

Commandant's Note

Enhanced Lethality: Today's Initiatives, Tomorrow's Success

The last Commandant's Note highlighted marksmanship — one of the Army's top six modernization priorities — as the key to lethality. Soldier fitness, mission-oriented training, mobility, survivability, and the ability to counter constantly changing threats all contribute to achieving dominant and sustained lethality as well. We are a nation at war, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The enemies we face will range from marginally viable terrorist organizations to near-peer adversaries. This array of enemies can count on technological, logistical, and tactical support from states whose industrial base, power projection potential, and long-term goals compete with our own. These aggressor states will continue to use today's conflicts as the testbed for their own weapons systems, but our technological edge and industrial overmatch will ensure that we remain the decisive military force against all adversaries.

A key element of achieving and maintaining this predominance is the infantry Soldier, and we are doing that by making sure that we select, train, and sustain the right people. We need intelligent Soldiers in top physical condition who can deploy against a near-peer enemy, strike hard, win, and return home, and their training hinges upon mastery of the infantry basics, which can best be taught at Fort Benning. With that in mind, in July we will run a pilot 21-week One Station Unit Training (OSUT) program aimed at producing a graduated Soldier who can report in to his unit ready to go to war, win, and survive. We cannot expect gaining units to absorb partially trained Soldiers and remediate deficiencies when they are trying to assimilate the new arrivals into the battle rhythm of the unit. These Soldiers must also be prepared to fight and win in multi-domain environments such as urban, subterranean, cyber, and even space. The urban fight has long proven to be among the most protracted and costly in terms of casualties and materiel demands, and the Army science and technology (S&T) community is employing geospatial research to generate multidimensional 3-D maps of an urban environment, something that is still in its early stages, but which has potential to enhance situational awareness, navigation, and tactical advantages as it matures. This will demand greater awareness as we commit to further urban-oriented priorities as envisioned by GEN Mark Milley, Army Chief of Staff, who also shares our concern for the civilian casualties commensurate with dislodging a determined enemy in an urban environment.

Given the proliferation of urban areas across the globe and the demonstrated preference of adversaries such as ISIS for the urban fight, it is hardly surprising that our enemies will prefer to draw us into an urban domain where they can fight from prepared positions, draw support — willingly or unwillingly — from a refugee population, subject civilians to friendly and hostile weapons effects, and exploit media to support their assertions. For U.S. forces deployed to Cold-War Germany, where noncombatant evacuation and population movement plans were at least considered — but never executed — as civil affairs contingencies, these considerations were at least possible given the existing German infrastructure and willingness of authorities to discuss and plan for comprehensive host nation support, but the megacities in which we could find ourselves in the Middle and Far East have little or no infrastructure to support such operations.

The future battlefield will likely include some of the most intense, protracted urban combat seen since WWII in Aachen, Germany, in the Philippines, in Mosul, or during the German fight for Stalingrad or even the Soviet attack to capture Berlin. Then, as now, victory could only be earned by well-trained, disciplined, capably led Soldiers who had mastered the basics of their profession and who possessed the marksmanship skills to kill the enemy. They were able to fight outnumbered if necessary against a near-peer adversary in an austere environment in spite of marginal or non-existent communications, and they did it time and time again.

We will remain a leader among the family of nations because of the American Soldier. His ability — and eagerness — to close with and defeat the enemy by close combat, fire, and maneuver will continue to make the decisive difference. I am proud to serve with a brotherhood of professionals, warriors whose sense of duty and unsurpassed expertise have inspired my successors as they do me. We need your input as we strive to send the Infantry message to the force, so please continue to write the articles and the letters that help us to be a better professional bulletin for the combined arms team.

One force, one fight! Follow me!

