



FUSION CELL

By Sergeant First Class Christopher T. Sanson

The Fusion Cell is the United States Army Engineer School answer to the requirement for a central coordination cell to bring together the people who can answer the multitude of questions so often heard throughout the Engineer Regiment in these fast-moving times. *“When are we doing our base realignment and closure (BRAC) move?” “When are we deploying to support Operation Iraqi Freedom?” “When are we transforming to the Future Engineer Force modular design?” “Which modular design are we transforming to?” “Where do we send our equipment?” “How are we getting our new equipment?”* These and hundreds of other questions need to be answered, and often the answers are not readily apparent or even finalized.

Purpose

The Fusion Cell’s mission is to gather and present data on the current state of engineer transformation, restationing, and support to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). It is not, in itself, responsible for correcting problems and issues; its role is to assist in issue identification, facilitate communication, and assist in issue resolution.

The Fusion Cell was born from the need to synchronize the Regiment’s actions as it sails ahead, with three major waves (significant actions) surging together like the proverbial “perfect storm” and threatening to sink the ship of progress:

- Global repositioning and BRAC.
- Deployment in support of the GWOT.
- Transformation to the modular Regiment.

In September 2005, the Cell was formed as a means of synchronizing and deconflicting these potentially counteracting requirements. It is possible to have a situation where an engineer unit is identified to relocate to the continental United States (CONUS) as part of global repositioning, transform into the modular force or stand up as a new unit, and deploy in support of GWOT within the same calendar year. However, it is not feasible to expect a unit to

undergo such significant change within the same year, so one of the most critical functions of the Fusion Cell has been to work with the Department of the Army (DA) to modify the timing of basings, force structure changes, or GWOT rotations. The senior engineer leaders are aggressively engaging the DA staff to synchronize challenges and maximize the abilities of units to manage the rate of change in a given year. Ensuring that this happens is a massive undertaking, and to accomplish it requires communication with numerous organizations, including the installation, the United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), DA, and others.

Challenges

Working primarily with Active Army FEF units outside the brigade combat teams, many challenges and recurring issues arise. The biggest challenge is getting the personnel and equipment to the unit with sufficient time remaining to conduct the required training in preparation for a GWOT deployment. Time is the biggest hurdle since many tasks are being done concurrently.

Activating a unit from scratch is a very challenging task, especially for the unit’s commander and staff. Once the United States Army Human Resources Command (HRC) identifies the personnel for the unit, the key personnel must hit the ground running and set the foundation for the rest of the unit to arrive. A key issue is that HRC assigns personnel to the installations. Units that will be next in line on their installation to deploy must work with their installation to ensure that they receive the inbound personnel who have the required military occupational specialties (MOSs), particularly if there are other engineer units on that installation.

The task of securing the motor pools, barracks, and orderly rooms may or may not be an easy one, depending on the facilities available on the installation. Lessons learned show that an early and thorough scrub of the end-state modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) is key to ensuring


that the unit gets the right equipment as quickly as possible. A unit identification code (UIC) allows the unit to receive personnel, equipment, and funding from their major command. However, *no* funding solely intended for transformation is being issued to units. Newly activated units are given operational funds like every other unit in the Army, and no more.

An engineer higher headquarters will not necessarily reside on the same installation to provide support to the activating unit. A key event is assigning a parent unit to facilitate the unit's activation. In the future, parent units will provide guidance from the experiences of units that have already activated or transformed into the same type of unit. The goal should be that the personnel arrive at the activating unit in time to operate and maintain the equipment as it arrives. Often, many of the items needed are on another installation and require coordination for movement.

A converting unit may have some of the same issues but normally will have an easier time if it remains on the same installation, because some of the personnel and equipment are retained when the unit transforms. Again, completing an early scrub of the MTOE is a key factor in doing this successfully. Based on the master plan for the installation and the transformation of its units, individual units may have to move somewhere else on the installation, but the support structure will remain intact. Any excess equipment will be identified and sent where it is needed.

Summary

These are only some of the most prevalent issues discussed in Fusion Cell sessions. These sessions will continue for an indefinite time into the future. The hard work of the Office of the Chief of Engineers (OCE); HRC; FORSCOM; United States Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM); DA Assistant Chief of Staff, Operations and Plans (G-3) and Assistant Chief of Staff, Finance (G-8) staffs; and many others—as participants in Cell sessions and members of the team—have provided an outstanding forum in which to solve problems and conflicts. Many engineer units are or will ride at least one of the waves of the perfect storm in the same year, but will be able to have a helping hand along the way.

Units are encouraged to use the weekly session to help prepare their plans, using the lessons learned and issues discussed by other units that are activating, converting, or rebasing. Useful information has been posted to an Army Knowledge Online (AKO) site. Contact the Fusion Cell noncommissioned officer in charge at <*Christopher.sanson@us.army.mil*> or the link provided on the USAES home page for any questions or for access to the files. 

Sergeant First Class Sanson is the noncommissioned officer in charge of the United States Army Engineer School Fusion Cell.