

AC-RC in the 21st Century (From an AC Perspective)

By Captain Jason Meharg and Captain Michael Konczey

Many in the armor and engineer communities—and the Army community in general—perceive Active Component (AC)-Reserve Component (RC) assignments to be the “kiss of death” for their careers. Others see them as a sign that they have done something wrong and are no longer worthy of the more prestigious assignments, such as small group instructor (SGI) at a branch school or observer-controller (OC) at a combat training center. To dispel this perception, the Armor and Engineer Branches even state on their respective home pages, “The general rule is not *if* you will serve, it’s more like *when* will you serve”¹ in an AC-RC assignment and “Most officers will be assigned to a ‘3R’ (recruiting, Reserve Officer Training Corps, Reserve Component) assignment. The 3R assignment itself has no negative bearing on promotion, schooling, and battalion command.”² While there are some disadvantages to an AC-RC assignment, we submit that these assignments are not career-enders and that the rewards far outweigh the challenges. The intent of this article is to address some of these challenges, highlight some of the rewards, and perhaps change the perception of AC-RC assignments across the force.

Within the AC-RC community, there are two different paths: First, there is the resident training support battalion. These

units cover down with only one RC unit. Second, there is the observer-controller/trainer (OC/T) battalion. These units evaluate and assist in training several RC units within a specified region. This article focuses on the training support battalion.

Despite the negative connotations and personal feelings regarding AC-RC assignments, they remain a necessary, important, and rewarding aspect of the total Army assignments process. First and foremost, the AC-RC program is congressionally mandated and requires the Army to “provide Active Component advisors to Army RC units to improve readiness. As a result, AC-RC assignments are placed first or second on the priority list of fill.”³ These assignments are also important because the officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who fill them play important roles in the personal and professional development of the supported RC units. Lastly, these assignments help AC soldiers understand how the RC functions. As we move more to an “Army of One,” it’s likely that many AC leaders will either work for or have RC units working for them in future deployments.

Since Operation Desert Storm in 1991, and the drawdown at its conclusion, the Army National Guard has continued to play an increasingly larger role in the U.S. Army’s power projection capabilities. The National Guard has participated in Operations Southern Watch, Northern Watch, Joint Forge, Joint Guardian, and Deliberate Forge, to name just a few. In 2000, the 49th Armored Division took the lead in Bosnia for Stabilization Force 7 Operation Joint Forge, Multinational Division-North. This deployment marked the first time since American soldiers entered Bosnia in late 1995 that an Army National Guard unit served as the headquarters element and provided a troop component for this peacekeeping mission.⁴ National Guard units continue to perform this mission today.

Since 11 September 2001, RC units have taken on even larger roles, ranging from Homeland Defense, to the United Nations Multinational Force Observer Mission in the Sinai, to operations in combat theaters of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Currently, RC units provide the majority of operational and theater-level logistical support and maneuver control for combat operations. RC units are the primary force running aerial port of



National Guard troops conduct a map reconnaissance for an upcoming training event with their resident trainer.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE DEC 2003		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2003 to 00-00-2003	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE AC-RC in the 21st Century (From an AC Perspective)				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Engineer School,14010 MSCoE Loop BLDG 3201, Suite 2661,Fort Leonard Wood ,MO,65473-8702				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 3	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

debarkation operations in Uzbekistan. Similarly, RC units provide the majority of transportation assets in Kuwait. More significantly, follow-on forces for the next phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom will include RC combat units in addition to the many combat support and combat service support units already in theater. The 39th Infantry Brigade (Enhanced Separate Brigade), Arkansas Army National Guard, and the 30th Infantry Brigade (Enhanced Separate Brigade), North Carolina Army National Guard, recently received mobilization orders to deploy to Iraq with 1st Cavalry Division and 1st Armored Division, respectively.

Serving in an AC-RC assignment presents many challenges and rewards. First, we work on a daily basis with the supported RC unit. We work in their armories and live in the same communities. Our mission is to—

- Provide military occupational specialty (MOS)-specific training assistance to the leaders and soldiers of the unit.
- Focus efforts in planning, executing, and evaluating battle-focused training to improve the combat effectiveness of the company/battalion/brigade and to reduce post-mobilization training time.
- Perform duties as directed by the AC commander.
- Fill key vacancies and deploy with the unit, on order.

