

# The Personnel Exchange Program

A unique opportunity for Marines.

by Maj Troy E. Mitchell

**T**he Personnel Exchange Program (PEP) serves critical strategic interests with partner countries, which may not be known or understood by those who have not served or collaborated with exchange personnel in building global partnership capacities. According to MCO 1520.11F, *International Affairs Program*,

Personnel exchanges represent dedicated, long term Marine Corps engagement with allied partners to exchange and standardize operational procedures between coalition partners. Marine Corps exchange personnel embed with partnered military units ... to develop and enhance worldwide security cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

Many Marines may be unfamiliar with the program unless reviewing the yearly MARADMIN or through brief interactions with previous PEP personnel. This article provides background on the PEP, explain the roles PEP serves, and illuminates the application procedures to encourage more Marines to compete and serve our national interests as exchange personnel and ambassadors to the United States and our Corps.

The Marine Corps' PEP is a sub-entity of the International Affairs Program (IAP) within Plans, Policies, and Operations (PP&O)-Strategy and Plans Division (PL), International Affairs Branch (PLU). IAP's mission is to

identify, select, and educate Marines with Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) capabilities for assignments on tactical, operational, and strategic-level staffs, joint and combined assignments, and for duty with interagency organizations

**>Dr. Mitchell is a 2d MEB MAGTF Planner. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in intelligence and counterterrorism studies. He writes on issues involving national security, intelligence analysis, and violent extremism.**

in order to improve MAGTF plans, operations, security cooperation and intelligence efforts.<sup>2</sup>

The PEP is intended to be a one-for-one reciprocal exchange of officers and career-designated SNCOs<sup>3</sup> Entry into this program is voluntary and qualifies Marines for the 8220 (Political-Military Officer) or 8210 (Political-Military Staff NCO) MOS.

## Enrichment Opportunity

Prospective PEP Marines must have showed maturity, personal stability, and financial responsibility to live and work in an overseas location without immediate access to Marine Corps' services and support. Their responsibilities focus on serving the host country as an integrated member of the host unit. The PEP personnel are under the operational control of the host nation with administrative control from the Service component. It is critical to note that PEPs are not liaison officers, which may create a shift in how the exchange personnel maintains reporting requirements to Marine Corps' affiliates. By managing expectations, the exchange personnel embrace their billets and host command while easing any misperceptions of how or to "whom" the Marine Corps representative reports. Avoiding the misperception of serving as a liaison

vice exchange personnel allows the PEP Marine to serve as a trusted member of the host command.

Serving in a PEP assignment fosters strategic partnerships and acts as a career-broadening tour. Through MAGTF experiences, the Marine Corps exchange personnel continue to educate and build relationships with strategic partners. Individual MAGTF experiences significantly increase the host-nation's capability by providing lessons learned and experience in providing examples of how the Marine Corps addresses host country concerns regarding their abilities. Meanwhile, the exchange personnel get a unique perspective about the host nation and region's perspective of the United States and its ability to project military power. Exchange personnel serve a humbling experience to self-reflect on the capability and capacity the United States possesses in influencing global powers. Although exchange personnel help educate strategic partners, it provides the Marine an invaluable opportunity to learn just as much from the host nation. Much of the exchange tour is serving the host-nation's interest, managing expectations, acting as an ambassador for our Corps and country, and embracing the opportunities presented. Serving as exchange personnel requires Marines to convert MAGTF concepts into a useable form to support the host-nation's interest. Many individuals in the host nation may be wed to their military paradigms, which may be a hybrid of other global militaries. By translating the MAGTF's capabilities into a useable form, the United States continues to increase our strategic partnerships and global security.

The PEP experience extends to the service member's family, as well when serving as ambassadors of our Corps. From the spouse to the children, the holistic family gets the host-nation's perspective on the United States while educating or confirming the aperture of those they interact with regarding their perceptions. The family also serves as ambassadors of our Corps and the United States. The experience is truly life-changing, which provides culturally refined perspectives of the United States, the host region, and the country. Although the transition into the host-nation's culture may prove challenging, the relationships and experience foster maturing and embracing opportunities conducive to getting holistic perspectives for the rest of the family member's lives. A critical concept is finding content during stressful transitions and keeping an open-minded perception.

In some geographical locations, the Marine may be the sole Marine Corps representative, or there may be many Marines serving in different capacities to support strategic relationships. Meanwhile, certain geographical locations may support other Service exchange programs from the Army, Navy, Air Force, or interagency. The lasting bond we as Marines have with our whole of government approach to building strategic relationships lasts a lifetime. These bonding partnerships help ease the transitions of our servicemen and women in potentially austere environments while fostering friendly atmospherics when encountering other American personnel overseas. The camaraderie established between the whole of the government and the host nation provides a unique facet to the exchange program.

