

Education key for enlisted Soldier contracting certification

by Daniel P. Elkins
MICC Public Affairs Office

Entering the Army Acquisition Corps necessitates enlisted Soldiers to meet specific education and certification

requirements outlined in federal statutes in order to execute contracts on behalf of the government and maintain readiness.

Soldiers in the 51C military occupational specialty attached to the Mission and Installation Contracting Command arrive having completed training on the basic fundamentals of contracting before promptly entering a carefully mapped training regimen under the

observant direction of a mentor.

Helping steer their development is the MICC 51C Contingency Contracting Officer Rotational Training Plan and a proficiency guide that outline a structured approach and defines training guidelines and participant responsibilities. The plan charts training, education and experience requirements on a rotational schedule alongside MICC civilian professionals allowing uniformed members to gain experience and certification necessary in performing operational contract support in garrison and during contingency operations.

“Attaching Soldiers to the MICC was a deliberate decision by the Army Contracting Command to broaden their proficiency in contracting while increasing readiness,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Bowens, the MICC command sergeant major. “Accomplishing the necessary steps in a timely manner to achieve appropriate certification is at the core of readiness. I cannot overstate the importance of this as a critical mission component.”

The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, or DAWIA, sets forth core standards in acquisition and functional training as well as education and experience for contracting certification at three levels for both uniformed and civilian members in the workforce.

Soldiers also have the opportunity to work toward certification by attending several in-resident courses to include the three-week Army Acquisition Foundation Course, four-week Army Basic Contracting Course and four-week Army Acquisition



Intermediate Contracting Course in Huntsville, Ala., provided by the Army Acquisition Center of Excellence. The AACoE is a centralized training, education, and career development school for Army acquisition officers, noncommissioned officers, and

Department of the Army civilians. The center integrates Army institutional training, education, and career development courses for the acquisition, logistics, and technology workforce.

analysis, contract structure and format, and Federal Acquisition Regulation fundamentals for basic certification. Intermediate courses explore legal considerations, source selection, managing government property, analyzing contract costs and negotiation.

acquisition workforce already possessing the necessary education, and approximately 96 percent are certified or within the grace period of accomplishing their appropriate certification. VanGilder said approximately 34 percent of enlisted members have achieved

“Accomplishing the necessary steps in a timely manner to achieve appropriate certification is at the core of readiness. I cannot overstate the importance of this as a critical mission component.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Bowens



their necessary certification level against a threshold of 94 percent.

“Much of the delinquency is due to accomplishing the education requirement in time to obtain certification,” she said.

While she anticipates that

Earning certification

Contracting experience essential for certification ranges from one year for DAWIA Level I certification to two years for Level II and four years for Level III. Eligible Soldiers and civilians may request to substitute a year of education for a year of experience when seeking their Level II and III certifications.

Donna VanGilder is the chief of training and readiness for MICC Operations. She explained that the requirement for enlisted Soldiers to obtain certification is also coupled with their grade. Staff sergeants are required to obtain a minimum Level I certification; sergeants first class should attain their Level II certification; and those in the grade of master sergeant and above must achieve their Level III certification.

Acquisition and functional training involve successfully completing multiple online and a few resident DAWIA courses in varied subjects to include contract planning, execution and management, cost and price

Advance certification training focuses on contracting for decision makers, construction contracting, cost accounting standards and acquisition law. Additional developmental training is also needed depending on the type of assignment and activity individuals represent.

Perhaps proving most demanding for enlisted Soldiers in the 51C MOS is satisfying the education requirement, according to VanGilder.

“A minimum education requirement of a bachelor’s degree in any field of study with at least 24 hours in business disciplines is required to obtain certification in the contracting career field,” she said.

A threshold of certification is established by the office of the principal deputy to the Army acquisition executive. Civilian interns and officers enter the

enlisted certification percentage to improve significantly in the next few months, it still falls below that necessary to ensure readiness.

Key discriminator

The decision to begin assessing uniformed members into the 51C contracting career field came about in late 2006 to meet the Army’s increasing need for contingency contracting officers. The integration of approximately 400 Soldiers to contracting offices throughout the MICC began in March 2013 as a means to streamline the span of control from oversight of uniformed service members stateside while enhancing their professional development.

As the influx of enlisted Soldiers into the 51C MOS continues, education is becoming more of a discriminator due to certification requirements. This stipulation has become a key element in a competitive selection process to enter into the career field, according to officials.

