

Enabling the FA40 Career Field for Success with National and Joint Internships

By J. Dave Price, MAJ, AV, FA40

“We are not here to make you Space experts.” Those were some of the first words we heard as Space Operations Officers Qualifications Course (SOOQC) 06-01 began. U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/U.S. Army Forces Strategic Command (SMDC/ARSTRAT) Directorate of Combat Development (DCD) runs the 10 week and two day qualification (Q) course at Building 20K (Battle Lab) in Colorado Springs, Colo. Well if we weren’t there to become Space experts, what were we doing in the course? Don’t get me wrong, between DCD and the cooperative efforts of the National Security Space Institute, we FA40 (Functional Area-40), some newly designated and some experienced have seen the alpha and omega of Space organizations, Space equipment, products and charts, electro-magnetic spectrum graphs, and so on. Well you get the idea. But somewhere along the way, we realized that they weren’t kidding, they were not going to make us Space experts. As a matter of fact, to quote one briefener in the course, “subject matter experts develop 98 percent of their expertise on their own in self-study, hard work and research.” Well, I believe the path to developing expertise can best be met with professional internships in the right National agencies and Joint Space organizations. The point is that the training of the professional Army Space cadre does not live up to the expectations of the new Space Operations Officer.

FA40 officers are Space officers. Unfortunately, Division and Corps commanders are expecting to get Space experts, even Space warriors when the FA40 reports for duty. They aren’t expecting to get officers who are coming to learn their jobs on the job with only 10 weeks of Space familiarization. Space officers, experts and warriors were ‘created’ to bring Space to the warfighters. We did visit multiple national, joint and fellow sister organizations to see how they function, are organized and how they can contribute to the Space fight, by

providing this Space expertise and products to the warfighter. Space is a highly technical field, but yet we are just beginning to learn about Space in the Q course. We are an inch deep and a meter wide, when we need to be a meter deep in Space. There have been lots of great things done to get the profession where it is today, but we need to get into afterburner or we will continue poking around the J2/J6/J3/Information Operations/Electronic Warfare desks looking for work in the field. A Space Operations Officer needs to have a greater technical education and training experience if they are going to help the Division and Corps Commanders understand Space, special technical operations and leverage National Space assets. A Space Operations Officer is in effect, a ‘wrangler,’ someone who can assist commanders and the operations officers by resolving battlefield challenges through an asymmetrical view of the battlespace, beginning with X (Space) until it intersects Y (the battle).

Let’s take a look at some of the training that other functional area experts get. If you are an FA48, Foreign Area Officer (FAO), you spend six to 14 months in language training, at least 12 months getting a Master’s in International Relations, and six to 12 months conducting In-country Training, where you attend another country’s military school, work with the Defense Attaché in that country and travel throughout your area of interest before they let you work as an FAO professional. What if you were in the Army Acquisition Corps, you would spend at least three months in basic and intermediate acquisition training, and have a 50 percent chance of going to Advance Civil Schooling (ACS). Many of the other functional areas are more mature and have the same type of training programs and ACS opportunities. But how can you compare another functional area to an FA40? A Force Modernization officer might be trained in 10 weeks, because they aren’t expected to understand or devise Space or special technical solutions, break down a satellite problem within a constellation, leverage



Space Operations Officer Qualifications Course students listen to a briefing during a class in 2004. There are approximately 180 FA40s in the field today. Photo by Sharon L. Hartman

national technical means, understand data distribution systems, collar solar effects, SATCOM gaps, Sun conjunctions, ground telemetry and control effects, and then brief the Joint Force Command/Task Force commander on their impacts on operations. These officers can rely on their own experiences in the Divisional and tactical Army when necessary. A new Space Operations Officer has little practical experience in this highly technical realm.

DCD is basically giving us the tools and a license to learn our jobs. There is a strong belief in the Space community that we can learn a majority of this technical field on our own. We are told to go out and determine where we can best support the Joint warfighters and combatant commanders, whether it brings Space effects or not. One of the advantages of the Q course is that you can get 12 credit hours towards a Master's of Science in Space from Webster's University. The hard part is finding the time in command, in a Space Support Element or an Army Space Support Team to get the other 24 hours completed. In other words, we need to find a way to get more than two FA40 students in Advanced Civil Schooling a year. Many other functional areas have 20 to 100 percent getting a Masters' degree to support their own highly technical areas of expertise.

Of course, we can't send every officer to three years of training like the FAO gets. We don't think every officer needs or deserves ACS or Training with Industry to be successful, but it is important to provide as many officers as possible each year in Space the opportunity for an internship-like program. We would need to place the right officers in the right internships, but here are a couple of examples. I recommend we should find at least 10 slots a year. Send every new Space officer to a six month PCS (permanent change of station) internship to the National Security Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, ADF, Missile Defense Agency, Joint Functional Component Command-Space, or like organization to start to develop this core of Space expertise. Select three to four of these officers annually and send them to the U.S. Air Force Space Weapons School, a Joint, Navy or Army IO/EW course, a Combined or Joint Air and Space Operations Cen-

ter tour, or to a National Space collection management office to learn these processes and systems. This will enhance corps of professional expertise and create long term effects on Army Space expertise. These newly interned officers will move our profession forward, not incrementally, but exponentially. Our community can no longer continue to accept less than what the warfighter deserves in a trained FA40.

There have been many Army Space officers, and senior folks in the Army Space community, past and present, working to build the profession to where it is today. The Space Operations Officer Qualifications Course has significantly improved with each and every new course. There are many organizations and services who would like to get a billet filled with an experienced FA40. However, we have departed from what is necessary and accepted the minimum standard to develop a professional corps, and must transition to what the Space calling is in Divisions, Corps and echelons above. Even if mo' money isn't out there, it doesn't reduce the requirements. Just like the force couldn't wait six years to get a Space Support Element in Divisions, Corps and Army headquarters. We can't get wait six years to get the professional development of the FA40 right.

It isn't that a Space Operations Officer deserves more, but the warfighters deserve Space experts that bring real expertise in Space to the field. We have accepted that this is the best we can do, but this leadership challenge must be met head on. Today the weight is on the Space Soldiers in the field, but we owe it to them and the Space community to fix it now – not later. Internships in National and Joint organizations is a right answer in the right direction. We must invest the appropriate time and money in Space Officers today so we can make a greater difference tomorrow.

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