Army Acquisition Corps program

During the past two years, the Materiel Acquisition Management (MAM) program has undergone continuing evolution as a result of the public laws enacted by Congress and the recent Defense Management Review initiative of the Bush Administration. Various studies of acquisition personnel policies have resulted in a series of revisions to the MAM program and recently culminated in a major policy change by senior Army leadership. Specifically, in August, September, and October 1989, the CSA and Secretary of the Army approved the creation of the Army Acquisition Corps. This corps will be comprised of both military and civilian members and will be focused on developing a dedicated pool of highly qualified acquisition specialists to fill designated critical acquisition management positions.

Since all officers possessing the MAM 6T officer skill identifier will be affected by the revised MAM program, this article explains the significant changes forthcoming. More information will be released through public affairs, command, and personnel channels over the next several months.

The Chief of Staff, Army (CSA) approved the steady-state plan comprised of the following program components:

- The Army Acquisition Corps' objective is to develop a dedicated pool of highly qualified military and civilian acquisition specialists to fill designated critical acquisition management positions, while ensuring that the development of weapon systems reflects a balance between keen regard for current operational realities and technical knowledge.
- The new military component of the program concentrates on the development of officers to fill some 359 LTC and COL positions which are coded critical. These are positions which require the level of education, training, and experience stated in Public Law 99-145 and DoD Directive 5000.52. The LTC and COL positions include project/product managers (PM), program executive officer staff, deputy or assistant PM, and selected positions on the SARDA, AMC, DA and DSMC staffs. Only "certified" LTCs and COLs may fill these critical positions.
- In order to fill the LTC/COL critical positions and maintain a quality PM eligibility pool of qualified acquisition specialists, it is necessary to develop officers in grades of CPT through COL. The steady-state inventory for certified and noncertified acquisition specialists will be approximately 3,000 (CPT through COL). The size of the inventory is based on the number of validated positions and accounts for officer attrition and promotion over time.
- Officers will be accessed in their eighth year of service and will be expected to declare functional area primacy. Officers will be selected based on their technical, scientific, or management academic background and will carry functional areas 51 (RD&A), 52 (Nuclear Weapons), 53 (System Automation), 97 (Contracting & Industrial Management) or branch combination 15/35 (Aviation/Intelligence). At this time, they will be awarded an acquisition candidate identifier of 4M. From this point, their careers will be geared to repetitive development acquisition tours. The officers will attend acquisition schooling and obtain acquisition experience in order to obtain acquisition (4Z) certification.

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• Acquisition certification is tied to the requirements set forth in PL 99-145 and DoD Directive 5000.52. Public Law 99-145 dictates education, training, and experience requirements for project managers. Specifically, any person prior to being assigned to duty as a program manager of a major defense acquisition program must have attended the program management course at the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC) and must have eight years experience in the acquisition of weapon systems and associated equipment, two of which must be in a "procurement command" (AMC, ISC, SDC). Department of Defense Directive 5000.52 and its implementing manual extends the education and experience requirements to non-major system project managers and deputy project managers. These individuals must complete three years of acquisition experience of which one year must be in a procurement command. In addition, they must also complete the program management course at DSMC. Furthermore, the implementing manual prescribes that all project managers will have a baccalaureate or advanced degree in a technical, scientific, or management field. An officer is certified at two levels. LTC certification requires the officer to meet the DoD directive and its implementing manual guidelines, while COL certification requires the officer to meet the major system project manager guidelines of Public Law 99-145.

• A 30-year leader development career pattern has been approved which will serve as a template for officer development. Officers will normally serve eight years of branch qualifying assignments prior to entering the program. Upon selection for the program, the officers will be sent to advanced civil schooling followed by attendance at the Advanced Logistics Management College (ALMC) MAM course. They will then be assigned to a functional area position for acquisition development. If selected for Command and Staff College, the officers will attend the resident course followed by an "acquisition-user experience" tour with their basic branch. This tour is designed to enhance the officer's acquisition development and user/doctrine awareness. The officers will be sent to the program management course at DSMC approximately between the 15th to 17th year of commissioned service. They can now be certified at the LTC level and are eligible to fill LTC 4Z critical positions and compete for selection as a LTC PM. They will continue to serve in acquisition critical and development positions and if selected for Senior Service College, will attend. The officers will be certifiable at the COL level and eligible for COL PM. If not serving in a critical position as a COL, the officers will be assigned to functional area positions.

• The promotion process for acquisition officers will be modified from standard procedures. In order to select best qualified officers to fill Army requirements, selection floors for the 4M/4Z officers will be established for the LTC/COL promotion boards. A goal will be established in the board guidance for the acquisition officer selection rate to be no less than the board average rate. In addition, there will be increased acquisition officer membership on the selection boards. Selection for CSC and SSC should mirror the Army selection rates.

• Product and Project Manager selection boards will be modified so that only 4Z, MAM certified officers, are considered for these vital positions. Given the stringent requirements of certification and the program's objective of developing highly qualified acquisition specialists, the past practice of dual competition for both battalion/brigade command and PM selection cannot apply in the future. Pursuit of both branch qualifying assignments leading to command selection and the achievement of the MAM certification standards for PM selection are not achievable in the normal time constraints of a military career. Hence, the new program requires the officer to pursue only the acquisition qualifying assignments leading to PM competition.