See CERTIFICATION, Page 8

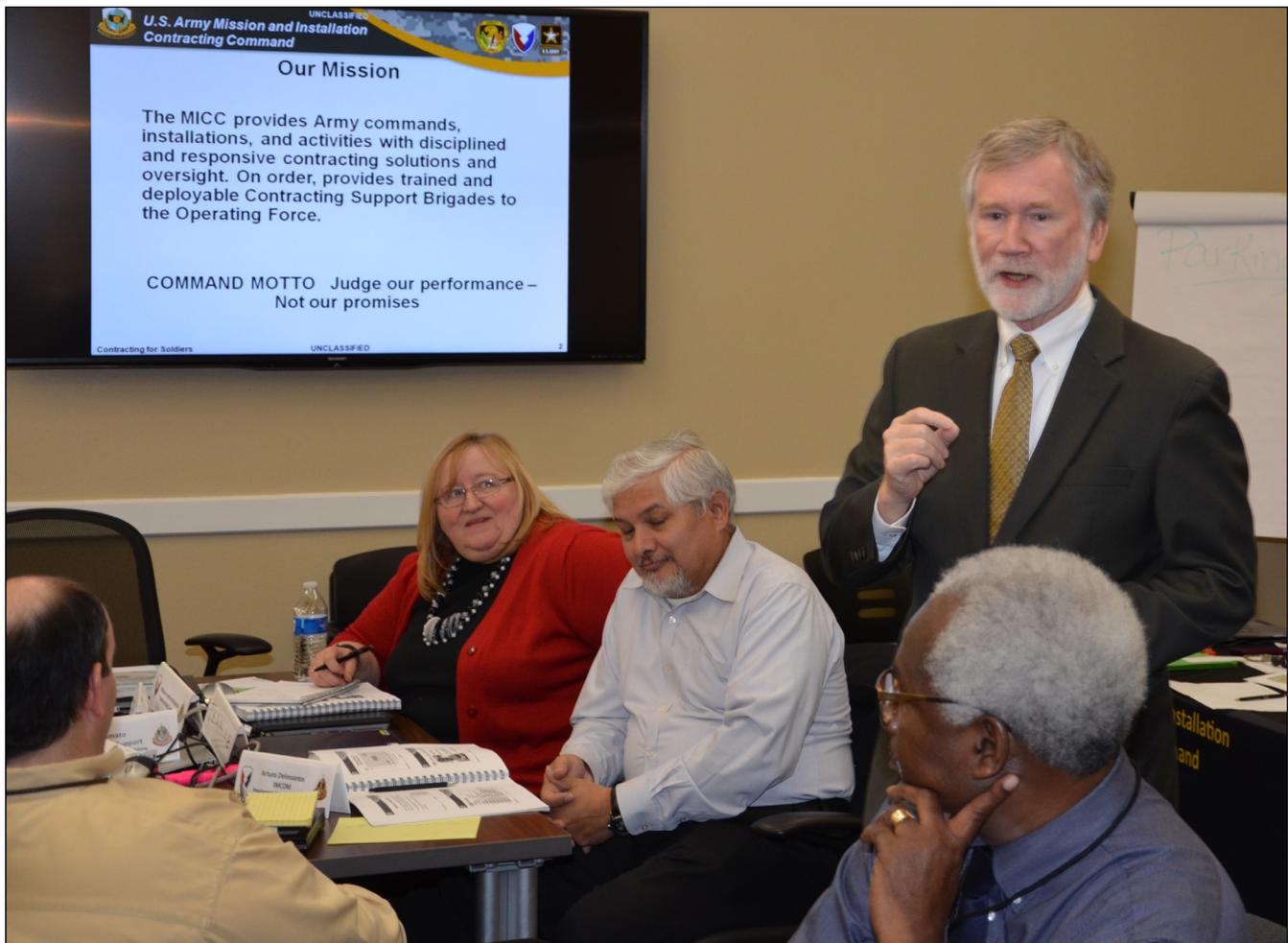


Photo by Ben Gonzales

George Cabaniss briefs acquisition members as part of the Requirements Generation Road Show March 24 at the Mission and Installation Contracting Command’s Long Barracks on Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas. The road show brought together more than 40 contracting professionals from throughout the country representing the Army’s major commands March 24-27 to discuss and learn acquisition essentials. Cabaniss is the MICC deputy to the commander.

CERTIFICATION, from Page 7

“NCOs are judged on a ‘total Soldier’ concept, with primary areas of emphasis consisting of completion of a bachelor’s degree and rated leadership time on an NCO evaluation report carrying the most significance,” said Master Sgt. Eric Sears, chief of the 51C Proponent NCO at the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center.

