

Develop Future Master Gunners

The master gunner (MG) is the subject matter expert for all weapon system platforms in armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs). MGs advise commanders at all echelons and are a crucial part in the operations process on combat and gunnery related training. For armor specifically, there are two master gunner courses — Abrams Master Gunner (AMG) and Bradley Master Gunner (BMG). Both courses are very demanding and require candidates to pass multiple technical tests to earn the coveted MG badge.

The term “master” is in the title for a reason because, quite frankly, we need subject matter experts within our formations. Therefore, the challenge is to train, in most cases, a junior NCO to achieve the level of mastery within their craft. The AMG/BMG cadre are up to this challenge and do produce MGs, but we do not produce enough of them. Therefore, identifying, training, and selecting candidates to attend the AMG/BMG Course must be a top priority for divisions with ABCTs. There needs to be an understanding between the U.S. Army Armor School and the operational force to identify the need and produce more MGs to increase lethality and be better warfighters.

Career Management Field 19 Soldiers will primarily train/operate within ABCTs where platforms are the most technical and casualty-producing pieces of equipment in the formation; therefore, MGs are needed more than ever. For our armored crewmembers (Abrams and Bradley crews), I would argue the training focus needs to be more on the technical aspect, where MGs are empowered to provide that level of training. There has always been a need for military occupational specialty (MOS) 19K (Armor Crewman) Abrams MGs, but with the implementation of MOS 19C (Bradley Crewmember) that goes live on Oct. 1, 2024, we need to ensure they have priority to attend the BMG Course to instill a culture of mastery within that MOS.

There are quite a few changes within Master Gunner Course that will help produce more MGs for the Abrams and Bradley platforms. Master Gunner Common Core will close in October 2024 when we go to pure AMG/BMG standalone courses. AMG/BMG Course prerequisites will be reestablished and enforced. With the implementation of MOS 19C, the Armor School will work with other proponents to ensure unit authorizations are adjusted appropriately (especially for Bradley Master Gunner). Finally, the Armor School will propose a standing operating procedure (SOP) for identifying, training and selecting candidates to attend the AMG/BMG Course. This SOP will require III Corps, divisions with ABCTs, and the Armor School to work together to ensure future MGs are identified early and trained to standard at unit level, and the best Soldiers selected to attend the AMG/BMG Course.

MGs at echelon will need to be empowered by their commanders with MG unit training being prioritized and protected. The SOP will go into detail on how this will be accomplished, but essentially, company/troop MGs will identify talent, division MGs will run a pre-MG course twice a year (commonly referred to as SABOT Academy), and III Corps will manage the AMG/BMG slots through a consolidated order of merit list. The details are currently being determined to include the division-run SABOT Academy instruction. In the near term, we need to identify and train quality candidates to attend the AMG/BMG Course. In the long term, we need to create a culture where every Abrams and Bradley Gunner is inspired to be a MG by selecting the best gunners to attend SABOT Academies.

Master Gunners are crucial for our armored crewmembers’ training progression to increase lethality, now more than ever. With the AMG/BMG Course realignment and the need to fill authorized MG positions, we need to develop future MGs by identifying potential candidates, providing them quality training at the unit, and selecting the best candidates to attend the course. The goal is to build a funnel of candidates early in their careers so that by the time they are tank and Bradley commanders, they have the experience and possess the prerequisites to attend the AMB/BMG Course and earn the MG badge.

Forge the Thunderbolt!

CSM Waylon D. Petty
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Armor School

Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

AMG – Abrams Master Gunner

BMG – Bradley Master Gunner

MG – master gunner

MOS – military occupational specialty

SOP – standing operating procedure