

# Commandant's Note

MG DAVID M. HODNE



## The Infantry Sergeant: *Our Army's Source of Overmatch*

The "Infantryman" statue sits on hallowed ground in front of the historic McGinnis-Wickam Hall, just as it has since 1960. It represents the essence of every Infantryman, past, present, and future. This likeness also sits in the rotunda of the National Infantry Museum, welcoming all, a prelude to the historical displays inside. I have been in awe of this statue since my days as a Lieutenant. Thirty years later, informed by experiences and shared hardships with my fellow Soldiers, I only hold higher regard for this statue and all it represents. This 12-foot high bronze statue is without a doubt the quintessential **Infantry Sergeant**. Boldly charging forward and signaling others to follow and close with the enemy, this Sergeant echoes the rallying cry of the Infantry, "Follow Me." It is clear that the Infantryman statue displays the leadership qualities of the combat Infantryman not only tested, but proven, in combat. This statue, and more importantly this Sergeant, also represent those qualities we seek to develop in our very best NCOs and officers here at the Infantry School.

When coaching young Infantry officers bound for their first assignments as Rifle Platoon Leaders, I point to "their Sergeant" as the one they will learn their craft from; the one who will teach them the standard; and the one who won't let them, or their Soldiers, down. I also remind them "their Sergeant," the Infantryman who stands in front of Building 4, is also the one whom these young officers must lead and inspire. This powerful relationship between officers and noncommissioned officers inspires all of us to be better.

In my often diverging responsibilities as both the Chief of Infantry and Director of the Soldier Lethality Cross-Functional Team within Army Futures Command, I also remind future leaders that while America's industrial base puts remarkable material technology and associated advantages in the hands of our Soldiers, the Infantry Sergeant long remains the steadfast cornerstone of our Army, and unquestionably remains the heart and soul of any Infantry unit. This Infantry Sergeant also remains our true source of overmatch against any adversary. Technology is a valuable enhancer to our profession, but it is and always will be the Infantry Sergeants who train and inspire young Americans, coach them in our values, teach them the profession of arms, lead their formations

against our Nation's enemies, and ensure victory on an increasingly dynamic battlefield.

I am immensely proud of the capable instructors in the Infantry School who seek to instill and inspire the Spirit of the Bayonet in all who train here. As Infantry Soldiers continue to prepare to close the last 100 yards in defeating our enemies, they begin their journey with their first 100 yards here at Fort Benning. Following 22 weeks of Infantry One Station Unit Training (OSUT), today's Infantry Soldiers are more physically fit, more lethal, and more disciplined as a result of the tireless hours put in by their Drill Sergeants and cadre. Their indoctrination starts on day one of the program of instruction (POI) under the inspiring example of Sergeants who issue the instruction, "Follow Me." The new Infantry OSUT POI emphasizes close adherence to the fundamentals of physical training, Soldier discipline, and marksmanship, among other key elements. The first 22-week course attrition rate was under 6 percent, a significant improvement from the previous 10-12 percent attrition rate of the most recent 14-week course. Other benefits are being achieved as well. Bonding results from shared hardships, challenges met and overcome, and the shared sense of accomplishment at earning skills that translate to lethality and survivability. Very few young Americans can claim the enhanced sense of self-awareness that is gained through the Infantry OSUT experience.



The fundamental concept, and the innate value, of the role of capable instructors and NCOs was underscored and codified with the publication of Training Circular (TC) 3-20.40, *Training and Qualification, Individual Weapons*. The Training Circular hosts major upgrades to training standards and qualifications for each weapon system and featured major updates concepts to small arms target systems. The improvements reflected in TC 3-20.40 continue to yield outstanding results in Infantry OSUT. The Drill Sergeant graduates of the Marksmanship Master Trainer Course (MMTC) learn the intricacies of TC 3-20.40 and the new course of fire. They become skilled at how to mentor trainees to help them fully realize their maximum potential as they hone their marksmanship skills. We observe the trust that develops between Soldiers and their Drill

Sergeants resulting in the highest qualification scores across the Army. Initial data shows Infantry OSUT trainees average 32 out of 40 in their rifle qualification scores after following the training progressions outlined in TC 3-20.40. I have interacted with several training companies hosting 75 percent of their Trainees firing expert, and recognized other companies hosting up to 20 Trainees who fired a perfect 40 out of 40 on the new course of fire. These impressive examples of excellence reinforce individual Soldier skills as both the foundation of any rifleman and the source of overmatch that assures victory. Ultimately, our Drill Sergeants immediately elevate unit readiness in the conduct of their duties here and even after they complete their drill sergeant duties and return to the force.