Sears added other factors influencing selection include total time in service and letters of recommendation.

Demanding duty

Entering the 51C MOS comes with the recognition that its demands are not limited to civilian education and DAWIA certification as Soldiers also must maintain all aspects of readiness.

“It can be really difficult since they still have to take into consideration family commitments, soldiering tasks such as weapons qualification and physical training, deployments and contingency training

exercises,” VanGilder said.

Soldiers begin their training with simplified contract actions alongside civilian contracting professionals. Simplified actions include the acquisition of supplies and services, including minor construction, research and development, and commercial items not exceeding a threshold of \$150,000. They then move on to more complex contracts until they become proficient in all procedures making up the contracting life cycle from pre-award and award to administration, including closeout.

“Technical, hands-on training is a critical component in developing contracting skills,” Bowens said, “but achieving all aspects required of certification is necessary to remain committed to the Army profession.”

Editor’s note: This is the first in a series of articles on the certification for contracting Soldiers. Following articles will highlight success stories and developmental benefits of obtaining certification.



Sgt. 1st Class Melissa Browning, left, reviews contract actions with Reece Hockstedler June 24 at Fort Riley, Kansas.

Photo by Dena O'Dell

NCOs set pace for certification

Two Soldiers attached to the Mission and Installation Contracting Command are among those exemplifying the Army profession through their acquisition certification efforts.

Sgts. 1st Class Melissa Browning and Shannon Davie are setting the pace for their enlisted peers in contracting by achieving certification levels beyond their requirements.

by Daniel P. Elkins
MICC Public Affairs Office

The Army Acquisition Corps requires enlisted Soldiers to meet specific education and certification requirements in order to execute contracts on behalf of the government. In order to obtain certification in the contracting career field, Soldiers must meet a minimum education requirement of a bachelor's degree in any field of study with at least 24 hours in business disciplines.

The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, or DAWIA, further outlines standards in acquisition and functional training as well as education and experience for contracting certification at three levels for both uniformed and civilian members in the workforce. Army staff sergeants are required

to obtain a minimum Level I certification; sergeants first class should attain their Level II certification; and those in the grade of master sergeant and above must achieve their Level III certification.

The degree requirement often compels enlisted Soldiers to expedite higher education goals in order to obtain certification commensurate with their rank to perform their missions. For Browning, a contracting officer for the 634th Contingency Contracting Team at MICC-Fort Riley, Kansas, this prerequisite proved most challenging.

"Completing a degree was actually the most difficult (challenge) to accomplish," said Browning, who entered the contracting military occupational specialty in May 2009 after spending 15 years as an automated logistical specialist. "It consumes

a lot of time, and mixing that in with your daily workload requires a delicate balancing act between the two."

She earned dual master's degrees in business administration and logistics from Trident University International in 2013 and is Level III certified in contracting, one level above that required as a sergeant first class.

Davie, who had about 80 semester hours under his belt before his selection to the Army Acquisition Corps in 2009, found the requirement less stressful so long as he remained focused on his goal.

"As long as you were a good Soldier and were motivated, the requirements were fairly easy," said Davie, the MICC noncommissioned officer in charge of training and readiness at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas. "I just kept chipping away at the civilian school and (Defense Acquisition University) courses to obtain my certification. The motivation was just to continue along my career path, so I could have everything in place in order to do my job to the best of my ability."

Davie completed a bachelor's degree in management in 2012 from the American Military University and has since focused his attention on obtaining DAWIA Level III certification in contracting and also

working toward a master's degree in healthcare administration. The Hopkinsville, Kentucky, native completed his final contracting course in July and is now Level III certified and is in his final class to satisfy requirements for the master's degree.

A dental lab technician supporting patients for nine years, Davie found the 51C MOS as a natural transition to continue applying his customer service skills by supporting military and contract partners.

Attracting Browning to the MOS was a curiosity of how essential supplies and services have always seemed to be in place ahead of her arrival upon multiple deployments as a logistician.

"There were several instances in which we were the first unit to occupy the area. It amazed me that items would just start to appear, and I honestly had no idea where they were coming from since we were the main logistical hub on the ground," the Vienna, Illinois, native said.

Both Browning and Davie entered the contracting career field with a basic understanding of contracting. They began their training with simplified contract actions that included the acquisition of supplies and services, including minor construction, research and development, and commercial items not exceeding a threshold of \$150,000. They have each moved on to more complex contracts while becoming more proficient in all procedures making up the contracting life cycle from pre-award and award to administration,



Photo by Daniel P. Elkins

As an acquisition noncommissioned officer, Sgt. 1st Class Shannon Davie is pursuing contracting certification requirements beyond what is required by his grade.

including contract closeout.

