

The Future of the INFANTRY

OFFICE OF INFANTRY FORCE MANAGEMENT
USAIS



Never before in our history have we in the Infantry faced as many changes in equipment, doctrine, force structure, and training as we face today. It has been said that today's technological change is so rapid that the art of war now changes as much in five years as it did in the period between World Wars I and II.

The advent of large-scale airmobile operations marked a significant change in the mid-1960s; the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 drastically altered our thinking, primarily on antitank warfare. By the late 1970s we were reasonably comfortable with our ability to stop first-echelon Threat forces and had begun to focus our attention on stopping second-echelon forces and on implementing the AirLand battle. We cannot help wondering whether this tempo of change will continue.

In the midst of such change, we always seem to be asking questions about the potential for survival of some of our systems — weapon systems and organizational systems — particularly as a result of the proliferation of highly sophisticated, extremely lethal weapons throughout the world. Can the helicopter survive in a mid-intensity conflict? Can the tank face the growing family of antitank guided missiles and still be effective on the battlefield? How do we mold today's Infantry into an organization that will be fit to fight on the battlefield of the future? Can the Infantry survive there?

There are even some people who question whether the Infantryman of the future will be able to perform his role in the combined arms team. They say that he is, in fact, no longer the nucleus of that team.

But it is the very unpredictability of the future that lends credence to the prediction that the United States Infantryman will be around for a long time. He will be around precisely because no one can predict when he will be needed or in what capacity. And he will be doing what he has always done — fighting or standing ready to fight on the ground, for the ground. In fact, as a result of the advancement of weapon systems and countersystems, future conflicts may be even more influenced by the Infantryman's ability to go and fight and endure where no machine or electronic system can survive.

The Infantry School has considered all these questions — these doubts and predictions — as they apply to various aspects of the Infantry system: doctrine, organization, training, material, and resources, and has learned that to develop a successful system for the future, the Infantry must have a purpose, a value system, and a philosophy from which to derive its direction and its goals. Any long-range goals, therefore, must come from an understanding of the Infantry's basic purpose and from a vision of how the various parts of the Infantry team contribute to the fulfillment of that purpose.

GOALS

The Infantry has certain broad goals that go beyond any specific combat scenario, goals that apply to all Infantrymen, regardless of component, major command,

or duty assignment. Each part of the Infantry, therefore, participates in its unique way in fulfilling the overall goals; each has a piece of the action.

These overall goals drawn from the Infantry's mission (as stated in Army Regulation 10-6) are to "close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver in order to destroy or capture him or repel his assault by fire, close combat, and counterattack," and, in spite of the critics, to form "the nucleus of the Army's fighting strength around which the other arms and services are grouped." An additional goal, when not in combat, is to maintain "a state of readiness in preparation for immediate combat worldwide."

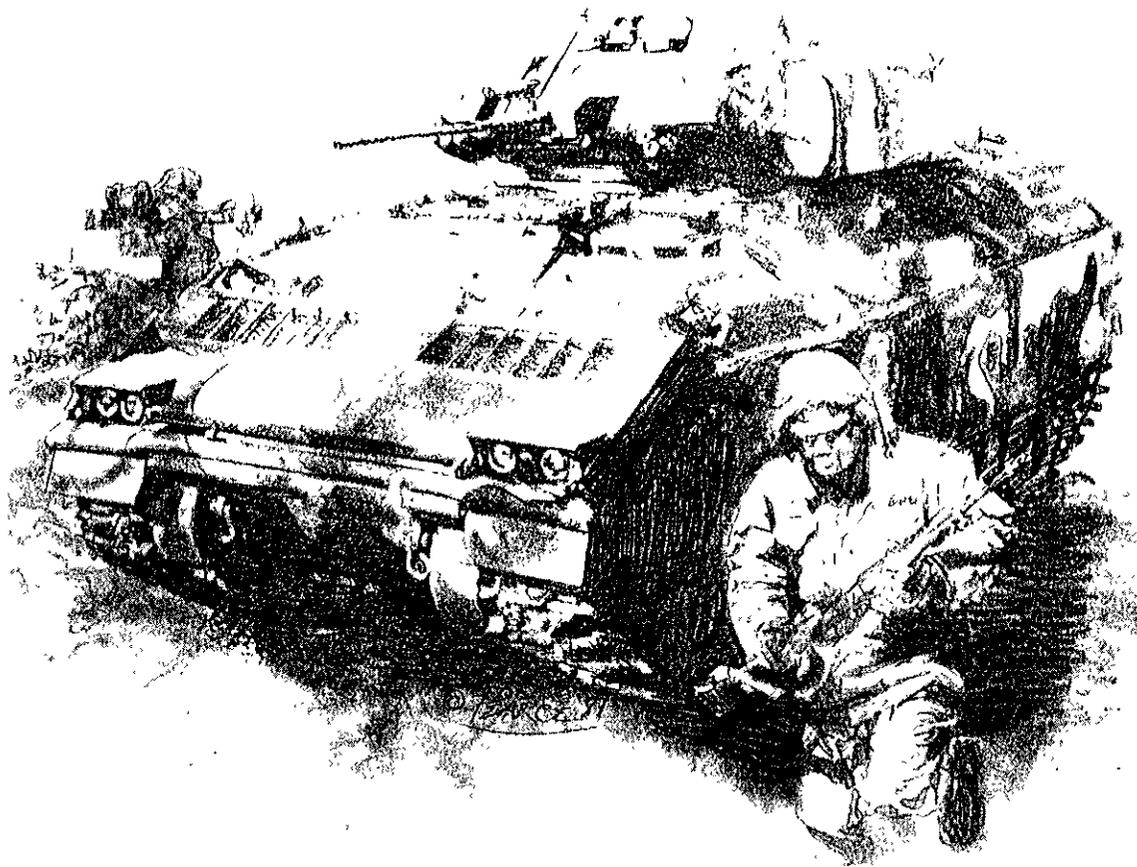
With the basic goals and purposes in mind, the Infantry School has begun the process of defining long range goals and objectives. These are expressed in the "Infantry Strategic Plan 2-82", published at Fort Benning in March 1982. While it does not pretend to be all inclusive, this plan takes into consideration the various types of war the Infantry may be called upon to fight in the future and lays out changes that may be needed in the elements of the Infantry system.