Every day, capable Sergeants across the U.S. Army Infantry School make a difference for our Army. The recurring, and often relentless, cycle of instructing professional military education and functional skills courses hones our sergeants' crafts and advances an expertise that is not developed overnight. This skill is the result of repetition and dedication, and following their assignment here at Fort Benning, this skill will improve the readiness of our maneuver formations. Again, every day here, there are notable examples of the exceptional professionalism and skill of our instructors. In our Basic Airborne Course, Black Hats instruct then reinforce standards and discipline needed to safely produce paratroopers in an inherently dangerous program of instruction. These professional instructors also lead, reform, and inform the broader community on initiatives to improve airborne operations.

Another example of Infantry Sergeants driving change occurs in the U.S. Army Sniper Course. The military sniper's role is well established throughout history, but as tactics and target priorities change, we see modifications to the sniper's mission and equipment. The Maneuver Capabilities Development and Integration Directorate (MCDID) at Fort Benning, GA, working with the Sergeants at the Sniper School discovered the inability of current M110 sniper rifles using 7.62x51mm ammunition to provide precision fire beyond 1,200 meters. They helped develop the MK22 and its complementary Leupold MK5hd scope, which is superior to the current inventory with increased accuracy, portability, versatility, munitions, and both day and night target acquisition. With these weapon systems in place, the sniper team is better equipped than ever before. Incorporating updated tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and technology, the team will be able to conduct operations in all environments, against any enemy, and under any condition. We have the weapons and the technology, we have the facilities and the Soldiers to retain our dominance of the sniper environment, and we have the Infantry Sergeants whose commitment, patience, and sheer technical mastery of their craft keep them at the peak of their profession.



Approaching nearly three years here in the U.S. Army Infantry School, I can recount countless more examples of the incredible contributions of Sergeants across our dozens of Infantry programs of instruction. We credit our success here at the U.S. Army Infantry School to seasoned, dedicated Sergeants who transform young Americans into Soldiers who display an inherent Spirit of the Bayonet. We similarly credit both the success and readiness of maneuver formations to our capable Infantry Sergeants at echelon. The envy of all other Armies, friend and foe alike, our Sergeants remain our Army's source of overmatch. As we mutually invest in both the long term health of the Infantry Branch and corresponding readiness of our Army, we must recognize the service, expertise, and important contributions of these dedicated leaders.

I am the Infantry! Follow Me!

# The “FIRST 100 YARDS”

1. To the first professional U.S. Army Infantry Soldiers, the Trench...meant safety...a brief respite from the horror of war.
2. Leaving the trench, however...meant the opposite. For those who bravely clawed and climbed out of the illusion of security the trench provided....their character and commitment demands respect.
3. Going “Over the Top” was an expression Soldiers used in World War I when referring to leaving their own trenches to assault the enemy.
4. Leaving the trench...meant mustering the courage to cross the first 100 yards of “No Man’s Land” only to face withering machine gun fire...and certain death.
5. Leaving the trench...meant you believed in yourself. You believed you would make it.
6. More importantly, leaving the trench...meant you believed in your teammates. When the chips were down, you would not fail your fellow Soldiers...and they would not fail you.
7. Leaving the trench...also meant you had faith in your leaders. You believed they had the wisdom to make the call, they would lead you through the unknown obstacles ahead, and they had the experience needed to guarantee victory. They lived our motto, “Follow Me.”
8. Leaving the trench...and the courage required to step off into the unknown...the first 100 yards... is something you will never forget.
9. Lastly, leaving the trench was only the beginning. The work of the Infantry was not complete until we closed with and destroyed the enemy.
10. Embarking on the “First 100 yards” takes personal courage. Completing the mission by closing with and destroying the enemy in the last 100 yards yields victory...and charts our legacy as the Infantry.
11. Life in the Infantry, the foot Soldier, is one of both hardship and pride. This journey starts with going “over the top” and the “First 100 Yards.”

