



Maj. Gen. Winston Brooks, commanding general of the Fires Center of Excellence and Fort Sill, Oklahoma, speaks Tuesday at an AUSA Hot Topic focused on future fires. (AUSA PHOTO)

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Fires transformation makes ‘great strides’

Arrmy fires must develop and converge effects to support large-scale combat operations on a battlefield where the enemy can see everything, a senior leader said.

Maj. Gen. Winston Brooks, commanding general of the Fires Center of Excellence and Fort Sill, Oklahoma, said that while air defense and field artillery are and should remain separate and distinct branches, efficiencies can be gained with sensors, shooters and battle command systems.

“We must continue to modernize the fires warfighting function by integrating all forms of fires from air defense, field artillery, aviation and our non-lethal fires within the air defense and field artillery branches,”

Brooks said Tuesday at a Hot Topic on the future of fires hosted by the Association of the U.S. Army.

“We must seek opportunities to converge on commonality and make fires more efficient and effective to support our maneuver forces, we must fight better with fires and make every projectile, rocket and missile count,” he said.

There are three elements of integrating fires, Brooks said. They are “sensor networks, data convergence of command and control or fire control systems and common launcher platforms,” he said, adding that the fires enterprise is looking into development of “a common tactical fires radar that can execute counter-fire, target acquisition and air surveil-

lance for our light divisions.”

These capabilities, he said, will enable joint forcible entry operations and provide early warning in the future. Brooks cautioned that these capabilities do not automatically create transparency on the battlefield. “We must create transparency through leveraging these assets, our processes and the accurate use of the sensors that we have available,” he said.

Progress has been made in modernizing Army fires, Brooks said, noting that the service has “made great strides in activating field artillery headquarters at the theater and corps levels.”

Since 2020, the fires enterprise has modernized for large-scale combat

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Army must leverage data, technology for fires overmatch

While the Army has been trying to see farther at least since the Civil War, it is now working to leverage data and unmanned systems to push even deeper into the battlefield, a panel of experts said Tuesday.

“We’ve been here before. What’s different is the scale and speed,” Brig. Gen. Rory Crooks, director of Army Futures Command’s Long-Range Precision Fires Cross-Functional Team, said during a panel discussion that was part of an Association of the U.S. Army Hot Topic on fires.

During the Civil War, the Army tried to use balloons to see farther, Crooks said. Since the turn of the 20th century, it has looked to aviation to achieve that goal. “We were trying to adapt new technology to try to see farther,” Crooks said. “We’ve had satellite imagery, U-2 flights, Predators. What we’re doing now is trying to leverage these in ways so we can access their data better.”

The panel discussion, titled “Maneuver to Destroy with Fires: Extending Range and Survivability,” highlighted the importance of massing and positioning fires on the battlefield.

“We’ve grown comfortable ... saying any sensor, best shooter,” Crooks said. “Once we get access to the data, that’s going to take us from any sensor to all sensors. When we can take and ingest all the data ... that allows us to see farther across the electromagnetic spectrum as we ever had before.”

But, Crooks warned, America’s adversaries also have the same capability. “What that means is that we’re always potentially in contact, in ways we may not recognize,” he said. “If we’re always potentially in contact, everything we do must be more deliberately thought out.”

Gen. James Rainey, commanding general of Army Futures Command, often says that the land component matters—and positioning matters,



Brig. Gen. Rory Crooks, director of Army Futures Command’s Long-Range Precision Fires Cross-Functional Team, addresses an AUSA Hot Topic forum Tuesday. (AUSA PHOTO)

Crooks said. “What we do to position our fires into a position of relative advantage absolutely matters, and why you maneuver to these positions of relative advantage is so we can engage at the maximum possible way,” he said.

Whichever side does that successfully first “allows that commander to shape and gain the initiative and retain the initiative,” Crooks said.

Observing lessons from the fighting in Ukraine, there has been “huge attrition on the battlefield in Europe,” said James Miller, vice president of business development for BAE Systems, who was on the panel with Crooks and retired Lt. Gen. Richard Formica, vice president of CALIBRE Systems.

As industry works with the Army on what it needs, maneuverability and survivability are key, Miller said. In addition to preventing the enemy from “finding you” on the battlefield, survivability is something industry must consider and “how that transforms into requirements for industry to deliver to the Army,” he said.

“We have a real good relationship between industry and the field artillery community and the Army, ... to study things together and exchange ideas pretty frequently,” Miller said. “We’ve got to continue that and make sure the investments are going to the right place.”

