

EIA Offers Opportunity for Self-Development

by CSM Carl E. Christian, Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Armor Center

The Armor Force faces no greater challenge today than developing leaders and soldiers who can rethink traditional roles and adapt to new missions and organizations. As part of this challenge, we need to evaluate our efforts in terms of the three pillars of training — unit, institution, and self-development. We have already established a strong foundation for unit and institutional training. We will continue to build on it with initiatives like the Mounted Training Strategy and resident professional courses with distance learning components.

However, we must improve in the area of self-development. It is not enough to encourage soldiers to improve themselves on their own initiative. We must produce and promote self-development programs that “grow” Armor and Cavalry soldiers who can meet the demands of the changing Armor Force. The tools for building and maintaining an effective self-development strategy are already in place: the Excellence in Armor (EIA) Program; the Tank Commander Competency Test – Level II (TCCT II); and the Cavalry Scout Commander Competency Test – Level II (SCCT II).

The goals of the EIA Program are to identify and develop intelligent, highly motivated Armor and Cavalry soldiers whose performance is consistently outstanding; encourage and facilitate their career progression and growth into non-commissioned leaders; and provide incentives which will lead to retention of these high quality NCOs. EIA is both an Active and Reserve Component program. Soldiers can be nominated for the EIA program during the One Station Unit Training (OSUT) at Fort Knox or while stationed in their units.

EIA is a win-win program with unlimited potential. It benefits the total Armor Force by recognizing superior performance and potential, increasing soldier motivation, and identifying soldiers that we need to retain. The EIA Program benefits enrolled soldiers by giving them an edge when it comes to early promotion and early enrollment in PLDC and BNCOC. In FY 99, 61 per-

cent of SFC/E-7 board selectees were EIA members. That's a great figure, though we need to ensure that commanders continue to give EIA soldiers special consideration for early promotion and NCOES if they consistently maintain their high standards. This will send a message to other soldiers that demonstrated performance and potential count more for promotion than just time in grade.

Soldiers enrolled in the EIA Program can also earn 50 additional promotion points, in accordance with AR 600-200, by passing the SCCT-II or TCCT-II. We will soon complete the first updates of those tests in over a decade. The revisions were long overdue, but we've taken the opportunity to significantly improve the tests. The new scenario-based SCCT-II will consist of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions on skill level 3 tasks and subject areas. Each test booklet will contain an OPORD and overlay that students will need to analyze to answer some of the questions. As in the past, SCCT-II and TCCT-II candidates will be allowed to take the test one time only on a pass/fail basis. The prerequisites for taking the test are: (1) enrollment in EIA; (2) must be a promotable sergeant; (3) recommendation from the battalion/squadron commander. We will field the new SCCT-II in early 2001, with the new TCCT-II to follow soon after.

Concurrently, we are exploring ways to make the next-generation SCCT-II and TCCT-II even better evaluation tools. We recently designed a prototype CD version of the SCCT-II that contains video footage of a platoon leader reading the OPORD. As soldiers take the test, they can view an overlay on their PC screen as they listen to the order. This approach more closely approximates the field experience, and that's what we want to test and measure. Ultimately, we want to put the test on a secure internet web site. That will enable us to update it quickly and electronically distribute the new version to the field.

With the demise of the Self-Development Test (SDT), the SCCT-II and TCCT-II rank among the Army's most effective ways to formally measure a soldier's knowledge of his MOS tasks. From the soldier's perspective, the tests provide a means for earning bonus promotion points for E5 sergeants in EIA. So there's a lot of upside to the SCCT-II and the TCCT-II. And yet, the number of soldiers taking the tests is very low. Certainly, the Armor Force needs to market the tests better, but we can increase their usage in other ways, too.

We're looking at tying the SCCT-II and TCCT-II more closely to the EIA Program. Right now, a soldier in EIA does not have to take the Level II test. That doesn't make sense. An EIA soldier should be required to pass the SCCT-II or TCCT-II by the time he makes SFC. If he does not, then maybe he should be “dis-enrolled” from the EIA Program. This is one way we can evaluate EIA soldiers throughout their careers to measure whether they reached the potential they first exhibited when enrolled in the program. Another way might be to develop SCCT-III and TCCT-III gates for senior EIA soldiers. We don't need to recreate the SDT; we do need to evaluate the effectiveness of self-development programs like EIA as soldiers progress through their careers.

With the SCCT-II and TCCT-II, and the EIA Program, the Armor Force has started building a strong foundation for promoting self-development. We need to continue to improve these programs as we're doing now with the SCCT-II. We also need to promote these programs to our young soldiers and actively seek out those with the technical, tactical, and leadership potential to lead the Army of tomorrow. To learn more about any of these programs I've described, you can contact the Office, Chief of Armor, at DSN 464-TANK. I challenge you all to take an active role in the self-development of the soldiers under your command.

**“TODAY IS THE BEST DAY
TO BE A SOLDIER!”**