

# “Where do I go from here?”

By SSG Russell E. Gehrlein

One of the best things about the Army is the variety of assignments an enlisted soldier can experience. There's no excuse for becoming bored in the Army; there's more to life than the motor pool. Every career management field has the potential for great challenge and job satisfaction. Most soldiers, however, aren't well-informed on career planning.

Counseling for career planning is a part of effective leadership. It should be an on-going process as we mentor younger NCOs. All too often, it's merely reserved for the retention NCO and the unit commander at re-enlistment time. Perhaps it's time we focused on helping young soldiers and junior NCOs set goals that will bring them fulfilling careers, rather than just recommending jobs that will give them an edge in promotion.

NCOs must be subject matter experts in the field of career planning. In addition to promotion and NCO Education System requirements, we also need to be aware of the best number of assignments available to us as we and our soldiers move up through the ranks. Our goal in career counseling is *retention—keeping good soldiers in the Army.*

Every NCO will say that doing well in a variety of assignments is needed to be competitive for promotion. But how many NCOs can describe the many options available? There's much more out there than the usual staff or leadership positions. Let's take a brief look at the many challenging and unique jobs and assignments (and some that are seldom ever mentioned) that either we or our soldiers can consider.

## Challenging Assignments

*Airborne, Ranger and Special Forces* are challenging arenas that many soldiers qualify for and should consider. Air-

borne School is difficult to get into, but if your branch needs Airborne-qualified soldiers, you may be able to get a shot. Ranger battalions need quite a few combat support and combat service support MOSes in ranks up through sergeant first class. Special Forces is open to all male soldiers in all MOSes who meet the qualifications. Read the regulations before applying.

*Drill sergeant* duty is physically and mentally demanding, but also rewarding for those who are successful. Since CONUS soldiers must be on-station 36 months before applying, it's usually best to apply about 12 months before DEROS in an overseas location or prior to departing for a short tour. Consult your branch before putting together a packet.

*Recruiting duty* is another high-visibility assignment that (if you do well) can greatly enhance your promotion potential. There are over 20 items on the qualification criteria in AR 601-1 that must be considered before volunteering. Of course, if you're a sharp NCO, and meet all the criteria, you may be selected by your branch anyway.

*Instructor duty* may be a good move for you, either as a small group leader at your branch school, at the post NCO Academy or, for a select few, the Sergeants Major Academy.

## Overlooked Assignments

Is there an Additional Skill Identifier (ASI) or Skill Qualification Identifier (SQI) that might open up the doors to something new? Do you or one of your soldiers qualify for *embassy duty*? What about working at an *ROTC program* in a university? Have you looked at the possibility of working at one of the various *agencies at the Pentagon*? Is there a slot for a soldier with your background and experience functioning as an *Observer-Controller* at the *National Training Center* or *Joint Readiness Training Center*? What about assignment to a *Military En-*

*trance Processing Station*? Don't forget, you can always serve as an *advisor to a Reserve Component* (USAR or NG) unit.

The fact is, we can be proactive in the assignment process and not just hang around waiting for the right job to come along. There are limited slots out there for those who are aware of them, meet the qualifications and happen to apply at the right time.

## Gathering Information

How many know, or could find, the answers to the following questions your soldiers may ask regarding professional development or career management issues:

- How long do I have to be on-station before volunteering to go overseas?
- What are the qualifications for drill sergeant duty?
- What re-enlistment options do I have?
- How can I change my MOS if I want to do something else?
- How can I get assigned closer to home?

Information about assignments and

## “Operation Engage In Better Careers”

*NCOs who want to become more involved in their assignments and career progression have new means to communicate more closely with the U.S. Total Army Personnel Command (PERSCOM). It's called “Operation Engage.”*

*PERSCOM announced the new series of initiatives is designed to increase soldiers' participation in managing their careers.*

*To help soldiers communicate better with their career managers, the Enlisted Personnel Management Directorate (EPMD) has developed five new means for communication:*

- *Interactive voice response telephone system (IVRS)*
- *Expanded E-Mail capabilities*
- *High-speed fax machines*
- *Mail-grams*
- *Pocket reference information card*

*“Getting soldiers involved in managing their careers is a major priority,” said SGM Dennis D. Scott, EPMD sergeant major. The goal is to have soldiers participate in their career management and to develop and foster an ongoing dialogue with their career managers.*

*The cornerstone initiative is the Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS), which is a*

specialized training opportunities is scattered throughout numerous Army regulations, Department of the Army pamphlets and updates. To chart your own career as well as advise up-and-coming younger soldiers, familiarize yourself with the following references:

- **Enlisted Ranks Update** has three key regulations (ARs 600-200, Enlisted Personnel Management System; 601-280, Total Army Retention Program; and 614-200, Selection of Enlisted Soldiers for Training and Assignment) that NCOs should know.
- **All Ranks Update** contains AR 614-30, Overseas Service.
- **AR 611-201**, found in **Military Occupational Specialty Classification and Training Update** provides a wealth of information about enlisted career management field progression, additional skill identifiers and job descriptions by rank for every MOS.
- Two other crucial resources are **AR 351-1, Individual Military Education and Training** and **DA Pam 351-4,**

### Army Formal Schools Catalog.

Once you start reading these regulations, you may begin to notice that they work together like pieces of a puzzle. For example, Ranger training and assignment is mentioned in **AR 614-200** and **AR 351-1** and course information is located in **DA Pam 351-4**.

