USAASC PERSPECTIVE

FROM THE DIRECTOR,
U.S. ARMY ACQUISITION SUPPORT CENTER

WHY SECTION 852?

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During the 1990s and the early 2000s, the acquisition community was specifically targeted for reductions. Some members of Congress said that "there were too many buyers and too many shoppers" in the acquisition community. DOD, through previous *National Defense Authorization Acts* (*NDAAs*), had specific targets for reduction in acquisition organizations and the acquisition workforce itself. These occurred without a commensurate reduction in workload.

Over the years, the pendulum started to swing back. The number of acquisition workforce personnel decreased while workload and total obligation authority increased (See Figure 1). In 2007, the *Gansler Commission Report* on the state of Army acquisition highlighted several areas that were broken in Army contracting. So as we've grown, we have specifically targeted some of those challenges in the contracting arena. We've tried to lay out a plan for achieving workforce growth. We have taken a very strategic look at skill set gaps in the Army Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology Workforce and set priorities for those gaps, in a targeted approach to acquisition workforce growth and development.

Congress recognized this trend and included the Defense Acquisition Workforce Fund in Section 852 of the *NDAA* for FY08, which allowed DOD to recruit, hire, and train the acquisition workforce. On April 6, 2009, the Secretary of Defense announced the Defense Acquisition Workforce Growth Initiative, with a target of increasing new acquisition hires by 10,000 by FY15. The Army's new-hire target was set at 1,885, with 1,650 of the positions reserved for the contracting career field.

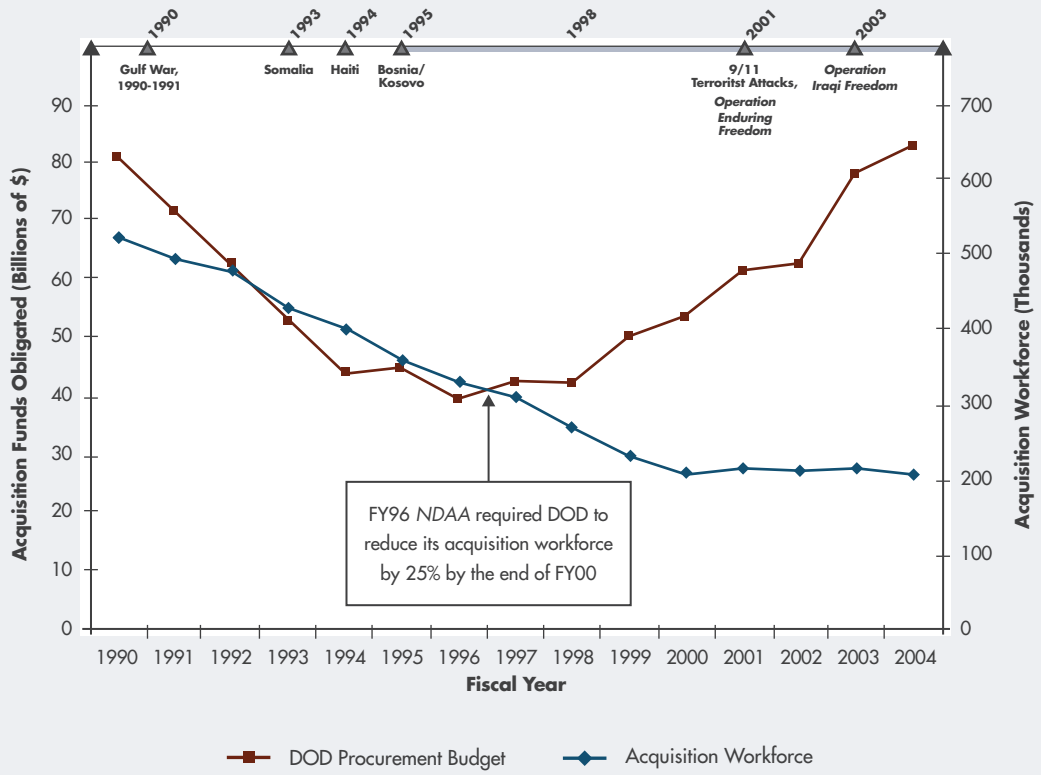
If you look at these changes in concert with operations in theater, DOD has received a lot more Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) dollars, which has substantially increased the Army AL&T workload. We've had to ramp up dramatically to meet the OCO requirement and our workforce's increasing responsibilities. Programs and OCO dollars have increased for those reasons, and the Secretary of Defense targets for workforce growth have had to increase. From my perspective, the Acquisition Workforce Growth Initiative was woefully overdue and critically needed to resolve the imbalance between the challenging workload and the number of people in the workforce.

The Army's goal is not only to increase the workforce, but also to bring in the right kinds of people, with the right types of skills to perform the functions that are necessary. In a Senate hearing April 5, Director of Acquisition Career Management LTG William N. Phillips answered questions on the quality of interns that the Army was recruiting into the acquisition workforce.

"We are actually looking at folks coming out of colleges and universities that have skills that are necessary to bring them in and train them in cost analysis and areas such as that. … Matter of

DOD Acquisition Trends Set the Tone for the Acquisition Workload

Figure 1



SOURCE (Workforce Data): DOD Inspector General (IG) Report D-2000-088, Feb. 29, 2000; and DOD IG Report D-2006-073, April 17, 2006

SOURCE (Budget Data): Annual Defense Reports, available at http://www.dod.mil/execsec/adr_intro.html

fact, the standards that the Army uses to bring in an intern today, with a GPA of 3.5, are pretty high," he said.

