

# Armor School's Move Improves Training, Opportunities and Armor Branch Traditions

by COL Sean W. Barnes

It is hard to imagine that 10 years have passed since the U.S. Army Armor School (USAARMS) occupied its new battle position at Fort Benning, GA, and in the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE). Upon reflection of personally moving 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 16<sup>th</sup> Cavalry (Armor Basic Officer Leader Course) and from discussions with USAARMS' first deputy commandant at Fort Benning, COL (Retired) Michael Wadsworth, it is important to see how much we have improved and what is beyond the long-range mover.

The execution of the base realignment and closure move of USAARMS from Fort Knox, KY, to Fort Benning more than 10 years ago allowed the school to increase training, realize opportunities and improve our Armor Branch traditions. Today the school is fully integrated into MCoE and continues to improve our position.

## Training

As Wadsworth mentioned, "The biggest early challenge was getting the Infantry School – the new center – to understand the unique challenges of training Armor officers, [noncommissioned officers (NCOs)] and Soldiers; as well as Abrams and Bradley mechanics." Armor Soldiers face challenges that are unique to the branch. Although the school moved into new buildings on Harmony Church, it faced several challenges with maneuver-training land.

Early on, the Armor School relegated much of the early training to simulations, tank trails and the Digital Multipurpose Range Complex. As the installation completed the Good Hope Maneuver Training Area (GHMTA), and we collectively worked utilization between U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command and U.S. Army Forces Command units, tank training improved.

Currently we continue to maximize a blend of both live and simulated training. The school continues its close coordination with the Corps of Engineers and Fort Benning garrison to improve mounted training areas by right-sizing and adjusting options to improve the Heavy Off-Road Mounted Maneuver Training Area (HOMMTA). On the simulation front, our master gunners continue to provide user input to the next Close-Combat Tactical Trainer – the Reconfigurable Combat Vehicle Trainer currently scheduled for Limited User Testing July 2022 at Fort Hood, TX.

MCoE collectively works to improve installation resources and large-caliber ranges. The Armor School will continue to deliver Soldiers and leaders who are proficient in gunnery fundamentals. Simultaneously, we will plan to meet the demands of Abrams V3, V4, Abrams Next, Optionally Manned Fighting Vehicle and robots.

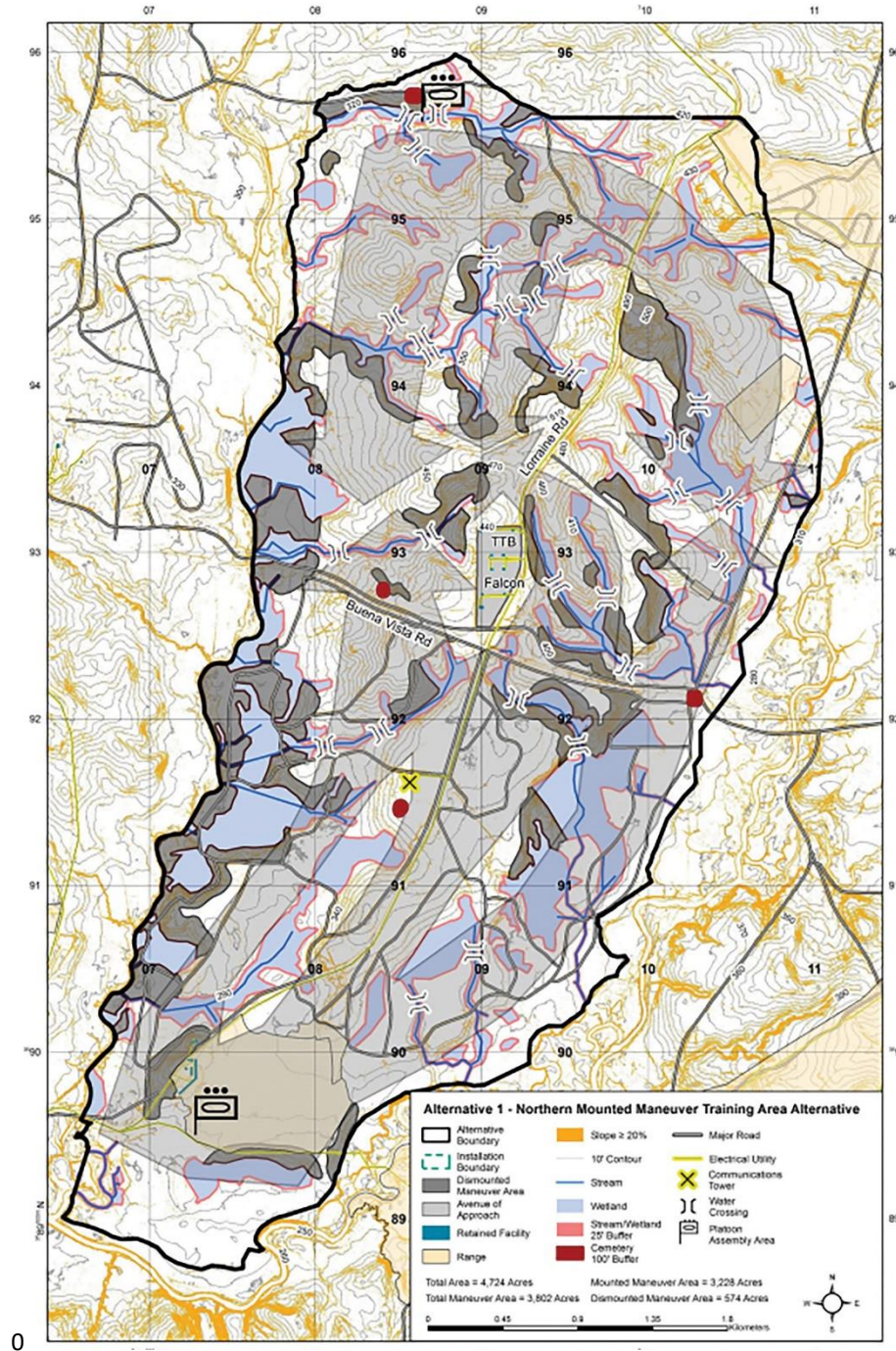
In addition to our modernization efforts, we will exploit the training opportunities created through co-location of both the Infantry and Armor Schools.

