



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D C 20548

090126

GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

JUL 31 1973

Mr William Eudey
Assistant Postmaster General
Employee Relations Department

DLG 05470

Dear Mr Eudey

The General Accounting Office has completed a survey of selected Postal Service training activities. The objective of our survey was to obtain a working knowledge of postal training activities for the purpose of deciding whether an indepth examination was warranted.

We performed work at Postal Service headquarters, the Southern Region headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee, certain post offices in the Southern Region, and the Oklahoma Postal Training Operation (OPTO).

Our survey disclosed that

- the need for the present OPTO facility should be reevaluated,
- the method of allocating OPTO billets should be examined,
- there is a need to improve the evaluations of OPTO courses,
- there was an apparent lack of communication and coordination between headquarters and field officials in developing the Postal Employee Development Center (PEDC) program, and
- there is a need to coordinate PEDC cross-training with available positions.

We discussed these matters with Postal Service officials who have undertaken or plan to take corrective action. We are bringing these matters to your attention for whatever corrective action you deem appropriate.

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NEED TO REEVALUATE PRESENT OPTO FACILITY

In view of the relatively low utilization of OPTO facility and because the substantial training program changes that have been made-- and are planned to be made--will adversely affect the need for space at the OPTO facility, we believe that the Postal Service should re-evaluate its requirement for the present central training facility.

OPTO is presently located in a 12-story, 4-wing building situated on the University of Oklahoma campus at Norman, Oklahoma. Effective December 1, 1969, the Postal Service and the University entered into a 3-year lease, with two 1-year options, for one-half of the seventh floor and for floors eight through twelve. Amendments to the lease provided additional space for OPTO's use and, as of December 1, 1970, OPTO had the entire building under lease. Through November 30, 1972, the accumulated lease cost was approximately \$3.7 million. As of December 1, 1972, OPTO exercised the first of its 1-year options at a cost of approximately \$1.36 million.

At the present time, three OPTO divisions are responsible for Postal Service training programs. The National Maintenance Training Center (NMTC) conducts technical maintenance training in support of postal operations and vehicle and plant equipment. The Correspondence Programs Division is responsible for designing, preparing, and administering correspondence courses designed for preparatory and refresher training in management, maintenance craft, and specialized fields. The first line supervisory and other specialized training courses are the responsibility of the Resident Program Division (RPD).

During the second half of fiscal year 1972, postal employees in training at the OPTO facility occupied about 97 percent of the facility's 455 dormitory rooms used for billeting employees in training. During the first half of fiscal year 1973, however, the rate of occupancy fell off to 45 percent. OPTO officials told us that the following factors contributed to the substantial decrease in the facility's utilization.

1. The number of employees that postal regions have sent to OPTO for training has been less than the number of training billets OPTO had allotted to the regions.
2. A shortage of training instructors.
3. The termination, during the first half of fiscal year 1973, of the training program for security force personnel.

4. The phasing out, from OPTO to the field, of the responsibility for the first line supervisory training courses.

The Director of OPTO told us that the training billets formerly required for the security force and supervisory training programs will be filled by employees who will receive maintenance training for machines to be used in preferential mail centers (PMCs) and bulk mail centers (BMCs).

On October 13, 1972, OPTO prepared its preliminary training load plan for fiscal year 1974 on the basis that 15 PMCs and 7 BMCs would be operational. The number of class offerings for the PMC/BMC maintenance training courses planned for fiscal year 1974 represent approximately 45 percent of all OPTO class offerings and the employees to be trained at OPTO during the year. Preliminary training plans for fiscal year 1975 indicate that the PMC/BMC classes will be 69 percent of all classes and that 67 percent of all trainees at OPTO will be in PMC/BMC training classes.

We understand that only one of the 15 PMCs and two of the seven BMCs are expected to be operational by the end of fiscal year 1974. Therefore, the number of employees required to be trained for PMC/BMC maintenance work during fiscal year 1974 would be significantly lower than the number of billets expected to be needed for fiscal year 1974. As a result, it appears that OPTO will continue, during fiscal year 1974, to be utilized at about 50 percent of its normal capacity.

Also the implementation of the Postal Employee Development Centers (PEDCs) will have a further limiting effect on OPTO's operations. Postal Service officials at OPTO and at headquarters told us that many of the basic electronic, mechanic, and automotive courses will be dropped by OPTO and will be offered to employees at the PEDCs which will be located at 183 post offices.

