The Junior Officer District Intern Program

By Lieutenant Colonel Christopher J. Toomey, First Lieutenant Jeff Qualteri, and First Lieutenant Kevin Truesdell

The 14th Combat Engineer Battalion's Officer Professional Development Program engages the unit's junior officers at multiple levels—from very specific, short-horizon, mission-essential-task-list (METL)-driven tasks to long-term exposure to the opportunities afforded through a career in the Army and the Engineer Regiment. One of the program's recurring components is visits to the neighboring Seattle and Portland U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Districts, whose headquarters are close to Fort Lewis, Washington. These tours are always interesting, and most of the battalion's lieutenants and captains—particularly those with engineering and construction backgrounds—find work in the districts intriguing and a source of inspiration to remain on active duty. Recognizing the phenomenal diversity of the Regiment, many are excited about the prospect of serving in USACE Districts following successful company commands.

In an effort to enhance the breadth of junior officers' understanding of work within the USACE and develop construction management skills, the "Rugged" 14th Battalion developed a partnership with several of the districts in the USACE's Pacific Northwest Division. Modeled after the Cadet District Engineer Program sponsored by the United States Military Academy's Department of Civil and Mechanical Engineering, the Rugged Junior Officer District Intern Program (JODIP) places selected junior officers in local districts at the project-engineer level for two to four weeks.

Following the development of the initial concept with commanders of the Pacific Northwest Division and Fort Lewis' 555th Combat Engineer Group, the 14th Battalion approached the Seattle, Portland, and Walla Walla Districts with the idea and met positive responses. The ensuing process involved orchestration around four basic considerations.

- **Assignment**. The battalion asked the USACE Districts to place the officers in project-engineer positions on current construction projects. This does not preclude a district orientation, which is beneficial, but the intent is to place the junior officers in "muddy-boots" positions and expose them to construction and construction management in the field, to include quality assurance and safety.
- **Officer Selection**. The battalion looks for solid performers, typically first lieutenants and junior captains,



1LT Jeff Qualteri served his internship at the Portland District's Bonneville Lock and Dam. He is shown inspecting recently installed ductwork.



1LT Kevin Truesdell, while working in the Fort Lewis Resident Office, Seattle District, conducts quality-control and safety inspections at the McChord Air Force Base Medical Clinic.

with an interest in serving with the USACE. A desirable criterion is an academic background in engineering or construction management.

- **Timing**. A balance must be achieved between timing the officer's assignment with meaningful on-site construction and when the officer can be spared from the unit (normally during a post-support or "red" cycle). In addition, it is recommend that the duration be from two to four weeks with the latter being optimal.
- **Funding**. The unit must decide what it can fund and what the district can fund in terms of travel and per diem, particularly if the project site is far from the home station. Selecting USACE-managed construction projects on the installation can mitigate this cost. To date, USACE Districts absorb all TDY costs.

Two first lieutenants recently participated in the JODIP. One officer spent his assignment at the Portland District's Bonneville Dam. Following a briefing at the district office, he was assigned as a project engineer at the dam, where he completed a quality-assurance plan for rebuilding a 300-ton crane. He also attended a half-day course based on marine-construction cost estimating and learned about and worked with change orders and submittals from the contractor to the engineering department. While at the dam, he observed a final exciter test and an alignment test on a hydropowered generator before it was placed on-line for commercial use. The generator is part of the first powerhouse restoration being completed at the Bonneville Dam. From start to finish, the officer was actively employed, with each day's events scheduled for maximum opportunities. There was an equal balance of educational training and employment on various tasks.

For his internship, the second officer worked for the Seattle District Corps of Engineers at the Fort Lewis Area Office, which is primarily responsible for construction on Fort Lewis and nearby McChord Air Force Base. Assigned to the project site of a new medical clinic at McChord, the officer's responsibilities included processing requests for information and conducting quality-control and safety inspections. While processing requests for information, he worked with the superintendent and quality-assurance officer to determine ways to adjust the design of the building. The quality-assurance inspections were an excellent opportunity to observe the construction trades in action. The safety inspections consisted of daily walks through the project site to ensure that the subcontractors were following both Occupational Safety and Health Administration and USACE guidelines. The officer also had the opportunity to use his technical degree by designing a footing for the clinic's entrance sign.

The JODIP is making a positive impact on the participating officers and the sponsoring USACE Districts. For the officers, the program provides a valuable look at the remarkable diversity of assignments within the Regiment and the Army and allows the officers to get actual hands-on, project-engineer experience. The program also benefits the host district by providing it an opportunity to work and train future project engineers, deputy commanders, and commanders. The program is now broadened to all engineer units at Fort Lewis and is administered under the guidance of the 555th Combat Engineer Group. A third officer recently interned with the Walla Walla District.

At this time, it is difficult to gauge the long-term benefit of the intern program as a vehicle for officer retention. Yet, it clearly will contribute to further educating our junior officers to the vast assignment opportunities available and will serve as another "arrow in the quiver" in making the decision to remain a part of our Army.

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