PLANNING FOR CONSTRUCTION OF THE PERFECT CASTLE

By Captain Christopher A. Springer

The Problem

In Fall 2021, I was a first lieutenant, serving as the construction officer for the 10th Brigade Engineer Battalion (BEB), Fort Stewart, Georgia, which was undertaking sustainment, renovation, and modernization efforts. One of our tasks during this time was to renovate and modernize the battalion museum area. The centerpiece of the museum was a plywood engineer castle. The castle was burnt orange instead of scarlet red, pieces were coming unglued and falling off, and the dimensions of the castle were not proportional.

The Solution

Coming from a criminal justice degree background and having previously served as a mechanized sapper platoon leader, I lacked construction expertise; however, with virtually no resources, I initiated the project by measuring the existing wall and locating proportionally correct images of the U.S. Army engineer castle online through basic Google® searches. I then scaled the images in such a way that the constructed castle would fill the display wall, with the turrets wrapping around the sides.

Once my vision for the renovated castle was complete, it was time for the battalion to act. Sergent First Class Seth A. Taitague and Sergent Thomas J. Seymour were the driving forces behind the design of the project. Sergent First Class Taitague provided the construction expertise needed to improve the original vision and determine the equipment and materials required for construction, and Sergent Seymour took the initiative to use his personal computer and his drafting software to create a professional-grade design template. Together, they produced drawings for higher command and Department of Public Works review and approval. I continued to work on the budget and resourcing of equipment and material as well as the standard paperwork involved with a construction project, such as the scope of work, risk assessment, bill of materials, and funding requests.

Lessons Learned

Resource and budget constraints imposed upon construction cells in BEBs may force construction officers to get creative with their projects. It helps to know about available resources in the area; for instance, the 92d Engineer Battalion, Fort Stewart, had the equipment that we needed for our construction project. Therefore, coordinating a troop construction tasking and signing for equipment from the 92d were plausible options. Knowing how Army funding works—including how government credit cards are used for the purchase of construction materials and how training funds are leveraged for construction projects—also plays a factor. There are other sources and channels of income for construction, but they vary based on the project. Getting to know fellow Soldiers, learning their talents and capabilities, and generating "buy-in" can help get a project off the ground; otherwise, it can wither and die.

Conclusion

An Army engineer castle is an icon that any engineer unit should be proud to display as part of the engineer legacy. There are many approaches to planning new construction or renovating an existing castle, but the end goal should be to showcase our engineer expertise and ingenuity by creating "the perfect castle."

At the time this article was written, Captain Springer was a student in the Engineer Captain's Career Course, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He is currently the Romanian liaison officer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 21st BEB, 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Battalion (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He holds an associate's degree in health science laboratory technology from George Washington University, Washington, D.C.; a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas; and a master's degree in geological engineering from the Missouri University of Science and Technology at Rolla.