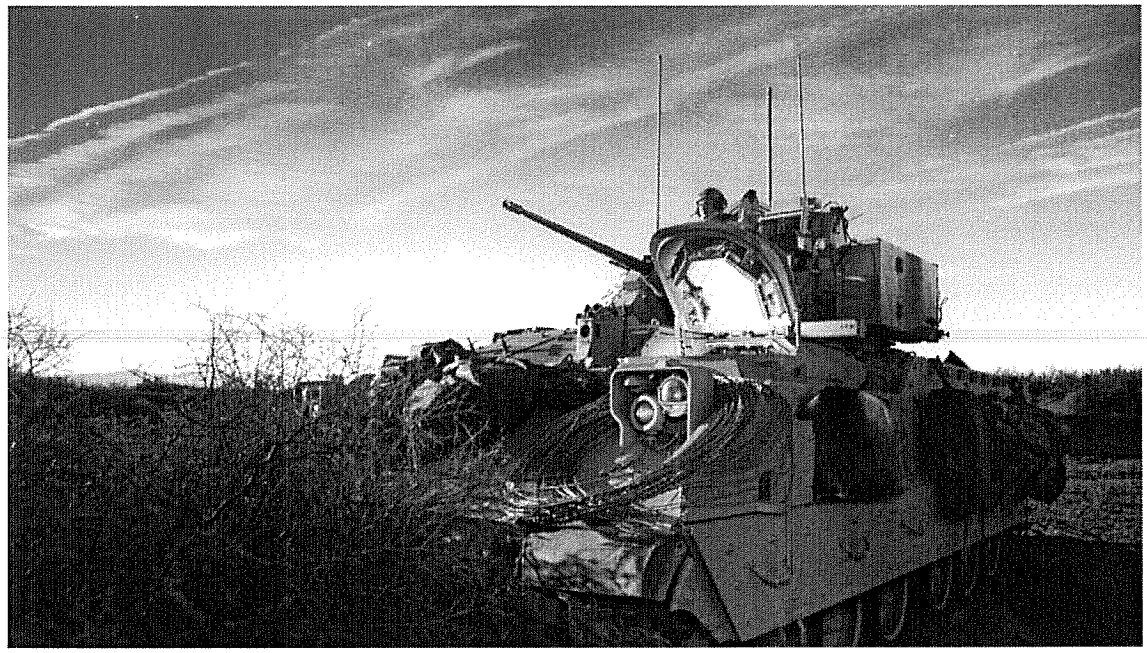


**What is the Next-Gen Combat Vehicle?**

By: Jen Judson, November 3, 2016 (Photo Credit: Sgt. Steven Hitchcock / US Army 55th Combat Camera)

WASHINGTON -- What is the next-generation combat vehicle? It's not the Future Fighting Vehicle mentioned in the Army's combat vehicle modernization strategy, according to the director of mounted requirements division at the US Army Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning.

"That is not to say NGCV might be an infantry fighting vehicle," Col. William Nuckols said Tuesday at an Association of the US Army "Hot Topic" event on combat vehicles in Arlington, Virginia. "But it could also be a single combat vehicle that replaces the Abrams, the Bradley, potentially even the [Mobile Protected Firepower] MPF solution or potentially even a Stryker. We don't know yet, it could be a family of vehicles very similar to the original [Future Combat Systems] FCS program."

Nuckols laid out a conceptual, recently-developed roadmap to show where potential decision-making points could exist to bring a next-generation combat vehicle to life with an initial fielding goal of 2035. The timeline is based on the eventual retirement of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle and the Abrams tank -- which are, according to Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, the Army Capabilities Integration Center director, going to remain in the inventory for 50 to 70 years.

Nuckols was quick to note that the roadmap is in no way "set in stone" and the Army has no plans to repeat the mistakes it made in the FCS program -- meant to bring online a new generation of ground-warfare equipment that ended up being one of the biggest failures in recent Army procurement history, wasting roughly $18 billion.

"We are trying diligently to pay attention to FCS and the lessons learned from that, which is why we are going to have a series of decision points made in there," he said. One of the major criticisms of the FCS program is that it lacked mechanisms to periodically re-evaluate key assumptions. "We will make conscious decisions about what NGCV will or will not be and what capabilities and technologies it will have based on our assessments of technology and where it is," Nuckols said.

And based on getting a first unit equipped with this next-generation vehicle by 2035, Nuckols noted, work has to start now. "What it means is the majority of the hard work that I and my team have to do is going to have be done before 2025 because it's going to take 10 years for industry to actually build and field."

Nuckols apologized to an audience that might be hoping to get a better sense of what the combat vehicle would look like or be, adding, "we simply don't know yet," because he envisions another four years of analysis that has to occur before ideas on a way forward really take shape.

The Army is also closing in on finalizing its movement and maneuver functional concept for the brigade and below that will enable brigade combat teams to fight "semi-independently."

The service -- when conceptualizing the NGCV -- will look through the prism of that concept, Nuckols said, which is expected to be finished "shortly" and will also base decisions on the Army's best projection of enemy capabilities in 2035.

Once the Army understands the capabilities it will require for NGCV, it will be able to better direct efforts in the science and technology community, he said.

The Army estimates it will begin seeking industry input for NGCV in 2021, according to Nuckols.

Also yet to be decided is when the Army stops improving its current capital assets -- mainly keeping Bradley and Abrams humming -- and puts all of its effort into fielding the next-generation vehicle or family of vehicles, Nuckols said. "We simply don't know what is going to occur yet."

Then there is the question of how the Army will pay for the endeavor.

McMaster lamented at the AUSA event on Tuesday that this is the first time since World War I where the Army hasn't had a new combat vehicle under development.

"Can you imagine if you walked into the Navy and said, 'You guys working on any new ships?' 'No, we are okay with what we have.' Or the Air Force: 'Any new planes in mind?' 'No, no, we are good, we are happy with what we have,'" McMaster said.

Vehicles are an inexpensive capability compared to the other services' big ticket procurements and, "if you think about where our enemy has been challenging us on land, where the fight is fairest, where we've been taking casualties, obviously in close combat, and compare that reality to the level of investment between the land systems and maritime and aerospace systems," McMaster said, the Army is "gravely under-invested in close combat, gravely under-invested in land systems broadly, and gravely under-invested in combat vehicles in particular."

In terms of funding for the future effort, "there isn't any to speak of," Maj. Gen. Eric Wesley said at AUSA, but he added, "The greatest progress, or rather change, since we refined our campaign plan is frankly on NGCV. It is the most changed in the last several months."

Wesley described the change as "redefining what NGCV is. It was FFV, something that would follow the Bradley, and we pulled away from that" in order to avoid repeating history and "stretch people's

thinking to move beyond just a fighting vehicle: What is the next-gen means of conveyance to maneuver with?"

Where FFV has lines in the Long-Range Investment Requirements Analysis (LIRA), Wesley said, "we want to evolve that to the next-generation combat vehicle determined by potential trades and decisions on [Engineering Change Proposals] ECPs that we have scheduled for the Bradleys and tanks."

The Army would "ultimately, probably, trade away ECPs at some point either in volume or in function in order to increasingly put S&T in a focused manner towards mature technology," for the next-generation program, he added.