

Continuous Transformation of Armor and Cavalry

On Feb. 27, 2024, the U.S. Army published the Army Structure (ARSTRUC) which will transform our Army from 2025-2029. The effects of this decision will reverberate throughout our Army for the next decade as we transform into a more capable force designed specifically for large-scale combat operations. While standing up additional long-range fires, air defense, and multi-domain units, the U.S. Army made the difficult choice to stand down engineer, military police, and light cavalry units along with many more.

Understandably, some will feel uneasy about these decisions. However, we should all acknowledge the ARSTRUC reflects an analysis of the Army's available resources coupled with a prioritization of requirements to succeed in future combat. The ARSTRUC also reflects the hard decisions every leader must make going forward in a continuing era of constrained resources to ensure we are capable of fighting and winning future wars – to include standing up four mobile protected firepower battalions of M10 Bookers within light units for which the Armor School serves as the proponent. While the loss of 14 light cavalry squadrons among our infantry and Stryker brigades is not ideal, this decision reflects the evolving character of war and a prioritization of the requirements necessary for our Army to respond in crisis and prevail during competition.

To ensure the remaining armor and cavalry formations maintain warfighting capable personnel readiness levels, the Armor School worked with Headquarters Department of the Army G-1, Human Resources Command, U.S. Army Forces Command, and the operational force to ease the burden on commanders and military occupational specialty (MOS) 19D Soldiers during this period of transition. As CSM Waylon D. Petty, Thunderbolt 7, discusses in "From the Gunners Seat," despite the inactivations, the Armor Branch and the Army requires the skills and knowledge in the armor and cavalry force. On March 11, 2024, the Armor School published the decision to forego the 19K MOS transition course requirements for MOS 19D skill level I and II Soldiers. Additionally, the Armor School published the decision to forego the 19C MOS transition course requirements for MOS 19D skill level I, II and III Soldiers. This action serves as a temporary easement of requirements to allow MOS 19Ds within inactivating cavalry squadrons to quickly transition to other CMF 19 MOSs should they desire. Upon arrival at their new armored brigade combat team (ABCT), transitioning MOS 19Ds will encounter the same risk mitigations already in place among operational units. These Soldiers will be under the supervision of an experienced non-commissioned officer. They will progress in this learning environment until they successfully complete an entire gunnery progression and obtain a valid operator's license in accordance with current Army regulation. At the same time, the Armor School has established the 19C and 19K MOS transition classes for other MOSs to provide them a method for quickly transitioning into CMF 19 should they desire to reclassify. Combined, these actions will enable operational commanders the ability to quickly restructure formations while moving MOS 19D Soldiers from inactivating formations into new positions. It will also prioritize spaces at the Armor School for non-CMF 19 Soldiers at the schoolhouse as they pursue reclassification as MOS 19C or 19K.

To the leaders and Soldiers of the Armor force of today, this ARSTRUC marks another in a consistent note in the melody of changes underpinning the character of war. Standoff and the ability to engage at extended ranges is becoming increasingly important on the battlefield. Current conflicts show that attacking first with lightly armored, unprotected formations and inducing high casualty rates in an environment where artillery evokes payment in blood isn't a viable option for an expeditionary Army. Finding the enemy on current and future battlefields occurs at greater distances than previously through more technical means rather than by means willing to sacrifice blood for first contact. Seeing first in this environment implies being able to persistently see well over the horizon. If conditions merit, and we are forced into an offensive movement to contact, then those forces must be well protected and capable of absorbing any punch the enemy can throw. We simply can't plan on meandering across a 25-30 kilometer killing field with unprotected Soldiers while hoping for the best. Places like Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine and Gaza have consistently reminded us of these facts. These hard lessons, currently being paid by others, give us much to seriously consider about how we will really fight these future fights with America's sons and daughters.

The ARSTRUC also directed the end of the Armored Division Cavalry Squadron pilot and the return of the 1st Cavalry Division to the standard ABCT structure. Since Army forces will always need to conduct reconnaissance, surveillance, and security operations during all phases of multidomain operations, we are working with partners

across the Army enterprise to address the continued need for specialized, organic reconnaissance, security, and surveillance capability within our formations to gain decisional advantage at echelon. We are on track to start experimentation of the initial concept this spring through the Maneuver Battle Lab. Critical to the success of this effort is the integration of partners across Army Futures Command and other Centers of Excellence to ensure we remain nested with and contributing to the Army's Future Warfighting Concept. All weather reconnaissance, security, and surveillance are operations all close combat formations must successfully undertake, and at the Armor School we have a vested interest in leading a combined effort to develop an integrated way ahead for our formations.

As we move forward, the Army leadership recently established their transformation in contact initiative designed to allow the U.S. Army to transform and integrate new capabilities more rapidly. Placing small Unmanned Aircraft Systems down at lower levels, incorporating robotic capabilities, and enabling lower echelons with longer range fires capabilities constitute just a few of the experimentation initiatives our Army will see moving forward. At Armor branch, we will posture the armor formations of today to be prepared to experiment with, accept, and integrate these new capabilities into our formations as they mature. The ARSTRUC only constituted the first step in this critical movement forward into the future. Incorporating future combat vehicles into the force will likely be more technologically complicated and allow for fewer Soldiers as crew members resulting in an increased in cognitive load. The Soldiers of today will be the leaders of tomorrow who rise to this challenge. Along the way, we must maintain the platform expertise that will allow our formations to win today, tomorrow, or at any point in the future.

For the foreseeable future, the U.S. Armor Force retains an unchanged number of ABCTs. These ABCTs will continue to bring with them an unparalleled capability close with and destroy our nation's enemies on whatever ground they decided to stand upon in future fights. Maintaining that capability, today and well into the future, constitutes the sole reason Armor exists. We are the mounted combat arm of decision. We are the greatest and most visible expression of American resolve. When America's armor forces deploy to a fight, enemy armies don't just react – those armies fall in battle. And the whole world knows it. Losing has never been an option for the U.S. Army armor force, and it never will be. In our world today, and well into the future, there is no prize for second place.

Forge the Thunderbolt!

BG Michael J. Simmering
Chief of Armor/Commandant
U.S. Army Armor School

Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

ARSTRUC – Army Structure

MOS – military operational specialty