

Process Matters -- Managing Expectations for Future CGSC Interagency Fellowship Applicants

By Maj. Christopher J. Masson



2015 Interagency Fellow (far left, civilian clothes) with Cameroonian Security Forces

government departments and agencies during global engagements, such as assistance missions, and disaster response operations within the continental United States. However, interested officers must thoroughly understand the application, selection, and notification timelines to discern potential impacts to their career goals and assignment options. This paper will briefly highlight the importance, history, and objectives of the fellowship program. Second, it will examine the current process timeline, its potential impact to officers during assignment cycles, and finally, examine an adaptation to the process that would better assist applying officers and further help the Army recruit quality candidates for this valuable program.

As the U.S. Army continues to encourage broadening opportunity programs (B.O.P.) for officers, one unique broadening prospect is the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) Interagency Fellowship Program. Under this program, the Army sends selected field grade officers to participating departments and agencies, both inside and outside the Department of Defense (DoD), to work as fully-integrated staff officers for ten to twelve months.¹ This unique opportunity will help Army organizational leaders improve their understanding of how the Army partners with other U.S.

stability operations or humanitarian

The Broadening Experience Enhances the Army Profession

As the global security environment continues to grow increasingly complex and dangerous, it's important that today's Army prepares correctly for future threats while simultaneously focusing on winning our current fights – both of these requirements are encapsulated in the Chief of Staff of the Army's (CSA) top priority of *Readiness*.² Ensuring flexible, adaptable, broadened, and experienced officers is one way to help prepare the future force and retain the Army, as a profession; immersion in the joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational (JIIM) environment can help facilitate this effort.

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1, defines the *Army Profession* as

a unique vocation of experts certified in the ethical design, generation, support, and application of landpower, serving under civilian authority and entrusted to defend the Constitution and the rights and interests of the American people.³

Samuel P. Huntington further expands on this idea of profession, in *The Soldier and The State*, when he writes that “[a] profession is a peculiar type of functional group with highly specialized characteristics. The distinguishing characteristics of a profession as a special type of vocation are its expertise, responsibility, and corporate-



ness.⁴ Society perceiving the Army as a profession adds to its credibility; experts that are responsibly defending the nation will receive more autonomy to man, train, equip, and ultimately maneuver the force in combat.⁵ Officers that broaden themselves through experiences like this fellowship will, undoubtedly, help grow the Army in professional, credible ways.

In Dr. Snider's abstract from his special commentary *Renewing the Motivational Power of the Army's Professional Ethic*, he further warns that

The US Army currently faces challenges not unlike those of the post-Vietnam era and the post-Cold War period. Subsumed within these challenges is a more critical overarching one; simply stated, will the Army that emerges from this transition period in 2025 be an effective and ethical military profession, or just another large government bureaucracy? The former can defend the Republic and its interests abroad, the latter cannot.⁶

Arguably, a more broadened, diverse officer can better guide the Army Profession during this complex, challenging period.

The Army Profession must continue to foster broadening opportunities to expand its ability to operate within the JIIM environment and further, grow organizational leaders that understand the Army's impacts and contributions to JIIM. Additionally, Army professionals must be able to understand the Army as an instrument of national power and gain awareness in policy, funding, and the how the Army's capabilities are directed by the President and applied by Congressional leaders. That's why, in the range of broadening opportunities, they cross all spectrums of the government apparatus. Some of these additional programs include the Army Congressional Fellowship, the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) Strategic Studies Group (SSG), and the White House Fellowship.

