

US ARMY EUROPE

SOLDIERS FIRST

By Lieutenant Colonel(P) Frederick P. Vollrath

US Army Europe is a command of over 200,000 soldiers spread over USAREUR wide geographic areas. Commands are based where they can best perform their mission. In the Federal Republic of Germany alone, some commands are spread throughout all 11 states comprising the Republic — often remotely located and many miles distant from their parent units and headquarters. Communication, coordination, and essential support to the soldier and his family members are real challenges facing the command structure and the personnel community.

A US Army Europe military personnel office supports all units in its geographic area, with a few minor exceptions, regardless of command affiliation. For example, one military personnel office can be supporting up to 16 major subordinate commands. That same Major Army Command could be serviced by as many as 22 separate military personnel offices.

A US Army Europe military personnel office which provides area personnel services support maintains records and provides general personnel management and action services to commanders and soldiers. It does not normally become involved with command management functions on assignment and distribution of soldiers. A US Army Europe military personnel office providing geographical personnel services support will have one of three titles: Personnel Service Company, Regional Personnel Center, or Composite Team. Composite Teams are formed when needed from either Personnel Service Company or Regional Personnel Center. The Personnel Service Company are table of organization and equipment units assigned to a division, Corps, support command or a support group. Regional Personnel Center are table of distribution-augmentation units assigned to

either a Corps or division. Composite Teams report to Personnel Service Company or Regional Personnel Center which are considered their higher headquarters.

US Army Europe also has fifteen self contained military personnel offices that provide all types of personnel service companies and solely service their command of assignment. These units are organic to self supporting US Army Europe commands scattered throughout eight countries in Europe and the Middle East.

Soldier Proximity

The area military personnel office personnel service support concept provides services to the soldier close to home. 1st PERSCOM studies show 74% of soldiers are within 30 minutes walking distance from a military personnel office; 25% have to travel one to three hours. Without geographic personnel service support, approximately 75% of our soldiers would likely travel at least two hours to a military personnel office. Area personnel service support provides the best possible support to commanders and soldiers by reducing time away from important unit training functions.

Two basic issues must always be faced and dealt with: military personnel office service to multiple commands, and SIDPERS. As mentioned earlier, geographic personnel service support requires military personnel offices to service units in their area. To illustrate this, suppose we have a Composite Team which is assigned to a Corps providing personnel service support to an infantry battalion assigned to a division.

Under most situations, this Composite Team would operate under personnel service support policy established by their Corps headquarters. The division headquarters to which the infantry

battalion is assigned would have established internal command personnel service support policy. The two might be different. Other units serviced by the Composite Team may be in a predicament similar to that of the infantry battalion.

SIDPERS is the next issue and perhaps the greatest challenge. By design, SIDPERS is intended to capture command information on organizations and soldiers; rapidly pass the data to military personnel center; and produce reports for commanders, their staffs, and military personnel office. The information provided in these reports is used to manage the organization and make important personnel decisions. In the United States, the military personnel office SIDPERS Interface Branch, which includes the data base, and the serviced units are generally on the same installation and under the control of the same commander. As stated earlier, this is frequently not the case in US Army Europe.

US Army Europe has 11 SIDPERS Interface Divisions (SID) of data bases; one for each division (4) and forward deployed brigade (2), one for each Corps for its organic non-division units (2), and three operated by 1st PERSCOM which service all the other commands within the theater. In US Army Europe, our SIDPERS Interface Branch are integral to a military personnel office and cannot readily access a computer.

Let's expand this thought further. The military personnel office composite team receives, reviews, and forwards to their military personnel office SIDPERS Interface Branch, all transactions received each day. The SIDPERS Interface Branch in turn does the same for all the SIDPERS users in its servicing area, plus other Composite Teams which may be under its control. The SIDPERS Interface Branch reviews, accounts for, and data reduces the input, and forwards it to the appropriate SIDPERS Interface Branch for processing. Since this military personnel office (with the Composite Teams) services multiple commands, and since each command is unique to a data base, in our worst case the SIDPERS data may be forwarded to six different SIDPERS Interface Divisions. As can be seen, the opportunity for error is great if all parties are not alert (see Figure 2).

Another factor affecting SIDPERS in US Army Europe is distance. SIDPERS data is forwarded from SIDPERS Interface Branch to SIDPERS Interface Division by three separate means; AUTODIN, mail, or courier. The method used is based on which works best for the military personnel concerned. A military personnel office may be located in the same community as a

SIDPERS Interface Division, or may be hundreds of miles from it. This, of course, impacts directly on the timeliness of transactions. The greater the distance from each other — the greater the timeliness problem. Compounding this problem is the distance between the military personnel office and its organic Composite Teams, and the Composite Teams and serviced units. Of course, the cycle reverses itself for output from the cycle as well as turnaround time for error resolution.

As is readily apparent, SIDPERS in US Army Europe requires a lot of attention to insure that SIDPERS works for us rather than against us.

To make area personnel service support and SIDPERS work in US Army Europe we developed and refined a management concept which has proven successful — collective US Army Europe major area command planning for personnel service support with 1st PERSCOM taking the lead. A personnel service support Steering Group composed of the senior personnel managers from each major area command meets quarterly. Current programs are analyzed, ideas shared, solutions to problems surfaced, and decisions made on the future courses of personnel service support. The collective approach results in uniform programs and policies US Army Europe-wide while conflict is reduced. Instructions and procedures are determined and published which can be uniformly followed, and changed when necessary based on agreement.

The personnel service support Steering Group meets monthly in a discussion mode to talk about current issues, voice concerns, gather opinions, and share information. These sessions are usually building blocks upon which the quarterly meetings are based. Constant communication, coordination, and sharing of ideas are the hallmark of the personnel service support Steering Group.

We believe an effective personnel service support mechanism exists in US Army Europe. We believe soldiers come first. We will continually give them our best in services and look for and find better ways to do our job.



Lieutenant Colonel (P) Frederick E. Vollrath was commissioned in the United States Army through ROTC in 1962 in the Adjutant General Corps. He has served in various key personnel and administrative assignments in the 3d Armored Division, 5th US Army, 4th Inf Div/Fort Carson, and US Army Military Personnel Center.

Lieutenant Colonel Vollrath holds a BA in Management from the University of Miami, and a MA in Personnel Management from Central Michigan University. He has attended the Army War College and the Command and General Staff College. He presently is the Director, Personnel Services Support at the 1st Personnel Command in Schweitzingen, Germany.