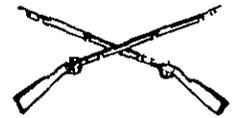




Commandant's NOTE



Major General John W. Foss

Chief of Infantry

Since becoming Chief of Infantry, I have visited many of our infantry units and have talked with our infantrymen the world over. I have been impressed with what I have seen and heard, and I can't help feeling a surge of pride when I think of how far we have come in the years since I first joined the infantry's ranks some 35 years ago.

At the same time, though, I am concerned that our Infantry community could become a divided one. On one side would be infantrymen who hold that there is only *one infantry* and on the other, those who believe there are many — light, airborne, air assault, mechanized, and the like — and that there can no longer be just one.

In my way of thinking there is indeed only *one Infantry* (with a capital "I"), but, at the same time, there are *several infantries* (generic, with a little "i"). Every infantryman, no matter what kind of label precedes his name, is a plain vanilla infantryman first; and his basic mission has not changed since our Infantry came into being on 14 June 1775. That mission is to get to the battlefield and close with the enemy by fire and movement to destroy or capture him, or to repel his attack by fire, close combat, and counterattack — the hardest task on the battlefield.

All infantrymen, therefore, spring from one source; all are trained in those things that have sustained Infantry units on various battlefields for more than 200 years: the use of terrain, camouflage, marksmanship, and stealth; the basic tactics of fire and movement; and the taking and holding of ground. It is only after they have learned these common lessons that infantrymen can move on to become, if you will, "specialist" infantrymen.

We have a variety of different infantry units — from Bradley to airborne — whose sole reason for existing is to put infantrymen on the battlefield. These units operate at different paces and within different combined arms teams. Bradley infantry units, for example, operate with M-1 tanks, DIVAD guns, self-propelled howitzers, attack helicopters, and close air support aircraft in highly mobile armored task forces that move quickly on the battlefield. They rely on speed, firepower, and shock action, and do considerable fighting while on the move. When the Bradley units dismount their infantry for battle, these infantrymen can be assured of a high volume of supporting fire, especially from the 25mm cannon on their own vehicles. The leaders of these units — the platoon leaders, the company commanders, and the battalion commanders — therefore must learn to orchestrate the firepower and mobility of their particular combined arms team. Yet the Bradley rifle teams, dismounted for a fight, perform the same tasks other infantrymen do — they take and hold ground.

An airborne infantry task force, on the other hand, introduced into an area by parachute assault, normally fights as part of a combined

arms team made up of light artillery, light mortars, tactical air support aircraft, and, possibly, helicopters. It relies on surprise, infantry ground mobility, and small arms firepower to accomplish its mission. Accordingly, its leaders have significantly different tasks to plan for, coordinate, and execute than the Bradley infantry leaders have; yet the airborne rifle squads perform the same tasks and fight the same kind of fight the dismounted Bradley infantry units do to accomplish the time-honored infantry tasks of taking and holding ground. These examples, therefore, describe both the sameness of one Infantry and the great diversity in the many types of infantry units.

Many well-meaning officers, generally not Infantry officers, often suggest giving proponentcy for our mechanized infantry to the Armored School or turning air assault infantry over to the Aviation School. Unfortunately, these officers (and a few infantrymen as well) have become enamored of the means rather than the end — with the transport (the helicopter) or the base of fire (the Bradley). They seem to have forgotten why those vehicles exist — to get infantrymen onto the battlefield.

What would happen if these suggestions were adopted — if the types of infantry were separated from the rest? The focus in those units would probably shift from their infantry role — the primary one — to their fighting vehicles or helicopters. This change in focus would be a normal reaction within the armor and aviation communities, but it would also be the primary reason why ONE INFANTRY under one proponent is so vital to the future of the Infantry in the U.S. Army.

Our Army is unique because of its worldwide orientation. Our country has treaties and security arrangements with many different nations. We have infantry units stationed in many of those countries. We cannot afford to have infantry officers and noncommissioned officers hold a view so narrow and be so specialized that they cannot serve effectively in different types of infantry units around the world.

Furthermore, situations such as that in Vietnam will continue to develop in which infantry soldiers of all grades and backgrounds will be asked to function in a single unique infantry role. They must be ready for this. But to be ready, they must be trained and experienced in a multitude of specialties — mechanized, airborne, air assault, motorized, and the like.

Yes, there are several infantries — and there will always be several — but there is only one overall Infantry. And its mission — our mission — has not changed.

In the future some of our present types of infantry units no doubt will be replaced by newer ones. But all of them will continue to be trained for the Infantry's central tasks, and there will still be a need for cohesiveness to unify the several infantries into one Infantry.