The Broadening Experience

There are currently twenty-one broadening opportunities in the Army Human Resources Command (AHRC) broadening opportunities program catalogue; twenty of these opportunities are available to officers of various ranks.⁷ Specifically examining the CGSC Interagency Fellowship, a September 2015 Information Paper succinctly summarizes the program as

...a broadening experience that enables selected Army officers to gain an in-depth understanding of the capabilities, missions, procedures and requirements of Federal agencies and other organizations both inside and outside the Department of Defense (DoD) through experiential learning.⁸

Further, this program is an official Army Fellowship that, through recommendation by the Department of the Army Fellowship Review Committee (DAFRC), was approved by the Department of the Army (DA) G-3/5/7 on 13 April 2010.⁹ Fellows are, in essence, broadened by immersion in the partnered agency/department. The Fellows' exposure to these organizations' inner-workings, and the officers' opportunities to experience processes within the overall national security infrastructure, is invaluable to these Army leaders.

There are five main objectives for the CGSC Interagency Fellowship Program. These objectives include:

- a. Enhancing the Army's ability to support a comprehensive approach through partnering with governmental and non-governmental agencies in the conduct of stability operations, disaster response, or humanitarian assistance.
- b. Improving the nation's overall security-related capabilities through the synchronization of common missions, cohesiveness and unity of effort with Army and interagency players.
- c. Improving the Army's ability to interact and leverage the capabilities of various agencies through understanding their cultures and development of working relationships.
- d. Broadening each Fellow's understanding of the complex JIIM environment in which the Army



operates with its national security partners.

e. Using the experience gained in interagency assignments to improve the Army's ability to interact with governmental and non-governmental agencies, and to implement innovative management practices and procedures learned during the Fellowship.¹⁰

Ultimately, Fellows are value-added staff officers within the department/agency with which they are immersed. Further, they bring back experiences and processes that contribute to the Army for many years to come. This value can be applied at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels; understanding agencies and organizations that work laterally with the Army within the continental U.S. and outside of the continental U.S. is paramount and value added at every level.

The Current Process to Apply

Individual officers that desire to apply for this B.O.P. will craft and compile their own packet, track the suspense and timelines, and ultimately, submit the completed documents via email to the AHRC point of contact (POC) – this is currently Mr. Joel Strout.¹¹ The CGSC Interagency Fellowship Program is currently capped at fifty-five officers per year; these officers can be the rank of major or lieutenant colonel of any branch and/or functional area.¹² In addition, the current construct (summer of 2016 and forward) requires applicants to be complete with key and developmental (KD) assignments, military education level four (MEL4), and Joint Professional Military Education-Level 1 (JPME1). In short, a resident Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC) graduate will achieve both MEL4 and JPME1 credit.

The application process should begin at some point after the AHRC releases that fiscal year's CGSC Interagency Fellowship Program Military Personnel (MILPER) message. All the detailed instructions for completing an accurate application and submitting that application will be included in the MILPER message. HRC MILPER messages provide ample time for applicants to assess their current career situation, seek counsel from mentors and current officers in their chain of command, and discuss options with their family. The FY2016/17 CGSC Interagency KD/Post MEL4 Fellowship Program MILPER Message was number 15-221, and was released 15 July 2015. The final packet was not due until end-December 2015, providing five months for potential applicants to plan and prepare. The FY2016/17 application packet required the following items:

- a. Department of the Army (DA) Form 4187, Personnel Action, where the requesting officer stated his/her intent to apply for the fellowship; listed graduate and undergraduate GPAs; acknowledged that a service obligation would result from serving as a Fellow; acknowledged that he/she could not compete for an additional broadening opportunity; and, finally, received the signature of an O-6 in his/her chain of command.
- b. DA Form 705, Army Physical Fitness Test Scorecard (and a DA Form 5500, Body Fat Content Worksheet, if this is applicable).
- c. Essay titled "Why I Should Be Selected."
- d. Not more than five letters of recommendation (LORs).
- e. Civilian-looking resume crafted for a Senior Executive Staff (SES) member.
- f. Memorandum for the President, Interagency Program Selection Panel, outlining the applicant's top five desired partner agencies (the top three required a brief explanation of why these were choices for the applicant).¹³

Once the HRC POC receives the documents and verifies they are acceptable, the POC routes this packet through various gates at HRC; one such review is at the officer's Branch level. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that any officer desiring to pursue this fellowship engages with his/her Branch Manager early in the process to



verify the overall strength of their file. The more competitive an officer's overall file, the better chance the officer will have during future portions of the process. Ultimately, there is an HRC-managed board that will determine an order of merit list (OML) for potential future Fellows. This board will look at the above mentioned items but will also look deeper at the officers' past evaluations, jobs performed, and academic records from undergraduate and graduate institutions.