### Application Procedures

PLU releases a MARADMIN announcement in the April to mid-May timeframe soliciting nominations to the program by mid-June. The MARADMIN announces available positions and additional requirements, including deadlines and other administrative details for the application and nomination process. Then, PLU coordinates the nomination, screening, selection, acceptance, and assignment of PEP person-



**PEP Marines must have shown maturity, personal stability, and financial responsibility in order to live in an overseas environment.** (Photo by LCpl Marcus Allen.)

nel. Collaborating with Manpower & Reserve Affairs (M&RA), PLU assists in the coordination of prerequisite training requirements with billet sponsors and schedules required training with Training and Education Command. Active duty Marines are eligible for PEP assignments. The grade requirement depends on the solicited billet, but officers between the ranks of first lieutenant and lieutenant colonel and SNCOs are eligible. It requires personnel selected for the PEP to have sufficient obligated service remaining after completion of the PEP tour to fulfill a two-year follow-on assignment. Enlisted Marines are required to reenlist or extend their current enlistment before an assignment to the PEP.

An application package includes an administrative action form or application letter with endorsements from the first General Officer in the Marine's chain of command, Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB) scores and test date (unless the Marine possesses a Defense Language Proficiency Test score/test date), overseas and independent duty screenings, and a command endorsement. DLAB scores serve as a predictor of success in learning a language; therefore, the Marine's DLAB score must meet the minimum level required by the Defense Language Insti-

tute Foreign Language Center language category for the host-nation's language. The prospective PEP Marines and their family members must not have any financial, medical, personal, legal, or other concerns that could hurt the performance of duty in the PEP assignment or the reputation of the Marine Corps. Marines enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program will require additional screening before acceptance in the PEP. Getting the certificate of suitability from overseas screening is potentially the lengthiest requirement of the package for family members. Without prior planning before the release of the solicitation MARADMIN, there is a potential that they may not complete the certificate requirements to include the documentation with the package.

During the selection process, members of M&RA co-chair the screening panel with representation from DC Aviation, Intelligence Division, occupational field sponsors, and M&RA to ensure proper screening of applicants. Once a candidate is screened and approved, M&RA issues orders to the Marine selected to take part in the PEP. Orders should include all pre-assignment training evolutions as required by the billet. If language training is unnecessary for the host country, the monitor releases PCS orders during the regular

issuance of orders contingent on the reporting date agreed by the host nation.

While serving as exchange personnel, the Marine serves the Marine Corps component commander responsible for the assigned area of responsibility. The Marine Corps component commander provides administrative support and exercises administrative control over Marines assigned to the PEP in their area of responsibility.<sup>4</sup> Administrative support and control include processing temporary additional duty requests, reporting unit diary events such as the semi-annual physical fitness test and the combat fitness test data, height and weight verification, settling travel claims, processing leave or emergency leave requests, and coordinating medical or dental support.<sup>5</sup>

Once selected, exchange personnel should initially contact the billet sponsor to get a point of contact for the gaining exchange billet and the agreed exchange billet description. The current PEP personnel should start communication once the selection results post. The initial contact opens connections and provides key personnel in the geographical region an opportunity to contact and get different perspectives of the PEP tour to manage expectations and educate the new PEP as they begin their transition. These various contacts, including other DOD or interagency

points of contacts, ease the transition and help guide the new PEP personnel and their family through the different procedures entering the host country.

Before departing the Marine's current duty station, he may meet with the Service component command or billet-related organizations to open communication and educate the new exchange personnel before transitioning to the host country. These entities help educate new exchange personnel on various personnel throughout different commands that enable our strategic partnership with the host nation through mutual interest and exchanges while empowering the new PEP to activate reach-back mechanisms assisting the PEP in their duties or responsibilities. A common theme throughout the potential meetings is the PEP personnel work for the host nation in an administrative control relationship with the Marine Corps; therefore, PEP personnel should not misconstrue their assignments with that of liaison assigned billets. When visiting the Service component, there is an opportunity to address administrative concerns and processing. If funding is not available, a video teleconference, a phone call, and a point of contact list support educating the exchange personnel relative to collaborating with Marines supporting common interests.

The United States and the Marine Corps stand to benefit immeasurably, as does the host country, via the PEP. With the yearly MARADMIN soliciting for qualified Marine candidates to serve strategic billets, more Marines are encouraged to apply to experience the rewards associated with service as exchange personnel. To learn more about the PEP and the experiences, applicants should collaborate with current and former exchange personnel, billet sponsors, PLU, mentors, and monitors. Personal examples and testimony remain the best form of advertising. The PEP is not for everyone, but the experience the opportunity provides is rewarding for professional opportunists. Those who seek a challenge and want to serve in strategic billets should apply.

---

#### Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 1520.11F, International Affairs Program*, (Washington, DC: March 2013).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

