

Gunner's Seat

Make Maintenance Noncommissioned Officer Business Again

This Gunner's Seat will cover several areas. First, I'd like to give our thanks to CSM Michael Clemens, who's faithfully served the Armor community for the past couple of years. CSM Clemens has been instrumental in navigating the Armored Force through some challenging times as we continue to downsize the current force and realign ourselves from full-spectrum combat operations to getting back to the basics of Soldiering – with a focus on doctrine while still maintaining the valuable lessons-learned from overseas. CSM Clemens will continue service as the command sergeant major for Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan.

Next, a short introduction of myself. My most recent assignment was as the command sergeant major of 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team out of Fort Stewart, GA. I have served our Army for more than 27 years in every leadership position a 19K tanker can hold – from tank crewman through brigade command sergeant major. I've also gained experience by serving as a senior-enlisted trainer with Operations Group National Training Center (NTC) and as Active Component/Reserve Component division adviser. It is an honor to further serve our cavalry/armor Soldiers. My top priority is aligned with the Army: readiness of our Soldiers, families, equipment and training.

Last, I'd like to address something in my first article that I feel is critically important to mission success for our formations, and that's basic vehicle maintenance. Vehicles are the backbone of an army. Operations and logistics depend largely on the reliability and adequacy of vehicles. I'd like to begin by stating the importance the noncommissioned officer (NCO) has regarding vehicle maintenance. Regardless if you're a tank commander charged with the care of and operation of an M1A2 tank or a supply sergeant operating an Light-Medium Tactical Vehicle, you are an integral part of overall mission success.

Historically, mission success has been directly tied to logistics and maintenance. As an NCO, you are the "technical expert" for the vehicle assigned to you, and it's incumbent on you to fully understand the 10-level preventative-maintenance checks and services (PMCS) required for that vehicle, as well as to ensure your crew are assigned the PMCS checks for their respective part of that vehicle – with you as the NCO supervising and spot-checking them as they conduct their PMCS. Always remember that "Soldiers do what leaders check."

Current operational readiness (OR) rates coming from NTC are 83 percent for Stryker brigade combat teams and 81 percent for armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs). Let's break that down into actual numbers of vehicles readily available for operations. For an ABCT, with an OR rate of 81 percent, you are looking at a company-plus of pacing items unavailable for combat operations at any given time. To me, that is shocking and unacceptable. As NCOs, we have to ask ourselves: are we teaching our drivers, gunners and crewmembers how to properly PMCS their vehicles? Are we supervising those PMCSs? Are we assisting our platoon leaders in tracking the 5988-Es daily, weekly and monthly until deficiencies are properly corrected?

We've always stressed that training Soldiers is NCO business, but I challenge you to make maintenance NCO business again. Let's get our Soldiers into the motorpools and train them on how to maintain their vehicles properly.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

NCO – noncommissioned officer

NTC – National Training Centers

OR – operational readiness

PMCS – preventative-maintenance checks and services