

Commandant's Note

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Restoring Infantry Overmatch Starts in 2020

As we drafted this newest edition of *INFANTRY*, we entered a brand new decade rife with opportunities and challenges. Early on, the “twenties” (2020’s) already portend significant changes in the strategic, operational, and tactical landscapes where our Infantry will operate. For example, the 29th of February 2020 hailed the signing of a peace deal with the Taliban that, after 18 years, could mark the end of America’s longest war. In his remarks in Kabul on the occasion of the peace deal, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper honored all service members who fought through the years for this hard earned settlement. I would like to similarly pay tribute to the role of our Infantry throughout this campaign. It is precisely because of our unyielding relentless pressure, and the Taliban’s unsustainable losses in spite of their operational sanctuary, that inspired them to come to the negotiating table.

Entering a new decade also generally gives cause for reflection. I remind young Infantry officers that most of today’s Battalion Commanders know only an Army engaged in conflicts in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. While this combat experience is invaluable, it is also incomplete. Considering the wide range of tactical and operational challenges associated with potential large-scale combat operations against peer adversaries, and considering the context of how all domains (land, air, sea, space, and cyber) influence these efforts, ensuring today’s Infantry leaders are prepared to achieve victory in large-scale combat operations is paramount. This requires emphasis on skills extending beyond small unit action in support of counterinsurgency, and also requires renewed focus necessary to deliver core and functional expertise expected of our branch.

Achieving the tenets of “Army Vision 2028” requires balancing reform, readiness, and modernization initiatives. Today’s acceleration of, and necessary changes within, each of these areas is unprecedented. Moreover, this acceleration induces friction and perhaps constitutes one of the most dynamic periods of change our Army has ever witnessed. Considering almost two decades at war, combined with numerous continued operational commitments around the globe, requires careful evaluation of the state of Infantry proficiency in both our School and in our formations. The Army Modernization Strategy, and the associated overhaul of capabilities, also necessitates an inward look on the culture of our Infantry that resides in every echelon.

Beginning in Fiscal Year 2020 (October 2019), the U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS) embarked on a path to reinvigorate support to both TRADOC and FORSCOM in providing quality instruction representative of an unrivaled Army, while delivering proficient Soldiers to units with confidence gained from their hard earned and rewarding experience here. Concurrently,

USAIS supports Army formations with integration of urgent force modernization efforts; supports Army talent alignment processes internal to the School and as the branch proponent; facilitates Army wide implementation of the new individual weapons integrated training strategy and qualification; implements a sustainable lieutenant initial military training (IMT) strategy; aligns NCO PME with new and emerging doctrine; clarifies proponent roles for functional training; evaluates course physical fitness entry standards following the Army’s implementation of the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT); fully implements expanded One Station Unit Training (OSUT); and informs audiences of initiatives within the School and the branch. Lastly, in the years ahead, your Infantry School will identify, prioritize, and restore functional training shortfalls, while simultaneously maximizing existing resources.

While senior leaders in Infantry formations know well an Army engaged in conflict, few, if any, of our most senior leaders are familiar with an Army comprehensively engaged in modernization. Where the “Big Five” (M1 tank, M2 fighting vehicle, AH-64 attack helicopter, UH-60 helicopter, and Patriot air defense missile system) first emerged in the early 1970s, they will remain in our inventory for over a half a century. Entering the 20’s, Army Futures Command seeks to introduce 31 Signature efforts across the Army’s new modernization priorities (long range precision fires; future vertical lift; next generation combat vehicle; air and missile defense; soldier lethality; network; assured positioning, navigation, and timing; and the synthetic training environment). Given our Army fielded the “Big Five” over a period of two decades and in the context of the Cold War, in considering the Army’s overhaul ahead, I often pose the question, “what does a modernizing Army look like?” It’s highly unlikely the pace of commitments will lessen considering the current strategic security environment. Today’s Infantry leaders will likely continue to accrue combat experience and ensure formations remain trained and ready. They will also accomplish this while simultaneously fielding and integrating new equipment rapidly.

This new decade indeed presents exciting opportunities for our Infantry and our Army. This decade will come to define the period where our Army regains overmatch against all potential adversaries. The U.S. Army Infantry School will continue to produce fit, motivated, and disciplined Infantry who will close with and destroy the enemies of our nation. Investing in our people first, we will balance readiness, reform, and modernization in the dynamic decade ahead.

I am the Infantry! Follow me!