

Some Final Words on Soldiers, Opportunities, and Teamwork

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As I prepare to move across the large pond again, the Armor Center has just finished conducting the Platform Performance Demonstration (PPD). This "market survey" brought 33 medium weight armored vehicles to Ft. Knox, manned them with fine soldiers drawn from the 16th Cavalry Regiment as well as Ft. Benning and Ft. Lewis, and put them through two months of harsh conditions and field/gunnery exercises.

Stand in the January weather, watch and listen to our soldiers exercising these vehicles, and to those soldiers involved in supporting the exercises, and you would have been inspired by their enthusiasm and pride as they accomplished all their missions.

Others will write at length about the analytic results of the demonstration. I simply want to point out in this, my final article from the driver's hatch, that our excellent soldiers are making it happen. Not the contractors, not the civilian data gatherers, not even the senior leaders. First sergeants, master gunners, scouts, mechanized infantrymen, and tankers are having decisive impact on the requirements for the medium weight platforms, and thus what the platforms will finally look like. I am proud of these men.

For two and one-half years, I have had the responsibility and honor of being the Armor Center CSM. This role has allowed me to visit much of the armored force, and to listen to the soldiers' issues and concerns, while communicating the vision of the Chief of Armor for professional and force development. Everywhere I have gone, I have met caring leaders and successful soldiers. No one has it easy; no one has enough resources, but everyone is wrestling with the problems and turning them into opportunities.

There are plenty of opportunities in the Army and the armored force today. GEN Shinseki's vision will expand the role of armor in every spectrum of warfare, up-armor and up-gun the 2d ACR, and ultimately return tankers to the 82d Airborne division. The transformation of units into medium brigade combat teams will actually increase the number of medium/heavy units in the Army. The heavy force will remain vitally important, for the M1 and M2/3 series platforms are still world-class war winners. The Armor Center is at the spearhead of the transformation of both heavy and medium forces. It has never been busier and has never been more engaged in force development and doctrinal development issues.

The armor enlisted professional development program stands as a model for the entire Army. As the enlisted personnel management system XXI task force met in December 1999, only one center was invited to present their development/assignment program: it was the Armor Center. I am proud of the teamwork that now exists between armor assignments branch, the armor proponent office (OCA) on Fort Knox, and the headquarters, Armor Center. One vision guides assignments and promotions, and one document, *The Armor Enlisted Professional Development Guide*, captures the vision for all soldiers to read and heed. No other branch states so clearly how to prepare for greater responsibility and earn promotion.

My successor and his team will have many problems to wrestle: developing programs of instruction to prepare crewmen and leaders for new systems and new organizations; supporting an ever-changing fielding plan for modernized

and digitized vehicles; developing a sustainment training process to keep scouts and tankers competent on their vehicles as they go from specialty to operational assignments; creating enough scouts to man the new systems while absorbing the excess tankers from the division redesign; sustaining the high quality of training on Fort Knox with a severely reduced enlisted cadre to conduct an increased training load.

They will solve these problems if they continue to consult the operational force, and draw on the collective wisdom of our armored leaders. We have greatly benefited by talking and listening: the new gunnery manual, the division redesign, NCOES and OES curricula redesign, the PPD, all have been better for the input of the total armored force.

I am grateful that two Chiefs of Armor, MG George Harmeyer and MG B.B. Bell, have given me so broad a range fan and enabled me to contribute in so many areas for the installation and the force. I am grateful for the teamwork among the senior NCOs of Fort Knox as we have worked to improve training and quality of life at the Armor Center. I am grateful for the drill sergeants, instructors, and support personnel (military and civilian) who build the end-strength of the Army and provide armored units with competent commissioned and noncommissioned leaders. I am grateful to be part of America's armored force and to share in our heritage of victory.

The Army goes rolling along. I'm rolling to USAREUR. I look forward to serving with you there.

"This is Thunderbolt Seven. Mission complete. Departing the net. Out."