

Leaving a Legacy at IBOLC: The Key Terrain of the Infantry

MAJ BARKEF OSIGIAN

“What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.”

— Pericles

People are motivated by purpose. Many of you joined the military, in part, because you wanted to be part of something greater than yourselves. Consciously or subconsciously, you routinely ask yourself tough questions, such as “What is my contribution? Am I making a difference? What is my legacy?” If you seek an answer to these questions, look no farther than joining the Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course (IBOLC) cadre team. Here, more so than anywhere else, you will leave a legacy.

Welcome to IBOLC — you are about to take over as a platoon trainer. You will be responsible for training 40 Infantry lieutenants per class, for two to three classes a year. You’ll work long hours in austere conditions. Most of the 19-week course is spent in the field, and when your students are out there shivering and sweating, you’ll be there too. You have a mountain of instruction to give them in a relatively short amount of time. But these inconveniences are nothing compared to the incredible sense of stewardship you will feel over the students you influence. This will be a highly rewarding experience, and it may be, in the grand scheme of things, the biggest and most lasting contribution you make to our force during your time in the military.

Infantry lieutenants come to IBOLC from every commissioning source. Whether they attended the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), Officer Candidate School (OCS), or Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), every single Infantry officer passes through the Leader Battalion, and then from Fort Moore to every unit in the Army. Not only does every infantry platoon leader pass through this pipeline, but so does every future infantry company commander, field grade staff officer, battalion commander, and brigade commander. In this unit, you could be mentoring the future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. IBOLC is key terrain for the Infantry Branch. It is the primary access valve where good doctrine, tactics, and leadership principles are infused into our Infantry leaders. Even a small adjustment to our course will echo for decades, having



Students in Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course Class 09-23 conduct a platoon live-fire exercise. (Photos courtesy of 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment)

second and third order effects across the Army for generations. The 40 men and women who you train and prepare each class will move into the force and lead 40 Infantrymen in their platoon. That means every cycle a platoon trainer is impacting up to 1,600 Soldiers. If those same students go on to lead companies, battalions, and brigades during their careers, that reach is expanded exponentially. There is no other job in the Army where a single officer can have such an expansive impact on the future. A good platoon trainer will provide the Infantry with a host of good Infantry leaders, while bad platoon trainers can create a generation of disillusioned, disgruntled junior leaders. The seeds we plant here set the tone for the future of the Infantry.

To prepare officers is to prepare leaders. The influence and responsibility you have over the next generation of Infantry officers is difficult to exaggerate. Your platoon will learn almost everything they know about the Infantry from you. This means you will have a lasting impact on the values, priorities, and leadership style of every student under your tutelage. You'll be their first impression of an Infantry officer, and the example that you set will be a lasting one. Most of your students will become reflections of you and mirror your example. They will imitate your communication style, the way you stand, the way you wear your kit, the way you joke with your NCOs, and the way you act when frustrated or proud. After IBOLC, they will go into the larger force and be given positions of immense responsibility of their own, carrying on the example you provided them at the start point of their career. In the Infantry, we expect our officers to be highly competent tacticians. We expect them to be confident, decisive, and comfortable with public speaking. We expect them to look the part, have their Ranger Tab, be fit, and lead with character. To raise the next generation of Infantry officers, we must provide exemplars who embody this ideal. Our students learn more from the examples of their instructors than they do from the instruction they receive in our course. There is no substitute for the modeling provided by our platoon trainers.

Here, you will realize quickly that these students learn fast. It is amazing to see how rapidly they grow in a short period of time. Their physical fitness, competence in small unit tactics, and skill in the troop leading procedures will improve at an unbelievable rate. Many of our students come to IBOLC with an exceptional foundation of values and habits that they learned from their ROTC instructors or OCS cadre. However, it does not take long for IBOLC instructors to notice the differences in student competence based on where they came from. IBOLC is the great equalizer. It is the single point of greatest influence for Infantry leaders on their way to the force. It is often the most formative period in their career, a time when they are still eager and impressionable, not jaded or set in their ways as they may be when they get to the Maneuver Captain's Career Course. The Army is still romantic to them, and they are eager to lead and win. Most of the things they learn here they are learning for the first time, and many of the things we teach them are being taught to them for the last time. IBOLC is the only training experience that every single Infantry officer shares, which means we have to get it right. The weight of this responsibility is heavy, but if you are anything like me, you'll find it incredibly motivating.

Most of us Infantry officers joined the Infantry to fight. We wanted to be the boots on the ground, the tip of the spear. We grew up dreaming about crawling under barbed wire, shooting machine guns, jumping out of planes, and kicking in doors. We were inspired by video games like *Call of Duty* and movies like *Saving Private Ryan*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Black Hawk Down*. We picked this branch because the Infantry is hard and cool. We understand that our nation's next fight will come when we least expect it, and it will likely be larger and bloodier than anything our military has seen in years. The students we teach will fight our next war, and we will lead them. This assumption inspires and motivates IBOLC cadre. It makes us jump out of bed in the morning. The knowledge that we are responsible for our student's performance in combat adds a sense of urgency to everything we do here. As a platoon trainer, your students' success on the battlefield is up to you — their survival is up to you. It will be determined by the foundation you give them now, at this early and fragile stage in their development. If you train them well, they will be successful on America's next battlefield, they will defeat our enemies, and they will bring their Soldiers home. The better you train them now, the fewer of them will die, and the fewer of the men and women



Students assault an objective during Leader Forge, their culminating exercise in IBOLC. Infantry lieutenants come to IBOLC eager to learn, and it is remarkable how much they improve during their 19 weeks in the course.

they lead will die. Everything we do here matters, from the physical training (PT) we conduct, to the classes we teach, to the patrols we observe, to the papers we grade, to the example we set. The impact you will have here is incalculable, and the stakes are high.

Let's get started!

MAJ Barkef K. Osigian IV currently serves as the operations officer for the Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course (IBOLC) at Fort Moore, GA. His previous assignments include serving as the commander of both Baker Company, 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment (IBOLC), and Blackfoot Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment (Airborne), 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, AK. He deployed to Northern Syria as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, where he served as the squadron liaison officer to Task Force 9.5. He also served as a long-range surveillance detachment leader in D Company, 52nd Infantry Regiment at Fort Cavazos, TX; and as a rifle platoon leader and company executive officer in Sabre Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment at Fort Cavazos. CPT Osigian earned a bachelor's degree in Spanish from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY.