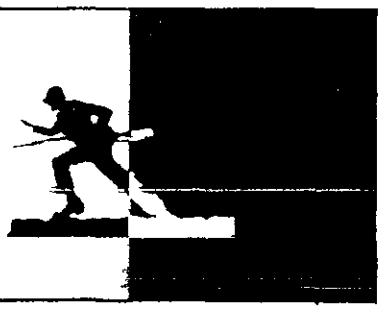
INFANTRY LETTERS



FLAG SIGNALS

Since I wrote the article "Flag Signals" (INFANTRY, November-December 1986, page 38), there have been some changes in doctrine, and I would like to correct myself.

Field Manual 7-7J has eliminated one of the formations previously used by armored vehicles, the "VEE," thereby precluding a signal for it.

Also, I recommend these signals for two additional reasons: Infantrymen of "normal" stature such as I am (66 inches) usually cannot stand high enough outside the hatch or cupola to perform the standard signals now in use, nor can they stand that far out while the vehicle is moving quickly cross country. I find that balance and safety are maintained when I ride mid-torso high in the hatch, which does not allow the full range of lateral downward motion of the arms for the signals currently in use.

FC 21-60, Visual Signals (USAIS, September 1986) has some vehicular signals in it, but they are limited and no differentiation is made between administrative (range) and tactical signals. Again, the same problem occurs with the use of three flags for tactical signals. In a moving vehicle, three flags are difficult to hold and also to see (two flags must be held in one hand, thereby masking one flag from observation from either side). In addition, signals with three flags are harder to remember than with two.

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CAPABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

I was delighted to read Colonel Huba Wass de Czege's article "More On Infantry" in the September-October 1986 issue of INFANTRY (page 13). It caused me to ponder several issues that affect our profession, and this reflection prompted me to offer my views on the specialization of the Infantry arm.

While the shift to Bradley-equipped mechanized infantry on one end of the spectrum and light infantry on the other may be the correct move, we must fully understand how it changes the capabilities of our entire infantry force.

Colonel Wass de Czege says that "having made our infantry types most effective near the ends of the spectrum . . . we have a void in the middle." This is a problem, because the middle of the spectrum contains missions that require heavy firepower, position defense, and assault of fortified positions. We accept a risk if we decrease our ability to respond to these traditional infantry missions.

In a major conventional war, the strength of an army is found in its standard infantry units. From John English's *On Infantry*, we learn that the Russian and Allied armies of World War II were victorious only after the German infantry, the backbone of the Wehrmacht, had been defeated on the battlefield.

As we move away from the center and tailor our forces for specialized conflict, we must also be aware of the limitations of those forces. Although standard infantry, either mechanized or "straight leg," has normally been able to handle demands on the extreme ends of the infantry spectrum, specialized infantry rarely is able to make a successful shift to the center. In fact, many Allied armored operations in World War II, such as Operation Goodwood in 1944, fell short of their goals primarily because of a lack of infantry support. Additionally, the United States found in that war that specialized infantry units such as mountain troops were not suited to the demands of the European battlefield and, except for the 10th Division, converted them to standard infantry divisions. The greatest hindrance to our operations in 1944-45 was the widespread shortage of *basic* infantry troops.

As we separate our infantry into Bradley and light forces, we should also be aware of the resulting effect on training. For example, we should once again examine our views on dual-tracking the students in some of our courses in both light and mechanized infantry. As the differences between light and mechanized forces become more pronounced, it becomes more difficult for infantrymen to switch from one type to another. These problems are most acute at the NCO and company-grade officer levels. (Although infantry units at higher levels may be more alike than different, within platoons and companies the difference between a Bradley unit and a light infantry unit is profound.) While most good infantry officers can successfully make the transition from a light unit to a Bradley force, they do experience a period of decreased performance while they realign their mental processes with the demands of the new force. We reduce the combat effectiveness of our units by constantly saddling them with new leaders who are struggling to make that shift.

Other branches demand specialization from their officers with good results. If we in our branch are to train today with the real possibility of fighting tomorrow, we should allow our officers to master one phase of the infantry instead of striving to make each a "Jack of All Trades."

In short, we must develop units and leaders that are capable of performing at maximum potential with minimum notice. As we undertake these changes to our Infantry arm, let us be confident of our direction and vigorously move to achieve our goals.

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TO "BERET" OR NOT?

