Chief of Armor's Hatch: Ongoing Modernization

It has been an honor to see the world-class cadre and faculty of the U.S. Army Armor School professionally navigate the uncertain times over the past few months, given the COVID-19 situation. Our instructors and their staffs implemented safe ways to continue training future Armor and Cavalry leaders and Soldiers. The cadre enabled the Armor School to continue its mission of training, developing, educating and inspiring the world's most agile and adaptive Armor and Cavalry leaders, Soldiers and formations to win in complex environments.

The Armor School also supports multiple ongoing modernization efforts with the Next-Generation Combat Vehicle Cross-Functional Team as well as the other eight centers of excellence, Combined Arms Center, Training and Doctrine Command and Army Futures Command. In January, the Army realigned its focus on the Optionally Manned Fighting Vehicle (OMFV) program by canceling its solicitation for OMFV prototypes and entered a new phase in the program. The Army's choice allows us to find a system capable of growth on future battlefields.

The Army is also determining the best way forward on effective manned-unmanned teaming (MUM-T) through the continued efforts in the Robotic Combat Vehicle (RCV) program. The RCV team designed, built and tested the first set of RCV surrogates and control vehicles quickly. The next step of experimenting in a live environment during the first MUM-T Soldier Operational Experiment at Fort Carson, CO, is on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial system training and orientation was effective and well-received by Soldiers of 4th Infantry Division, and I look forward to a successful experiment. The Armor School team is already building plans for integrating this new technology into our courses and formations to make our Soldiers, leaders and formations more lethal and ready.

In the near-term, the Army is on-track to replace the M113 family of vehicles with the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle (AMPV), with the first full brigade combat team (BCT) fielding expected to be complete in 2022. This will allow enablers in the armor BCT to have improved mobility and be capable of keeping pace with the tracked combat platforms they are supporting. The AMPV program made many improvements after last year's AMPV limited user test (LUT) and continues on its glide path. The Soldiers who took part in the LUT provided positive feedback on all five variants of the vehicle, and I anticipate seeing these vehicles maneuvering alongside our Abrams and Bradleys soon.

On a separate note, thank you to our outstanding Armor/Cavalry Soldiers and leaders who continue to serve our country and succeed on the COVID-19 battlefield.

Lastly, in May we farewelled CSM Kevin J. Muhlenbeck with a combined change of responsibility/retirement ceremony. CSM Muhlenbeck has been a tremendous asset to the U.S. Army Armor School and our Army, and will be missed. He's worked closely with the senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) across the Maneuver Center of Excellence to ensure that the Armor School delivers trained, disciplined and ready NCOs and Soldiers. I'm looking forward to seeing the great things that CSM Tony Towns – who is joining us from 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, Fort Bliss, TX – will bring to the table as the new Thunderbolt 7.

Forge the Thunderbolt!

BG KEVIN D. ADMIRAL
Chief of Armor/Commandant
U.S. Army Armor School

Acronym Quick-Scan
AMPV – Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle
BCT – brigade combat team
LUT – Limited User Test
MUM-T – Manned-Unmanned Teaming
NCO – noncommissioned officer
OMPV – Optionally Manned Fighting Vehicle
RCV – Robotic Combat Vehicle