

Forging Forward: Capturing Armor Expertise for this Fight and the Next

by CPT Jabari M. Jackson

Before the Armor force spreads Armor expertise, we must first capture Armor expertise. We have lost the experts in the noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps. We have lost our ability to sustain our formations. Our Cavalry cannot visualize the battlefield for the commander. We compromise combined-arms proficiency because we lack the habitual relationships.

“The doer does what the checker checks” is a popular Army phrase. What if the checker doesn’t know what to check? What happens when the checker knows what to check but not how to check? After-action reviews from decisive-action rotational exercises at our combat training centers describe atrophy as the cause of a lack of proficiency in what are considered basic Armor skills: failure to provide maintenance support in conjunction with decisive maneuver; failure to visualize the battlefield with a common operational picture; and failure to provide effects in the engagement area.¹

These results are symptoms of a much larger problem. We need to forge a branch of confident and experienced Armor and Cavalry professionals. We will capture expertise for this fight by making our NCOs experts by:

- Creating a platform-based regimental system for scouts;
- Adding Armor Advantage to the Excellence in Armor (EIA) program;
- Forging in Armor Soldiers the maintenance mindset;
- Redesigning the maintenance-control element (MCE);
- Establishing combat collection teams (CCTs) to overcome battlefield blindness; and
- Investing in the Close-Combat Tactical Trainer (CCTT) to facilitate combined-arms training.

Forge NCO leader development

Leader development of enlisted Soldiers, from private to sergeant first class, is the most important investment the Chief of Armor can make in capturing and sharing Armor expertise throughout the Army and the joint environment because the Armor proponent directly impacts the training curriculum and developmental assignments.² The NCO corps is the strength of the Armor force. NCOs are the experts and train every individual in our force, including the commissioned officer – and not only the commissioned officer, but our partners in both contingency and conflict.

To ensure our NCOs meet these expectations, we must invigorate a regimental system for scouts associated around platforms to promote organizational and platform expertise, commit to functional training attendance and add the “Armor Advantage” program to the EIA program.

Forge platform-based regimental system

We need to invigorate a platform-based regimental system because experience builds uncanny resourcefulness among NCOs that inspires troop commanders and platoon leaders to do as retired GEN Carl Vuono wrote, “Through the ages, the most celebrated leaders in the profession of arms began their rise with the simple words, ‘Sergeant, show me how.’” Tankers need to be around tanks. A platoon sergeant in a Bradley organization must have expertise and experience as a crew member, gunner and in a dismounted leadership position to resource and train his platoon. Only time in similar organizations will allow him to fully develop the skills and experience to perform his task.

Atrophy may not be the appropriate word to describe the status of basic Armor skills. As stated earlier, maybe we don’t know how to check. NCOs need more practice and multiple duty positions within the same organization to fully develop the competence and resourcefulness to properly conduct pre-combat checks and pre-combat inspections under condensed timelines and in stressful environments, and to fix deficiencies before executing the operation.

We must apply a similar model for a platoon sergeant in a Stryker or truck-cavalry organization.

Forge functional-training attendance

The Armor community must work with the Armor School to encourage functional-school attendance. The Armor School must collaborate with other proponents to deliberately synchronize primary-military-education course dates with functional-school dates to allow optimal opportunity for class attendance immediately after the course. Organizational commands must commit time and training funds to support attendance during critical times in the NCO's career. Technical and tactical experts are educated in our functional classrooms and training environments.³

The courses I believe most relevant for the Armor community are the Master Gunner's Course (tank and Bradley), Army Reconnaissance Course (ARC), Joint Fires Course, Battle Staff Course and Reconnaissance Surveillance Leader's Course (RSLC). A good time to go to Master Gunner School is immediately after Senior Leader's Course or Advanced Leader's Course (ALC). A good time for a scout to attend ARC is immediately after ALC.

Forge Armor Advantage

EIA is our program of record, and we must use it as a vehicle to maximize Armor and Cavalry individual skill-building and expertise. EIA promotes pride and confidence in the Soldier by recognizing individuals with the aptitude and attitude to lead with distinction in the future. The program provides tailored mentorship and promotes continuous achievement and learning by providing the personnel-development skill-identifier code E4J.⁴

We are missing a critical component to the program. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, EIA membership featured an initiative similar to the Airborne Advantage by providing 35 promotion points for specialists promotable and sergeants promotable.⁵ Adding another 35 to 50 points in an Armor Advantage program will energize the EIA program and provide considerable prestige to it.

Also, the tank master gunner and first sergeant is the perfect administration team for the program in tank companies. A composite of the first sergeant, ARC, RSLC and master-gunner graduates can best develop the scouts in the program.

