

DRIVER'S SEAT

Excellence in Armor:

First Sergeant's Program to Train and Retain Future Leaders

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In 1984, CSM John Stephens, former USAARMC CSM, developed and proposed the Excellence in Armor Program (EIA), which identifies outstanding soldiers in CMF 19 OSUT, armor/cavalry units, and infantry scout platoons. For 12 years, our leaders have used the program to develop the NCO corps of the future. We are now seeing the final products of this program: the FY98 Centralized Promotion Boards selected a large percentage of EIAs for additional responsibility (FY98 SGM, 10 EIA selectees (24.3%); MSG, 28 EIA selectees (30.4%); SFC, 296 selectees (60.9%!)).

Currently, 19 percent of the armor force is enrolled in the EIA program. The extremely high promotion rates for EIA soldiers clearly show that the program is identifying the best and brightest armor and cavalry soldiers whose level of performance is consistently outstanding. Can it do even better? Can it be a program to address the significant attrition of our first-term soldiers? Of course it can, but only if first sergeants and master gunners implement the program in our companies and troops. Too many armor leaders do not understand the program, do not know that it exists, and resent the program as an "OSUT Program" with little use to the field.

We will retain the best of our soldiers only if we can excite them about the role and skills of the Armor/Cavalry leader. Tough/realistic training and the promise of increased responsibility, combined with accelerated promotions, will help to keep our best young soldiers in commander's hatches and stations.

The soldier's first opportunity for selection to EIA is in 19D and 19K OSUT. In the tenth week of training, up to 20 percent of each class may be selected to compete to enter the program. These soldiers are recommended by their drill sergeants, based on performance, motivation, and leadership potential. A battalion-level board, chaired by the battalion/squadron CSM, confirms this recommendation and admits the soldier into the additional training program. The 19D EIA soldiers receive 60 additional hours training in communications, land navigation, vehicles, tactics and leadership, and scout skills. All 19K EIA soldiers receive 52 additional hours training in the same basic areas. They must pass the APFT with 230 or more points; qualify Sharpshooter or Expert with the 9mm pistol or the M16 rifle; receive all GOs on the Armor Crewman Test (ACT) or the Scout Skills Test (SST), all GOs on the Scout Gunnery Skills Test, and all GOs in the Armor or Cavalry Skills Test. They must have a high school diploma or equivalent and NO UCMJ actions.

At nomination (10th week), the soldier is promoted to PV2. At graduation, the soldier who has passed all tests to standard is formally enrolled in EIA. The unit should expect an OSUT EIA to have more leadership potential, to be motivated and disciplined, to be better trained in critical skills, and to be more mature, self confident, and responsible—and the unit should support him by providing him the opportunity to display these qualities.

As a first sergeant, I identified and tracked my newly assigned EIAs. I did

not put them immediately into gunner seats but saw to it that they were utilized sensibly and given more training in gunnery tasks (one newly assigned EIA soldier walked into my office and demanded to be made a gunner. He had a short, blunt, one-sided interview with me and returned to his loader's station). In my battalion, such great Silver Lion first sergeants as CSM David Hartzell and SGM James Sands ran excellent programs which trained their Excellence in Armor soldiers to be ready when gunner positions opened up.

I ask that unit leaders identify newly assigned EIA soldiers. Track them and keep them on tanks or scout vehicles. Yes, they're good, but the Armor Center did not make the extra investment to create computer operators or drivers. Disenroll them if they fail to meet the higher unit enrollment standards within a year of assignment: APFT 260; CTT Pass; Sharpshooter or higher with individual weapon; Pass the Tank Commander or Scout Commander Competency Test (TCCT/SCCT Level I); Pass the commander's subjective evaluation of their proficiency, leadership, potential, and motivation.

The second opportunity for enrollment in EIA is in the unit. As Armor leaders, we are responsible for identifying and enrolling soldiers whose performance meets the criteria for EIA membership. OSUT enrollees showed that they could peak for a short period under strict super-

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vision; unit enrollees must show excellence over a longer period without such close supervision. I have always considered unit enrollees to be the more credible group. Implement and reinforce the EIA program by executing extra training with these tankers and scouts (excellent example: 1SG Sands conducting special EIA training every Thursday from 1300-1500; training planned 90 days in advance, conducted by the unit master gunner; focused on gunnery and maintenance; including training in the UCOFT). Administer the (TCCT/SCCT I) annually in the unit. Encourage your EIA sergeants to take the TCCT/SCCT — Level II examination.

I owe you a quick review of the TCCT and SCCT. TCCT-I (19K) is the Tank Crew Gunnery Skills Test (TCGST) in accordance with FM 17-12-1/2; SCCT-I (19D) is the Gunnery Skills Test for the unit equipment; CFV in accordance with FM 23-1 and HMMWV-equipped in accordance with FM 17-12-8 (Light Cavalry Gunnery). TCCT/SCCT II is for sergeants (E5P) who have graduated BNCO. It is a difficult written exam based solely on SL 3 and 4 tasks. It can only be taken once in a soldier's career. It is administered by the local TSO. NCOs who pass the exam will be awarded 50 promotion points under Military Education. The Armor Force is the only branch that has such a program to accelerate promotion to SSG!

The Office of the Chief of Armor administers the program. You can find out much more about the program through the Armor Web Page, or by calling COMM 502-624-1368/1439/3188 (DSN 464-1368/1439/3188).

Excellence in Armor is the Chief of Armor's program, designed to assist the unit in developing the best soldiers into leaders. It is a valuable program if unit leaders use the program to train soldiers for service as gunners, vehicle commanders, and section leaders. It is a valuable program if the best soldiers are enrolled, and if those who cannot maintain the standard are disenrolled. It is a valuable program if it assists unit leaders in identifying those soldiers who are ready for accelerated promotion and additional responsibility. First Sergeant, it is your program.

'FIRST SERGEANT, TAKE THE LEAD'