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Focusing on Tactical Expertise, Role of NCO, Developing Future Scout and Armor Crewman

This month, **ARMOR** looks at how we are developing, evaluating and integrating capabilities. From my position, what does this mean to the Armor noncommissioned officer? Certainly, the NCO has the responsibility of training the small units of the Army – crews, teams and squads – to fight together cohesively by using their training and equipment effectively. We all know that tough, realistic training breeds a confident team focused on accomplishing the mission. But is there a larger role for the NCO? Are there responsibilities that go beyond training? As our units down to the squad level gain access to more enablers and greater capabilities, the “everyday” job of the NCO grows. The NCO’s expertise in training and employing capabilities available to the squad and platoon, and in advising the commander at the company and battalion, is of paramount importance to our Armor and Cavalry force. This role has expanded exponentially during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. With this in mind, I believe we should focus on three critical areas: tactical expertise in the operational unit, the role of the NCO in the generating force, and the development of the future scout and armor crewman.

In most of our Armor and Cavalry force, the NCO is responsible for building the team at the operational level and for being the tactical expert at employing his squad or platoon. SFC Gary Littrell was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions while serving as an adviser to the Army of the Re-

public of Vietnam; his citation best exemplifies this role:

Repeatedly abandoning positions of relative safety, he directed artillery and air support by day and marked the unit’s location by night, despite the heavy, concentrated enemy fire. His dauntless will instilled in the men of the 23rd Battalion a deep desire to resist. Assault after assault was repulsed as the battalion responded to the extraordinary leadership and personal example exhibited by SFC Littrell as he continuously moved to those points most seriously threatened by the enemy, redistributed ammunition, strengthened faltering defenses, cared for the wounded and shouted encouragement to the Vietnamese in their own language. When the beleaguered battalion was finally ordered to withdraw, numerous ambushes were encountered. SFC Littrell repeatedly prevented widespread disorder by directing air strikes to within 50 meters of their position. Through his indomitable courage and complete disregard for his safety, he averted excessive loss of life and injury to the members of the battalion.

Without a doubt, our collective ability to be that expert, both personally and in the development of our Soldiers, has expanded with new systems and technological resources previously unavailable now being exploited at the squad level. However, this increased capacity is easily met with greater potential, ability and aptitude of today’s NCOs. Nonetheless, it will require a

greater emphasis on NCOs identifying and teaching individual tasks, determining their collective tasks, and having the CSM and other key NCOs reviewing, refining and certifying those tasks. This chain of events will be the key in retaining 12 years of hard-won experience and its integration with more traditional Armor and Cavalry tasks and missions.

Some of the best Armor NCOs are serving inside the generating force, and that continues to be a goal we will maintain. The upholding of standards in the schoolhouse is a sacred responsibility that will not be forfeited. Leadership development is the Armor School’s main effort, and NCOs play a pivotal role in teaching, coaching, mentoring and training the future of our Armor and Cavalry force at every level. In an era of diminishing resources, we can no longer have an “operational vs. institutional” mindset but must find ways they complement each other. To serve in this capacity, an NCO must be qualified as a squad leader, tank commander or platoon sergeant; 99 percent of the NCOs in the generating force have recent, relevant deployment and combat-related experiences they bring to the classroom to ensure we are integrating real-world capabilities and scenarios into instruction.

Instructors at Fort Benning have made great strides incorporating rotary-wing assets, high-frequency communications, Air Force Joint Terminal Attack

Controllers (JTAC) and unmanned aerial vehicle platforms into day-to-day lesson plans. On a more fundamental level, added rigor in one-station unit training (OSUT) and the NCO Academy (NCOA); increased physical-fitness and land-navigation requirements; weapon- and platform-specific training; and the return of a culminating field-training exercise (FTX) conducted in the field with leaders and Soldiers from all courses (Armor Basic Leadership Course (ABOLC), Officer Candidate School (OCS), NCOA and OSUT) training ensures we are developing the capabilities the force requires. Leaders and Soldiers being evaluated in their respective positions also aids development of these capabilities.

As we seek to define, develop and evaluate future capabilities, the NCO remains at the forefront. NCOs have led their elements or participated as evaluators and observers during Army Expeditionary Warfare Experiments (AEWEs), where they have pioneered the 6x36 scout platoon and precision fires at the squad level, and have worked to formalize the requirement for a company intelligence-support team (CoIST). Also, NCOs are working hard on the development of the “scout of the future,” identifying the skillsets needed for reconnaissance leaders in 2020 and beyond. Legacy tasks like “provide early warning” are being maintained, while “integrate joint capabilities” are added and “integrate

indigenous forces” is evaluated to maintain the premier reconnaissance capability the Army has always enjoyed. These projects, along with NCOs serving in developmental roles where they test and evaluate future vehicle and weapon systems, ensure we are focused on the integration of capabilities from across the spectrum to develop the best mounted warrior.

In summary, the Armor NCO’s skills, training and professional experiences makes him an invaluable tool to our branch and a critical part of our development strategy. His ability to train his formations, coach and mentor, and use experience to evaluate future capabilities will be essential in the Armor force’s future.