They believe their previous service contributed to their success and drive to excel in the 51C specialty but also credit mentorship by civilian contracting professionals.

"Mentoring is important in every aspect. In regards to certification, mentoring is most important in the ability to provide guidance

and direction to contracting NCOs and officers to help them excel," Browning said. "The purpose of mentoring is also to help you pay attention to your intentions and get to where you want to be."

Davie agrees, adding that mentors play a critical role in helping guide Soldiers and other civilians through the myriad of changes to the Federal Acquisition Regulation,

contracting policies and the certification process.

With each having achieved an acquisition certification level beyond their requirements, they serve as a motivating force for others to emulate, according to Donna VanGilder, the chief of training and readiness for MICC Operations.

She said approximately 34

percent, or 78, of the 230 enlisted members attached to the MICC have achieved their necessary certification level against a threshold of 96 percent established by the office of the principal deputy to the Army acquisition executive. VanGilder said the primary reason for NCOs not meeting their required level of certification is the lack of a bachelor's degree. However, approximately 48 additional NCOs are expecting to complete their degree in the next six months, and a large number of those have already completed the required DAWIA training and experience requirements for certification.

Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Gabbert, the MICC commanding general, said a commitment to the Army profession combined with the contracting proficiency expected of senior NCOs in the 51C MOS reveal a higher caliber of professionalism and leadership. He believes contracting certification reflects a practical and professional experience valuable to Army leaders at all levels of command.

"The acquisition corps is able to attract and retain the best Soldiers our Army has to offer, because today's Soldiers want to be challenged," Gabbert said. "To succeed within the career field, an NCO must not only be intelligent, a leader and possess character beyond reproach but must also be self-disciplined and driven."

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles on the certification for contracting Soldiers.

MICC contracting teams deploy

by Daniel P. Elkins
MICC Public Affairs Office

The arrival of the 614th Contingency Contracting Team in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in August signals the first deployment of a contracting team in support of combat operations for the Army Contracting Command since integrating uniformed members at contracting offices across the country.

Mission and Installation Contracting Command officials received a short-notice deployment order for a five-member team in July. Operations officials at the headquarters at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston worked closely with the MICC Field Directorate Office at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia, to assess teams, consider augmentation needs and identify the 614th CCT from MICC-Fort Benning, Georgia.

Previously, individual Soldiers were selected to deploy forward and fall into a team once in country.

“The objective was to deploy a complete team through the entire process, which includes training, deploying forward and operating as a team,” said Art Jackson, the chief of the MICC Current Operations Division at Fort Sam Houston.

The Expeditionary Contracting Command’s 408th Contracting Support Brigade at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, maintains a forward presence in the CENTCOM AOR. After accomplishing all necessary requirements, members from the 614th CCT deployed and stood up an operation in the CENTCOM AOR that reports to the 408th CSB.

“They were able to go from notification to being in theater in less than 45 days,” said Mike Koppers, the MICC deployment operations officer at JBSA. “In that time, they completed home

station training, medical readiness, pre-deployment preparedness, and had the opportunity for a week of block leave to spend time with their families.”

Integrity Test

ACC officials announced in January 2013 its plans for integrating Soldiers in the 51C contracting military occupational specialty across its centers and MICC contracting offices to streamline the span of control of Soldiers assigned stateside and enhance professional development. The MICC’s role was to broaden their contracting skills and proficiency by pairing the Soldiers alongside seasoned civilian contracting professionals while completing acquisition certification requirements. Soldiers would then put those skills to the test when called upon to deploy.

Soldiers attached to the MICC



Photo by 1st Lt. Lauren Magrane

The Mission and Installation Contracting Command leadership met with three contingency contracting teams in mid-July during a visit to Fort Benning, Georgia, as Soldiers making up the 614th Contingency Contracting Team were preparing to depart for readiness training at Fort Bliss, Texas, en route to their deployment.



Courtesy photo

Command leaders from the field directorate office at Fort Eustis are helping members of the 735th Contingency Contracting Team at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, prepare to deploy in support of operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

are part of the more than 38,000 members of the Army Acquisition workforce whose execution of the acquisition mission keeps Soldiers well-equipped, well-protected and prepared for mission success.

MICC officials said the deployment of a team marks a significant milestone for the command as an organization and validates its Soldier certification efforts.