Because of space availability, GAO suggested that officials of the Postal Service's Oklahoma City District make arrangements to hold certain district training courses at OPTO in lieu of a lodge in Oklahoma during January and February 1973. We estimate that the Oklahoma City District's decision to hold its training courses at OPTO resulted in a savings to the Postal Service of about \$8,800. Furthermore, the Director of OPTO sent a letter to the Southern Postal Region to inform them of available OPTO space and to invite them to hold their training sessions at OPTO.

INADEQUATE METHOD FOR ALLOCATING BILLETS

The Acting Director, National Maintenance Training Center, told us that, for maintenance courses on machines whose number would be uniformly distributed between regions, an equal number of available billets are allocated to each of four regions and the fifth region--the New York Region--is allocated a number that is 20 percent less than that allocated to each of the other regions. The official said that the allocation basis is predicated on the assumption that the four regions have approximately an equal number of employees and pieces of equipment but that the New York Region's number of employees and pieces of equipment would be about 20 percent less than any of the four other regions.

We noted that statistical data for authorized employees complements, as shown in a Postal Service publication, do not support the equal distribution assumption. The following is a tabulation of the publication's data on maintenance employee complements for the five postal regions.

Postal region	Total authorized number of maintenance employees	Percent	Maintenance employees authorized for			
			Vehicles		Buildings and equipment	
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent
New York	5,222	15	809	12	4,413	16
Eastern	7,647	22	1,495	23	6,152	22
Southern	5,748	17	1,345	21	4,403	16
Central	10,074	29	1,657	25	8,417	30
Western	5,609	16	1,247	19	4,362	16
Total	<u>34,300</u>	<u>100^a</u>	<u>6,553</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>27,747</u>	<u>100</u>

^aDoes not add down due to rounding.

On the premise that the authorized employee complement is indicative of the number of maintenance employees needed in each region, the tabulation shows that the number of maintenance employees is not uniform in the four regions other than the New York region.

The Acting Chief, Customer Service Division, OPTO, told us that it would be more practicable to allocate billets to the regions on the basis of an annual regional survey of need. He said that the Division had attempted to follow this procedure when planning the number of billets to be allocated for the fiscal year 1973 automotive maintenance courses. He said further than, when each individual region's percentage of the total

available billets for each course was presented to a regional personnel meeting at OPTO, certain regional people would not accept this allocation method and inferred that the other regions had inflated their survey of need in order to obtain more billets. The Acting Chief told us that as a result of that meeting, OPTO officials agreed that billets would be allocated according to the usual equal basis method.

As a general proposition, it would appear likely that training needs could vary considerably between regions. Therefore, where billets are allocated on the basis that all regions' training needs are equal, certain regions would receive fewer billets than needed and others would receive more. We believe that the equal basis method of allocating billets could be a contributing factor in the underutilization of OPTO and that this situation could be avoided by allocating billets on the basis of regional need and requiring regions to fill the billets allocated to them.

INADEQUATE COURSE EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Our survey results indicate that OPTO's training course evaluation procedures generally have been informal in that evaluation results have not been made a matter of record and training divisions have followed different evaluation procedures. There appears to be no overall OPTO policy as to procedures for evaluating the relevance and effect of training courses.

The Acting Director of NMTC told us that on one occasion OPTO let a contract to evaluate five NMTC courses. This evaluation required the employee--after he has returned to his regular job--and the employee's supervisor to answer questionnaires concerning job-related benefits that have resulted from the employee's training experience.

The comments of OPTO's three NMTC division chiefs indicated that they use or will use, different approaches to obtain training course evaluation information. The Mail Processing Division chief told us that, to evaluate the proficiency of employees trained in the maintenance of mail processing equipment, a program was being developed that would require the trained employee to pass a certification test before he could work on the equipment he had been trained for. The Customer Service Division chief said that his division has done little in documenting evaluations of training courses and that most of the evaluation effort had been on the basis of verbal discussions with students. The Maintenance Support Division chief told us that he has relied on students' class critiques and verbal comments for course evaluation but that a more comprehensive program is being planned to evaluate future training courses.

We believe that OPTO should have an overall evaluation policy that would be sufficiently comprehensive so as to provide a basis for determining the relevance and effect of training courses which, in turn, would identify courses needing improvements in training techniques or objectives.