Potential Impacts to Officers During Assignment Cycles

The most important piece of information that officers need to understand is the time period when notification of the OML is made. Officers might not know the HRC board results until mid-April of the same calendar year that they will execute a permanent change of station (PCS) for the assignment. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the officer pursuing a fellowship will be able to retain any other assignment options after January/February of that year. Specifically, in my case, I had to receive a revocation of a request for orders (RFO) for another assignment to remain on-track with the fellowship. Basically, an officer places all his/her eggs in one basket when pursuing this fellowship because of the lateness of the OML results *if that officer is in a PCS window*. In other words, it will be very hard for most Branch Managers to retain an alternate assignment for an officer in the event the officer does not post on the OML.

So, the risk is that an officer failing to make the fellowship OML may be forced to take an assignment that no other officer desired during that PCS cycle. This would obviously not be a risk for officers outside of a potential PCS window. This further reinforces the need to maintain close contact with Branch before and during the process; Branch Managers will try and indicate the strength of an officer's file so that, if the officer pursues the inter-agency fellowship in a PCS cycle, that officer stands a good chance of selection on the OML. But, there is absolutely no way that a Branch Manager can know for certain how the board will vote.

This information is certainly not meant to deter anyone from competing for this fellowship; it is only meant to adequately define the potential risk to some officers and better define the timeline and process. The fellowship report date is structured to mitigate this somewhat, with the current reporting in August. However, the reality is that AHRC PCS assignment determinations are often tentatively slated in the December/January timeframes and then a great many assignment instructions (AIs)/requests for orders (RFOs) follow in late January, February, and March; the Interagency Fellowship OML is released well afterwards.

Recommended Adaptation to the Current Process

Since the Army operates on a two-cycle assignment system, fall/winter and spring/summer, and the current Interagency Fellowship notifications can occur as late as mid-April, adjusting the overall timeline for this fellowship could facilitate more applicants, relieve pressure on assignment officers, and align the Fellows' notifications with the timeframe when most other AIs/RFOs are distributed.

A suggested recommendation to adapt this current timeline is for the CGSC/Combined Arms Center (CAC) Interagency Department to work with AHRC and shift everything in this process sixty days earlier. This would result in the MILPER message release date in the month of May, rather than July; the final packet would be due to AHRC POC in October, versus December; and, finally, the release of the board results and notification to Fellows could occur in February. This adjustment would align much better with the release of the majority of AIs/RFOs for the spring/summer assignment cycle. The report dates for Fellows would not necessarily have to shift; Fellows would still PCS in the spring/summer and report to their agencies in August. The difference would be in *earlier notification* (around sixty days sooner) and this earlier notification would further trigger faster release of AIs/RFOs in the target window for assignments.



Conclusion

The Army will continue JIIM operations as it moves forward focusing on the Chief of Staff of the Army's (CSA) top priority of *Readiness*. The Army continues to rely on the JIIM partners to help achieve successes in its core competencies of combined arms maneuver and wide area security. This broadening opportunity will hopefully assist in improving the Army's ability to interact with and leverage the capabilities of JIIM partners and, ultimately, help the Army execute more effectively globally. However, better aligning the process and timeline for this important fellowship would increase the pool of applicants, reduce friction during the spring/summer assignment cycle, and allow the selected officers earlier notification and faster release of their AIs/RFOs to afford a better transition from one installation to the next. Continuing to grow and foster the Army Profession is paramount; smoothing out the timeline for the CGSC Inteagency Fellowship is just one small step towards continuing this effort.

