

Reclassification Preserves The Vitality of MOS 19D and 19K

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As you have all just read this issue's "Commander's Hatch" (if you have not, go back and read it now, beginning with paragraph six), you know MG Bell's view of the continuing vitality and usefulness of the heavy armored force. Until significant technological breakthroughs enable the fielding of the Future Combat System (FCS), the M1-series of tanks will remain absolutely necessary as the Army dominates high-, mid-, and low-intensity conflict.

The medium-weight force is not designed to replace the heavy force. In fact, the draft operational and organizational requirements (O&O) for the initial brigade states that it must have augmentation to operate successfully against armored and mechanized forces. Such augmentation would come from heavy armor. Our Army has not departed from the doctrine that major theater wars will be fought and won by the heavy force. In this fiscal year alone, nearly \$850 million will be spent to continue the development and fielding of the M1A2 and M1A2 SEP tanks. The fielding plan for equipping all armor battalions and heavy armored cavalry squadrons with the M1A2 SEP or the M1A1D by 2009 remains in place.

Two factors seem to be contributing to the perception that the Army, and the Armor Center, is turning away from heavy armor units as the centerpiece of the armored force: The first was the publicity accompanying the creation of the first medium weight brigade; and the second, the ongoing restructuring of the heavy divisions which reduce 19K authorizations throughout the operational force while increasing 19D authorizations.

Many tankers are very concerned about the opportunities for professional service and development as the Army changes. Many see the reclassification of MOS 19K soldiers to MOS 19D as evidence that 19K is fading away.

That is not the case. In fact, reclassification is a tool which will be used to keep both MOSs vital, to meet operational needs without allowing promotion and assignment opportunities in either MOS to stagnate.

By June 00, 12 heavy brigades will have begun or completed limited conversion to the Division XXI design. Each will have lost one armor company per battalion; each will have organized the brigade cavalry troop; most will still have ten-vehicle scout platoons in each armor or mechanized battalion.

These changes will cause 19D authorizations to grow by over 400 in this FY alone. Most of those authorizations are for junior NCOs. The current population of Specialists cannot support the internal growth of these NCOs. 19K authorizations are decreasing this FY by 638 authorizations. The 19K Specialist population will be at 124% of authorized strength, overstrength by 614 soldiers.

The Armor Center and PERSCOM cannot allow this imbalance to stand. The new cavalry organizations will fail for want of soldiers and MOS 19K will see a sharp slowdown in promotions that will drive skilled crewmen out of the Army.

For nearly five months, PERSCOM and the Armor Center have advertised for soldiers to volunteer for reclassification from 19K to 19D. Results have been

poor. In-service training seats (in the 19D OSUT battalion) are limited to a few each class. Reclassified soldiers join their training cycle at week nine, after the cycle has gone through basic combat training. In order to fill the cavalry units by June 00, involuntary reclassification of 19Ks will begin 5 December 1999.

Without additional reclassification volunteers, 195 soldiers will receive involuntary reclassification orders in order to meet the goal for this FY. The number will drop as more soldiers volunteer for reclassification. PERSCOM will use TDY and return for most of the soldiers being reclassified as long as valid requirements exist on their installation for 19D. Armor branch at PERSCOM has created an order of merit list, identifying good 19K SPCs who are candidates for promotion but whose opportunity will come slowly if the imbalance in 19K is allowed to remain.

I ask my fellow noncommissioned officers to continue to encourage their soldiers to reclassify voluntarily. There is risk to involuntary reclassification; it is *not* what MG Bell and I would prefer to do. However, the operational requirements will be filled and the needs of the Army will be met. In future articles, the CG and I will detail the implications for both MOSs as the first two brigades are converted to medium-weight units; this too will cause a need for reclassifications.

Sergeants, we can set the force and our soldiers up for success. Or, we can allow PERSCOM managers to try. Assessing, counseling, and coaching are not the core tasks of bureaucrats. Those are our tasks.

"SERGEANTS, TAKE THE LEAD"