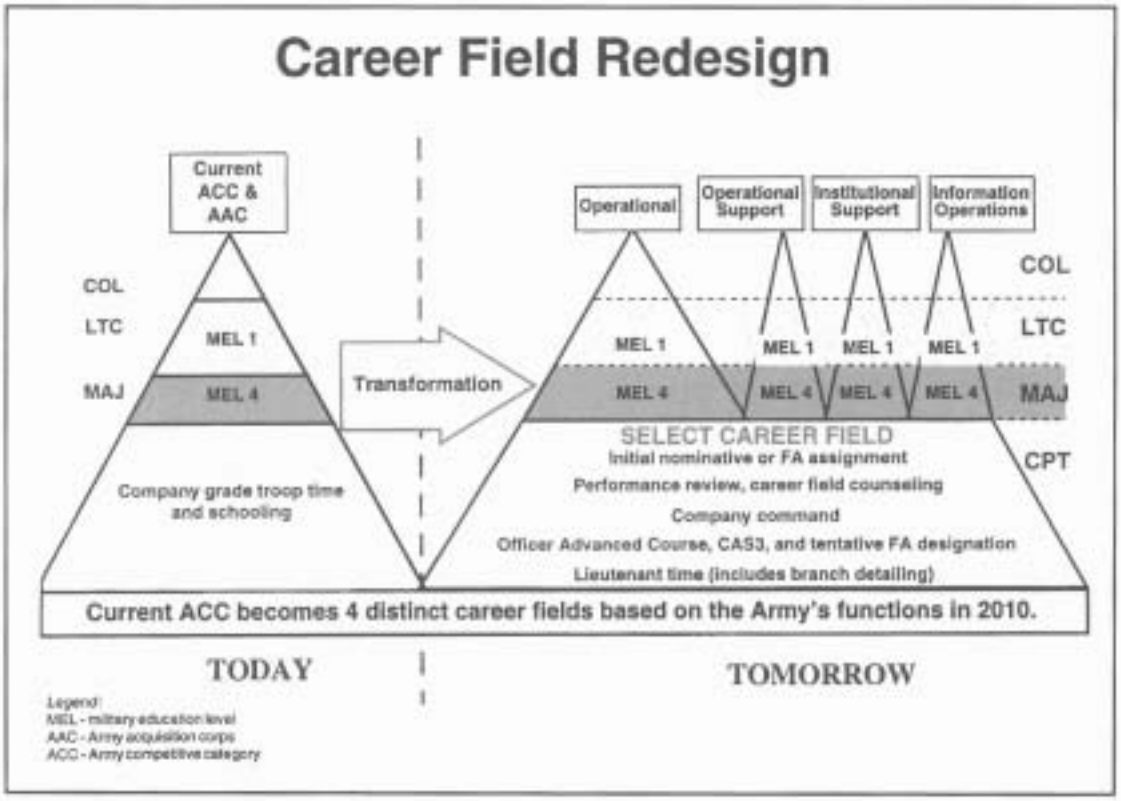


Figure 1

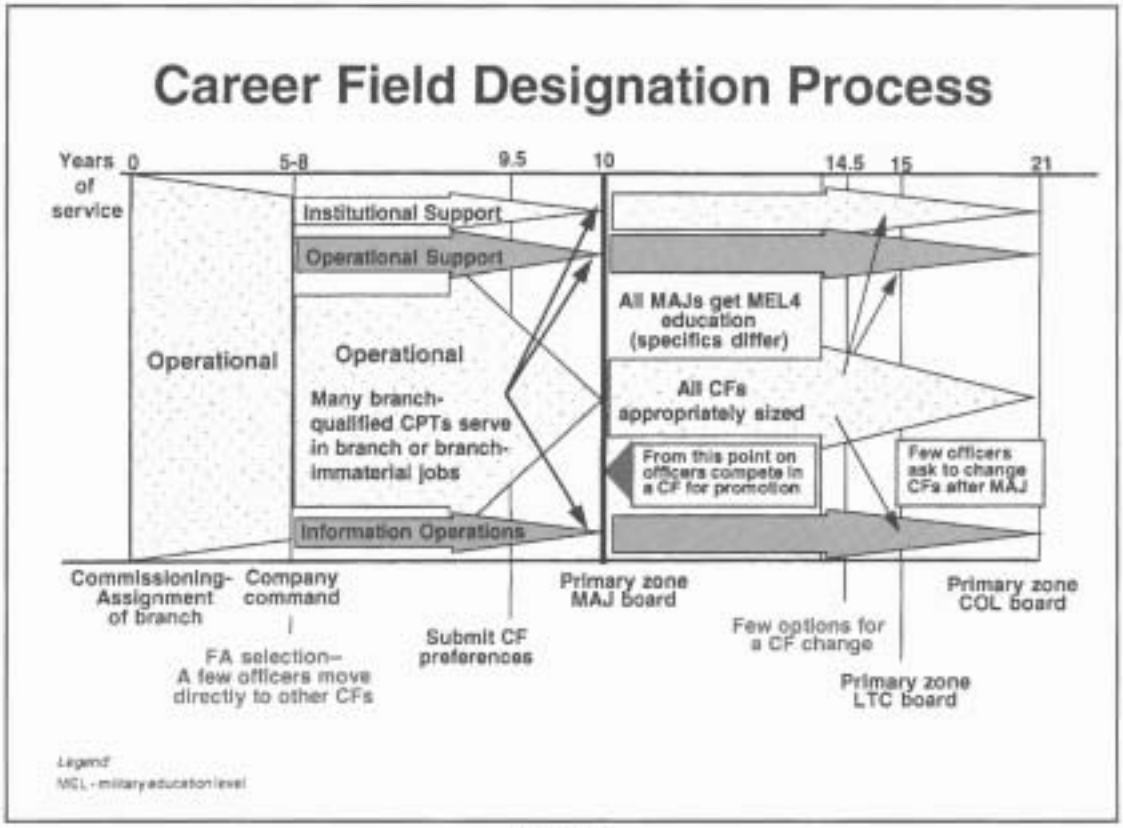


Figure 2

functional areas—FA 43 (Human Resource Manager) and FA 50 (Force Developer)—are grouped in this career field.

The Information Operations Career Field recognizes the Army's requirement for specialists skilled in collecting, organizing, processing, and disseminating intelligence across the full spectrum of the human, signal, and electronic information bands. The current FA 46 (Public Affairs) and FA 53 (Automation Systems) are joined with four new functional areas related to the collection and analysis of strategic intelligence, modeling and simulations, space-based operations, and the integration of information operations in support of joint/component commanders.

Focusing

Figure 2 shows how the proposed officer development system separates officers into the four career fields. Recognizing the necessity for grounding Army officers in solid, leadership-developing platoon and company experiences, the task force proposed a system that maintains the current, familiar initial developmental pattern. Officers continue to enter the Army with a branch designation and serve in that branch until they complete company command. Then (about their fifth year of service) they select a functional area. Single tracking will no longer exist. The functional area choice, their personal goals, and performance counseling will guide the officer's career into one of the four career paths. The path is permanently designated after their primary zone promotion to major. From this point on, they are promoted and selected for schooling from only the officers in their career path. No longer will there be "double" looks for promotion or schooling, which is possible now because of separate basic branch and functional area boards. Limited opportunities will exist to change career paths after selection for major. The new system allows officers with the desire and aptitude for performing roles outside of today's command track to continue to hone their skills, compete for challenging assignments, and serve the Army and the nation.

Challenges

The Engineer Branch faces two key challenges as we move toward OPMS XXI. The first is our need to remain one regiment. By aligning the entire engineer force under the operational force, the branch averted the consequences of an early task force recommendation to create a separate functional area, in a separate career field, for USACE officers. The current focus is to balance the officer inventory with our requirements and authorizations. The task force's recoding initiative directs that branch proponencies review their authorizations and, with specific guidance, determine which positions can be recoded. These recoded positions will help the task force develop the new functional areas and create viable career opportunities for each career field. The Engineer School's Personnel

Proponency Office is reviewing the branch authorizations and will brief the Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel, on 10 December 1997.