Previously, the ECC provided contracting support to deployed locations on an individual replacement basis. The MICC now joins ECC in providing the ACC with the capability of additional contingency contracting personnel and units to support combatant

commanders worldwide, Kuppers said.

Kuppers added that supporting a combat capability as an organization validates architecture in place to meet the Army's intent of aligning units to supported units. He explained that a contracting support brigade deploys in support of an Army corps, a contingency contracting battalion in support of a division, and contingency contracting teams in support of brigade combat teams.

"The accomplishment of this mission illustrates to the Army why it is important to maintain the contingency contracting infrastructure," Jackson said. "Even though we've always supported

the mission down range, this opportunity validates our ability to deploy our numbered units from within the United States."

Local Impact

Contracting offices across the MICC provide on-the-job training for approximately 450 Soldiers in the 51C MOS. Their attachment in 2013 came at a time when contracting offices were unable to add civilian employees for two years due to a hiring freeze.

Steve Sullivan, the director of MICC-Fort Benning, said the short-notice nature of the deployment shifted the contracting office's primary attention to making sure Soldiers were ready to deploy and

had their personal affairs, to include powers of attorney, family care plans, weapons, etc., in order.

The MICC-Fort Benning deputy director said that groundwork included preparing the team to arrive in austere conditions with limited support.

“To facilitate any training gaps, the contracting office developed toolkits and training packages for Soldiers,” Brenda Clark said. “We had guides, checklists and especially a construction training presentation that Soldiers and units took with them for reference. We learned these documents came in handy when they arrived at their base with no computer support.”

Although the intent of attaching Soldiers to contracting offices was to train for deployment, they were quickly immersed in a variety of acquisitions from simple to more complex buys that helped alleviate workload challenges for many offices.

MICC-Fort Benning is responsible for providing installation contracting support for the garrison and varied activities including the largest logistics readiness center’s base operations and dining facility contracts in the DOD; a multi-million dollar multiple award task order contract for Maneuver Center of Excellence support; and the Western Hemisphere Institute for Economic Security requiring translation services for instruction to Central and Latin American soldiers training on the installation.

To mitigate the impact of losing the team of Soldiers, operations officials at the MICC headquarters coordinated the deployment tasking with the command’s field directorate office at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, which oversees MICC-Fort Benning. MICC FDO-Fort Eustis leaders were able to coordinate additional resources from other subordinate contracting offices to support Fort Benning requirements.

New Mindset

The MICC was established as a Tables of Distribution and Allowances unit. TDA organizations are usually considered to be non-deployable. Jackson said the attachment of Soldiers began a shift in that mindset. Soldiers are assigned to ECC but attached to the MICC for professional development. Once called upon to deploy, the unit would then return as an ECC asset.

“This is a significant accomplishment from a year ago when we first attached Soldiers into our contracting offices. The initial intent was to improve their training, and when they were given a mission, we would detach them back to ECC to work specific deployment issues,” Jackson explained. “What happens now is that we work closely with our counterparts at the ACC and our offices in taking the units until they are ‘wheels-up’ en route to their deployed location.”

He added that providing combat-ready contingency contracting Soldiers and units to our warfighting units is the result of a collaborative effort between ACC, ECC, MICC headquarters, MICC offices, and Soldiers.

As officials manage the transition to align contingency contracting units with warfighters, Koppers believes the alignment will give MICC Soldiers and the office to which they are attached greater predictability.

The MICC Operations Directorate is already coordinating efforts for the deployment of a second team, the 735th CCT, from MICC-Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

“Our team is made up of Soldiers who have different operational backgrounds to include Field Artillery, Infantry, Finance and Logistics,” said Maj. Chris Thomas, the team leader. “This will be the first contracting team from Fort Leonard Wood to deploy, which is a huge honor for our organization.”

The team will also support the 408th CSB once in place at its forward location. MICC officials are also in the process of coordinating additional deployment requirements for 2015.

“Soldiers are going to deploy at some point, that’s understood,” Koppers said. “Aligning contingency contracting units to warfighting units allows the contracting office greater predictability to shift workload since the organization will know six months to a year out that they have a unit projected to go.”

As planning for the deployment of other MICC units continues, Sullivan advised that organizations should take full advantage of pre-deployment time.

“Contracting success down range will result when preparation meets opportunity,” he said.

Editor’s note: This is the final in a series of three articles on the certification of Soldiers in the Mission and Installation Contracting Command.

“Soldiers are going to deploy at some point, that’s understood. Aligning contingency contracting units to warfighting units allows the contracting office greater predictability to shift workload since the organization will know six months to a year out that they have a unit projected to go.”

Mike Koppers
