

Exchange Officer's View: "What it's All About."

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Perhaps like many of you, I did not know what being an Exchange Officer was all about... now I "am one." I want to share my story with fellow USAWOA members and others. Here is my view as to "what it's all about."

After DA has notified you of assignment/acceptance into an exchange officer position your research begins. These assignments are certainly outside the normal career path of an American officer. Other than looking at a map to determine where your new home is located, here are a few tips.

Army Regulation 614-10 Personnel Exchange Program (PEP) 1 Jul 77 is the controlling document for these positions. It specifies that the objectives of these assignments are:

- Establish relationships where experience, professional knowledge and doctrine are shared.
- Foster a mutual appreciation and understanding of policies and doctrines of different armies.
- Encourage mutual confidence, respect and understanding between armies.
- Provide interesting and challenging duty with other armies.

All exchange postings are on a "one-for-one" basis. As you are being assigned to duty in a foreign country, there is an officer, from the country to which you are destined, already in the US or being assigned. Presently, there are 113 exchange positions in 14 countries. Minus differences in weapons systems, organizational structures exchange personnel are assigned to positions commensurate with their grade and qualifications. Specific topics that are expected of you are laid out in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the participating countries.

The Military Personnel Exchange Program is a CSA Military to Military program. The Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans is the executive agent. The Army Attache', or another appropriate Army officer, is responsible for "In-country" supervision of each exchange officer. In a country the size of Australia, interaction with the Attache' is limited by many other diplomatic duties and distances involved. For example, from Darwin to Canberra is over 2000 miles straight-line distance, so in my personal situation I don't expect to see this officer often.

How does a warrant officer get selected for an exchange assignment? First, you must have demonstrated in your previous assignments and schooling to be capable of representing the US Army with tact and diplomacy and to be highly motivated. If English is not the primary language of the host country, you must be proficient in the language of that country. Lastly, the hosting nation must approve you after reviewing your career history, and security information.

Once in country you will be housed and rationed as if you were with in the hosting military. If special considerations are to be addressed, these will be spelled out with in the MOA. All medical and dental treatment will be provided by your host government, as it does for its own military personnel and dependents. Normally TRICARE will cover your dependents medical and dental, and you will be provided Overseas Housing and Cost of Living Allowances to cover living expenses.

"Command" is one issue where AR614-10 is very clear. While a US officer may serve in positions of command as agreed to by the host service. Under no circumstance may foreign personnel be assigned to a position where they would have to exercise command of American troops. Warrant Officers are advised to expect to command in these assignments.

It is important to become knowledgeable of the regulatory requirements. It is also helpful to obtain copies of the MOA, duty statement for the assignment; and, justification from the requesting army for the exchange.

These documents spell out what will be your expectations for duty performance. You will also find out everything that is required for your administration with in these documents; tour lengths, uniform requirements, report requirements, evaluation requirements, administrative and logistical support.

Observations on Exchange Duties

Exchange officers will find the duty to certainly be both interesting and challenging. In my present exchange assignment, as a senior aviator, I am expected to be all things, a flight instructor, maintenance test pilot, aviation safety officer, gunnery officer if applicable and, as required, be in a command position if not administratively, operationally. These four duty responsibilities mentioned are normally done by four different specialists in the US Army. Acronyms are a joy to learn. If you thought you had ours straight, wait until you get to learn those of another army and realize some that you use, now means entirely different things. Just because we speak a common language does not mean we are communicating.

Establish relationships that form mutual confidence and appreciation for each other's armies. Finding a host officer, that has been an exchange officer to the US, helps greatly. They have "been there and done that" so they are empathetic to your learning the ropes. While we on our US Army bases do not see many exchange officers in our day to day lives, Army Aviation in Australia has four different US exchange personnel. Chances are there will be at least one officer with in your organization that has been an exchange officer or was trained in the US.

How you carry out your day-to-day duties will foster mutual confidence and appreciation between the armies. There are differences in doctrine as to how we staff and support our armies. You will see different means of accomplishing tasks, some of which you will like or dislike. This is where tact and diplomacy comes into play. Share your knowledge and experience where able, but always keep in mind it is their army and we do not own the inherent right to dictate tactics and doctrine.

Being so far from the US flag pole does come with some difficulties and challenges. Never the less, it is quite a compliment to your professionalism to know that your commander has placed their trust in you; to be in the right uniform, at the right time representing the US Army, with the right attitude. In my two and a half years in country, I have seen my senior rater twice outside of my initial in briefing.

Overall, my personal experience as an exchange officer has been positive. It has been, as I expected, both challenging and professionally rewarding. Some claim that because these duties are so far outside the main stream that it may be a career-ending move. Only my opinion, but evidence from here shows that our officers go on to command Battalions, continue to be selected for advanced schooling, promotions and demanding assignments afterwards.

Aviation and Warrant Officers

Australia has warrant officers in the same manner as the British system. These are the senior enlisted men of the organization in duty positions that our ~ Sgt.'s and CSM's typically hold. There is no close match to a US CW4, so expect to be asked exactly where you fall into the main steam.

Here in Australia, we have four Warrant Officers, three aviators and a rigger. Our aviators make up a large portion of the experience base for these units. CH47s have only just been reintroduced to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) after being transferred from the air force to army. Our UH60/ S70 black hawk position is the technical expert on this aircraft as a true maintenance test pilot. Here, maintenance officers are generally engineers but not pilots; our exchange officer fills this void. Both the UH601570 and CH47 aircraft are assigned to 5th Aviation Regiment in Townsville, Queensland. My position in the reconnaissance aircraft is the newest exchange position. This position started out in Darwin, Northern Territory and was moved to the Regimental Headquarters located at Oakey Army Airfield, Queensland. With the introduction of a new armed reconnaissance airframe, this position within the 1st Aviation Regiment closely resembles that of a standardization officer and master gunner.

On any given day, one of us will be deployed away from home base, if not all of us. It is not uncommon to meet up away from our home bases. We in our daily duties are meeting the four objectives of these assignments. Our skills are recognized, judgment appreciated, and experience put to work. You will only be limited by your own abilities and initiative.

If approached by your career manager about an exchange position, my recommendation is to take the assignment.

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