

19K One-Station Unit Training: Creating the Army's Future Tank Forces

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19K one-station unit training continues to evolve as our missions, battlefields and enemies change. Eighteen years ago, dismounted patrolling and urban operations were virtually unheard of during 19K OSUT. Sayings such as “death before dismount” and “why walk when you can ride” were also commonplace among Soldiers during that time. However, today’s 19K OSUT graduate can conduct dismounted operations and still effectively retain his knowledge of main-battle-tank operations at the -10 level of execution.

Further, with the implementation of the Army’s physical-readiness training program, injuries due to exercise have been reduced in virtually all categories, and final Army Physical Fitness Test failures are less than 5 percent (60/60/60 scale).

Under the guidance of the Maneuver Center of Excellence and Armor School, all new Armor crewmen that units receive in the U.S. Army come from one place: Fort Benning, GA. The 1st Battalion, 81st Armor Regiment, has four companies that train these new 19Ks. Each new volunteer is introduced to the Army through a five-phase, 15-week long OSUT. The five phases are Red, White and Blue for basic combat training, and Black and Gold for advanced individual training/military-occupation specialty-specific training.

Let’s examine each phase in a little more detail.

Introduction to PRT and weapons-immersion program

The Red Phase is the foundation that builds an adept and agile Soldier. Drill sergeants deliberately attempt to force trainees out of their comfort zones. During the three weeks of the Red Phase, future 19Ks have maximum face-to-face time with their drill sergeants, who are all 19Ks. Normally, a drill sergeant is present from the 5 a.m. wake-up until 10 p.m. lights-out during this phase. Constant interaction with drill sergeants facilitates proper discipline and teaches new Soldiers how to live by the seven Army Values.

Other than receiving mandatory briefings covering general military subjects such as rank structure, basics of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program orientation, new Soldiers are introduced to PRT and the weapons-immersion program.

PRT is designed to help new Soldiers adjust from an increasingly sedentary society to a culture where physical fitness is extremely important. Many Millennials struggle with Army physical-fitness standards, and many of them experience muscle-skeleton injuries – mainly due to sedentary lifestyle prior to joining the Army.

The 194th Armored Brigade, of which 1-81 Armor Battalion is a part, is fortunate to have a team of athletic trainers on standby to help trainees safely continue their overall physical training, even when the Soldier has a physically limiting injury or profile. Throughout their stay at Fort Benning, future Armor crewmen are gradually exposed to more elements of PRT in accor-

dance with the Army PRT Manual, Training Circular 3-22.20, *Army Physical Readiness Training*. By the time of graduation, new Soldiers are well-versed in the PRT preparation drill, conditioning drills one and two as well as the climbing drill, and various cardiovascular training regimens commonly known as 30-60s, 60-120s, ability group runs and hill repeats.

WIP is crucial to introducing new Soldiers into the Army and teaching proper weapon-handling procedures. This training focuses on safe weapons handling, orientation, proper loading and clearing procedures, and maintaining situational awareness at all times. After the new Soldier receives his weapon during the first few days of 19K OSUT’s BCT portion, that weapon stays with him all 15 weeks until graduation. Moreover, Soldiers are issued blank ammunition to constantly practice clearing procedures and further increase personal weapons familiarization.

During the rest of the Red Phase, Soldiers participate in Combat Life Saver Course Training with a chance to receive full certification upon passing the final exam. Lastly, each Soldier participates in the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear chamber confidence exercise and receives his first classes on basic rifle marksmanship.

Shoot, shoot and shoot

Instead of the more frequently used “shoot, move and communicate” slogan, the motto for the White Phase is “shoot, shoot and then shoot some more.” The primary focus during this phase is development of basic combat skills, with an emphasis on weapon proficiency and physical training. Soldiers are expected to maintain the basic Soldier skills learned in the Red Phase and begin to conform to establish standards.

Soldiers spend the entire White Phase conducting training at various firing ranges, which increases their knowledge about their personal weapon system, generally the M4, and introduces them to other weapons commonly used in the Army. After zeroing their personal weapon at a 25-meter range, they receive further weapons familiarization with the Location of Miss and Hit system and field-fire ranges prior to actual qualification.

LOMAH is a projectile-detection target system for small-arms marksmanship training. The LOMAH system detects a projectile as it passes through or around a target silhouette and alerts shooters to their performance by displaying the shot location on a computer screen next to them. This system allows immediate feedback to the shooter and continued use of silhouette targets, even with many gaps/holes in the silhouette surface. Qualifying with the individual rifle or carbine is just one of the many requirements for a 19K Soldier.

After qualification, Soldiers receive advanced rifle marksmanship training, where they are introduced to advanced firing techniques and a get a chance to use day- and night-time scopes during range firing. To complete their White Phase training, trainees get a chance to fire the M203 Grenade Launcher, M249 Squad Automatic Weapon and M240B machine gun, and throw a live hand grenade.

Last phase of BCT

Blue Phase includes all the high-intensity events. Future Armor crewmen gain a great deal of knowledge about improvised explosive devices, their content, concept of operation and common employment tactics, techniques and procedures the enemy uses. The IED-defeat training range provides them hands-on experience in what our troops faced in Iraq and still are facing in Afghanistan. Our drill sergeants, all combat veterans, further provide vignettes from their recent deployments and share their knowledge with the new generation.

