

Army Builds Contracting as a Profession

Kris Osborn

The Army is taking steps to better establish contracting as a profession within its ranks by expanding the size and complexity of the acquisition workforce, increasing training opportunities, and recruiting new officers to embark upon contracting careers in the Army.

Contracting officer's representatives (CORs) and contingency contracting professionals are placed with operational units to ensure that forward-positioned forces in harm's way have the contracting support they need to sustain combat efforts. Here, CPT Justin Casey, then a first lieutenant and a COR assigned to Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, and Dr. Ibrahim Al-Nedawi discuss the contract for the apprenticeship program in Nasir Wa Salam, Baghdad, Iraq, June 16, 2009. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Peter Ford.)





LTC Wiley Blevins (right), Team Leader, Bamyan Embedded Training Team, and MAJ Timothy Drake, COR, Bamyan Embedded Training Team, discuss the positioning of a new 28-person barracks at the Waras district police station with Afghan National Police COL Mohamad Ishawk, Chief of Police for Waras District, Oct. 22, 2010. (U.S. Army photo by Peter Ferrell.)

“As an Army, we are working vigorously to fortify our contracting workforce with more people and better establish a host of career opportunities within the field for Soldiers and civilians,” said LTG William N. Phillips, Principal Military Deputy to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology (ASAALT). “Continuing and building upon contracting excellence is vital to our ongoing effort to provide our Soldiers the best capabilities for combat.”

Army contracting, which oversees approximately \$140 billion in Army services, products, and weapon systems deals annually, will be adding up to 1,650 civilian and 600 military personnel over the next several years,

increasing the size of its 5,800-strong acquisition and contracting workforce, according to Edward M. Harrington, the former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Procurement.

The contracting emphasis is needed to help compensate for the drawdown of thousands of contracting professionals across the services during the 1990s following the end of the Cold War, a reality that underscores the need to rebuild the bench over time to meet the rapidly growing needs of the current wars.

“Contracting officers right now have nearly 10 times the transaction workload they had a decade ago,” Harrington said. “We want to get that

workload in balance with the numbers in the workforce. It is a profession practiced much like law and medicine; it takes a continual evolution of learning and experience.”

Training Plus Experience

The Defense Acquisition University has added an intensive 4-week course aimed at exposing new recruits to the rigors and nuances of the contracting profession. The introductory course is followed by more advanced courses, each with a commensurate measure of additional training and certification. Cost and price analysis is a large part of the training. Through these courses, new recruits are taught the essentials of contracting.

“We conduct training in negotiation,” said Harrington. “We have quality assurance training. Awarding of a contract just begins the performance on the part of the contractor. The oversight of that contractor throughout the life cycle of the contract is the next critical function. You have to structure the contract,
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develop a business arrangement, and then, once you award the contract, oversee the contractor's performance. Quality assurance is essential."

Also, new contracting recruits are put through an intensive 6- to 8-week contracting "boot camp" course where they are placed in a contracting environment with a supervisory specialist and are faced with making key acquisition and contracting decisions. "They get on-the-job training, and then, once they finish, they go to work full-time for a contracting officer," Harrington explained.

Part of this training involves working to achieve the needed flexibility and strike the right balance between rapid acquisition procedures and longer, more formal processes. "There is flexibility in the *Federal Acquisition Regulation* [<https://www.acquisition.gov/far/index.html>]," Harrington said. "There are certain special instances where there may be a critical emergency requirement that allows you to execute things on an emergency basis. If there is only one source for something, and if it is needed on an emergency basis, you might not have to compete it."

Through these efforts to refine a contracting career path within the service, the Army is emphasizing the blend of training and experience necessary to develop the essential skills to handle complex contracting assignments, such as multiyear, billion-dollar weapon development contracts, according to Harrington. "Contracting is focused on establishing a business arrangement with industry that ensures that taxpayer dollars are expended for the best business arrangement and get the best product that we can for the warfighter," he said.

Harrington's office hired a recruiting specialist to help identify and bring in contracting professionals. In addition,



LTC Jason I. Kuroiwa, Director, 81st Adjutant General (Postal), studies his textbook during a COR course. To better establish contracting as a profession within its ranks, the Army is increasing training opportunities to include a new course at Defense Acquisition University and an intensive 6- to 8-week contracting "boot camp" course for new recruits. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Matthew Cooley.)

representatives from the U.S. Army Contracting Command have attended job fairs, colleges, and industry events to advertise for the skills they need.

Greater Visibility in Theater

The Army is also increasing the number of general officers it has in the contracting ranks. Another key focus area has been to vastly increase the number of forward-positioned contracting officer's representatives (CORs). CORs and contingency contracting professionals are placed with operational units to ensure that forward-positioned forces in harm's way have the contracting support they need to sustain combat efforts.

"CORs document what the contracting officer does and then authorize payment," said Harrington. "About a year and a half ago, fewer than 40 percent of theater contracts managed by the Defense Contract Management Agency had an active COR. Now, well above 90 percent of theater contracts have an active COR every day."

Underlying all of these efforts to solidify contracting as a career path is a single, powerful, unifying work ethic, Harrington emphasized. "What these contracting professionals do is work

business arrangements to get something that is either a service in support of the warfighter or a product that gets put in the warfighter's hands," he said. "Every one of these individuals—civilian and military—does something every day that directly affects a U.S. Soldier. We have American Soldiers engaged in lethal combat. Ten thousand miles away right now, as I speak, some American Soldier is getting shot at or returning fire. There is a life-and-death responsibility here. That is the real essence of what this is about for the Army."

Editor's Note: After more than 35 years of dedicated service to the U.S. Army, Mr. Harrington left government service in December 2010 to re-enter private life. Mr. Lee Thompson, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Strategic Communications and Business Transformation, has been named the Acting DASA for Procurement.

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