

# Setting a Firm Foundation for the Way Ahead in Army Contracting

Jeffrey P. Parsons

**A**ctivated in March 2008, the U.S. Army Contracting Command (ACC) intensely focuses on reorganizing and reenergizing the Army's contracting mission. Substantial progress is being made implementing business processes, technology solutions, and staffing recommendations made in the October 2007 *Urgent Reform Required: Army Expeditionary Contracting*, also known as the *Gansler Commission Report*.

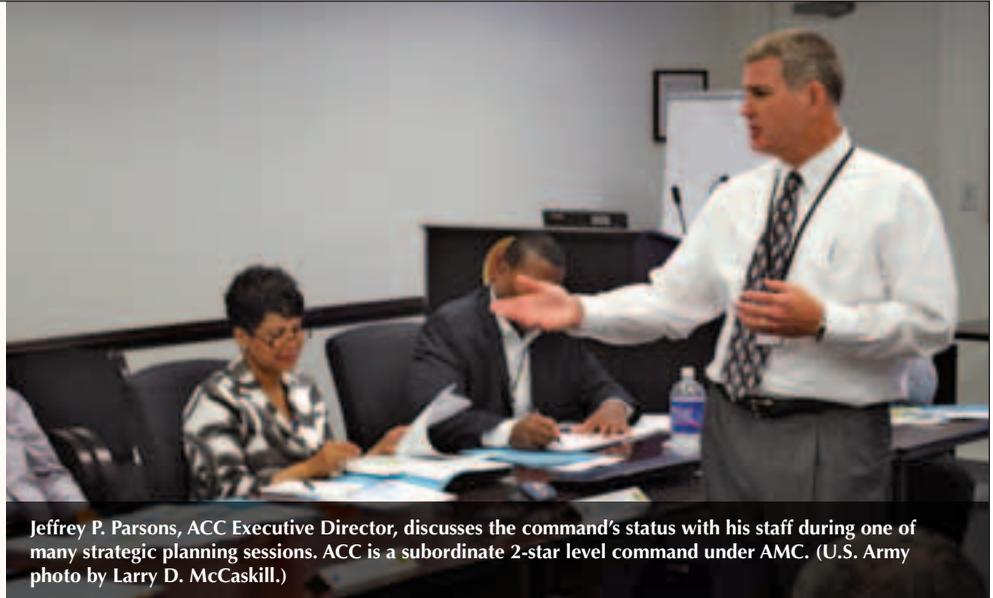
CORs are responsible for being the "eyes and ears" that monitor contractor value and effectiveness. Here, 1LT Justin Casey, COR assigned to Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, and Dr. Ibrahim Al-Nedawi walk along an unpaved road discussing the asphalt and road-paving equipment operator apprenticeship program in Nasir Wa Salam, Baghdad, Iraq, June 16, 2009. (U.S Army photo by SSG Peter Ford.)

Being responsive to warfighter needs while ensuring vigilant stewardship of taxpayer dollars is the heart of the Army's contracting mission. The ACC's dedication to weaving together best practices from industry and the military to move Army contracting forward in the most effective and efficient manner possible is unparalleled.

Of the 22 Army-specific recommendations in the report, ACC is moving forward with bold actions on 21 of those, and the remaining item, increased staffing, is also being addressed. The Gansler Commission recommended increasing the contracting workforce by 400 military personnel and 1,000 civilians. ACC will increase in workforce size deliberately over the next 3 years to ensure it has both the quality and quantity necessary to execute its contracting mission.

ACC places a strong emphasis on leveraging innovative technology to accelerate contracting processes, improve the accuracy and timeliness of information flows, and deploy the tools that contracting personnel need to excel in their mission. Regarding expeditionary operations, ACC is firmly committed to providing its people with the technology, tools, and training they need to succeed in the fast-paced environment of theater operations.

Current capabilities in the Standard Procurement System and Procurement Desktop-Defense (SPS/PD2) systems are enhanced by the Army's Virtual Contracting Enterprise (VCE) solution. This Web-based VCE solution enables SPS/PD2 capabilities and contract information to be shared Armywide. The development and deployment of a fully automated, paperless, and Web-based enterprise contracting and procurement system will occur in stages over the next several years.



Jeffrey P. Parsons, ACC Executive Director, discusses the command's status with his staff during one of many strategic planning sessions. ACC is a subordinate 2-star level command under AMC. (U.S. Army photo by Larry D. McCaskill.)

