

20 Feb 2015

From: Foreign Area Officer Community Manager (BUPERS 314)

To: Foreign Area Officer Lateral Transfer Applicants

SUBJ: GENERAL INFORMATION FOR CONSIDERATION TO APPLY FOR LATERAL TRANSFER AND REDESIGNATION INTO THE U.S. NAVY FOREIGN AREA OFFICER (FAO) COMMUNITY

Refs: (a) DODD 1315.17
(b) DODINST 1315.20
(c) SECNAVINST 1301.7
(d) OPNAVINST 1301.10 (series)

1. Thank you for your interest in becoming one of the U.S. Navy's International Engagement Professionals. Please use the information provided in this letter as you consider applying for lateral transfer and re-designation as a FAO. The majority of FAO assignments are accompanied overseas tours, therefore, I highly encourage you to inform your family of, "what it means to be a FAO," and involve them in this important career and life-changing decision.

2. Background: Per reference (a) and (b) the Navy FAO Community was established in 2006. As we approach a decade as a "single-track" community, and with the January 2014 approval of the FAO Full Operational Capability (FOC) Plan, the Navy's FAO inventory has grown to over 300 and will reach its FOC end-strength of approximately 400 officers by Fiscal Year 2019. From Lieutenant to Rear Admiral, FAOs provide a unique combination of operational experience, cultural knowledge, and language expertise to the fleet and Joint commands. Directly supporting the National and Maritime Strategies through our three lines of work (Attaché, Security Assistance, and Pol-Mil advisors on Major Staffs) FAOs are force multipliers, forging critical global relationships through persistent and credible presence in 70 countries.

3. Regions: FAOs are organized into five geographic regions that correspond to the current Geographic Combatant Command (CENTCOM, PACOM, SOUTHCOM, EUCOM, and AFRICOM) Areas of Responsibility (AOR). FAOs are assigned to an AOR when they gain acceptance into the community and become political-military experts in their assigned region. Although personal abilities are taken into consideration, **the needs of the Navy and the FAO Community drive AOR assignments**. FAO applicants must understand that applying for transfer to FAO means applying to become a Navy international engagement professional vice applying for assignment to a specific country or region based on personal preferences.

4. Assignment: As members of a small community, FAOs can expect assignment choices to be limited compared to those offered during their time in their parent communities. It is common to be offered only one or two choices that meet an officer's career path timing. FAOs must be prepared to go to hard jobs, many times back-to-back assignments, where the community and the Navy need you. Approximately 70% of your time as a FAO will be served in-country/in-region. The typical "in-country/in-region" jobs are in Security Assistance (e.g. Offices of Defense Cooperation, International Armaments Cooperation, etc.) and in the Defense Attaché Service

(DAS) when an officer is more senior (O5-O6). It is important to note that not all attachés are FAOs and not all FAOs are attachés. When not in-country, FAOs serve on staff assignments with Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs), Navy Component Commands (NCCs), OPNAV, Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff (JS), and Department of State (DoS) as well as in other interagency appointments.

5. Overseas Service. A FAO's service overseas is best characterized as "remote, challenging, and rewarding." Professionally, a FAO must be able to combine his or her significant warfare and operational expertise with independent judgment in order to be effective as regional experts within the three lines of FAO-work. Some of the locations where FAOs find themselves may lack the vast support infrastructure of U.S. overseas bases, and often FAOs find themselves the most senior U.S. Navy representative in a country.

6. Qualifications: Per references (c) and (d), a fully qualified FAO must have the following:

- (a) A regionally focused Master's degree (War College acceptable). This qualification may be waived by ASN (M&RA) for those with Master's degrees in other areas of study and who have *significant* overseas experience working in-country with a host nation's government and military.
- (b) Foreign language qualification via the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) and Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) goal of 3/3/3. In order to be designated fully qualified, a FAO must attain a score of at least 2 in at least two of the three modalities (i.e. listening, reading, and/or speaking) in a foreign language of their assigned region.
- (c) At least six months experience in his or her assigned region.

7. Accession: Today, the FAO community is manned to 90% of its authorized manpower levels. Entry into the community is highly selective and competitive. **Many year groups are closed to new accessions due to the existing number of FAOs already in these year groups.** Candidates with the highest chance of selection generally possess the following qualities:

- First and foremost, sustained superior performance (e.g. break out FITREPs, milestone screened, etc) in their parent community;
- Demonstrated aptitude in international settings via substantial experience in FAO-like overseas jobs;
- Language aptitude as measured by the Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB), and/or actual foreign language skills as documented with the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT). The lateral transfer board will only consider documented DLAB and DLPT scores achieved within three years of application;
- For LCDRs with greater than two years time-in-grade, at least two of the qualifications mentioned in paragraph (5) above are highly desirable.

FAOs are accessed during the semiannual Lateral Transfer Boards held in June and November. Basic requirements for application to the board include:

- At least eight years of commissioned service (officers with 5-7 years commissioned service may be considered on a case-by-case basis);
- Worldwide assignable as defined by successful completion of overseas screening to CENTCOM AOR (Bahrain) standards; however, waivers will be considered for officers with Exceptional Family Members (EFM) in category 1, 2, and 6 status;
- Eligible to obtain or already in possession of a TS/SCI clearance (verified by a current SSBI adjudication, JPAS report, or letter from SSO);
- DLAB test score of 95 or greater (however, > 120 is the average for the community as were the scores of most of the successful candidates over the last five boards);
- Generally all applicants should be within one year of their PRD.

The following are highly desirable:

- Language qualifications in CAT III or CAT IV languages associated with maritime countries as documented with a DLPT score within three years of application;
- Regionally focused International Relations or Strategic Studies type Master's degree;
- PEP / Foreign War College graduates / Olmsted Scholars;
- Have not failed to select for promotion to the next paygrade.

7. Family Considerations: A career as a FAO presents unique family challenges, and in many overseas assignments, **the spouse of a FAO is an integral part of the team**. Many FAO assignments involve orders to locations with limited special education or medical support. Some locations are dependent-limited or restricted. Senior FAO assignments tend to be located overseas where the greatest depth and breadth of international engagement takes place and where FAO capability is highly sought after by Embassy Country Teams. These present competing priorities for FAO families with children transitioning to college and/or spouses expanding their careers. **Every applicant is highly encouraged to discuss the long-term implications of a career as a FAO with their family**, to include the potential of living in austere locations and/or the possibility of unaccompanied assignments. Applicants with families enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) should discuss with their local coordinators to ensure that their EFMP status is up to date, and understand the limitations regarding assignments overseas before applying.

8. Contact: If you wish to discuss specific questions not addressed here, or if you want to meet with a FAO near you, please contact me at (901) 874-3694, DSN 882-3694, or email william.whitsitt@navy.mil.

Very Respectfully,

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