As the Army prepares for the future battlefield, “we know we have to emplace, we have to fight, we have to displace and we have to resupply much more quickly than we did before,” Crooks said.



Forward observers with the 166th Regiment-Regional Training Institute’s 1st Battalion use small unmanned aircraft systems to acquire targeting data and call for artillery fire Nov. 15 at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. (ARMY NATIONAL GUARD/SGT. 1ST CLASS SHANE SMITH)

Paper: Modernizing Army must not sacrifice close combat capabilities



Sgt. Noah Morse of the 3rd Infantry Division shoots an M500 shotgun during a stress shoot competition Nov. 20 at Fort Stewart, Georgia. (U.S. ARMY/SPC. BENJAMIN HALE)

The Army would do well to double down on its close combat forces despite its cancellation of several modernization programs and its reduction in force structure, according to a new paper published by the Association of the U.S. Army.

“Army modernization, according to an array of reporting, had a rough 2024,” retired Lt. Col. Amos Fox writes in his paper. “Constriction is the exact wrong thing that the Army should be doing, considering the wide array of threats, theaters and challenges that the U.S. military must address, or might have to address, in relative short order.”

In “An Army Modernization Update,” Fox, a professor of practice in Arizona State University’s School of Politics and Global Studies and a lecturer in the University of Houston’s department of politics, writes that the Army must maintain its identity as a land warfare-centric force.

The service’s force structure modernization efforts prioritize long-range fires, drones and battlefield surveillance over close combat capabilities, Fox writes.

“The Army has sacrificed forward-positioned close combat (and

combat-enabling) capability for a rear-focused, defensive, fires-centric strategy,” he writes.

Despite the growing use of modern capabilities by U.S. adversaries, the Army’s most important defense is still its ability to maintain control of land, he writes.

“Armies exist to fight other military forces (state and nonstate) for control of territory. Control requires land forces on the ground that can not only go toe-to-toe in direct close combat with a hostile force, but that, in doing so, can seal tactical and operational victories,” Fox writes.

This year “has been a challenging” one “for Army modernization,” he writes.

“A land force can only be stretched in so many directions before it runs out of blood and money,” Fox writes. “Thus, if the Army is to accomplish its own mission, plus serve as the joint force’s key enabling service, it must not reduce its close combat forces, but rather must see them increased. The control of territory exists in an adversarial context; thus, the Army must have bigger—not smaller—close combat forces.”

Read the paper here.

AUSAExtra

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Tricare's window for health care changes ends Dec. 10

Until Dec. 10, military retirees and eligible beneficiaries who use Tricare can enroll in or make changes to their health care coverage.

Beneficiaries who use Tricare Prime, Tricare Select or the U.S. Family Health Plan can stay on their plan, enroll in a plan or change plans. Changes go into effect Jan. 1.

For beneficiaries living in the United States, Tricare announced the move of six states from the East Region to the West Region. The states moving to the West Region are Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas and Wisconsin.

As of Jan. 1, TriWest Healthcare Alliance will replace Health Net Federal Services as the West Region contractor, while Humana Military will continue as the contractor for the East Region.

All beneficiaries must confirm their information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS. Those in the West Region, including those whose states are moving, can check if their providers are in the TriWest network by visiting tricare.mil/west.

Those who pay enrollment or premium payments by credit card or bank transfer will need to transfer payment information to the TriWest self-service patient portal by Dec. 31.

Outside of Tricare open season, beneficiaries can enroll or change their enrollment following certain life events, including marriage, the birth of a child or retirement from active duty.

Open season does not apply to active-duty service members or Tricare for Life, as coverage is automatic for eligible beneficiaries.

Premium-based plans, including Tricare Reserve Select, Retired Reserve and Young Adult, also are not impacted by open season. Eligible beneficiaries can buy these plans at any time throughout the year, according to Tricare.

Additionally, eligible military beneficiaries have until Dec. 9 to enroll in or make changes to their vision and/or dental coverage through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program. Known as FEDVIP, the program, managed by the Office of Personnel Management, offers a range of plans at varying costs, and beneficiaries must act to enroll in a dental or vision plan.

For more information on Tricare and FEDVIP open seasons, click [here](#).

For information on health plan costs for 2025, click [here](#).



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Outcome unclear for critical defense authorization act

Back in session after the election, Congress has much work to do before the end of the year.

Of particular interest, the Association of the U.S. Army's Government Affairs team remains hopeful that the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act will become law before the new year, as it has seen significantly more progress than the appropriations bills. Work on the bill continued during the recess, but the exact timing of the legislation remains fluid.