APPARENT LACK OF COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION IN DEVELOPING PEDC'S

The Craft Training Field Center (CTFC) of the Postal Service Management Institute devised the Postal Employee Development Center (PEDC) concept of on-the-job training and is responsible for implementing the program in 183 selected post offices across the country. This new program replaces the Orientation and Craft Skill Training (OCTS) method of providing locally administered on-the-job training for postal employees. According to CTFC's plans, all 183 PEDC's were to be operational by the end of fiscal year 1973. However, of the 142 PEDC's scheduled to be operational at March 31, 1973, only 15 were in operation on that date.

Because the PEDC program is in the early stages of implementation, we have no basis for commenting on the program's effectiveness. However, our survey results indicate that certain problems may have contributed to the slippage in the schedule for implementing the PEDC program. We believe that the Postal Service should consider these problems as it works toward fully implementing the PEDC program.

Although the PEDC program places demands on the local Postmaster's plant, staff, and money resources, the results of our discussions with local training personnel indicate that CTFC officials did not communicate, coordinate, or cooperate with the Postmasters of the selected post offices during the development of the PEDC program or during the early stages of its implementation.

Lack of communication

On the basis of information we obtained from Southern Postal Region training officials and the training officer of the Washington, D.C., post office, it appears that CTFC officials developed the PEDC concept, and selected the 183 post offices in which to implement the program, without discussing the concept with local training personnel and without giving advance notice to the postmasters of the selected post offices. Thus, the local post office officials had no planning input in the development of the PEDC program.

Various local post office training officials in the Southern Postal Region told us that the PEDC concept had not been discussed with them until CTFC officials contacted them about installing a PEDC in their respective post offices. Most of the local training people we interviewed told us that they understood that the PEDC would be supplemental to the OCTS program. This understanding is contrary to the CTFC position that the PEDC program will replace the OCTS program.

Under the CTFC scheduling of PEDCs to be implemented, the Washington, D C , post office was to have a PEDC in operation by September 30, 1972. The training officer of the Washington Post Office told us, in January 1973, that he was not aware of the PEDC concept, that no PEDC had been implemented in the post office, and that, if a PEDC were scheduled for the post office, he would have been advised of such planning.

Lack of Coordination

A typical PEDC includes a career advisor and a development advisor who are to counsel employees interested in career development and in self-development. Training officers at local post offices told us of their concern over whether the local training staffs would be large enough to provide the full staffing required by a PEDC. On the other hand, a CTFC official said that there is a question of whether all present training officers would be qualified to function in the capacities required by the PEDC program. Thus, even though training staffs of adequate numbers and appropriate qualifications are essential elements of the PEDC's, the CTFC officials, in planning for the development of the PEDC program, apparently did not coordinate with postmasters of the selected local post offices the matter of the number and qualifications of training officials needed for the PEDC program.

NEED TO COORDINATE CROSS-TRAINING OFFERINGS WITH POSITION AVAILABILITIES

One of the PEDC's functions is to provide employees the opportunity to cross-train--to train for a position different from that currently held by the employees. Among field training officials, there appeared to be reservations as to the value of such cross-training.

During a PEDC seminar in October 1972 at Columbus, Ohio, field training officials said that there was a lack of information available to them to assist them in setting career goals for employees. The official's concern was that they had no basis for ascertaining what particular jobs would become available in the future and that they could not, therefore, counsel those employees who wish to cross-train.

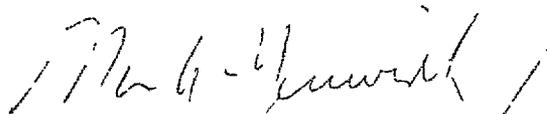
We believe that an employee will be disillusioned and frustrated if, after completing cross-training on his own time for a specific job, he finds that there are no prospects of an opening in the area he trained for. We believe also that frequent instances of employee experiences of this nature would have a negative impact on employee morale and could result in fewer employees making use of PEDC training. It is our view that Postal Service should establish a means for determining the vacancy probability of various postal jobs and to coordinate the offering of cross-training with these probability determinations.

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On April 25, 1973, we discussed our findings with officials of the Office of Manpower Planning and Development, Employees Relations Department. The officials generally agreed that the findings indicated problem areas. They said that corrective action--such as notifying the Southern Region of space availability at OPTO for District-level training and the possibility of subleasing OPTO space--was being planned or implemented.

We appreciate the cooperation extended to our representatives during this survey. We shall appreciate being advised of any actions taken by the Postal Service or any comments you may have regarding the matters discussed in this report.

Sincerely yours,



Max A. Neuwirth
Associate Director