Thunderbolt Blast

ARMOR SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

July 2025

SAVE THE DATE: Wednesday, 10 September 2025
Armor Dinner during the Maneuver Warfighter Conference.
Conference Registration Information to be published soon!

Chief of Armor

Armor and Cavalry Leaders: We're Built Different

In this article, I thought I would offer some thoughts about what it means and what it takes to be a leader in our Armor and Cavalry formations. Armor and Cavalry will always be essential to the U.S. Army's fighting and winning our Nation's wars. But to be clear, this has nothing to do with the tanks and Bradleys that we bring to the fight. Instead, I would argue that we Armor and Cavalry leaders are built different. And we will always be needed because of how we think, how we act, and how we fight as part of the Combined Arms Team.

We Think Differently

Armor and Cavalry leaders do not think like the rest of the Army.

We are big map people, not small map people. Others may move one kilometer in an hour. We move one kilometer every three minutes. That kind of speed and tempo forces us to think further ahead: not just about our next move, but the one after that, and the one after that. We do not simply react to what the enemy presents to us; instead, we move fast and strike hard so that we dictate the terms of the fight to the enemy. We multi-task and we are comfortable with that. We fight the tank. We fight the section. We fight the platoon. All at the same time. We operate on multiple radio nets: giving direction, executing reporting, and conducting cross talk. We are constantly developing the situation and driving action at distances and at a tempo that others do not.

Most importantly, we have a bias for trust. Micromanagement just isn't in our DNA. The pace and distance of the fight forces us to trust our crews, our sections, our platoons. We rely on disciplined initiative because at 40 miles an hour, and with weapons systems that reach out and destroy the enemy at kilometers, not meters, we just don't have time to spell out to our teammates how to accomplish the mission. We trust our training and we trust each other. And through that trust we unleash a terrible force and violence that overwhelms our enemies.

Finally, we develop an intuitive feel for the battlefield. We think fast. We think over distance. We develop a knack for rapid pattern recognition and quick tactical judgments. We decide faster than the enemy, and that is why we win.

We Act Differently

But we don't just think differently, we act differently.

We are disciplined. The sheer destructive power of our weapons systems forces us to operate with a different level of responsibility. A single tank platoon has more firepower than other battalion sized formations. That power demands discipline, rooted in a spirit of trust that we develop by proven competence over time.

We value maintenance and logistics. Our fight does not start with just pulling triggers. We keep our machines running. We fight to get into the fight. If your tank is not moving, it is a target. And if your logistics are not planned and executed, you are out of the fight before it even begins.

And for sure, we have a strong, distinct culture. We honor our history, our traditions: Stetsons, Spurs, Tanker Boots. But you do not get those things for free. You earn them. You are awarded your Spurs through hard work and shared hardship. You have to qualify your tank first before you have the right to wear Tanker Boots. And you earn the right to say, **"If you ain't Cav, you ain't __,"** not because it's a catchy phrase, but because you've lived the discipline and training to back it up.

Us acting differently is serious business. Just like how we think … how we act is part of our DNA. It defines how we train, how we lead, and ultimately how we win as part of the Combined Arms Team.

We Fight as Part of the Combined Arms Team

But let's be clear. Victory on the battlefield is not won alone, and it is not just about the tank's overwhelming firepower. It is about forcing the enemy to fight in multiple directions against multiple forms of contact, breaking the enemy, and taking away his ability to respond in the fight. And combining arms is what makes us lethal in combat … it is what allows us to win wars.

For sure, the Armor provides the mobility, firepower, and shock effect to close with and destroy the enemy. But we almost never do this alone. We need the Infantry to clear terrain, seize buildings, and fight in the complex terrain where tanks cannot go alone. We Armor and Cavalry leaders always bring the Infantry into the fight as part of the Combined Arms Team.

Fire support and attack aviation are essential to suppressing the enemy, forcing the enemy to keep his head down as the Armor and Infantry close the distance between their last covered and concealed positions and the enemy's line. We Armor and Cavalry leaders always bring the Artillery and Aviation into the fight as part of the Combined Arms Team.

We do not go anywhere without the Engineers. The Sapper's ability to breach obstacles under fire, fortify our positions, and emplace obstacles are essential to all of us. We Armor Leaders always bring the Engineers into the fight as part of the Combined Arms Team.

Today's wars are also showing us just how important air defense and electronic warfare capabilities are to the Combined Arms Team. And our Logistician brothers and sisters are always at the forefront of our thinking as we plan, prepare, and execute the fight. We Armor Leaders always bring these capabilities into the fight as part of the Combined Arms Team.

Make no mistake about this. The Armor Branch and its leaders have spearheaded the Army's thinking about the Combined Arms Team for the last 90 years. It is us tankers and cavalrymen who think first about fighting as a synchronized force playing what General Patton called the Symphony of Mars not just our own French Horn. Our commitment to the Combined Arms Team makes us different because we think with rigor about how it fights, how to train it, and how to keep it ready.

In closing, I think that it is important that from time to time we remind ourselves that we all belong to a branch that is unlike any other. We demand that our leaders fight faster, fight harder, and fight with a kind of discipline that our adversaries both envy and fear. Armor and Cavalry leaders will always be essential to our Army and the Joint Force. Not because of our machines, but because we think differently, we act differently, and because we fight as a Combined Arms Team.

We Armor and Cavalry leaders are built different.

Forge the Thunderbolt!

BG Chad C. Chalfont, U.S. Army
55th Chief of Armor

CSM Ryan W. Roush
Armor School CSM

In Recognition of Armor Excellence

Secretary of Army, Career Counselor of the Year
SSG Natalie C. Mathena
HHC BDE, 2-15 CAV, 194th Armored Brigade

Staff Sergeant Natalie C. Mathena, born December 5, 1995, in Baker, Florida, enlisted in the Army in 2014 as a 31B Military Police Officer. She completed training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and was stationed in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii with the 8th MP Brigade, later supporting a rotation to Guam with Task Force Talon. Her service includes leadership roles at Fort Stewart, Georgia, and investigative and operational duties at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, where she also served as a Battalion Retention NCO. She graduated as the distinguished honor graduate from the Basic Career Counselor Course enroute to Fort Benning, Georgia, and now serves as the Brigade Career Counselor for the 194th Armored Brigade. SSG Mathena is a passionate leader who is dedicated to the Soldiers she serves and making a lasting impact throughout the force.

Maneuver Center of Excellence, Drill Sergeant of the Year
SSG Steven E. Bouton
B TRP, 2-15 CAV, 194th Armored Brigade

Staff Sergeant Bouton hails from Manassas, Virginia and enlisted in the United States Army on September 20, 2016, as a 19D Cavalry Scout. SSG Bouton's first assignment was with 2-8 CAV, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, TX where he served as a HMMWV Driver, HHMWV Gunner, and Team Leader. From 2018 - 2019, he deployed to Poland, Turkey, and Germany under Operations Atlantic Resolve and Atlantic Sentry. Following his time in Europe, SSG Bouton was assigned to 2-1 CAV, 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, CO where he served as an MGS Gunner, Sniper Section Leader, Senior Scout, and Platoon Sergeant. He deployed with 2-1 CAV to Syria in 2022, combating ISIS groups in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. SSG Bouton now applies his expertise to training the next generation of Troopers, serving as a Drill Sergeant in 2-15 CAV, 194th Armored Brigade at Fort Benning, GA.

Protecting our Force from Hearing Loss

It has been an on ongoing issue that our Soldiers have been using non-serviceable CVCs to conduct training resulting in noise-induced hearing loss. DA PAM 40-501 (Army Hearing Program) states on paragraph 6-10 it is the Units' Hearing Program Officer to inspect CVCs semiannually to determine if whether the helmets including ear cup seals and chin straps need to be serviced. The price of a new CVC is around $1,500 whereas replacement ear cup seals are $60. Leaders at all levels need to ensure Soldiers are wearing their CVCs correctly to prevent hearing loss. Ear cup seals should totally enclose the ear. The chin strap needs to be attached with tension to keep the ear cups in place during training.