Government Affairs

AUSA recently sent a letter to key leaders on Capitol Hill, advocating for swift passage of this critical legislation as well as authorization of additional funding for the Total Army, among other provisions.

"As you know, the Army is indispensable to national security ... we urge you to swiftly pass the NDAA and authorize additional resources that reflect the demonstrated need and urgency that our national security challenges require," retired Gen. Bob Brown, AUSA president and CEO, writes in the letter.

You can read the letter [here](#).

It is clear that lawmakers will not be able to pass the 12 appropriations bills before the current continuing

resolution expires on Dec. 20. Although the House speaker has said he wants another short-term resolution so Congress can complete the appropriations, there is potential for a full year stopgap funding measure.

This would be unfortunate for the Army, and AUSA is on record for Congress to complete the appropriations as soon as possible. Nonetheless, little visible progress has been made.

You can help build momentum for quick passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, all 12 appro-

priations bills and additional funding for the Total Army by contacting your representatives and senators or meeting with them. If you meet with lawmakers or their staff as a constituent, veteran and AUSA member, advocate for AUSA's Focus Areas and passage of the bills mentioned above.

We will continue to monitor these and other developments closely as we advocate for the Total Army with Congress.

Mark Haaland is AUSA's Government Affairs director.



Congressional staff members speak with garrison leaders at Fort Carson, Colorado, about new housing projects on the installation. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. WOODLYNE ESCARNE)

Brooks

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operations, which requires command and control at echelon, massing capabilities and the ability to integrate air defense capabilities, he said.

Highlighting some examples, Brooks noted that the service stood up the 56th Artillery Command in Europe, as well as a theater fires element in the Pacific. An operational fires command pilot program is underway with V Corps that will comprise soldiers from the Army National Guard.

"The composite fires formations at echelon will employ advanced technologies to deliver lethal fires integrated with non-lethal effects through common sensing, command and control targeting and delivery capabilities," Brooks said. "This increases our ability to provide mass and lethality to support large-scale combat operations in both [the Regular Army and Army National Guard]."

Brooks also noted that the lack of short-range air defense, which left maneuver formations and critical nodes unprotected against enemy

planes, helicopters, unmanned systems and rocket artillery and mortar systems, is being addressed with the fielding of divisional air defense battalions, indirect fire protection capability battalions, counter-small unmanned aircraft systems batteries and division counter-small unmanned aircraft system sets "to defend our high priority organizations in large-scale combat operations."

"These organizational changes are all being done simultaneously as the Army undergoes continuous transformation," Brooks said.

Discounts on senior living, holiday gifts with membership

Several years ago, a friend of mine moved to a retirement community and always spoke highly of the benefits.

I was surprised at the move because I didn't think of him as "old"—he is athletic, volunteers for many veterans' organizations, dates regularly and is always on the go. He wasn't in need of any assistance, medically or otherwise.

When I visited him, I felt like I was at an all-inclusive luxury hotel. He had a beautiful apartment, and there

Member Benefits

was a variety of recreational options—swimming pool, tennis court,

billiards, ping pong, poker and more.

There were lots of fun, active people enjoying themselves, now free from yard work and the daily chores of running a household.

My friend had a car, but transportation was provided to the golf course, appointments and shopping excursions, as well as group outings to museums, concerts and other activities. I couldn't help but think, "We should all live like this."

So, after getting used to the fact that 55 is considered a "senior" in the industry, I started to see senior living differently and spoke with Brookdale Senior Living about a member discount for Association of the U.S. Army members.

Many seniors don't consider senior living until they have increased medical needs. Others make the transition to make the most of their retirement years and find new friends in the same season of life.

There are more than 10,000 veterans and spouses enjoying Brookdale life. I enjoyed hearing some of their stories and hearing from Army veteran Richard Gambino. When his daughter suggested Brookdale, he said, "No way, I'm not doing it." But he later found that he loved it and doesn't plan to leave.

This benefit is not just for AUSA



AUSA members have access to exclusive discounts on independent living, assisted living, memory care and in-home services with Brookdale Senior Living. (COURTESY PHOTO)

members over age 55, but for members of all ages who may have noticed that their parents or other loved ones need some assistance.

Brookdale is the largest operator of senior housing in the U.S., and AUSA members enjoy exclusive discounts on independent living, assisted living, memory care and in-home services.

The discount can be used for yourself, your spouse, your parents, stepparents, siblings, in-laws, adult children and stepchildren, grandparents—any qualifying family member. As you can imagine, those savings will be substantial over time.

To learn more, use the code "Go Army!" at www.brookdale.com/ausa or call 1-888-303-8601 and mention the code. Services and availability vary by location, and certain restrictions apply.