Obviously, Infantrymen will require equipment with still higher technology to meet these future needs, but their leaders cannot lose sight of the human dimension. Tomorrow's leader must train the soldiers to master the existing technology so that he can get the most out of what he has, because the next war will be won by people. The victory will go to the commander who can lead, motivate, and inspire. Small unit leaders — squad, platoon, company — will have to be imaginative and resourceful. They may find themselves isolated on a high-intensity battlefield with much of their equipment destroyed or rendered useless by an opposing force's sophisticated countermeasures. Or they may be alone on a security mission in support of regularly constituted civil authorities in an urban area.

No matter what new techniques of combat the Infantryman may be required to adopt and learn, he will not be able to discard any of the old ones. While the future Infantryman may race over the battlefield in a BIFV, flit around in a helicopter, or strap himself to an antigravity machine like Buck Rogers, he will not be able to neglect the skills that have sustained him on the battlefield for more than 200 years — the use of terrain, camouflage, marksmanship and stealth, and the basic tactics of fire and maneuver. Whatever sophisticated weapons he may employ, it is a good bet that he will still carry an individual weapon designed for one-to-one combat with a foe.

TRAINING

The ability of small units to succeed will depend on their training. Historically, the strength of the U.S. Army has been the individual initiative exhibited by its soldiers, plus their ability to think on their feet and to cope with changing situations. In the future also, the Army's training must build upon and expand these human capabilities.



From the total corps of young men whose self-worth depends in part on their skills as professional Infantrymen, certain ones will — as always — prove more skillful, quicker to learn, and more able to lead, and they will rise above their fellows in terms of professional accomplishments. If these leaders can be given the time to mature, the Infantry should develop the finest, most professional officers and noncommissioned officers the Army has ever known. The competition for advancement will be keen, and the winners should be truly outstanding soldiers.

A bright aspect of the Infantryman's future is the steadily increasing value of his training. A dedicated professional who is offered the training opportunities already established and the ever more valid and realistic training techniques of the immediate future should easily achieve standards of professional competence never before approached. Today's training devices, simulator systems, evaluation programs, and heightened emphasis on "hands on" training, backed by substantive, usable training literature, give the future Infantryman a great training advantage over his predecessors.

The concept of preparing to fight outnumbered and win "the first battle" on a sophisticated battlefield has been the Army's training orientation in recent years. U.S. Infantrymen can realistically expect to go into battle outnumbered and, on a weapon-for-weapon basis, outgunned. To the individual Infantryman, this means that he must develop two basic skills to a high degree: The

ability to survive in a very lethal environment and the power to inflict heavy damage on his opponent. In other words, he will be the better trained and the better equipped soldier on the battlefield.

Previous wars have shown how unexpected changes or new developments can determine tactics and strategy. The Infantry must be open-minded and innovative enough to take full advantage of those changes. It must also be farsighted and imaginative so that its doctrinal concepts can direct the development of the weapons and equipment it needs. Each organization must be considered a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Sound structure may be a prerequisite to an organization's health, but it is not health itself. What matters is not the brevity, the clarity, or the perfection of the organization, it is the performance of the people within that organization.

The Infantryman must be prepared to support the national strategy in the face of any future threat. As the most flexible, adaptable, and strategically deployable of the combat arms, we must be prepared to respond to the demands of present and future military operations.

The legacy for the Infantry of tomorrow is directly dependent on the efforts that are expended today. A strong foundation has been firmly implanted, but the changing scene can quickly outpace us unless we stay ahead of the changes. The Infantry Strategic Plan provides a framework that links our daily decisions into a coherent plan for the future.