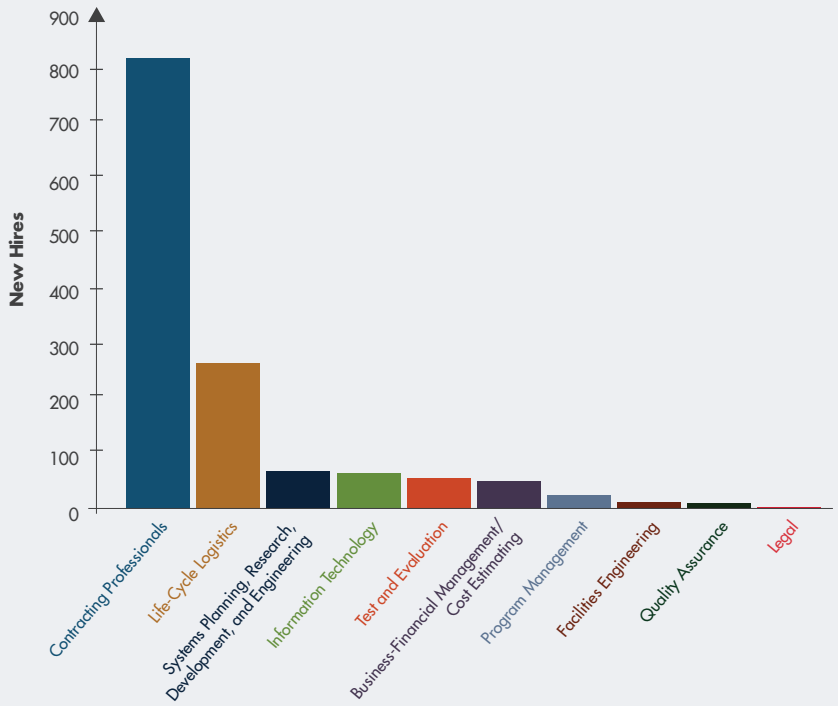
We are looking for the best and the brightest individuals who are motivated, consider public service to be their higher calling, and understand that the acquisition profession they undertake will afford them opportunities to lead early in their careers. We are looking for people who bring basic skills and knowledge, preferably with the right kinds of degrees and advanced degrees in areas that are acquisition-related. They will be performing jobs such as program analysts, cost analysts, cost estimators, and contracting officers. Once we get the best talent, we ensure that we train, educate, and develop that talent so our future leadership will continue to instill the high standards of the AL&T Workforce. They will eventually become program managers, engineers on major information and weapon systems programs, and life-cycle logisticians.

If you look at the majority of interns we've hired using Section 852 funding, they've been in the contracting field. Overall, the progress has been dramatic. As of June 1, the Army had hired 1,370 new acquisition professionals, including 809 for the contracting field and 561 in other acquisition career fields (See Figure 2). We haven't just used the growth initiative as a tool to bring on people; we've also created several interesting and targeted pilot programs. We've supported a Science and System Engineer program at the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Life Cycle Management Command that has proven very successful. Its focus is on bringing the "ilities" skills—reliability, maintainability, and availability—back to that community. The engineers who perform those functions must understand them thoroughly. That was a skill set we had stopped focusing on over time, but

1,370 Acquisition New Hires as of June 1

1,217 interns / 153 journeymen

Figure 2



809 Contracting Professionals
732 interns/77 journeymen

268 Life-Cycle Logistics

69 Systems Planning, Research, Development, and Engineering

65 Information Technology

56 Test and Evaluation

55 Business-Financial Management/ Cost Estimating

26 Program Management

11 Facilities Engineering

9 Quality Assurance

2 Legal

SOURCE: USAASC

now recognize that it created a gap in our capabilities. This growth pertains not only to civilians, but to our military counterparts as well.

We have been accessing and growing noncommissioned officers to serve specifically as contracting professionals in the 51C Military Occupational Specialty. These board-selected NCOs receive training at either the U.S. Army Acquisition Center of Excellence at the University of Alabama in Huntsville or the U.S. Air Force Mission Ready Airman Contracting Apprentice Course in San Antonio, TX. After training, the NCOs are assigned to contracting teams where they learn technical skills from experienced contracting civilians. We also have the Functional Area 51 officer program, where we access officers into acquisition and provide them opportunities to excel in their acquisition skills. We access them only after they've had several years as Soldiers in their respective branches, to look, feel, walk, and talk like other Soldiers, so they will have credibility in that community later in their acquisition careers.

We've been working diligently at growing the AL&T Workforce, but now, the very pendulum that brought acquisition growth is moving in the opposite direction. The Army is now in a time when OCO dollars are coming down, we've withdrawn the majority of our troops from Iraq, our missions in theater are drawing down, and we have financial and manpower reductions across DOD. We're going to be in a very difficult and constrained environment from a resource perspective. History has told us that resources go up and down, and we are now on the downward side of a resources peak. We are going to have to be prudent and judicious in managing our resources. When DOD has resource challenges, it will look to all its facets, including Army AL&T, to reduce cost and increase efficiencies. We actively support Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Dr. Ashton B. Carter's *Better Buying Power: Mandate for Restoring Affordability and Productivity in Defense Spending*.

That's why the Army Acquisition Workforce Growth Initiative is so critical to getting the right people in the right positions. We can't be more efficient with less-than-stellar performers—we absolutely need the best and the brightest to do more without more.