Transition and Implementation Plan.

In October 1989, the CSA approved the Army Acquisition Corps transition and implementation plan. This plan provides for the time-phased implementation of the Acquisition Corps program elements. Specifically, the following actions were directed and are currently being conducted:

• Conversion of the current 6T officers from the old officer skill to the new 4M/4Z skill. On 11 September 1989, a qualification/validation board was convened at PERSCOM to review the records of all officers participating in the Materiel Acquisition Management program. This board realigned officers to the new skill identifier approved on 5 July 1989, and published in AR 611-101. Board membership was drawn from the AMC, SARDA and PERSCOM community and reviewed the Officer Record Brief (ORB) of all officers in the MAM program to recommend retention or removal from the new program with its more stringent PL 99-145 qualifications. Letters were sent to all officers informing them of their status and requesting reclamas based on additional information or desire to be removed from the new management field.

• Since the program only allows functional area 51, 52, 53, 97 and certain 15/35 officers in the 4M/4Z career field, reclassification of non-MAM to MAM functional areas is required for some officers possessing other than the desired areas. These officers were sent letters informing them of the change and permitted reclama action if they desired.

• The Q/V board found that year groups 1971 to 1982 were understrength as compared to the program's required structure, and year groups 1970 through 1965 were overstrength in the grade of LTC and COL. Therefore, it was recommended and approved by the CSA that a DA selection board be convened to examine the records of the overage year groups and determine "best qualified" officers for retention into the acquisition program. The Acquisition Officer Selection Board is scheduled for March 1990, and will have the mission of reviewing some 600 files from the September Q/V results to select the requisite LTC and COL inventory to meet Army requirements. Selection criteria are being developed by the DCSPER and will include acquisition qualifications, performance in acquisition tours, civil/military schooling, assignment history, and physical fitness/military bearing. A zone message announcing the Acquisition Officer Selection Board will be dispatched to the field by PERSCOM.

• Recruitment for shortages in year groups 1982-1971 will be conducted by the assignment branches within OPMD. Each branch participating in the acquisition program will be given specific recruitment quotas for each year group. Entry criteria will be determined as to acquisition experience, civil education degrees, and military schooling appropriate to the grade and years of service. A public affairs campaign to include media releases and direct contact will be part of the recruitment activities. Voluntary entry into the program with the concurrence and recommendation of the branch and functional proponent is the desired goal.

• Steady-state sustainment of the acquisition program is dependent on annual accessions at the eighth year of service. The first such accession year group is 1983. This acquisition designation will take place by direct contact to previously designated functional area 51, 52, 53, 97 and 15/35 officers. Assignment branches of OPMD will forward their candidates for inclusion into the program to the PERSCOM Acquisition Accession Board. The officers selected for the program will be awarded skill identifier 4M, MAM candidate. The officer will declare primacy in functional area on the ORB and the Career Management Information File (CMIF) will be transferred from the basic branch to the Acquisition Management Branch for the remainder of the officer's career. Year group 1983 will be the first year group targeted for 100 percent Advanced Civil Schooling. Subsequent year groups will be accessed annually thereafter.

• The steady-state program recognized the difficulty in pursuing branch qualification for battalion and brigade command and at the same time achieving the legal acquisition requirements of PL 99-145. Given the constraints of time, the officer must elect to either be competitive for command or be qualified for selection as a Product/Project Manager. Officers entering the program must be solely dedicated to pursuing excellence and experience in the acquisition field. Effective with the FY 92 Command/PM board series for COL and LTC, acquisition officers will be eligible for PM selection only. The FY 91 PM board for COL in December 1989, and the LTC PM board in March 1990 will "grandfather" officers dual selected for both command and PM. The CG, PERSCOM will decide which position the selected officers are slated to, based on individual qualifications.

• FY 90 promotion boards will feature modified board guidance such that acquisition officers will receive promotion rates appropriate to the Army requirements for LTC, COL, and General Officer. The first board to incorporate the 4M/4Z modified guidance is the LTC board scheduled for 21 June to 6 July 1990. The COL board in April 1990 will also contain provisions for the promotion of acquisition qualified officers possessing officer skill 4Z.

• Officers should seek the advice and counsel of their commanders in career planning and decisions related to the program. Additionally, the Personnel Service Company (PSC) can assist in updating officer records or other personnel actions. Any questions concerning the Army Acquisition Corps can be addressed to Commander, U.S. Total Army Personnel Command, TAPC-OPB-A, ATTN: Military Acquisition Management Branch, 200 Stovall Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22332-0411, AUTOVON 221-3125 or commercial (202) 325-3125. Point of contact for LTC(P) and COL is Colonel Beauchamp, Colonels Division, AUTOVON 221-7860 or commercial (202) 325-7860.

The Army program for acquisition management has undergone considerable study and refinement over the years. The recently approved Army Acquisition Corps Plan meets the requirements of public law, corrects problems with the earlier 6T program, supports the Leader Development Action Plan, and fully integrates the recommendations of the Defense Management Review. Officers entering the revised acquisition program will be able to contribute operational and acquisition skills to the development and finding of weapon systems. Personnel policies have been approved that ensure the building of a dedicated corps of acquisition specialists with assurance of advancement to the highest ranks based on excellence in acquisition abilities.