Ear Cushions NSN: 5965-99-001-9853

Liner-Medium NSN: 5965-99-665-6497

2025 Gainey Cup

From 28 April through 01 May 2025, 18x teams competed for the opportunity to be named the "Best Scout Squad". These teams comprised the finest Soldiers and NCOs from across the force and our international partners. This year, we had 5x international partners: the United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, and Germany. Squads were evaluated on reconnaissance and security operations, adaptability under stress, and the integration of modern battlefield enablers in a rigorous and realistic environment.

Squads tested their technical and tactical proficiency through a series of events: Recon PT, Call for Fire, Doctrine Exam, Land Navigation, Area Reconnaissance Lane, Technical Proficiency Lane, and a "Final Charge." These events were selected based on observations from the 2023 Gainey Cup and the force. The intent was to test a Squad's ability to perform the Armor Force fundamentals in a continuous 72-hour period.

Squads executed a modified Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) followed by a 12-mile ruck march. They then moved to the Clarke Simulation Center, where they completed multiple iterations of the Call for Fire Trainer, followed by a skill-level-specific doctrine exam and vehicle identification.

Squads were then divided into two groups and established at a Tactical Assembly Area (TAA), where they received additional guidance. Group A conducted night and day land navigation, followed by the execution of technical lanes, while Group B conducted Area Reconnaissance Lane.

The technical lanes evaluated the Squad's ability to employ weapon systems, react to contact and treat a casualty. The Area Reconnaissance Lane evaluated the Squad’s ability to utilize all available reconnaissance assets to fulfill the Commander's Information Requirements in a contested environment. Upon completion, the groups switched and conducted the other respective lanes. After roughly 72 hrs. of continuous operations, Squads moved back to the cantonment area to prepare for the "Final Charge."

During the final charge, Squads conducted a physically and technically challenging event in front of numerous spectators, culminating in front of MCoE headquarters.

An analysis of both individual and Squad results demonstrated that those Squads with a clear understanding of the Armor Force Fundamentals were successful.

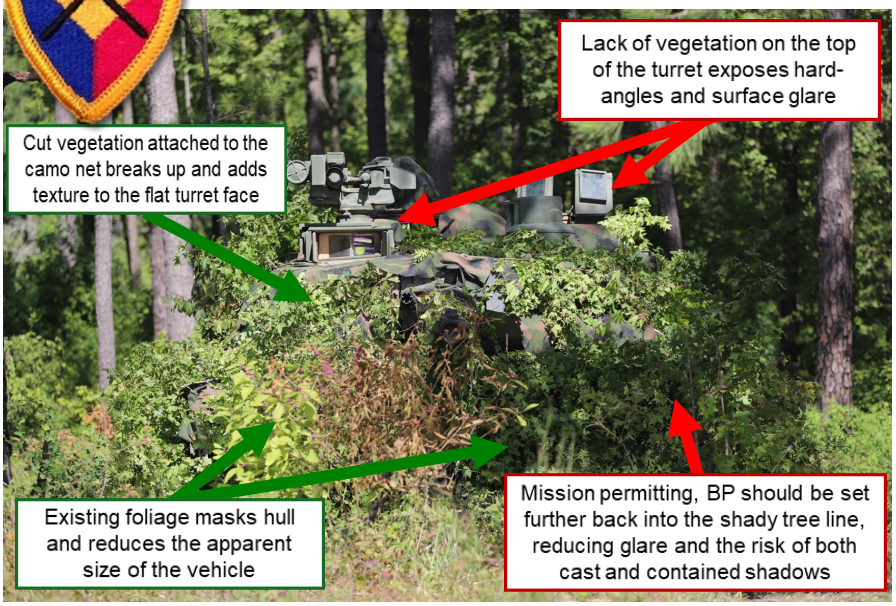
Each Squad demonstrated that the Armor Force has Soldiers who can think critically, operate independently, and embody the aggressive mindset needed to succeed. Despite impressive performances from all the Squads, only one Squad could be selected as the "Best Scout Squad."

Congratulations to the Squad from 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade.

316th Cavalry Brigade could not have executed this event without the support of the Maneuver Center of Excellence, the Armor School, the 194th Armored Brigade, and countless other organizations.

The 316th Cavalry Brigade looks forward to hosting the 2026 Sullivan Cup in May 2026. Stay tuned for more information.

