

# DRIVER'S SEAT

---

## New Professional Development Guide: How to Succeed in the Armor Force

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

I presented all armor sergeants major attending the 1999 Armor Conference with their own copy of our newly finished professional development guide. Nearly a year in the making, this guide provides career planning and professional development guidance for Armor and cavalry soldiers and noncommissioned officers. It is a summary of what a tanker or scout must do, and when they must do it, in order to prepare for additional responsibility and promotion. From PVT to CSM, it describes how to succeed in the Armor Force.

In 51 pages, the guide reviews the role of soldiers, leaders, and personnel managers in the Enlisted Personnel Management System; explains professional development requirements for each rank; summarizes the noncommissioned officer evaluation reporting system. It explains how to prepare for DA centralized selection boards (SFC, MSG, SGM/CSM). The guide also contains the structure of the armored force, lists all active component armor and cavalry regimental designations, and provides enlisted personnel management directorate-communications initiatives with useful internet addresses.

"MOS certification" is the heart of the guide. Stated bluntly, the armor and cavalry force needs expert warfighting leaders. It must select those tankers and scouts with the most success and experience as leaders of warfighting teams for promotion and additional responsibility. Certification requires that all enlisted soldiers prove themselves experts in the key leadership assignments for their grade before they will be identified as ready for promotion. Armor assignment branch managers use this concept as they advise soldiers which assignments are best for their professional development. Branch must allow soldiers to remain in these leadership assignments for at least 18 months. I admit that this is barely enough time for the NCO to be identified as "ready for promotion" (through the NCOER), but is often the best that our

assignment managers can allow before reassigning soldiers into higher priority specialty assignments.

Our best soldiers will probably serve in specialty or staff assignments at **each** NCO grade, not at every other grade. The days of tank commanders and platoon sergeants with multiple consecutive assignments in line platoons are over. Armor force structure requires that over half of our staff sergeants and sergeants first class go to the personnel priority group (PPG1) specialty assignments as soon as they achieve minimum certification requirements. This is the harsh reality, due to an increasing imbalance in cavalry and armor between TOE and TDA authorizations. This situation is not the fault of certification requirements, rather the opposite is true. Many of these PPG1 assignments require experienced tank commanders, scout section leaders, and platoon sergeants (such as AC/RC, observer-controller, and instructor) in order to satisfy eligibility requirements.

Certification places a structure on the assignment process, places needed emphasis on warfighting skills and experience as soldiers develop themselves, and allows armor and cavalry to fill the PPG1 assignments with NCOs qualified for those missions.

The professional development guide also identifies the balance that every soldier must achieve between certifying and specialty assignments, at each NCO grade. Both types of assignments are necessary to develop the NCO, and a typical pattern of assignments should be "line to specialty and back to line." Consecutive specialty or staff jobs, in different assignments, will hurt an NCO's chance for promotion. The guide also explains the role that military education, civilian education, and physical fitness play in professional development.

Interspersed among the guidelines for each enlisted rank are comments from the last three centralized selection boards.

These comments from the panel members illustrate what identified NCOs as ready or not ready for promotion. They are very interesting and should add credibility to the guidelines.

Thirteen pages of the guide focus on the NCOER and preparation for centralized boards. The guide explains the importance of accurate records, the personnel qualification record (PQR), and the photograph, and reviews when and how to write a letter to the president of the board. How to request microfiche and how to transfer Articles 15 from performance fiche are also explained. Finally, it tells when and how to request a re-look of your records by the Standby Advisory Board, if you believe that your records were incomplete or incorrect when reviewed by the selection board.

This guide was ably written by SFC Michael Carew, a cavalry scout, who took it through numerous drafts to meet the intent of the Chief of Armor and me. His research and writing abilities have benefited our entire force.

It is available to every interested soldier. The whole text or any portion of the text may be reproduced. Copies of this text are available from the Office of the Chief of Armor (OCOA), ATZK-AR, Fort Knox, Kentucky, 40121-5000, DSN 464-1439/1368, and from the OCOA home page at:

<http://147.238.100.101/center/ocoa>

Every leader should read this guide and use it to coach his soldiers. It is consistent with the guidance that I have given the last five selection boards. I WILL USE IT AS I GUIDE FUTURE SELECTION BOARDS. Leaders, assignment managers, and soldiers themselves can all contribute to effective development of a well-trained and mature noncommissioned force by using our armor enlisted professional development guide.

"SERGEANT, TAKE THE LEAD"