

The Expert Armor Badge: How It Might Work

by Captain Rick Johnson and Sergeant First Class Michael Carew

Authors Note: At this point in planning, any description of the proposed Expert Armor Badge should be considered tentative. The purpose of this article, in conjunction with the Expert Armor Badge website listed at the end of the article, is to inform the Armor community, and gain feedback, on the Expert Armor Badge initiative. In writing this article, every attempt has been made to preclude reference to specific tasks or task numbers, as the proposed task list is subject to change. However, a tentative sequence of events is included for explanatory purposes.

The Expert Armor Badge: Past to Present

The history of the Expert Armor Badge, or EAB, is long and varied; an Armor badge in one form or another was worn during periods of conflict, to include World War II and the Korean War. These badges were unofficially “awarded” to soldiers in the Armor and Cavalry force but never officially approved and thus eventually faded away. Since the establishment of the Expert Infantryman’s Badge (EIB) in the years following World War II, the Armor Center at Fort Knox has several times sought the Army’s approval for a similar Armor and Cavalry version of an MOS-specific, individual competency award or skills badge. The EAB proposal was last taken forward shortly after Operation Desert Storm in 1991; it was approved and sent to Department of the Army (DA) level by the Commanding General of the U.S. Army’s Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). This request for approval stated:

“The ability of armored soldiers to effectively apply speed, mobility, and firepower in close combat, reconnaissance, security, and economy of force operations demands a high level expertise. The unique skills of the tanker and cavalry scout are essential to the effective prosecution of armored combat on the modern battlefield. It is in the best interests of the Army to promote such skills and encourage excellence.”

The request for approval went on to state:

“The establishment of this badge will give proper recognition to Armor sol-

diers and will enhance unit esprit and morale. This award will strengthen incentives while encouraging high professional standards already associated with the armor and armored cavalry scouts.”

However, the 1991 EAB proposal was disapproved at DA level on 13 April 1992, in a memorandum stating:

“While it is true that special skill badges are awarded to denote qualifications and successful completion of prescribed training courses, it is neither desirable nor feasible to recognize every such skill with a badge.”

Presently, many within the Armor community see a need for an EAB program, to raise the “Pillar of Competence” within the Armor and Cavalry force, build unit *esprit de corps* and branch pride, and fill the void left by the demise of the Skills Qualification Tests (SQT) in the mid-1990s. With that in mind, the Office of the Chief of Armor (OCA), part of the Armor Center at Fort Knox, is currently developing a mentally and physically challenging series of skills tests that will tax even the best scout or tanker and, most importantly, train all who compete. It is important to note that the intent of this program is not solely to offer yet another “shiny badge” for soldiers to wear on their uniforms. Rather, it should be seen as an excellent opportunity for commanders to train their soldiers on relevant combat-oriented skills according to uncompromising standards. All would be trained, but only the best would be awarded the EAB. This test, although modeled after the Infantry’s EIB and the Medical Corps’ Expert Field Medical Badge (EFMB), would be Armor-centric with

the goal of providing our units with a superb training event.

Test Overview

Much like the EIB, the crux of the Expert Armor Badge program would center on an individual competency, task-based testing event. However, unlike the EIB, each candidate would have to complete a crew-based qualification before being allowed to proceed to the individual phase of the EAB. A crew event, used as a prerequisite, would emphasize the “crew over individual” concept so important in Armor and Cavalry operations. As this is a program for tankers and scouts, it would not be complete without the inclusion of an event crucial to Armor and Cavalry units everywhere: crew-level gunnery. Prior to completing the individual skills test, a prospective EAB candidate would have to qualify as a member of a crew on an approved Table VIII tank, CFV, or HMMWV. Active duty soldiers would have to complete this requirement up to one year prior to individual EAB testing; Reserve Component soldiers would have up to two years. With this prerequisite complete, a candidate would then be eligible to compete for the EAB in the individual skills competency test.

While the EIB program uses skill level 1 tasks exclusively, the average skill level for EAB tasks would be a bit higher due to the technical nature of the Armor and Cavalry branch. Selection for the proposed task list was unlimited – selected tasks come from skill levels 1-4. As a result, the EAB will be tough but not impossible to attain, although junior soldiers and officers just out of basic training would most likely have to work harder to earn it.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
APFT	Mounted Land Navigation (Night)	Station Testing	20km Orienteering Course
Individual Weapons Qualification	Station Testing	Retest	Awards Ceremony
Mounted Land Navigation (Night)			

Figure 1. EAB Test Overview

Like the EIB, the EAB test would be administered concurrently over the course of several days (or, for the National Guard, over several drill periods). With current plans in place, the EAB would be scheduled for four days, as in Figure 1.

Day 1: Begins with the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) administered per *FM 21-20*. EAB candidates must score 270 or higher in their respective age group. This is followed by Individual Weapons Qualification; EAB standard for progression in this event is Expert, fired with assigned individual weapons (M9 for tankers, M16A2 for scouts, in most cases).