Holiday gifts

If you are seeking an incredible value for an unforgettable holiday gift, all AUSA members—even those who have not served in the military—are eligible for Armed Forces Vacation Club, where you can enjoy weeklong

resort stays for just \$419 per week.

For more information and to join, visit <https://www.afvclub.com/ausa>. Select "AUSA Member" as your membership eligibility, even if you're a veteran, and search "R&R Vacations" for the \$419 offers.

Now through Dec. 22, you can book those resorts for just \$309 per week or purchase a Resort Vacation Certificate for just \$309 to provide this wonderful benefit as a gift.

AUSA members also save on *Army Times*, *Navy Times*, *Air Force Times*, *Marine Corps Times* and *Defense News* at <https://offers.armytimes.com/ausa-offer/>. Save 60% on *Stars and Stripes* with code AUSA60 by visiting <https://ww2.stripes.com/ausa>.

If you want to share the value of AUSA membership, you can gift a two-year premium membership to a friend or relative.

Your recipient will have access to scholarships, a legal document service paid for by the association, discounts on meetings and events and many more savings and benefits.

Susan Rubel is AUSA's Association and Affinity Partnerships director.

Chapter hosts AUSA president, honors exceptional soldiers

In November, the Association of the U.S. Army's Central Virginia chapter hosted retired Gen. Bob Brown, AUSA president and CEO, for a daylong visit to meet with one of the chapter's Community Partners, speak with soldiers and cadets and recognize outstanding service members.

The day began with a guided tour of Tech for Troops, a veteran service organization and AUSA Community Partner that provides homeless, unemployed and disabled veterans and their families with computer technology and IT workforce training.

"The lunch and tour of T4T was enlightening and demonstrated how

Central Virginia

one company's commitment to empowering veterans through technology, education and training is shaping a brighter future for veterans and their families," said Pete Svoboda, the chapter secretary.

Brown then visited with Virginia Army National Guard soldiers in Richmond, followed by a meeting with ROTC cadets at the University of Richmond. His remarks focused on enduring principles for successful leaders.

The most engaging discussions took place during questions from the officers, NCOs and cadets in attendance, who received an AUSA coin or pin for their efforts.

"The questions were wide-ranging, and Gen. Brown was more than up to the task," using experiences from his time as a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, to his final assignment as commander of U.S. Army Pacific to give a personal perspective on how best to lead, react, overcome failure and adversity and accomplish the mission, Svoboda said.

"Brown's foundational message was that success as a leader comes from establishing trust up and down the chain of command—and with



Retired Gen. Bob Brown, AUSA president and CEO, addresses Virginia Army National Guard soldiers during a visit to the association's Central Virginia chapter. (AUSA PHOTO)

peers—and to always, always take care of your soldiers," Svoboda said.

The visit culminated with a chapter dinner and general membership meeting hosted at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9808 in Mechanicsville, where "a great turnout of members and guests made for a wonderful evening of fellowship," said retired Col. Leif Johnson, the chapter president.



Retired Col. Leif Johnson, left, president of AUSA's Central Virginia chapter, and retired Gen. Bob Brown, right, the association's president and CEO, recognize Staff Sgt. Jimmie Robinson of the Richmond Recruiting Battalion as the chapter's Top Recruiter for the year. (AUSA PHOTO)

During the meeting, several soldiers and an Army civilian were recognized for exceptional achievements, with retired Brig. Gen. Walt Mercer, the chapter's vice president for reserve affairs, serving as the master of ceremonies.

Sgt. Carter Cooper of the 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team and Staff Sgt. Patrick Bradner of the 276th Engineer Battalion were honored as the Virginia Army National Guard Soldier and NCO of the Year, respectively.

Richmond Recruiting Battalion soldiers Capt. David Butcher and 1st Sgt. Menard King were recognized as the Top Recruiting Command Team, and Staff Sgt. Jimmie Robinson as the Top Recruiter. Randal Westfall, who serves as a battalion intelligence adviser, was honored for outstanding service.

The evening concluded with Brown's remarks, which focused on the continued need for a strong Army and AUSA's role in supporting the service.

"It's hard to imagine a better day and evening for the chapter and the Army community in central Virginia," Johnson said. "Our chapter is indebted to Gen. Brown for his generous allocation of time and wisdom."

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Updated and published every two years, AUSA's *Profile of the United States Army* is an easy-to-read overview of the structure, purpose and activities of the Total Army; it serves as a useful guide to long-time Soldiers, new recruits, veterans, civilians and Army families.

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