ATP 3-37.34 Survivability Operations



CAMOUFLAGE NETS (para 6-79 and 6-80) The Ultra-lightweight Camouflage-Net Systems (ULCANS) is the standard Army/Marine Corps camouflage net currently available, and it can be ordered through normal unit supply channels (see appendix F). The ULCANS reduces a vehicle's visual, near-infrared, and radar signatures. Stainless steel fibers in the ULCANS material absorb some of the radar signal and reflect most of the remaining signal in all directions. The result is a small percentage of signal return to the radar for detection. The radar-scattering capabilities of the ULCANS are effective only if there is at least 2 feet of space between the ULCANS and the camouflaged equipment and if the ULCANS completely covers the equipment. Do not place a radar-scattering net over a radar antenna, because it interferes with transmission. The ULCANS is also available in a radar-transparent model. Do not mix radar scattering with radar-transparent ULCANS, or radar antenna may not work properly. See TM 5-1080-250-12&P for more information.

The different ULCANS color patterns are desert and woodland, each with a radar-scattering or radar transparent model. For arctic environments, units must still use the LCSS until ULCANS becomes available in an arctic pattern. Each side of each ULCANS/LCSS has a slightly different pattern to allow for seasonal variations. Both the ULCANS and LCSS use modular construction that allows the coverage of various sizes of equipment. Appendix F discusses the required components and the instructions for assembling ULCANS/LCSS structures for different sizes of equipment.

VEGETATION (para 6-81 to 6-83) Use branches and vines to temporarily conceal vehicles, equipment, and personnel. Attach vegetation to equipment with camouflage foliage brackets, spring clips, or expedient means (such as plastic tie-wraps). Use other foliage to complete the camouflage or to supplement natural-growing vegetation. Also use cut foliage to augment other artificial camouflage and concealment materials, such as branches placed on an ULCANS to break up its outline. Be careful when placing green vegetation, because the underside of leaves presents a lighter tone in photographs. Replace cut foliage often, because it wilts and changes color rapidly.

Living vegetation can be obtained in most environments, and its color and texture make it a good blending agent. However, foliage requires careful maintenance to keep the material fresh and in good condition. If branches are not placed in their proper growing positions, they may reveal friendly positions to enemy observers.

Living vegetation presents a chlorophyll response at certain near-infrared wavelengths. As cut vegetation wilts, it loses color and its near-infrared blending properties, which are related to the chlorophyll response. Replace cut vegetation regularly, because over time it becomes a detection cue rather than an effective concealment technique. 6-84. Use dead vegetation (dried grass, hay, straw, branches) for texturing. It provides good blending qualities if the surrounding background vegetation is also dead. Dead vegetation is usually readily available and requires little maintenance; however, it is flammable. Due to the absence of chlorophyll response, dead vegetation offers little camouflage and concealment against near-infrared sensors and hyperspectral sensors operating in the infrared regions.

EMPLOY REALISTIC CAMOUFLAGE AND CONCEALMENT ACTIVITIES (para 6-24) The more closely a target resembles its background, the more difficult it is for an enemy to distinguish between the two. Adhering to this fundamental principle of camouflage and concealment requires awareness of the surroundings, proper camouflage and concealment skills, and the ability to identify target EM signatures detected by enemy sensors.

VISUAL SENSORS (para 6-25) The most plentiful, reliable, and timely enemy sensors are visual. Therefore, effective camouflage and concealment techniques in the visual portion of the EMS are extremely important. Something that cannot be seen is often difficult to detect, identify, and target. Field uniforms, standard camouflage screening paint patterns, ULCANS, and battlefield obscurants provide effective camouflage and concealment against visual sensors. Full-coverage camouflage and concealment help to avoid visual detection by the enemy. When time is short, apply camouflage and concealment first to protect the target from the most likely direction of attack—then treat the remainder of the target as time allows.

ATP 3-37.34 Survivability Operations (continued)

SHAPES (para 6-44) Natural background is random, and most military equipment has regular features with hard, angular lines. Even an erected camouflage net takes on a shape with straight-line edges or smooth curves between support points. An enemy can easily see silhouetted targets, and its sensors can detect targets against any background unless their shape is disguised or disrupted. Size, which is implicitly related to shape, can also distinguish a target from its background.