Upon successful completion of these events, candidates proceed to a mounted land navigation course conducted during hours of darkness. To reduce resource requirements for the testing unit, candidates navigate the course mounted on HMMWVs, regardless of the vehicle the unit is equipped with. To further maximize time and resources, each HMMWV mounts four soldiers: three EAB candidates and one evaluator. While the evaluator drives, candidates take turns as vehicle commander, and each has three hours to find three points (one of which is located by GPS). This event should occupy the night of Day 1 and early morning of Day 2.

Days 2 and 3: Constitute the “heart and soul” of the EAB test, challenging the candidate’s physical ability and technical prowess. Like the EIB, candidates must complete a series of stations, testing individual competency in a variety of tasks. However, where EIB focuses solely on common task testing, EAB emphasizes tasks that are (in most cases) specific to the Armor and Cavalry force. Current plans split this portion of the test into six stations: First Aid, LP/OP, Mines, Gunnery Skills Test (GST), MOS-Specific Station, and Tactical Operations. To ease command and control requirements and resolution of appeals, stations collocate in the same general vicinity under a central command post, and candidates move in “round-robin” fashion from station to station throughout the day. Tasks at each station roughly relate to one another and follow a general scenario; for example, the LP/OP station tests candidates on tasks associated with the establishment and occupation of an observation post – communications, sur-

veillance, vehicle ID, and sending reports to higher headquarters.

To further differentiate this as an Armor/Cavalry-focused test, three of the stations employ tasks specific to Career Management Field (CMF) 19. In the GST station, soldiers test gunnery skills tasks specific to their vehicle – tank, Bradley, or HMMWV. In the Tactical Operations station, candidates face a tactical situation and must act and react following appropriate Armor or Cavalry doctrine. Finally, in the MOS-Specific Station, scouts and tankers test tasks specific to their MOS; 19Ks test target acquisition and conduct of fire, and 19Ds test route reconnaissance.

Like the EIB, candidates may retest stations they have failed. EIB standards for retesting are used: “A candidate may retest two times, but cannot retest twice at the same station. A candidate who fails a retest or fails at three points is not qualified...” (from *USAIC Pam 350-6*).

Day 4: Concludes the EAB competition with a capstone event — the 20km orienteering course. Whereas EIB finishes with a straight 20km foot march, EAB candidates are challenged to navigate from point to point within a prescribed time period. This event focuses on orienteering, vice the more traditional method of dead reckoning land navigation, as it is more applicable to Armor and Cavalry operations. However, this course is completed dismounted. Upon completion, successful candidates gather in unit formations and are immediately awarded the EAB.

The Way Ahead

OCOA is presently working with several agencies within the Armor Center to ensure that the final task list mandates a high level of expertise and physical ability for the scouts and tankers competing for the EAB. Once the proposal is staffed and approved at the Armor Center, it will be sent out to commanders in the field for their feedback and ideas on improving the program. We also plan to validate this test in the field at Fort Knox with a selected unit doing a “Spur

Ride”-type test using EAB tasks. With the data collected during the field staffing and the validation exercise, the EAB program will be ready for submission and request for approval at TRADOC and DA level.

CPT Rick Johnson was commissioned in Armor from the University of Pittsburgh in 1995. He served as a tank platoon leader with C Co, 2-72 AR, and scout and support platoon leader with 1st Sqdn, 2d ACR. He is currently a project officer with the Office of the Chief of Armor at Fort Knox, Ky.

SFC Michael Carew enlisted in the Army in 1982 as a 19D cavalry scout. His assignments include 6th Air Cav Bde, Fort Hood, Texas; 1/2d ACR, Bindlach, Germany; A Trp, 15th Cav, 197th IN Bde, Fort Benning, Ga.; 5/9th Cav, 25th ID (L), Schofield Barracks, Hawaii; 2-7th Inf, 24th ID, Fort Stewart, Ga.; Chicago Recruiting Battalion; and scout platoon sergeant, 15th Cav, Fort Knox, Ky. He is currently the 19D career management NCO with the Office of the Chief of Armor at Fort Knox, Ky.

How Would You Like to Design The Expert Armor Badge?

The Office of the Chief of Armor is asking that any comments, or concerns, or alternate badge designs be sent to the EAB Project Officers below:

CPT Rick Johnson
DSN 464-7064
Commercial: (502) 624-7064
Email: Richard.Johnson@knox.army.mil

SFC Michael Carew
DSN 464-1368
Commercial: (502) 624-1368
Email: Michael.Carew@knox.army.mil

Fax: (502) 624-7585

WE NEED YOUR INPUT ON THE TASK LIST

What tasks do you feel are important? Weak areas for you and your unit? Take a moment and fill out the task survey on the EAB web site at:

<http://knox-www.army.mil/center/ocoa/eab/>