

Commandant's Note

BG DAVID M. HODNE

Lethal Infantry Soldiers

The mission of the Infantry is to close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver in order to destroy or capture him, or to repel his assault with fire, maneuver, close combat, and counterattack.

The oldest branch in the U.S. Army, the Infantry is proud of its mission and proud of our role in defining our Nation's history. However, in accomplishing our mission and fighting on to the objective, the Infantry incurs between 70-90 percent of all casualties sustained in combat. To the uninitiated, the Infantry fight is a close-in, no-holds-barred fight on the objective in very close quarters; it is unique in that it is both very personal and impersonal at its core.

In every respect, our Infantry requires a special type of Soldier — one who is willing to perform the tough, hard-hitting duties necessary to win on the modern battlefield.

I am incredibly proud and humbled to serve as the Chief of our Infantry. I am also honored to serve as both the U.S. Army Infantry School Commandant and as the Director of the Soldier Lethality Cross Functional Team (SL-CFT). This SL-CFT is directly responsible for modernizing our "close combat" Soldiers. Informed by observations following my first 90 days in position, I offer the following to the field:

1. In all operational environments and under all conditions, our Infantry continues to lead the way while deployed around the world in support of combat operations and deterrence efforts. In accomplishing their mission, our Infantry Soldiers are defeating our adversaries, deterring aggressive competitors, and reassuring our Allies and partners. The demand for our Infantry has also never been higher, concurrent with both the recent growth of Security Force Advise and Assist Brigades (SFABs) and the transformation of Infantry One-Station Unit Training (OSUT) at Fort Benning. Both of these efforts require increased numbers of highly experienced and professional Infantry officers and NCOs.

2. The focus of the U.S. Army Infantry School is directly aligned with the Army's modernization strategy. Responsible for one of the Army's eight Cross Functional Teams (CFTs), the Soldier Lethality CFT is the only CFT where a school Commandant retains responsibility for both the CFT and the branch. In this respect, everything we do at Fort Benning addresses improving the lethality of our Infantry Soldiers and squads. There are clear capability gaps requiring our immediate attention to sustain overmatch against current and future threats. My predecessor, BG Chris "CD" Donahue, first established the CFT a year ago and generated significant momentum on a number of important

modernization efforts intended to improve squad and Soldier lethality. Over the next one to three years, we will equip the "Close Combat Force" (Infantry, Cav Scouts and their accompanying forward observers, medics, and engineers) with the Enhanced Night Vision Goggles (Binocular - ENVG-Bs), Next Generation Squad Automatic Rifles and Next Generation Rifles, and improved Small Arms Fire Control.

3. In addition to modernizing equipment, the USAIS intends to enhance lethality in our Infantry Soldiers through training and human performance efforts. This includes the transformation of Infantry OSUT from 14 weeks to 22 weeks in duration. This is the first major revision to Infantry OSUT since 1971 and delivers new Infantry Soldiers qualified (vs. familiar) on machine guns, combatives, and medical combat lifesaving skills. The results from our current pilot effort are positive, and we look forward to graduating the first two companies of the 22-week OSUT program on the 7th of December. Much like SFABs, this investment in lethality requires a corresponding investment in quality NCOs to train these initial entry Soldiers.

4. Lastly, in the coming year USAIS will publish the revised Marksmanship Course of Fire. Consistent with our other efforts to produce more lethal Infantry, the new rifle qualification standards improve Soldiers' skill in employing individual weapons in a manner that better replicates realistic firing conditions. Similar to our comprehensive transformation of OSUT, this is the first major revision to small arms weapons qualification in almost five decades.

In closing, we recently celebrated the historic 100th Anniversary of both Fort Benning and the U.S. Army Infantry School. To all of the Infantry Soldiers and leaders who read this: we are extremely proud of our last century of accomplishments and faithful service to our Nation. We have much to look forward to as we embark on the next 100 years.

I am the Infantry! Follow me!

