Armor Branch Update

A Look at the Officer Assignment Process

by MAJ Michael R. Berriman

Following is an informative look into how Armor Branch conducts the Human Resources Command (HRC) assignment process within a given distribution cycle (DC).

DCs are the six-month periods when officers are ordered to conduct a permanent change of station (PCS). Cycles are broken into two overall periods, traditionally known at the winter cycle (DC XX-01) and the summer cycle (DC XX-02). Within these cycles, Armor Branch will typically move 25 percent of a given population in the -01 (winter) cycle and 75 percent of a given population in the -02 (summer) cycle. The following information is an attempt to show "how a bill becomes a law" – or better, how an officer who is initially identified to PCS ends with a "request for orders" (RFO) released.

Step 1. Officer-identified-to-move (OIM) scrub. Assignment officers (AOs) conduct an initial query of their given population through use of the Total Army Personnel Management Information System (TOPMIS). This system identifies when officers are available to PCS by month and year. The initial scrub looks for officers available to PCS within a given DC: winter (October to March) and summer (April through September). This query produces a list of officers able to PCS in the particular DC and initiates contact from the AO to the identified population.

This notification starts the dialogue among the AO, the officer, his unit and his chain of command. Important to understand: The TOPMIS scrub will generally produce an 85 percent to 90 percent answer for OIMs. We further rely on interaction from units and officers on their availability. The result of this step is a total amount of officers identified to PCS, which drives the distribution of future billets.

Step 2. OIM declaration conference. Within the Operations Division, a conference is held where branches and AOs "declare" the total numbers of officers available to PCS during a given cycle. Once these numbers are identified, the HRC Operations Readiness Division (ORD) assigns a total number of billets to each AO for fill. This number is based on the amount of officers declared.

Important during this step: Once officer numbers are declared, the number of billets is identified for that grade plate. If an officer (or his chain of command) at a later date determines he cannot PCS, this creates a billet that potentially goes unfilled. In the larger picture, this means an organization will not receive an officer it was expecting to receive.

Step 3. Distribution of billets. With the conclusion of Step 2, the total amount of billets is identified, and the AO receives a list of potential billets that ORD created. AOs will first be issued an amount of hard-code billets – assignments that only their branch can fill. In some cases, AOs will then be given a number of O2B billets (Infantry Branch/Armor Branch only) to fill. The number of hard-code and O2B billets subtracted from the amount of billets leaves the rest of billets to be O2A and O1A billets (combat-arms immaterial and branch immaterial respectively). As a math problem it might look like this: Total billets – hard-code billets – O2B billets = immaterial billets.

Step 4. Immaterial draft. With the number of immaterial billets identified, AOs will then go through an ORD-produced document called the Distribution Requirements List (DRL). The DRL is the list of billets considered for fill during the DC. The DRL provides geographic location, unit identification, requested report dates and, in some cases, duty descriptions. Requisitions within the DRL are prioritized based on the Active Component Manning Guidance (ACMG) received by the Army Chief of Staff. The ACMG lists which units are priority for fills and the acceptable total percentage of fill for these units.

Within the Operations Division, a second conference is held, sometimes referred to as the "Fantasy Draft." Similar to a Fantasy Football draft, AOs of each branch within Operations Division (by grade plate) meet in a room and "draft" billets from the DRL to ensure distribution across all branches. The draft order is randomly selected. The result of the draft is a list of all immaterial billets the AO will fill during the DC.

Step 5. Preference sheet. AOs create the preference sheet (typically in the form of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet) for distribution to the OIM population. The preference sheet, at a minimum, has all billets available for consideration. The preference sheet will typically include billet location, duty title, report date (if known) and special considerations for the billet (Joint, dependent-restricted, nominative, etc.).

This is the officer's formal opportunity to provide feedback to the AO on where he'd like to be assigned during the DC. This is also the opportunity to provide important assignment considerations like Married Army Couple's Program (MACP), Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), availability date or other information.

Important during this step: While this will be the first time an officer sees the preference sheet, it is expected there has been some type of ongoing dialogue for assignment considerations among the officer, the AO and possibly the chain of command.

Step 6. Slating. Once all preference sheets are returned to the AO, slating begins. Considerations for slating include officer performance, chain-of-command communication, dwell time, MACP and EFMP, and officer preference. This process is a multi-week process, as the AO develops slates, communicates with the population and ultimately produces a slate for the Armor Branch chief's review. The AO briefs the Armor Branch chief, and only on his concurrence is the slating complete and approved.

Step 7. Notification. With the slate approved by the Armor Branch chief, the AO begins the notification process. Notification typically happens through email or by telephone and is based on the AO's assessment of how best to communicate. Size of the population and amount of time to notify are the key driving factors. In some cases, the AO will get the opportunity to provide notification face-to-face. During notification, the AO and officer discuss/confirm report dates and any other special considerations for release of the RFO.

Step 8. Release of RFO/assignment instructions. The RFO's release is the last step of the process and can take anywhere from 10 minutes to three weeks. The amount of time it takes is based on special considerations for each officer. These special considerations can include EFMP, MACP, time-on-station waivers, Army Educational Requirements System use or Joint considerations. When an officer has these considerations, the RFO goes through an internal HRC voting process, where experts in those fields review the special considerations and the RFO's circumstances, and determine if the billet location is right for the officer. Once approved and voted, the AO can release the RFO.

This process can take up to three weeks because it relies on individual people to review the officer's file and considerations. The voters are looking at the same type of considerations for all officers across all branches at the same time while conducting their normal HRC duties, thereby creating a longer process.

With the release of the RFO, officers then go to their Military Personnel Detachment for generation of orders.

As demonstrated, the assignment process is a multi-month event. Officers are typically identified to PCS about one year out from their actual PCS. The process requires interaction (at a minimum) between the AO and the identified officer. Preferably the chain of command is involved, providing feedback in preparation for the distribution of billets and considerations for assignments lating. The result of the process is an officer with RFO in hand, prepared for his next assignment.

MAJ Mike Berriman is the HRC Armor Branch lieutenant colonels AO. Previous assignments include the HRC Armor Branch's majors AO; regimental executive officer, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Vilseck, Germany; squadron S-3, 4th Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Vilseck; aide-de-camp for the commanding general of U.S. Army Europe, Heidelberg, Germany; and aide-de-camp for the deputy commanding general-initial military training, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, VA. His military schooling includes Command and General Staff College (via distance learning), MCCC and Armor Officer Basic Course. MAJ Berriman holds a bachelor's of science degree in psychology from Missouri State University and a master's of arts degree in leadership and management from Webster University.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ACMG – Active Component Manning Guidance
AO – assignment officer
DC – distribution cycle

DRL – Distribution Requirements List

EFMP – Exceptional Family Member Program

HRC – Human Resources Command

MACP – Married Army Couple's Program

OIM – officer identified to move

ORD – Operations Readiness Division

PCS – permanent change of station

RFO – request for orders

TOPMIS – Total Army Personnel Management Information System