We assist the unit in planning, preparing, and resourcing their training. We help ensure that their training is battle-focused and in line with the guidance issued by their higher headquarters. We coordinate for outside support in the form of OC/Ts for their externally evaluated lanes and annual training. Often, we assist the OC/Ts in planning and resourcing this training, as well as issuing the operations orders and maneuver graphics for these exercises. We also play a vital role in planning and preparing yearly training briefs that culminate in annual training, combat training center rotations, and/or real-world deployments. In short, we assist in the planning, preparation, and execution of training at all levels for the supported RC unit. Of course this helps the unit as well as our own professional growth. Our bottom-line objective is to ensure that the unit is ready to deploy when the nation calls.

As part of training the unit, we help educate the RC soldiers and leaders we support. We teach officer and NCO professional development and other classes; assist platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and junior NCOs in devising training for their soldiers; and even have the opportunity to develop soldiers on an individual level. In addition, we assist the supported RC unit in training, evaluating, and validating platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and company commanders, focusing on their ability to issue operations orders, conduct troop-leading procedures, give after-action reviews, and conduct proper risk assessments.

Our presence in these assignments is a delicate balance. We are expected to be the subject matter experts in many areas. Similarly, we are expected to share this expertise with the supported RC unit with the expectation that they will



National Guard troops review personal data before deployment.

incorporate what is applicable. This does not always occur, however, mostly because we are outsiders; we are not members of the tight-knit RC family. It is important to keep in mind that success in this assignment is measured in small bites. We must establish our credibility—as with any new unit—and cultivate a relationship of trust to be truly effective. Therefore, we must maintain the technical and tactical competence that is expected of us as professional officers and NCOs. We must also maintain our doctrinal knowledge and stay current within our respective branches (which can be difficult being located in such far-removed locations). By doing all of these things, we again benefit the unit as well as ourselves.

By and large, we work with a large, professional group of soldiers. National Guard soldiers are consistently willing to listen to new ideas from the training support battalion as well as the OC/Ts and incorporate these ideas into their next training event. They are motivated, patriotic, willing to do the right thing, and ready to fight to protect America.

In addition to the opportunity to help make the National Guard units better, one also gains a better—and necessary—understanding of how the National Guard works. This assignment gives firsthand insight into the constraints the units face, as well as how competent they are despite how little time they actually spend in uniform. When it comes to external evaluations, either during monthly drills or annual training, they are held to the same standard as AC units. The biggest difference is the amount of quality training time available to the RC unit. Like AC units, RC units still have annual maintenance, mobilization, and inspector general inspections, as well as individual common task training, Army physical fitness tests, and weapons qualifications. But unlike AC units, RC units are authorized 48 multiple unit training assemblies (weekend drills) a year, resulting in just 24 eight-hour days to conduct all of their administrative and training requirements in preparation for their annual training.

Another advantage is the opportunity to assist in the personal and professional development of soldiers, which is always rewarding, no matter which patch they wear. Other benefits include unparalleled family time and the opportunity to further one's civilian education.

While AC-RC assignments have many personal and professional rewards, they also have a few disadvantages. Often, we work in remote areas that lack the military support channels we have grown accustomed to when living on or near a military installation. There may be no military medical or dental facilities, no commissary or post exchange, no military barbers, and no military dry cleaners. Some live and work in communities that lack the TRICARE Health Care Program or TRICARE Prime Remote providers. Some live in areas with inadequate housing and schools for family members (situations that are being addressed). But most importantly, we miss out on the routine life on a military installation. Like recruiters, we lose the everyday camaraderie with our work groups, peers, and other Army families.

As with any military assignment, there are good and not-so-good aspects. An AC-RC assignment has many more good points than bad, providing the AC participant with opportunities not often available in other assignments. The opportunity to professionally develop by “rebluing” on doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures; pursue civilian education; spend time with your family; and live in a civilian community are once-in-a-career opportunities. Most importantly, you can have a huge impact on the readiness of many soldiers who may be deployed, with little or no notice, to real-world missions all over the globe. AC-RC assignments are not a fad, nor are they anathema. The important thing is to keep such assignments in perspective. Any assignment, if analyzed enough, can reveal something to complain about, but remember that we all chose to serve. Lastly, remember the 1st Infantry Division’s motto: “No mission too difficult, no sacrifice too great, duty first.”



Endnotes

¹ Armor Branch Web site at <https://www.perscom.online.army.mil/OParmor/arcpt_old.htm>

² Engineer Branch Web site at <<https://www.perscom.online.army.mil/OPeng/BQassign.htm>>

³ Armor Branch Web site at <https://www.perscom.online.army.mil/OParmor/arcpt_old.htm>

⁴ MAJ Ron Elliot. “49th Armored Division deploys to Bosnia.” *ArmyLINK News* February 15, 2000.

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