During the last phase of OSUT's BCT portion, each Soldier in the battalion engages in a buddy-team live-fire exercise, repels from a confidence tower and crawls under M240B overhead fire during the Night Infiltration Course. For more preparation for the modern battlefield, trainees get urban-operations training and are introduced to convoy operations.

Finally, all the training they have received up to this point is tested during the 96-hour field-training exercise that encompasses all the warrior tasks and battle drills. Our company commanders employ rigorous lane training as well as more land-navigation training to test Soldiers' skills.

How about that M1 Abrams tank?

The purpose of OSUT's Black Phase is to introduce the Soldier-in-training to the M1 Abrams and the associated systems and equipment the tank's crew uses. The process of creating an Armor crewman starts immediately following the BCT portion of OSUT and lasts three weeks. During this time, Soldiers have a slightly more relaxed learning environment to encourage retention of skills taught by the instructors and also prepare them to transition from a tightly controlled OSUT environment to their first unit. We want Soldiers capable of making the right decisions after duty hours. This starts the process of transitioning from a trained Soldier to a 19K MOS-qualified Soldier.

Black Phase truly starts in the motorpool, where Soldiers are introduced to M1A1 and M1A2 Systems Enhancement Program tanks. Soldiers are broken down into small groups, and each one of them is trained on the process required to conduct 10-level preventive-maintenance checks and services on the M1A1. This leads into their initial training in the drivers' station. This training teaches them the basics of what is expected of them as the tank driver and what steps and actions they must take to prepare the vehicle for operation.

Soldiers spend many hours at the Tank Driver Simulator. This system is a full mockup of the driver's station and allows the Soldier to understand the way the M1 Abrams handles before they actually drive one. Once the Soldier has completed the TDS, he moves to the Basic Drivers Course, where he drives the M1 Abrams and a humvee for the first time on an actual road. Upon completion of Black Phase training, Soldiers become proficient enough to join a tank crew as a driver.

In addition to learning the driver's station, Soldiers also learn the other 10-level positions for the tank crew, and that is at the loader's station. Soldiers learn the basics of how to operate the breach and load the 120mm ammo into the three ammunition storage racks inside the vehicle. They also learn to prepare the radios and the communication systems of the vehicle to ensure that every station can communicate and that the vehicle can communicate with the rest of the unit. Finally, Soldiers are trained in all the vehicle's weapons systems, including the .50-caliber, the M240 and the M9 pistol, on which they are also required to qualify before graduation.

The Armor Crewman Test administered at the end is the final event during OSUT's Black Phase – this testing is the culmina-

tion of all the training Soldiers have received during previous weeks. It covers the tasks involved with preparing the driver's and loader's stations, along with assembly and disassembly of all the weapons systems on the M1 Abrams. Soldiers' skills are tested on basic maintenance and safety drills to ensure retention of their newly acquired MOS skills. This test is the final gateway for Soldiers to move into Gold Phase training and to complete the OSUT process.

Gold Phase FTX and gunnery

The 96-hours end-of-cycle FTX, combined with tank gunnery, is the final step taken by new Armor crewmen before graduating from 1-81 Armor Battalion. This culminating event not only tests basic warrior knowledge obtained during OSUT's BCT portion, but it also ties it with new 19K Soldiers' MOS-related skills.

During gunnery, Soldiers engage stationary targets using their personal weapon, the M9 pistol and the M240B mounted on the loader's station, with the endstate of destroying the target through the use of proper engagement techniques in the least amount of time. Each Soldier also serves as a loader during tank engagements. Those who demonstrated high qualities through the entire OSUT cycle and met all the qualifications for Excellence in Armor have the privilege of shooting a few rounds from the gunner's station.

The Gold Phase FTX reinforces 19 tasks outlined by the 19K program of instruction. During the FTX, Soldiers demonstrate all the skills they have obtained during their stay at Fort Benning. Company commanders ensure that each Soldier participates in the land-navigation course, reacts to contact during mounted and dismounted situational-training exercise lanes, engages in the urban-operations mission and conducts basic PMCS on his assigned tank. The final FTX is finished with a 16-kilometer ruck march and a memorable rites-of-passage ceremony welcoming new Armor crewmen onto our team.

19K warrior

The 19K Soldiers leaving our training program and entering the operational force are trained in the basics of soldiering and the operation of a M1 series tank. These Soldiers obtain a solid foundation in weapons handling and receive familiarization with major weapon systems they will encounter in the force. They are physically fit and ready to perform the duties of a loader and driver on an M1 series tank.



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ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

BCT – basic combat training
BCT – brigade combat team
FTX – field-training exercise
HHC – headquarters and headquarters company
IED – improvised explosive device
LOMAH – location of miss and hit
MOS – military-occupation specialty
NCO – noncommissioned officer
OSUT – one-station unit training
PMCS – preventive-maintenance checks and services
PRT – physical-readiness training
TDS – Tank Driver Simulator
WIP – weapons-immersion program