Having been a reader of INFANTRY for quite some time, I feel compelled to respond to several views expressed in the letters section of the November-December 1986 issue (pages 4-5). I know the issue of berets and distinctive symbols is an old one, but I feel everyone has been missing the heart of the subject. A soldier's pride in himself and those around him is a powerful force in itself. Whether he thinks he can or thinks he can't do something, he's right! Half the battle is confidence; the other half is striving and training to prove that confidence is warranted. So I applaud Sergeant Stegall and Lieutenant Bobinski.

But after saying this, I must also agree with Captain R.D. Hooker's view. External symbols are nothing without competence. It is a leader's job to develop the skills and abilities of those in his charge and also to see that they are sustained. I interpret his view as a warning. Pride is one thing; over-confidence and cocksureness is quite another. It leads to underestimating an opponent and, in a combat environment, possibly defeat.

So let us put the issue to bed. If some have berets for their skills and talents, then those who do not are enraged. If all have berets, the elite are enraged. In the past year I have read many views on this issue. But the one area I have not seen addressed in any thoughtful length is the color of a beret and what it represents to those who wear it.

There are three berets authorized for wear in the Army to date—green, black, and maroon. Those who wear berets do so because they have earned the right. The berets were not given to them. A black beret means more to a Ranger than a green beret, not because he doesn't respect what the green beret stands for or what it means to those who wear it, but simply because he himself is a Ranger. This does not mean a given Ranger couldn't qualify for a green beret or that a given Special Forces soldier couldn't qualify for a black one. Each is where he wants to be. It's his cup of tea, his unit.

I believe this is the point the troops who are in favor of berets are trying to make. The difference in the comments I have seen recently is that each individual is speaking on behalf of *his* unit, division, or branch, showing his enthusiasm and esprit. When someone outside his unit reads his comment, it sounds as if he thinks his unit is the sole spearhead of the total Army. In reality the man is stating his pride in his unit, and this also contributes to the big picture. Recognition is, after all, a basic human need.

So forgive me, Captain Hooker, but here is another suggestion (of many) for pacifying this issue in the combat arms. First, those who have earned the berets should keep them. For the rest, Infantry might have powder blue berets (with distinctive flashes to distinguish mechanized units from straight-leg units); Light Infantry would have royal blue berets; Cavalry, brown; Armor, light brown; Engineer, rust; and Artillery, red. This combination would take nothing from anyone. The color would carry the meaning.

Additionally, personnel who did not perform to standard could be barred from wearing the unit's beret or unit crest on their beret until they had raised their proficiency level. Instead they would wear the beret without unit crest or would revert to the BDU soft cap. This would also serve as an additional impetus to perform; it would give leaders another way to correct job performance problems.

Complicated? Not really. But whatever the color, whatever the flash, berets don't stop bullets! One unit or branch doesn't win wars. It takes proficiency and it takes the combined arms working together.

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MODERN WAR STUDIES

The University Press of Kansas invites the submission of proposals and manuscripts for its new Modern War Studies series, edited by Raymond A. Callahan (University of Delaware), Jacob W. Kipp (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College), Jay Luvaas (U.S. Army War College), and Theodore A. Wilson (University of Kansas).

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Inquiries should be directed to me at University Press of Kansas, 329 Carruth, Lawrence, Kansas 66045.

MICHAEL BRIGGS
Acquisitions Editor

CANADIAN MAGAZINE AVAILABLE

The Canadian Embassy's magazine, CANADA TODAY/D'AUJOURD'HUI, considers the ongoing modernization of the Canadian Forces; Canada's role in NORAD, NATO, and peacekeeping; and its defense production industry.

The topics vary from issue to issue, but the magazine is basically about the people, economy, and politics of Canada, with a special emphasis on its relations with the United States. It is distributed free of charge to 100,000 people in the United States.

U.S. residents may obtain a copy or a subscription by writing the Public Affairs Office, 1771 N Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036.

DONNA THOMSON
Communications Assistant

FIRST DIVISION REUNION

The Society of the First Division (Big Red One), composed of the members of the First Infantry Division in World War I, World War II, and Vietnam, will hold its 69th annual reunion in Charleston, South Carolina, 9-13 September 1987 at the Charleston Place Hotel.

For further information, write to me at Society of the First Division, 5 Montgomery Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118.

ARTHUR L. CHAITT
Executive Director