Forge maintenance mindset

"Forget logistics, you lose" are the pragmatic words of LTG Fredrick Franks. Tactical maintenance organizations have encountered three major organizational transitions since the Division 86 force design. In 2004, the Army transitioned from a four-level maintenance system to a two-level maintenance system.⁶ While these changes closed gaps for the sustainment community, the Armor community has gradually divested itself of an active role in maintenance-leader development.

We need a study and proof of principle, similar to a standardized scout platoon, focused on reorganizing the MCE, assigning the right mechanics in the organization, moving the MCE to battalion headquarters and investing an Armor officer in maintenance planning.

Capture proper expertise

While serving as the squadron maintenance officer, I told a newly assigned maintenance-control sergeant that replacing engines and transmissions during our rotation would require a considerable amount of oil, coolant and liquids (Class IIIIP), and that we must coordinate for security and movement equipment. He said it shouldn't be a big deal, but after I walked him to the maintenance bay and had one of the maintenance-team chiefs show him the process, his attitude changed. He is not an incompetent NCO; his experience as a wheel mechanic in transportation units and brigade-support battalion maintenance companies had not prepared him for the needs of supporting an Armor and Cavalry unit.

U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Capability Manager-Armored Brigade Combat Team (TCM-ABCT) plans to assign a Military-Occupation Specialty (MOS) 91Z50 (mechanical-maintenance supervisor) master sergeant to combined-arms battalions (CABs) and Cavalry squadrons. The master sergeant will provide mentorship to the maintenance team chiefs and peer leadership to the first sergeants.

The ABCT motor sergeant must have previous 91A, 91M or 91H experience. The Armor School trains 91M Bradley system maintainers and 91A Abrams system maintainers. These professionals serve their key developmental assignments in ABCTs and provide critical sustainment support to the Armor formation. They understand "turret turbulence," and they are developed in the same culture and formations as our tankers and scouts. Tank and

Bradley mechanics learn the entire platform: drive train, optics and gun. Most wheel mechanic positions only address the drive train.

The 91H tracked-vehicle repairer is the only 91X feeder MOS with key developmental assignments exclusively authorized in the ABCT.⁷ The other 91X feeder MOSs are generator mechanic and wheel mechanic.

Forge experience into maintenance mission

Mounted organizations demand organizational oversight and a greater understanding of employment of combat platforms and the impact of ancillary equipment. We must move the maintenance-control section to the Cavalry squadron headquarters and CAB headquarters. The battalion maintenance officer (BMO) is the cornerstone of the organization's maintenance planning and a staff officer who provides unique information to staff assessments.

Recode the BMO position to O2A combat-arms officer in the CAB and to 19C in the Cavalry squadrons, and consider them in a primary staff-officer position. Maintenance is critical to Armor expertise, and we must address it with functional-enhancement training and leadership roles at the company-grade level. Unit maintenance-collection point (UMCP) operations and shop-supply-list management require a career-course graduate with Armor/Cavalry platoon-leader and troop/company executive-officer experience. This will provide the battalion's commander and executive officer the option to operate the UMCP independently of the combat-trains command post (CTCP).

The BMO may also provide critical staff-officer coverage at the CTCP during transitions in the battle and mentor company executive officers in the garrison environment because he or she possesses the conviction to understand the competing demands associated with maintenance and tactical operations.

Armor expertise is rooted in combined arms. As GEN Carl E. Vuono said, "The Army of today and tomorrow will be an integrated combined-arms team. The colors of the Armor patch say it all. The red, blue and yellow symbolize the spirit of combined arms."⁸

Everything we do is for the benefit of someone else. We must not forget our responsibility to pursue excellence in combined arms. The Chief of Armor must promote advancement in the CCTT; construct the emergence of a combat collection team to assist in battlefield visualization and targeting; and ensure we identify mission-command requirements in our current and future systems.

Forge simulation training

Fiscal pressure will force the Army to restrict and cut funding to programs. The Armor force reduction will force a shift to sustain high readiness levels. Armor and Cavalry formations can no longer accept "crawling or walking" into resource-intensive live-fire training events. Simulations training allows us to "run" faster and execute live-fire training better.

The Armor School must invest, protect and continue to improve CCTT because it is the most important simulation trainer we have. CCTT provides equipment that allows individuals, crews, squads, platoons and companies to simultaneously build muscle memory while executing key and collective tasks and missions – ultimately producing company teams ready to "run" into the live-fire training event. The simulated environment also provides the opportunity to introduce new threats and capabilities and effects on terrain.

