

Today's assignment managers are...

Balancing Army needs with Soldiers' desires

By Dave Crozier

Fair, equitable and efficient were words rarely heard in conversations about the Army's Enlisted Personnel Assignment System about a decade ago. At least that's what was reported in the Fall 1992 edition of the *NCO Journal*. An article which brought to light an informal survey of Sergeants Major Course students at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas, who described assignment managers at that time as being impersonal, calculating and felt the assignment process was plagued with a "who you know" method of management.

Those perceptions are not in existence today, according to Sgt. Maj. Gabriella Russum, Enlisted Personnel Management Division, Human Resources Command (HRC), Alexandria, Va.

"First and foremost, assignments today are based on the readiness of the Army and our efforts are to support the Global War on Terrorism and Army Transformation," she said. "For the most part I believe we have a great team of managers and NCOs at the assignments branch and we have even better systems in place than there were back in 1992."

Russum explained that with the introduction of web-based programs, Soldiers can now update their assignment preferences much easier than before.

"In 1992 we had the old dream sheet. Now we have the ASK (Assignment Satisfaction Key located at <https://isdrad06.hoffman.army.mil/ask/index.html>) program, while it definitely is not a concrete way of getting an assignment of your choice, but it is a Web-based program that allows Soldiers to go in and indicate their preferences for assignment," Russum said. "Now our assignment managers can go into the system and see what a Soldier's preference is from their desks and are able to make assignments, not necessarily based on the preferences, but we are able to help the Soldier get to a geographical location."

Russum cautioned, however, that any assignment is based on the needs of the Army.

"The primary goal of the assignment process hasn't changed much since 1992," Russum said. "It is still set up to satisfy the personnel requirements of the Army. Secondary goals are to equalize desirable and undesirable assignments by assigning the most eligible Soldier from among those of like military specialties and grade; equalize hardships of military service; assign Soldiers so they will have the greatest opportunity for professional development and promotion advancement; and to meet the Soldiers' personal desires."

Given that, Russum added, the Army has a more workable system than before and the perception of it being a "who you know" system is something she doesn't see as commonplace.

Another program Russum said is available for Soldiers is the PLUS 2 (Personnel Life Cycle Unit Support System located at <https://isdrad15.hoffman.army.mil/HRCSoldierPreferenceWeb/>) which allows Soldiers to volunteer for Units of Action, currently with 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, N.Y. and 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Ky.



"We are seeing success with this program. It's another way of us using volunteers to maximize our fills into these units," she said. It becomes a success story for both the Soldier and the unit if they come in and volunteer for these assignments."

One of the biggest changes to the assignment system in recent years is the Army's Transformation and the Army G1 Manning Guidance that is now seeking to bring more stability and depth to the unit and Soldier alike.

"The goal of manning is to provide increased stability and predictability for the Soldiers and their families. We also want to ensure we have ready and capable combatant commanders out in the field based on allowing Soldiers to stay in units longer than in the past," Russum said. "Our goal is to have a more deployable and combat ready unit — to make the unit more efficient. The intent is to provide more stability to the unit rather than breadth and instead of constantly giving assignments to



U.S. ARMY HUMAN RESOURCES COMMAND

ASK CONTACT HOME PERSONAL CONTACT DATA PREFERENCES VOLUNTEER ON ASSIGNMENT

Assignment Satisfaction Key Information

You will be able to view/update your personal contact information, assignment preferences, indicate special duty interests, and/or volunteer for assignment locations.

Assignment preferences are no longer "Dream Sheets" as they used to be called.

Under the old "Dream Sheet" days, you could choose from 230 CONUS locations and 280 OCONUS locations. In reality, you had almost no chance of being assigned to many of these locations. The newly designed assignment preferences require you to select 2 CONUS locations from a Divisional Installation Listing and 1 CONUS location from a more expanded listing. You will be able to select 3 OCONUS locations from a listing of 4.

Soldiers can get to the ASK or the PLUS2 Web sites through the HRC homepage link at <https://www.perscom.army.mil/OPfamis/59/index.htm> and follow the links to each site or they can go directly to the ASK Web site at <https://isdrad06.hoffman.army.mil/ask/index.html> or the PLUS2 Web site at [https://isdrad15.hoffman.army.mil/HRCSoldierPreference Web/](https://isdrad15.hoffman.army.mil/HRCSoldierPreferenceWeb/). Each site requires that you have an AKO account.

Soldiers every two or three years, we want the Soldier to be able to be stabilized in that unit for a longer period of time."

The key to assignment success, Russum explained, is for Soldiers to ensure their information is up-to-date on the ASK program.

"What I try and tell everyone is to have current information in the system, particularly how to get in contact with them. There are times when we are trying to fill a nominative position or need to do a quick fill and I need that information to be able to call you and let you know this assignment is out there, that I need to place you in it and to give you notice of the action," Russum said. "So it is important to us that every Soldier go into the program and update their phone number, e-mail address, unit of assignment, etc."

Even though the old "who you know" perception doesn't exist, Russum explained that Soldiers should also stay in contact with their assignment managers if they want to have more input into their assignment choices.

"This is still advisable. We do recommend Soldiers contact their assignment managers as well as their professional development NCOs to let them know their intent for assignments," Russum said. "Even if they are just inprocessing into a new unit or if they are stabilized and know they want to do something a year from now, it is always a good idea that they contact their assignments manager to let them know their preferences."

Another area for assignment consideration is in the institutional Army. Here, Russum explained, there are greater opportunities for Soldiers to be selected for special duties, such as drill sergeants, instructors, recruiters, etc.

"In this area, as we support strenuous jobs that helps us to recruit, train and sustain the force to support on-going missions and operations, we are trying to fill these positions with Soldiers who have recent combat experience," she said. "We

want this experience in these positions so that when a Soldier goes to Advance Individual Training and he or she is in an infantry unit, that instructor has the knowledge of just coming back from deployment."

Overall, Russum believes that Soldiers today are better informed about the assignment process and have more access to the program through the Internet than ever before. The key to success is keeping your information current on the ASK program and staying in touch with your assignment manager.

"The 'who you know' is an old perception; assignments today are fair across the board but I have to emphasize: assignments are based on readiness to support the Global War on Terrorism and Army Transformation. The goal is to provide fully-manned, ready and capable units for combatant commanders, and stability and cohesion of the units are the focus of all manning actions. The goal is that Soldiers will arrive, train and fight together."

For more information on the assignment process Soldiers can refer to AR 614-200, *Enlisted Assignments and Utilization Management*, or go to the HRC Web site at <https://www.perscom.army.mil/OPfamis/59/index.htm> and follow the links to the ASK or PLUS 2 site.

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the Fall 1992 edition of the NCO Journal and was written by Master Sgt. Steve Plate who was the NCO In Charge, Personnel Management Section, Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. It has been updated to indicate current standards and policies.