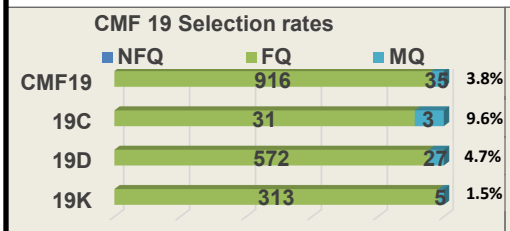
SHADOW (para 6-44) Shadow can be divided into the following two types: Cast shadow. A cast shadow is a silhouette of an object projected against its background. It is the more familiar type of shadow and can be highly conspicuous. In desert environments, a shadow cast by a target can be more conspicuous than the target itself. Contained shadow. A contained shadow is the dark pool that forms in a permanently shaded area. Examples are the shadows under the track guards of an armored fighting vehicle, inside a slit trench, inside an open cupola, or under a vehicle. Contained shadows show up much darker than their surroundings and are easily detected by an enemy.

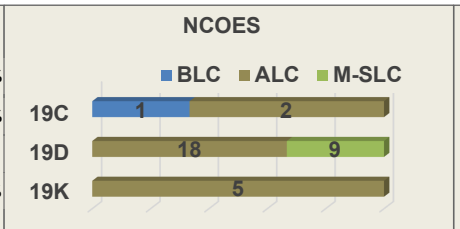
TEXTURE (para 6-48) A rough surface appears darker than a smooth surface, even if both surfaces are the same color. For example, vehicle tracks change the texture of the ground by leaving clearly visible track marks. This is particularly true in undisturbed or homogeneous environments, such as a desert or virgin snow, where vehicle tracks are highly detectable. In extreme cases, the texture of glass or other very smooth surfaces causes a shine that acts as a beacon. Under normal conditions, very smooth surfaces stand out from the background. Therefore, eliminating shine must be a high priority in camouflage and concealment.

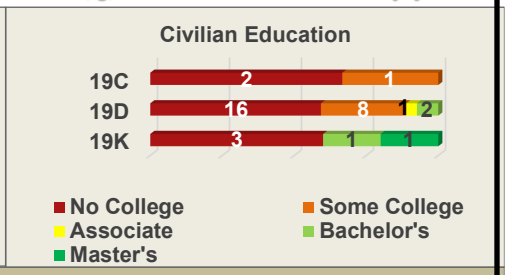
U.S. ARMY

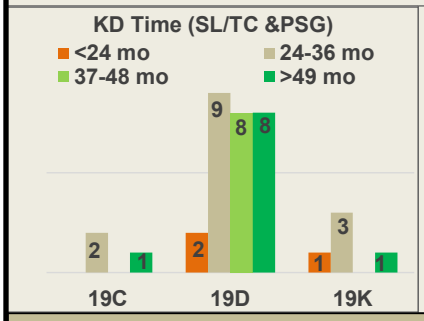
FY 2025 SSG Evaluation Board Results

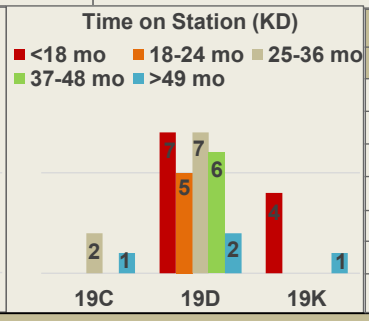
Fort Benning, Home of the Armor & Cavalry











Professionally Developing Assignments

	19C	19D	19K	Totals
MG	2	4	1	7
DS	1	6	2	9
Recruiter	0	5	0	5
Instructor	0	8	0	8
OC/T	0	1	1	2
NCOA	0	1	0	1
First Army	0	0	0	0

Functional Courses for CMF 19 NCOs

	Master Gunner (K8/J3)	Tank Commanders Course (19K)	Bardley Commanders Course (19C/19D)	*SLC (19D)	*Ranger (19D)	Battle Staff (CMF19)	Notes
19C	2		0			1	• (*) Annotated functional courses are only tracked for MOC 19D. These functional courses are not recommended for 19C/K. • The percentages for the (*) functional courses are for MOS 19D only.
19D	4		0	0	2	2	
19K	1	0	0			0	
Total	7	0	0	0	2	3	
PCT	20%	0%	0%	0%	7%	8%	