To restore historical relationships, Cavalry and Armor leaders must master engagement-area development by integrating aviation, field artillery and engineers. When I was a troop commander, we trained in CCTT with an Apache 64 unit operating in the Aviation Combined-Arms Tactical Trainer. (At the time, the pilots' aircraft were in reset.) We worked through integration and coordination. We discussed communications and worked through hunter-killer training, followed by informal capabilities training at the company level. Two months later, to our surprise, we arrived to our pre-flight brief, and the same unit flew in support of our operation. It was very comforting hearing a familiar voice over the net. We were able to execute a much more complex exercise than originally planned.

Forge CCT

Combat collection is an Armor expertise that allows supported commanders to visualize the battlefield. Cavalry units and officers must master collection. Collection mastery requires an integrated relationship with the intelligence and fires communities.

Legacy doctrine provides answers to what may be perceived as new problems. We need to look at old doctrine and bring forward aspects that are still relevant so that we can not only win the next war but be prepared for future wars, according to LTG H.R. McMaster.⁹

A case in point is 1-7 Cavalry's problem set of defining "functional tools to reduce the complexity of variables and not add pages of data."¹⁰ The unit presents a good professional line of discussion for focused reconnaissance and security doctrine. It lays out a systematic approach of processing tactical intelligence by identifying linking decision points to priority intelligence requirements, leading to the development of specific information requirements that battalion staffs translate to specific orders and requests (SOR) to troops, squads and teams.

The 1993 *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield* manual states that an SOR is "[t]he order or request that generates planning and execution of a collection mission or analysis of database information. SORs sent to subordinate commands are orders. SORs sent to other commands are requests. SORs often use system-specific message formats but also include standard military operations and fragmentary orders."¹¹

The Cavalry Leader's Course (CLC) has emerged as the course requiring less adjustment in our functional school systems.¹² The course lacks the interdependency with the centers of excellence (CoEs) to ensure emerging Cavalry doctrine keeps pace with tactical intelligence and targeting. We need to build a CCT with intelligence, aviation, fires and mission-command CoEs to establish synergistic reporting systems to visualize the battlefield and provide accurate targeting data over the digital and voice network.

Forge digital requirements

Collection mastery is limited to accuracy and timeliness of reports. We must spread the "spirit" by getting the information to the guns. Digital has become the primary means to pass targeting information.¹³ Collection mastery also impacts the development of new digital systems.

Since information systems are critical components of battle-tracking and passing combat information, emerging joint doctrine emphasizes interdependency. Our systems must easily collaborate with other systems, particularly in the software department. The Armor force needs to provide compliance standards that enhance information-management systems capable of distributing detailed information quickly and efficiently without bogging down the information network.

Conclusions

Adopting a platform-based regimental system ensures competence in our fighting force.

Increasing functional-school attendance forces professional growth.

Armor Advantage provides a vehicle for advancing Armor basics, forging an NCO corps of experts.

The MCE's reorganization places the right mix of people in the right place to ensure the maintenance mission is accomplished.

Armor expertise is nothing without the team. Investing in CCTT improves the mounted warrior and the combined-arms team.

Creating a CCT keeps doctrine relevant to our consumers.

Commitment to this plan ensures we forge forward and spread Armor expertise to this fight and the next.

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Notes

¹ Capabilities Development and Integration Directorate, August 2014. TCM-ABCT's semi-annual report.

² Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-25, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office (GPO), 2008.

³ Ibid.

⁴ OCoA, EIA Program, <http://www.benning.army.mil/armor/OCOA/content/PDF/Excellence%20In%20Armor%20MOI.pdf>.

⁵ C.R. Davis, "Excellence in Armor," *ARMOR*, January-February 1996.

⁶ D.M. Menter, *The Sustainment Battle Staff and Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP) Guide*, Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009.

⁷ DA PAM 600-25, Washington, DC: GPO, 2011.

⁸ GEN Carl E. Vuono, "Six Imperatives for the Armor Force," *ARMOR*, July-August 1990.

⁹ LTG H.R. McMaster, "Continuity and Change: The Army Operating Concept," *Military Review*, March-April 2015.

¹⁰ LTC Jason A. Miseli, MAJ Gregory W. McLean and CPT Jeremy Bovan, "Intelligence Support to a Cavalry Squadron," *ARMOR*, July-September 2014.

¹¹ Field Manual 34-130, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*, Washington, DC: GPO, 1993.

¹² TCM-ABCT semi-annual report, 2014.

¹³ Armored Warfighter's Forum Symposium 01-2015 notes, Dec. 2, 2014.