### Implementing Gansler Recommendations

Ensuring the success of expeditionary missions and overall contracting operations, the Gansler Commission made four overarching recommendations:

- Increase the stature, quantity, and career development of military and civilian contracting personnel, especially for expeditionary operations.
- Restructure the organization and restore responsibility to facilitate contracting and contract management in expeditionary and CONUS operations.
- Provide the training and tools for overall contracting activities in expeditionary operations.
- Obtain legislative, regulatory, and policy assistance to enable contracting effectiveness in expeditionary operations.

Standing up ACC is an essential aspect of fulfilling the recommendations of the Gansler Commission and the Army Contracting Campaign Plan Task Force (ACCP-TF). This task force was created to address the findings of the Commission and another independent review, the Army Contracting Task Force, which focused on immediate, short-term needs and complemented

the Commission's strategic orientation. With ACC in place, the ACCP-TF's primary work is completed. The fulfillment of all of the Gansler Commission recommendations are occurring over time as budgetary cycles and institutional capacities ramp up to accommodate new training regimens and newly hired staff.

### Training, Tools, and Career Development

Facilitating the career development of military and civilian contracting personnel requires a host of organizational and process changes that include extensive development and revision of training opportunities. As a result of recent actions, military contracting officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) can now begin to pursue their acquisition careers 2 to 3 years earlier than previously allowed, enabling personnel to have more time to develop contracting expertise.

The Army is also working with multiple educational institutions, including the Defense Acquisition University (DAU), the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and the U.S. Army Logistics Management College (ALMC) to enhance contracting training opportunities. More than 100 DAU contracting courses have

been added and ACC is working with Army training organizations to update curricula based on lessons learned and increase the number of courses offered for certifications.

A newly developed course at ALMC addresses the importance of overseeing contractors who support military forces. To help provide officers and NCOs with the tools and training they need prior to their initial contracting assignments, the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center is administering a scenario-based contracting lab focused on contract preparation and execution.

All of these activities are representative of efforts occurring across the Army to improve training related to contracts and contract management. At least 16 courses for officers and NCOs have been developed or revised to improve the level of awareness across the Army about the importance of contracting and contract management.

Training for program management personnel has also been upgraded over the last several years to emphasize performance measurement tools such as earned value management, total cost of ownership, and other techniques. All of these tools focus on establishing goals for cost, schedule, and performance as well as enabling regular assessments of progress made toward achieving goals.

To enhance knowledge sharing and skills development for Contracting Officer's Representatives (CORs), a deployment handbook has been published that contains practical examples. The handbook is a very useful tool in the field for CORs, who are responsible for being the "eyes and ears" that monitor contractor value and effectiveness. With the complexity of the contracting process, and at a time of significant increases in contract-related spending, CORs are more critical than ever to the process. Reflecting the increasingly important role of CORs is an entire

division of ACC dedicated to improving COR development. Additionally, a new emphasis is being placed on educating and informing commanders, their staff, and other non-contracting personnel about the role that CORs play in oversight.

By forging stronger links between commanders and contracting personnel, the Army's expeditionary contracting operations are better positioned to fulfill their important roles. Enhancements to expeditionary contracting operations include the use of planning cells within Contracting Support Brigades (CSBs), which further improves communication between contracting personnel and their customer, the warfighter.

Other guides recently published include the Joint Contingency Contracting (JCC) Handbook and a training manual for the Army's new contracting NCOs. Developed as a collaborative effort between the Army and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the JCC Handbook is used to help develop training material for expeditionary contracting operations.

### Process Improvements

Contracting is a complex process involving solicitations, negotiations,

and enforcement of terms and conditions. Contractor performance must be monitored, and systems and processes must be in place to efficiently and effectively collect and report data to measure contract compliance.

The Army is forming a comprehensive strategy to capture lessons learned from three perspectives: the requiring activity, the contracting officer, and the contractor. By establishing a formal process for the analysis of lessons learned data, ACC will be able to discover and rectify operational gaps in areas such as organizational structure, doctrine, training, and personnel development.

Among the process improvements identified and implemented is guidance restricting military contracting personnel from working in theater until they have at least 1 year of contracting experience stateside. Additionally, ACC has increased the resources dedicated to overseeing contractor performance and developed improved processes for evaluating and managing contracts.

In the area of business information systems, the implementation of immediate improvements, development of near-term solutions, and the planning of a future enterprise solution are in



Parsons concentrates during an ACC strategic planning session. He is moving the command forward to ensure it reaches its fully operational capabilities. (U.S. Army photo by Larry D. McCaskill.)

progress. Effective information technology is the key to uniting everyone involved in contracting. Information about the receipt of goods and services must be efficiently captured and property accountability systems must keep track of contracts and associated property and supplies. Later, the expended funds must be accurately documented and reconciled with contract closeout. There are also issues regarding aligning funding with actual dollars spent and the reapplication of excess funds to current accounts.

