

Commandant's Note



Our Priority: Instill the Spirit of the Bayonet

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We publish this issue of *INFANTRY* as our Army “goes rolling along,” very much living up to our Army song in these interesting times. In the midst of a global pandemic, our Army continues to execute missions around the world while simultaneously pursuing modernization efforts in pursuit of overmatch against near-peer adversaries. Absent context, many are tempted to view today’s challenges as new or unique. In many ways, however, these challenges are not unfamiliar to our very experienced Army. In fact, it is precisely because of our determination to overcome all challenges that our Army remains the unrivaled force that we are. Over 100 years ago, our Army rapidly modernized, or more realistically, endured a total overhaul, in a manner necessary to wage ongoing large-scale combat operations. This, too, occurred in the midst of the obstacles associated with a devastating global pandemic.

As our Army continues to march forward, your U.S. Army Infantry School similarly presses on with our important responsibility of developing leaders. The legacy of the United States Army’s Infantry heralds from our guarantee that we will close with and destroy our enemies in the final yards. This requires investing daily in coaching, teaching, and training the next generation of Infantry. With a proud history in training leaders for the rigors of close combat, you have to look no further than our Infantry School patch to understand our priorities. Emblazoned with an M1905 Bayonet, our mission is to inspire and instill the “Spirit of the Bayonet” in all who train here. The will to meet and destroy the enemy in hand-to-hand combat is the spirit of the bayonet.



Informed by his own combat experience in the trenches of World War I, and in our darkest hours of World War II, General George C. Marshall prioritized the revision and publication of FM 23-25, *Bayonet*. The bayonet, for those with the courage to wield it, serves an important purpose when rushing the enemy in the final yards. This requires will inherent to close quarters combat, best captured in the following excerpt from FM 23-25:

The will to meet and destroy the enemy in hand-to-hand combat is the spirit of the bayonet. It springs from the fighter's confidence, courage, and grim determination, and is the result of vigorous training. Through training, the fighting instinct of the individual soldier is developed to the highest point. The will to use the bayonet first appears in the trainee when he begins to handle it with facility, and increases as his confidence grows. The full development of his physical prowess and complete confidence in his weapon culminates in the final expression of the spirit of the bayonet — fierce and relentless destruction of the enemy.

In addition to proudly displaying a bayonet, our Infantry School patch also hosts two simple words, "Follow Me." These powerful words speak to the spirit of the bayonet, but also speak to the spirit of the Infantry. Fundamentally, all Infantry Soldiers believe in some very important truths. First, they believe in themselves. Whether crossing "no-man's land" or entering the room to finish the fight, the Infantry Soldier knows they have the skill to accomplish the mission and defeat any foe. Second, all Infantry Soldiers believe in their teammates. They know the members of their squad and platoon will always be at their side. Lastly, Infantry Soldiers expected to overcome difficult odds, believe in their leaders. They expect their leaders to have the wisdom and experience to make the tough calls, and they expect their leaders to look out for their welfare when leading them across "no-man's land." When an Infantry Leader says, "Follow Me," it means something. It means victory.

Instilling the spirit of the bayonet here requires both a willing student and a capable, professional instructor. Instilling the spirit of the bayonet is no small responsibility, and it doesn't happen without a great deal of effort. Our instructors must be supremely capable and confident in their expertise. They must also display the professionalism necessary to inspire the next generation of Infantry to defeat our enemies in all conditions. Again, our patch says, "Follow Me," and not, "Do As You Are Told." Our Drill Sergeants, Black Hats, Ranger Instructors, and our IBOLC Platoon Trainers know they invest daily in both the next generation of Infantry and in the future of our Army. Again, even at the seemingly desperate height of World War II, General Marshall recognized the role professional instructors play in inspiring Soldiers to face an unclear future. After detailing the specific technical competencies and training methodologies of bayonet fighting, FM 23-25 dedicates attention to a section titled, Advice to Instructors, emphasizing the key attributes of the professional instructor:

He must possess an intense enthusiasm, vigor, and those qualities of leadership which will inspire the best efforts of the men being trained. These qualities, or their lack, will be reflected in the efforts of the men.

...the bayonet fight may be the culmination of a grueling advance or a determined defense under conditions when men approach exhaustion. Therefore, throughout the training, he emphasizes continued driving forward with the bayonet by sheer power of will even though the body may be ready to collapse.

The instructor avoids boisterous, bullying, impatient methods. He uses a clear, earnest, and encouraging delivery to secure alert and willing response.

The instructor does not use or encourage the use of profanity to instill fighting spirit... Noise is no substitute for enthusiasm of ability.

Much like our motto, Marshall's advice to instructors is similarly powerful. Every day here in the U.S. Army Infantry School, students look to their instructors for good leadership to emulate. Every day we are responsible for living up to our motto, "Follow Me." This requires attention and accountability, and remains critical to instilling the Spirit of the Bayonet and to instilling the will to win within our next generation of Infantry Soldiers and leaders.

In closing, the life of the Infantry, the hardened foot Soldier, is one of both hardship and pride. However, the key to our incredible legacy always comes down to skill and will. This requires both mastery of our craft and belief in self, teammates, and leaders. This mastery, and this belief, inspired generations of Infantry Soldiers to achieve the impossible. Ask any Infantry Soldier about the unimaginable hardships they've endured, and they will tell you instead about the teammates they shared these hardships with.

I remain incredibly proud and humbled to wear the patch of our U.S. Army Infantry School. I am proud to do my part in instilling the Spirit of the Bayonet. I am proud to serve in the company of great NCOs and Officers who invest in the future of our Infantry. Lastly, I am proud to echo the cry of all Infantry Soldiers who've gone before me...

I am the Infantry! Follow me!