



SGT. 1ST CLASS RYAN D. JOHNSON

COMMAND/ORGANIZATION: U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center, The Army Acquisition School

TITLE: Instructor

YEARS OF SERVICE IN WORKFORCE: 10

YEARS OF MILITARY SERVICE: 14

DAWIA CERTIFICATIONS: Contracting Professional

EDUCATION: B.S. in agriculture, Washington State University; A.A. in general studies, University of Maryland

AWARDS: Meritorious Service Medal (one oak leaf cluster (OLC)); Army Commendation Medal (four OLCs); Army Achievement Medal (six OLCs); Meritorious Unit Citation (two OLCs); Superior Unit Award

BE A SPONGE

When Sgt. 1st Class Ryan D. Johnson first joined the Army Acquisition Workforce, he didn't know what Army acquisition was—but he learned fast.

In late 2012, he had been assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division and was considering a transition from the Army back to civilian life since his initial four-year enlistment was ending. Johnson had enlisted in the Army at the age of 36, and in a few short years, he reached the conclusion that “the infantry was a young man’s game.” He had moved from the Mortar Platoon to the training room in order to start his transition back to civilian life.

“One day, my company commander, Capt. Fred Martin Jr., said, ‘Sgt. Johnson, you are not getting out of the Army, you are going to acquisition!’ At the time, I didn’t think much of it and I had no idea what Capt. Martin was talking about; however, it did spark some interest,” he said. “I had no idea what Army acquisition was or even that contracting was a thing. Capt. Martin helped me with my application for reclassification to 51C and I was selected in May 2013.”

Johnson’s first assignment was in San Antonio, Texas, with the 412th Contracting Support Brigade, where he was assigned to work at the Mission and Installation Contracting Command’s Installation Support Programs Division. “My first actions as a contracting specialist were service and construction requirements in support of BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure] and the 63rd Regional Support Command,” he said. “The challenging nature of the job, understanding the FAR [Federal Acquisition Regulation] and, most importantly, the people, are all very appealing aspects of this career field.”

He is currently the primary instructor for the Army Contract Writing Lab (ACWL), a course offered through The Army Acquisition School in Huntsville, Alabama. He has been in the position since 2023, training Soldiers on using the Procurement Desktop-Defense (PD2) software, a key system used for creating contract actions in support of the warfighter.

“As the instructor for the ACWL, I leverage my expertise to ensure Soldiers are properly trained using PD2 to write clear, accurate and standardized contracts efficiently and accurately, while ensuring compliance with relevant acquisition regulations,” he said.

Johnson takes great pride in being a member of the Army Acquisition Corps, and one of his greatest satisfactions is understanding the impact a 51C has on the success of the Army’s mission. “As a member of the [Noncommissioned Officer] NCO Corps and the Army Acquisition Corps, I use my expertise as a professional and business expert to ensure that the warfighter has the right supplies and services acquired at the best possible value,” he said. “The role of a 51C is supporting the warfighter by procuring supplies and services in complex and challenging environments. The important work we do ensures that the Army has what it needs and is often the unseen part of the military’s success.”

Deployments as a 51C have been defining moments in Johnson's contracting career, putting all of his training into practice in an operational environment, procuring supplies, services and minor construction in direct support of the warfighter and seeing the tangible impact of his work. He said other important moments were mentoring and mentorship among superiors, peers and subordinates. "Learning new skills and techniques from others and then being able to share what I've learned over my 10-plus years in contracting has been very important to me."

Johnson attended the Joint Operational Contract Support (OCS) Planning and Execution Course in October 2021. The course, which he recommends taking,

really helped him develop new skills and knowledge about OCS planning and execution in a joint environment, which prepared him for supporting Pacific Pathways exercises while assigned to the 921st Contracting Battalion.

"Some of the advice I have given to newly assessed 51Cs in the past is read the regulation, pay attention to the details and be a sponge," he said. "Government contracting has many rules and regulations; familiarizing yourself with the FAR is a great start. In my opinion, success in this career, in part, depends on a keen eye for the details. Always double-check your work and have a peer review it to ensure that everything is accurate and complete. Most importantly, do not be a copy-and-paste bandit."

Finally, he added, "When you get out into the field after successful completion of the Army Acquisition Transition Course, soak up knowledge from a seasoned contracting professional. Shadow them, ask many questions and learn from their experiences."

Johnson has also learned from his experiences outside of work. "When my kids were younger, I was always involved with coaching youth sports," he said. "I was part of the coaching staff for youth football in Cedar Park, Texas, and a soccer coach at Fort Sam Houston. Many of the leadership skills learned while serving in the Army helped me be a better coach."

In the contracting field, Johnson attributes staying up to date, facilitating the learning process and managing expectations to on-the-job success. "Contracting evolves with new technologies and changes to policies, procedures and regulations. A 51C must quickly adapt and stay informed about these changes to ensure their work remains effective and compliant. When interacting with requiring activities, you must be able to set clear expectations from the beginning. It is crucial that a 51C communicate realistic timelines, deliverables and potential challenges to supported organizations and their leadership," he said. "This proactive communication helps avoid misunderstandings and delays down the road."

—*CHERYL MARINO*



COMMANDER'S COIN

Johnson, left, with Master Sgt. Isabel Sierra, Sgt. 1st Class Mark C. Lewis, Maj. Evert Chung and Sgt. 1st Class Ikai Wright, received the commander's coin for excellence in December 2016 at the Regional Contract Center-Afghanistan during deployment in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. 1st Class Ryan D. Johnson)