Cohesively performing all of these tasks in an efficient manner requires an enterprise solution, which will serve as a single information source for all parties involved in contracting and contract management. The system will enable total visibility of all aspects of the contracting process, and it will deliver a world-class information system that will make a significant difference on the battlefield.

With the improvements already implemented, ACC continues to make great strides in establishing the foundation needed to provide timely situational awareness to commanders in theater. By automating and standardizing many aspects of the contract-writing process, ACC has given expeditionary contracting personnel the tools they need to be more effective in theater. With forthcoming enhancements, commanders will have the precise information they need regarding the role and location of contracting personnel, which will enable them to better plan their military operations.

### **Demands on Systems and People**

In ideal environments, large-scale contracting can be a challenging task. The operational tempo of expeditionary warfare creates even greater opportunities. ACC has risen to these challenges with a comprehensive plan of action and the will to act on it.

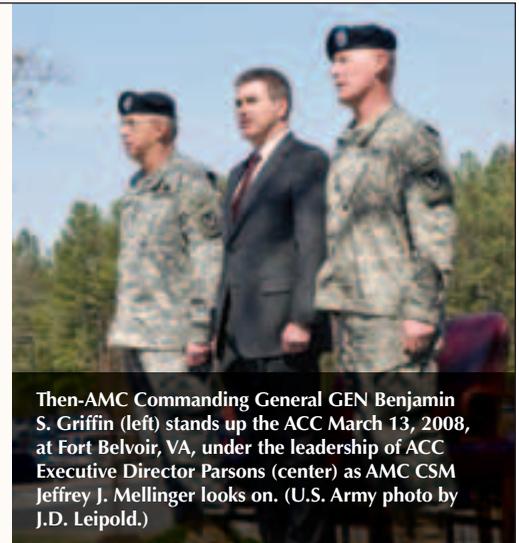
Contracting operations and contractors in theater are key contributors to mission success and commanders need to know how these personnel are contributing to operations in theater. ACC ensures that contracting expertise is placed in CSBs to coordinate contracting requirements with operational commanders.

Contracting is a critical link between warfighter requirements and the contractors who work diligently to meet those requirements. Restructuring within ACC ensures that expeditionary contracting personnel receive the necessary pre-deployment experience and training to provide excellent support to the warfighter—the ultimate customer.

As part of the ACC continuous process improvement approach to contracting, expeditionary personnel will capture and report key information to compile lessons learned, perform internal audits, and update policies and training as needed. ACC is constantly working to identify areas for performance improvements so the Army can be assured it is obtaining full value from contractors.

Hard data and concrete metrics are essential to measuring contractor performance, and ACC is developing key metrics related to costs, performance, and schedules that emphasize value delivered. By tracking metrics over time as an integral aspect of contract oversight, the Army will have advance notice of developing issues and whether they are arising because of difficulties beyond the contractor's control or due to contractor performance. As a result, ACC will be able to take corrective actions earlier, thereby reducing delays and improving the delivery of services for more cost-effective operations.

ACC strives to continually improve contracting, acquisition, and program management in expeditionary and installation operations. Recognizing the road ahead presents significant



Then-AMC Commanding General GEN Benjamin S. Griffin (left) stands up the ACC March 13, 2008, at Fort Belvoir, VA, under the leadership of ACC Executive Director Parsons (center) as AMC CSM Jeffrey J. Mellinger looks on. (U.S. Army photo by J.D. Leipold.)

challenges and opportunities, ACC has firmly planted the cornerstone and implemented the overarching framework envisioned by the Gansler Commission and the ACCP-TF.

ACC remains committed to the empowerment of the Army's contracting personnel by providing specialists the tools, systems, training, and career development opportunities needed to deliver excellent service to the warfighter. Contracting and procurement must be a core competency in the Army, and ACC is delivering on its mission to provide the Army and the taxpayer with the value and performance they deserve.

**JEFFREY P. PARSONS** is the Executive Director of ACC, a U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC) major subordinate command. He holds a B.A. in psychology from St. Joseph's University, an M.S. in administration with a concentration in procurement and contracting from George Washington University, and an M.S. in national resource strategy from the National Defense University. Parsons is an Industrial College of the Armed Forces and Defense Systems Management College Executive Program Management Course graduate, and is Level III certified in contracting and program management.