To be as knowledgeable as possible, put together a "cheat sheet" of applicable references for every conceivable career option. Start a series of files, or better yet, a binder, with copies of the appropriate paragraphs from the ARs or DA Pams in one place.

### Make it Happen

Finally, here are a few extra tips:

- **Daydream a little**—what can you see yourself doing five to 10 years from now?
- **List several options that are realistically available to you.** Do the necessary research to see if you qualify before you submit the DA Form 4187.
- **Narrow possibilities and choose care-**

fully. Go with your strengths, where you can make a valuable contribution.

- **Put an application packet together and send it through the proper channels.** If it gets disapproved, go for Plan B.
- **Whatever job you get, stay proficient in your MOS through self-study and strive for excellence to end up with a good NCOER.**

You have absolutely no control over many things in the Army—deployments, promotion point cutoff scores, pay, etc. However, what you make of the years you give to Uncle Sam is, to some degree, up to you. If you know what's out there, take the necessary steps to achieve your goals and make the changes that enhance your career and challenge you, then you can have a satisfying career. At the same time, you can also help younger soldiers get the most out of their Army experience. ■

*Gehrlein currently serves on the staff of the III Corps Chemical Section, Ft. Hood, TX.*

## Engages NCOs Management

Automated voice response telephone system that provides soldiers with career information 24 hours a day.

Soldiers must enter their social security number to use the system. Then, they are presented menu options that inform them if they are on assignment, scheduled to attend Army school or provide topical information on: retention, recruiting, drill sergeant, Special Forces, Ranger, compassionate reassignments, Exceptional Family Member program and separations. You can activate the IVRS system by dialing 1-800-FYI-EPMD or DSN 221-EPMD.

EPMD also encourages soldiers to use E-mail to keep in contact with their career managers. Inquiries concerning the status of personnel actions, future schooling or assignment are examples of typical information exchanges that can be conducted 24 hours a day. (See the accompanying list of E-mail addresses.)

Soldiers can also correspond with their career managers by fax, saving time by faxing communications directly to the desired career branch within EPMD for processing.

*The DA PERSGRAM (mail-gram) is designed to supplement the chain of command in keeping soldiers informed of career or assignment information.*

*You can keep track of all these new communications tools with EPMD's wallet-sized information card that lists your career manager's phone number, E-mail address, fax num-*

*ber and IVRS instructions and phone numbers. The card is available at your servicing personnel center.*

*To find out more information about Operation Engage, contact the PERSCOM Public Affairs Office at: e-mail tapepao@hoffman-emh1.army.mil or phone (703) 325-8857, DSN 221-8857.*

### Enlisted Personnel Management Directorate E-mail Addresses, FAX Numbers and Phone Numbers:

E-Mail Addresses are: Branch USERID@HOFFMAN-EMH1.ARMY.MIL  
Fax and Phone Numbers are: COM (703) 325-, DSN 221-

BRANCH	USERID	FAX NUMBER	PHONE
<b>Combat Arms Div</b>	<b>EPCAD</b>		
Infantry Branch	EPINF	-4880	-5582
Special Forces Br	EPSF	-4510	-8899
Air Defense Art Br	EPADA	-4664	-8867
Field Artillery Br	EPFA	-4533	-7549
Armor Branch	EPAR	-4683	-8862
<b>Combat Support Div</b>	<b>EPCSD</b>		
Engineer Branch	EPENGR	-4307	-5890
Military Police Br	EPMP	-4304	-5592
Military Intel Br	EPINTELL	-4304	-4738
Language Branch	EPLANG	-4304	-4738
Signal Branch	EPSIG	-4306	-5891
Aviation Branch	EPANV	-4308	-5682
<b>Combat Ser Spt Div</b>	<b>EPCSSD</b>		
Adjutant Gen Br	EPAG	-4474	-5808
Ordnance Branch	EPORD	-6555	-6553
Quartermaster Br	EPQMC	-4521	-5415
Chemical Branch	EPQMC	-4521	-5415
Health Service Br	EPHS	-4747	-9085
Transportation Br	EPTRANS	-4308	-5884
<b>CSM/SGM Office</b>	<b>EPCSMSGM</b>	-4694	-7888