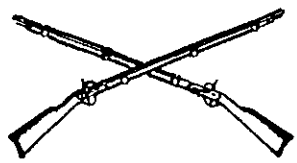
Commandant's NOTE



MAJOR GENERAL SAM WETZEL

BLACK HAWK IMPROVEMENTS

The Infantry School, in concert with the U.S. Army Aviation Center, is currently in the process of developing a "block improvement program" for the Black Hawk helicopter. This improvement program was begun as an infantry initiative by the combat developer in coordination with the materiel development community to improve the helicopter's deployability and survivability and concomitantly to keep pace with the combined arms requirements of the 1990s.

The first UH-60A Black Hawk was delivered to the Army in 1978. Since then, more than 200 have been delivered to various CONUS divisions and installations, and this fleet has accumulated more than 58,000 operational flying hours. The Army's experience with Black Hawks includes operations in the Egyptian desert, the Panamanian jungles, and the Alaskan arctic environment. By this summer, units in USAREUR will be using it as well.

As a result of this experience, the Army is now able to forecast the improvements that are needed in the Black Hawk to provide the Army with a capability for worldwide operations on the battlefield of the future. Some of these improvements include how to increase its lift so that it can move the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) anywhere in the world. Additionally, the Black Hawk's ability to survive against more advanced threat weapons must be updated; at the same time, its avionics package must also be updated with a new generation of equipment. This package includes improving the accuracy of the helicopter's navigation capability, since we are now required to operate in very remote areas of the world.

The interior space of the airframe must also be reconfigured to give the infantry an ability to carry its future weapon systems and equipment. Additionally, the redesign of the interior should give medical personnel more space for treating patients during medical evacuation missions.

Finally, externally carried fuel tanks must be included in the improvements so the Black Hawk can self-deploy across the longest route of the Atlantic Ocean to Europe.

In addition to these considerations, the Army is looking for innovations such as a two-hook suspension system for external loads. This would permit a vehicle such as a TOW-mounted jeep to be "snugged-up" close to the belly of the Black Hawk, which would allow the vehicle to be flown at very low levels and at high speeds without the oscillation that normally prohibits operational flight at these altitudes.

The Army plans to involve the Navy, Marines, and Air Force in this development program, because each has expressed an interest in the improved version.

Under the Army's proposal, one-half of the future fleet will be produced in the improved version, with plans to retrofit the earlier models later. The projected delivery date for the first improved Black Hawk is some time in 1984 or 1985.

These improvements will help make the 1980s the decade of progress for the combined arms team!