

DRIVER'S SEAT

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Once a Master Gunner, Always a Master Gunner

SGM Spurling was absolutely right in his letter to the editor in the January-February 1996 issue of *ARMOR* — “Once a Master Gunner, Always a Master Gunner.” There are 292 master gunner positions in the Army, in grades of SFC through SGM, with six of those positions in the grade of SGM. This number will increase to 303 in FY 97, with the number of SGM positions remaining the same. Once you have been accepted as a master gunner, you have the responsibility to maintain your proficiency, regardless of your assignments. You are the best of the best, the commander’s top gun, and are responsible to train soldiers in the most efficient way to deal death and destruction on the battlefield. Getting to be a master gunner hasn’t been easy or cheap.

To be selected, you had to have been an experienced tank commander. That experience did not come from just the OSUT training you received at Fort Knox. It came from studying on your own and the maintenance and gunnery training you received at unit level.

Then you were screened by the chain of command and personally interviewed to determine if you were the right soldier for the job. Finally, you arrived at Fort Knox to be trained. Eleven weeks and \$28,128 training dollars later, you picked up the additional skill identifier (ASI) of master gunner. This marked the point where the responsibility for remaining current shifted from the schoolhouse to you.

It would be a shame to squander the considerable time and money invested in your training. In these days of decreasing dollars, the Army must depend on those already trained to fill critical positions throughout the force. You must take the time to study the Abrams tank gunnery manual, FM 17-12-1-1/2, and the Abrams technical manuals. Stay in touch with new tank developments, training devices, and simulators through *ARMOR* or *PM Magazine*, just to name a couple. The master gunner branch at Fort Knox will always assist you by providing updated information on gunnery-related skills

while you are detailed outside the master gunner arena. If a new piece of equipment is fielded, you can return to Fort Knox for the necessary upgrade training. The opportunities are there; all that is necessary is your willingness to accept them.

In short, when you accepted the ASI of master gunner you accepted the lifelong commitment SGM Spurling described. There is no badge or extra money, but there is the satisfaction of knowing you taught soldiers to survive in combat. That is the essence of what we as noncommissioned officers do best, and master gunners have the additional training to do it better. No one twisted your arm to become a master gunner; it also helped you get promoted. The least you can do is stay current. The Army saw something special in you to train you as a master gunner. It is imperative that you maintain that cutting edge. Remember, once a master gunner, always a master gunner!