

DRIVER'S SEAT

Changes Coming in Armor NCO Structure

by CSM David L. Lady, Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Armor Center

Armor branch, good day.

As I climb into this hatch and run through the before-operations checks, there is much to learn in order to be an effective advocate for the force. Fort Knox, the Armor Center, and the Armored Force have changed dramatically in the past five years. Over the next five years, we must make even more dramatic changes in our force structure, our unit structure, our training strategy, and our personnel management. Armor and Cavalry must make the best use of the new technologies and equipment. As leaders, we must continue to improve so that we will always develop the best trained and motivated soldiers, and place them in the best synchronized and most cohesive units. There lies victory.

The key to my learning process is to get out and communicate with the force. You deserve information first-hand, and I need to assess your issues and challenges first-hand. Ft. Hood is first, in order to meet with our M1A2 NET team and the units they are training. These visits will become more useful to you, as I learn more about your needs and about what the branch and the Armor Center will do to fix them.

I am grateful to MG Harmeyer for his trust, and to CSM Davis for his example, as I hit the start button.

It is time to review the changes in Armor NCO structure proposed by the Armor Center and adopted by the Army Chief of Staff on 22 July 1997. These changes were only a part of the Army-wide reduction of the NCO structure from its current level of 49.6% to about 47.8% of the total enlisted structure. Since June, 1996, Armor has been developing and staffing the best way to support this goal.

Throughout the development and staffing process, senior sergeants were involved and CSM Davis took the lead in defending the critical leader and trainer positions throughout our force. He has been a worthy advocate and has advised

MG Harmeyer well as some very tough decisions were made. We owe CSM Davis thanks for his battle on our behalf.

Armor NCO structure is currently 48.4% of the total armor enlisted force. A target structure of 45.5% was the goal of the Change in NCO Structure (CIN-COS) initiative. This target would have required the downgrading of 1,616 NCO positions. Armor made a thorough, bottom-up review of every TDA position and every TOE function. This review included brigade, division, and corps staffs, and addressed the need for more opportunities for staff experience in MOS 19D.

As individual positions were considered, unit warfighting missions, branch health, and soldier development and morale were kept in clear focus. Armor was in a dilemma because the target figure could not be met without downgrading sergeant positions. Of these, 3,050 are MTOE, and only 240 are TDA. To re-code all gunners and scout squad leaders to grade E4 would decrease NCO percentage below the target, but would be devastating to the morale and efficiency of the force. Our leaders recognized that other positions would have to be reduced, and that a reasonable, good-faith effort must be made to comply with GEN Reimer's goal.

The price has been paid throughout the force. The price has been paid in the following positions: On the TOE side, by reducing the grades of the division, battalion, and company/troop master gunners; on the TDA side, by reducing the grades of tank crew, IET tank/track commander/instructor, operations sergeant, and other staff positions. No reductions were made in TOE first sergeant, platoon sergeant, tank commander, or gunner positions. No reductions were made in TDA instructor (less certain IET positions), drill sergeant, recruiter, or AC/RC positions.

There is some impact on warfighting. This impact is acceptable. Division/regi-

mental staffs with an operations SGM will suffer only limited impact by our reducing the SGM master gunner position in grade. Re-coding certain operations staff positions from 19K to 19D will improve the range of skills on staffs and improve career progression. Reducing battalion master gunners to SFC and company/troop master gunners to SSG will decrease master gunner experience levels, but it should not impact on master gunner technical skills. It will also better match our current training and assignment strategy.

There is legitimate concern that SGTs generally do not have the maturity, experience, and expertise to instruct in an institution. However, SGTs will only serve as instructors of basic skills for Initial Entry Soldiers, and then only under the direct supervision of a senior NCO. There will be no SGT instructors in NCOES/OES training.

In a future column, I'll present charts that show the changes by MACOM, the changes to Fort Knox positions, the changes to TDA positions outside Fort Knox, and the changes to TOE positions.

Our leaders have proposed a reasonable plan to reduce the NCO structure while protecting the keys to Armor and Cavalry effectiveness: Drill sergeants, NCOES/OES instructors, and noncommissioned leaders of tank and scout platoons. GEN Reimer saw the wisdom of the Armor proposal, and adopted it without modification: of the Armor enlisted force, 48 percent will remain noncommissioned officers. All MTOEs and TDAs are to be changed so that these changes will be completely documented by FY 99. The new TDA and TOE documents are to be available to the field for reporting purposes NLT June 1998.

We have reached the "Roger Out" moment. Let us accept, support, and carry on.

"SERGEANT, TAKE THE LEAD"