Our second challenge is a function of our diverse assignments. The Engineer Branch is struggling to branch-qualify all of our majors with the few branch-qualifying (S3/XO) positions available. This shortage has resulted in an unacceptable level of unit turbulence, with engineer majors serving barely 12 months in these key developmental positions.

So how does the Engineer Branch develop officers and then increase their depth of experience? Perhaps by expanding the definition of "branch qualification" to include certain USACE positions and division staff positions (such as assistant division engineer). We must also determine lieutenant colonel/colonel "command qualification" and if there are any formally recognized paths to either the table of organization and equipment (TO&E) or the USACE commands. Balancing the qualification of engineer officers while maintaining one regiment remains fundamental to our branch's success as OPMS XXI evolves.

Supporting Force XXI

The Army faces major challenges in the years ahead. The OPMS XXI Task Force and the Engineer Branch have made significant progress toward an officer development system that supports both the Army's future vision and the needs of today's engineer officers. Our success during this redesign period is a direct result of your input. With your support, tomorrow's Engineer Branch will continue to provide officers unparalleled challenges and unequaled job satisfaction. Equally important, we will ensure that the Engineer Corps remains ready to meet the nation's challenges in the future.

For more information on OPMS XXI, refer to the Engineer Personnel Proponency Office's home page: http://www.wood.army.mil/EPPO/eppo_hp.htm.

We welcome suggestions on forming our future officer career development pattern. The point of contact is CPT Matt Zajac at DSN 676-4087 or commercial (573) 563-4087. The e-mail address is: zajacm@wood.army.mil.

Captain Zajac, officer coordinator in the Engineer Personnel Proponency Office, has coordinated USAES efforts with the OPMS XXI Task Force for the past 18 months. Previous assignments include commander, C Company, 2d Engineer Battalion, Korea; executive officer, 362d Engineer Company (CSE), Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and platoon leader, 264th Engineer Company (MGB) during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield. CPT Zajac holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the University of Illinois and is completing a master's degree in engineering management from the University of Missouri at Rolla.

Carrying Your Concerns Forward

By Captain Matt Zajac

On 15 October 1997, MG Robert B. Flowers, Commandant, U.S. Army Engineer School, presented the 1997 Functional Review (FR) to LTG Frederick E. Vollrath, Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel (DCSPER). As the personnel predecessor to the annual Functional Area Assessment (FAA), the FR allows the DCSPER to address issues within the personnel arena before they are presented to the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army during the FAA. The commandant and representatives from the officer, warrant officer, and enlisted branches; the Office of the Chief of the Army Reserve; and the National Guard Bureau presented their assessments of and concerns about the engineer force.

Enlisted Concerns

MG Flowers stated that the shift of 76 percent of the engineer force to the Reserve Component during the drawdown has affected the branch's ability to rapidly respond to and maintain support for extended stability and support operations. A prime example of this challenge is the personnel status of our active duty bridge units. The 12C military occupational speciality (MOS) continues to experience an initial-term retention rate average of only 33 percent (FY96 to present) and only a 14-month CONUS tour stabilization. Low initial-term retention rates during FY97 for MOSs 12B, 51M, 51T, and 81T were also discussed.

The continuing shortage of active duty master sergeants and sergeants major in career management fields (CMFs) 12 and 51 is another concern. Promotion rates have exceeded the Army's average since June 1996, but retention rates are well below average.

Another enlisted concern is the Department of the Army's elimination of the 285th Engineer Detachment (Quarry). While the Reserve Component still has significant quarry assets, the Active Component cannot maintain viable career progression for this MOS (only 16 authorizations remain). Our challenge now is to identify how to train and support those units in the Reserve Component.

Officer Concerns

Engineer officers are concerned about the effects of OPMS XXI and the Officer Restructuring Initiative (ORI) on the branch's structure and career progression. Other concerns are the diversity of the branch—particularly with regard to developing and retaining female and African-American field grade officers—and the continuing shortage of branch-qualified captains. In response to these last two concerns, MG Flowers requested that PERSCOM initiate a *Call to Active Duty* for engineer officers who have recently left the service. LTG Vollrath agreed in concept but directed that the effects of OPMS XXI and ORI authorization reductions be studied before bringing officers back to active duty.