Major Christopher J. Masson, U.S. Army, attended the U.S. Army Command and General Staff Officers Course (CGSOC), Command and General Staff College (CGSC), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 2015/16. During that time he applied for the FY2016/2017 CGSC Interagency KD/Post MEL4 Fellowship Program. He was notified by Army Human Resource Command (AHRC) of his acceptance on the order of merit list (OML) in the spring of 2016. Currently, he serves as a Fellow in the Department of State (DoS) with Political-Military Affairs/Security Assistance and works as a member of the Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF) Team. His Fellowship will conclude July/August 2017.

NOTES:

1. This information was derived from a 29 September 2015 CGSC Information Paper (Subject: The CGSC Interagency Fellowship Program), produced and distributed by Mr. Tim O'Hagan, CGSC Interagency Program Manager, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and further approved by Dr. Ralph Doughty, Interagency Program Director, CAC/CGSC, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. A great deal of the information within this Information Paper was extracted from the MILPER Message that will be listed below in additional notes.
2. General Mark A. Milley, 39TH Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), since his initial message to the Army, has strongly articulated that his number one priority is *Readiness*. He further expands on this as being ready to fight today and being prepared to fight tomorrow. Finally, in writing and in speaking, GEN Milley has explained that "*Readiness is #1, and there is no other #1.*"
3. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1, *The Army Profession* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office [GPO], 14 June 2015), supersedes ADRP 1, 14 June 2013. This ADRP is part of an ongoing Army effort to define and develop the Army, as a profession. It further defines the Army Ethic and the Army Professional. Further, this ADRP expands the discussion on the Army's dual nature as a military department of the United States Government and a military profession.
4. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and The State* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and Random House, Inc., and Harvard University Press, 1957), 7.
5. This extract is from a paper by Major Christopher J. Masson titled "Why I Returned: Re-entering Service in the Army Profession", April 2016, that is currently with review for publishing by the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE).
6. Dr. Don M. Snider, Colonel (retired), US Army, described this position in a special commentary, "Renewing the Motivational Power of the Army's Professional Ethic," *Parameters* 44(3) (Autumn 2014). Further, Dr. Snider articulated very similar views in his presentation to the 2015/16 CGSC class in *Will the Army of 2025 Be a Profession?*, which was



presented to the Command and General Staff Officers Course (CGSOC), Command and General Staff College (CGSC), 3 September 2015. He described what a profession is and compared professions to bureaucracies. Dr. Snider's theme was that "We are Stewards of Our Profession." He explained how stewardship encompassed trust, honorable service, military expertise, esprit de corps, and stewardship of the profession. His presentation nested with and reinforced ADRP 1 and ADP 1. He further explained that, our Army, is a dual-character institution that consists of a bureaucracy plus a profession; these two characteristics together equal the Army we serve. Ultimately, he left us with the proposition that a profession must exist to develop professionals.

7. The Army Human Resources Command (AHRC) website is an excellent source for information on every B.O.P. – <https://www.hrc.army.mil/officer/broadening%20opportunities%20program%20catalog> and at <http://www.hrc.army.mil/bop>.

8. O'Hagan, "The CGSC Interagency Fellowship Program," 1.

9. Ibid., 2.

10. Ibid., 1-2.

11. Mr. Joel D. Strout can be contacted at Headquarters, U.S. AHRC, 1600 Spearhead Division Avenue, Department 280, Fort Knox, Kentucky 40122-5208, and at 502-613-6411 and at joel.d.strout.civ@mail.mil.

12. MILPER Message Number 15-221, 15 July 2015, FY2016/2017 CGSC Interagency KD/Post MEL4 Fellowship Program, Proponent: Army Human Resources Command (AHRC), 1-5.

13. O'Hagan, "The CGSC Interagency Fellowship Program," 3-5.