Conclusion:

NCOs that followed the Career Progression Plan guidance listed in DA PAM 600-25 fared well and were selected as Most Qualified. Completing more than the required Key Developmental Time, both as a Squad Leader, Section Leader, Tank Commander and as a Platoon Sergeant, was seen and graded favorably by the board. OCOA recommends following the TDMs outlined in DA PAM 600-25. NCOs should strive to maximize KD leadership positions prior to moving to broadening assignments. NCOs should strive to diversify assignments between operational and generating force

The DA PAM 600-25 Armor Career Progression Plan and Talent Development Models for CMF19 can be found online at https://www.army.mil/g-1#org-g-1-publications

2025 USAARMS Annual Award Winners

This past April, USAARMS held our annual Saint George Day celebration. During that event the winners of our Annual Awards Program were recognized. The winners were:

BG Samuel D. Rockenbach Award	2LT Miccah A. Peterson, HHT / 2-16th CAV, 199th IN BDE
SGT Elijah Church Award	SFC Justin T. Trumble, D / 1-16th CAV, 316th CAV BDE
SSG Ruben Rivers Award	SSG Keithren T. Pendergrass, L / 2-16th CAV, 199th IN BDE
Private Allen Walker Award	PFC Glennear V. McCree Jr. of HHT / 316th CAV BDE

These awards are meant to recognize the U.S. Army Armor School's most outstanding; Commissioned Officer, senior Noncommissioned Officer, junior Noncommissioned Officer, and Soldier of the year.

We will recognize a new group on Armor leaders in April 2026, please submit your nominations NLT 16 March 2026.

HQ U.S. Army Armor School			
	Chief of Armor	(706) 545-2029	BG Chad C. Chalfont
	Armor CSM	(706) 545-8169	CSM Ryan W Roush
	Deputy Commandant	(706) 545-8334	COL James Modlin
	Armor Historian	(706) 626-1491	Dr. Robert Cameron
	OCOA Director	(706) 545-1352	Mr. George DeSario
	OCOA SGM	(706) 545-7725	SGM Russell Zacherl
	OCOA (Excellence in Armor, Armor and Cavalry Leadership Award etc…)	(706) 626-TANK (8265)	https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/OCOA/
	ARMOR Magazine	(706) 545-2698	https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/eARMOR/
194th AR BDE			
	COL Allen B. Carroll CSM Ronald E. Kinard		
	30th AG (REC)	LTC Mercedes B. Skidmore	CSM Andrew Munoz
	1-81 AR	LTC Gregory Hope	CSM Ken Pilkenton
	2-15 CAV	LTC Stephen Deuble	CSM Avery Cunningham
	5-15 CAV	LTC Scott T. Dawe	CSM Andrew Pitman
316th CAV BDE			
	COL Justin D. Harper CSM Jeffrey C. Davis		
	1-16 CAV	LTC Carl Danko	CSM Kevin G. Stewart
	1-29 IN	LTC Pedro Escamilla	CSM Franklyn Rosario
	3-16 CAV	LTC Alan P. Hastings	CSM Tommy Snyder
	MATA	LTC Douglas Locke III	1SG Joshua Florio
199th IN BDE			
	COL Todd M. Tompkins CSM Fred N. Tolman		
	2-16 CAV	LTC Ryan Karasow	CSM Christopher Belch

Other Agencies					
ACM ABCT & RECON	COL Robert Furtick	Doctrine	Mr. David Guthrie	MRD	Mr Mark Andrews
	(706) 626-2444		(706) 545-7114		(706) 545-8355
ACM SFAB	COL Paul Davis				
	(913) 684-8843				

Armor School Links

MCoE: https://www.benning.army.mil/

Armor School: https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/

ARMOR Magazine: https://www.benning.army.mil/Armor/eARMOR/

Armor Branch (HRC) Website: https://www.hrc.army.mil/content/Armor%20Branch%20POCs