## Opportunities

As Wadsworth highlighted, "The single biggest example of created opportunity was the creation of the Maneuver Captain's Career Course (MCCC), followed closely by the availability to attend functional training."

MCCC continues to produce the best and brightest officers, capable of assuming command of infantry, armor and cavalry companies and troops upon graduation. Just as the school improved its position, the career course continues to improve, with the greatest example of meeting the challenges of large-scale combat operations by collaborating and setting the conditions to execute a command-post collaborative exercise – an exercise that virtually brings together multiple career courses to share planning experience and branch expertise across the enterprise.

The school continues to maximize the opportunities gained from co-mingling by incorporating Ranger, Airborne and Air-Assault Schools into the Armor commandant's leader-training strategy. As the school enters its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we see this only expanding as we look to realign MCoE units to bring greater efficiencies to leader education and training.



**Figure 1. Map of the proposed Northern Mounted Maneuver Training Area (NMMTA). NMMTA includes some 4,724 acres and would provide about 6.5 kilometers between platoon-assembly areas. This distance would ensure that a platoon cannot target the full HOMMTA from its assembly area, as is currently the case in the GHMTA. (Source: engineers' final environmental-impact study)**

### Armor traditions

One of the greatest concerns of early planning and execution was losing our branch identity and traditions. As we moved from Fort Knox, a large concern revolved around preserving the museum artifacts from the Patton Museum and integrating them into the National Infantry Museum – while also adapting to the Center for Military History’s new policies and procedures. Although we dispersed the storage and repair of large artifacts early, we now have

the ability to co-locate all macro- and micro-artifacts. With the October 2020 completion of the larger Training Support Facility (TSF), we can now store all of our larger artifacts. We will build on this success by completing the renovation of its sister building that will house micro-artifacts, as well as the vehicle restoration shop.



**Figure 2. The TSF stores the Armor Branch's larger artifacts, such as these tanks.**

In addition to housing our armor collection and providing a one-stop educational opportunity for both leaders and Soldiers, we continue to realize the opportunities and need to execute our Best Tank Competition (Sullivan Cup) and Best Scout Competition (Gainey Cup). Although the coronavirus disease pandemic prevented the execution of 2021's Best Scout Competition, the school continues to build on LTG Ted Martin's (the 45<sup>th</sup> and first MCoE Armor commandant) vision of hosting Armor Branch competitions that highlighted not only the best tank and scout crews but provided azimuth checks on trends impacting the lethality and training of all armor and cavalry formations. LTG Martin's vision lives on and we look forward to hosting a resource-informed 2022 Best Tank Competition at Fort Benning.



**Figure 3. Members of a tank crew with the Tennessee Army National Guard's H Troop, 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, 278<sup>th</sup> Armored-Cavalry Regiment, kick up dust as they race against the clock to their next land-navigation point on an M1A1 Abrams tank while competing in the GEN Gordon Sullivan Cup best-tank-crew competition at Fort Benning, GA, May 3, 2016. The Sullivan Cup tests tank crews from throughout the Army on everything from gunnery to mounted land navigation, maintenance and combat-casualty care in a variety of physically and mentally challenges setting to determine the Army's best tank crew. (U.S. Army photo by SFC Jon Soucy, National Guard Bureau)**

## **Conclusion**

The Armor School is better off now because of the co-location and the ability to maximize opportunities offered by both schools. As Wadsworth aptly noted, the Army is better off with the two schools joining to form the MCoE. The Armor School has, and will continue to, expand and improve on the training opportunities provided by consolidated resources without fear of losing our identity. We will remain resolved to train and educate competent and confident combined-arms officers, NCOs and Soldiers.

The collaboration between the Armor and Infantry Branches has made the Army a more lethal combat force, a clear result of the synergies achieved in combat, doctrine and leader development under MCoE.

*COL Sean Barnes is USAARMS' deputy commandant. He commanded 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 16<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, while it was based at Fort Knox, then at Fort Benning.*

## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**GHMTA** – Good Hope Maneuver Training Area

**HOMMTA** – Heavy Off-Road Mounted Maneuver Training Area

**MCCC** – Maneuver Captain's Career Course

**MCoE** – Maneuver Center of Excellence

**NCO** – noncommissioned officer

**NMMTA** – Northern Mounted Maneuver Training Area

**TSF** – Training Support Facility

**USAARMS** – U.S. Army Armor School