#skillbridge

ALCON-I am finishing up my RTP thru the Army Skill Bridge Program and wanted to give an account of how to make this happen as it can be a daunting task.  For the record, I am a soon to retire O-5 and work at USARCENT which is a 3 Star Command.  This will play into the outcome briefly.  First, let me say that although the Skill Bridge Program is a IMCOM/DOD approved Educational Program for separating and retiring Soldiers, it is still a request.  Just like Official Leave Request.  Meaning that it can be denied.  Fortunately for me, working at USARCENT meant that you trip over O-5s as you walk around the halls.  If you are in a Key Leader Position, you may have a more difficult time getting your request approved.

Start as early as you can.  I mean two years out as recommended  to start your SFL-TAP.  In these briefings, you will learn about the Skill Bridge as well as the POC in the Education Office.  Contact the program you desire to do the Skill Bridge at.  I chose Sky Warrior and Greg Sigler was very quick at signing the required memos for submission to the Ed Center.  Realize that your packet cannot be processed without your Final Retirement Orders.  This is essential.  A little easier for Active Duty but since I was actually in the SCARNG on COADOS/Active Duty Orders at USARCENT made this more complicated.  This was very tricky because I was on COADOS orders for a year at at time and couldn't request retirement until first, I had my last set of COADOS orders which would get me to retirement and then second request retirement thru the SCARNG.  NOTE:  Your State will not finalize your final set of orders until you clear.  Meaning, a complete reconciliation of your AD time vs your M-Day time.  Ensure you have all your orders together to get this all important RPAM complete and Secondly, turn in all your CIF back to your State.  This will be in conflict with you COADOS orders requiring you to not turn your CIF in until 30 days before you start Terminal Leave.  Obviously, USARCENT SOP pertains to Active Duty and not NG on COADOS orders.  So I was less than 9 months prior to retirement and 4 months prior to starting Skill Bridge before my packet finally started moving in the right direction.

Your packet will have to go thru Legal.  Meaning the packet must be complete, with orders and signed by your Supervisor all the way up to your Commander who may be an O-6.  This is another headache if your Commander is a GO.  Mine was, meaning that Legal has to review before he will sign any document, however, he has to sign before legal will review.  Kinda catch 22.  It took weeks to be able to explain to legal that he is first only signing my authorization to participate in Skill Bridge and then after he signs, then Legal does another review to approve me for the Program. Which he then signs again.

Realize that you can be authorized up to 180 days PTDY but you can only start the program 180 days before your retirement date.  Not the start of your terminal leave.  So I recommend you get 150 days for Skill Bridge and then use your 20 days Retirement PTDY and still report for a week or so for outprocessing.  Then by regulations, you must have at least 2 days of Terminal Leave taken before your final day.  What this means is if you have a lot of leave days accumulated as I did, you have two options.  Take them prior to the start of your Skill Bridge(180 days prior to retirement) or sell them back.   I did a little of both.

I started my Skill Bridge on 6 APR 22 and have maximized every day as possible.  Meaing that I haven't taken a day off unless wx or maintenance.  This can be stressful but is what it is.  If you have any deployments under you belt, you know what it means to work 24/7 without a scheduled break.  Sky Warrior has prioritized my training over everyone else and this has been essential to getting complete.

Some other items that I would say are essential are the following.

Buy Bose A-20s.  With Blue Tooth.  You will thank me later and use the RTAG/BOSE discount.  It is worth it.

Transfer all your flight time, either personal logs or DA Form 759s to LOGTEN PRO.  Just spend 1-2 hours every night and knock it out.  It will take effort but it will save you thousands of man hours later.  Whether you are filling out Airlineapps.com or IACRA or going thru a check ride.  You can always go back and correct stuff, which I had to do numerous times or be able to create a report into any format you need.  Plus once you get to the regionals, this is what they use and you will have to go to it eventually.  Trust me, this will be your greatest advantage.  Finally, you are required to send up a report to the Ed Center as well as your Commander/Supervisor of your progress every 30 days.  Do it and really tell then what you are accomplishing.  This will make it easier for the next guy to get approval and keeps you in good regards with the guy/gal who approved you to take part in this awesome program.  It will make them feel good for approving your request.

Finally, don't be that guy that takes advantage of this program and doesn't utilize it to its potential.  You can ruin it for all future applicants.  I only say this because it has happened.  Fortunately, it wasn't someone doing the RTP but another program in Skill Bridge.  It caused greater scrutiny and less programs being approved.  If you do this remember you represent the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines.  You represent your family. You represent your country.  Your Honor is a difficult thing to regain if tarnished.  Do your best and take time to extend a hand as you did countless times during your career.

If anyone has any additional questions, you can PM me anytime.  For all my teammates at USARCENT, I created a share folder that has all my required memos as well as a POAM.  Essentially a map to get to where I am now and already two others are on their way.  See you guys soon.