

INFANTRY LETTERS



LEADERSHIP AND CARE OF THE FEET

Upon reading Sergeant W. P. Conboy's excellent letter in *INFANTRY*'s September-October 1987 issue (page 3), I formed the impression that his procedures for care of the feet were self-taught with little direction or supervision from above. It was not always so.

I joined my first unit, Company A, 29th Infantry Regiment, at Fort Benning in September 1933 just in time to participate in the regiment's annual 100-mile practice march. At the conclusion of the first day's jaunt, I was handed a bottle of gentian violet, a needle, and some cotton swabs, and told to check the feet of each man in my platoon and administer whatever aid was necessary. When the task was completed, having incurred several blisters of my own christening my new field boots, I asked if anyone would like to take care of me. The platoon responded to a man. Apparently, they were eager to give me a liberal dose of my own medicine: namely, the "purple fire," as they called it.

I do not know whether that practice is still in vogue. I suspect that it is not. In reflecting on my own later service as a regimental, assistant division and division commander, I cannot recall ever observing such a ritual or inquiring specifically into procedures being used to ensure proper foot hygiene, other than for frostbite. Why I did not, I am embarrassed that I cannot now explain.

Much is being written these days about leadership, and rightly so, but most of these dissertations seem to concentrate on broad principles and age-old platitudes while being woefully short on up-to-date specifics. It is as if some magic formula is being sought that, if fully understood, could make one an instant leader.

Until such a formula is devised, I suggest that a new platoon leader following his first extended march with his unit—tired, hungry, thirsty, and sweaty though he may be—kneel down in the dirt before each one of his soldiers, inspect their feet, and give to each who needs it an appropriate dose of "purple fire." I believe he will find, as I did, that caring and demonstrating that care in a positive way will be one step toward developing that personal bond that must exist between the leader and the led.

DAVID W. GRAY
MG, Retired
Golden Beach, Florida

SPECIAL INFANTRY WEAPON

The article "Infantryman's Combat Weapon," by Captain Max Oliver (*INFANTRY*, November-December 1987, page 9) was quite interesting and addressed some key issues that are crucial to the Infantry.

The first issue concerns the M16 rifle. Is the current weapon the best we could have? Will future generations of the M16 be any better? Probably not.

I contend that a weapon similar (at least in principle) to the one described by Captain Oliver is what the infantry needs. It needn't be as complex as the one in the article, or even as user-friendly. (Never underestimate the ability of a "grunt" to get the job done.) A semi-automatic grenade launcher of the 20mm to 25mm variety with an effective range of 500 or 600 meters shows a great deal of promise.

Another issue that should be addressed has to do with policy. Why must an infantryman be saddled with a generic weapon that is designed for the entire Army? I would submit that the infantry needs greater killing power

than a standard rifle can provide.

Why not field a specialized "infantry weapon system"? There are folks at Aberdeen who feel the recoil would be too severe. Unless it is significantly more than the recoil of a 12-gauge shotgun, however, I think infantrymen could handle it. Some of the support troops in infantry units might have trouble, but they would be given M16s instead.

I believe there are two reasons for resistance to an infantry weapon system of this type: First, there is the usual reluctance of many people to change their institutions, in this case one of the oldest—war. Peacetime innovations are hard to sell. Second, we have a great deal invested in the M16, both financially and personally (research and development continues on the M16A3).

I applaud the efforts of Captain Oliver and the Directorate of Combat Developments at the Infantry School. They deserve the support of infantrymen everywhere.

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CORRECTION

Thank you for the complimentary copies of the January-February 1988 issue of *INFANTRY*, which contains my article "Aiming Circle Accuracy" (pages 9-11).

I do have one bone of contention. In the last sentence of the article, an important word was left out. That sentence should have read that the mortars are "the battalion commander's only *organic* indirect fire support," not his "only indirect fire support."

I fear that there will be a lynch mob of artillerymen out looking for me, not

to mention a deluge of letters to your office protesting that we overlooked a branch or two of fellow soldiers.

J. KEVIN MULLMAN
Irmo, South Carolina

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

It was with pleasure that I read your January-February 1988 issue. Many of the articles will be valuable additions to my clipping library, and I would like to comment on two items.

Reference your Infantry News item concerning the through-the-mask feeding system (page 5), while I am sure this effort is noble, I tend to believe that searching for a varied menu is a waste. If a soldier should have to spend two-and-one-half days in MOPP 4, he would undoubtedly have greater worries than the flavor of the food he is attempting to squeeze through his mask.

Reference Captain Robert R. Leonhard's article "Counter-Reconnaissance Company" (pages 23-26), I offer the following observations and comments:

Historically, the battle has belonged to the army that could dominate the area between the opposing forces. Even a cursory reading of after-action reports from the National Training Center reveals the same flaws over and over. By lack of aggressiveness, we give the enemy the information he needs to destroy us. While we cannot control the tactical situation and the force ratios involved, we can control the amount of intelligence the enemy can gather. In the article, it is debatable whether Captain Leonhard's battalion did anything more than establish a covering force, and whether the task organization was the best.

The principle and intent cannot be challenged, but I do not believe Captain Leonhard carried his thesis far enough. First, counter-reconnaissance is not unique to mechanized forces; second, counter-reconnaissance is not a primarily defensive action. It is a tactic as basic as mutually supporting positions and

noise and light discipline.

In the offense, a battalion must patrol aggressively enough that it can drive enemy observation posts in so close to his FEBA that they cease to be useful. Enemy patrols must be afraid to venture beyond the direct fire support of their units. This, as Captain Leonhard points out, allows us to "own the battlefield" so the enemy's first encounter is an ad-libbed affair that stresses *his* command and control, not ours.

My only criticism is with the excessively centralized control of the counter-reconnaissance force. I suspect that giving each company a zone or sector to dominate would be more practical than trying to manage phase lines. Captain Leonhard's fear, "a total loss of command and control," can be realized only when management is artificially imposed on an unmanageable situation.

Confusion is a two-edged sword. If those counter-recon units are cut off by the enemy attack, I believe it will be arguable who is more confused—the company that is out of contact with a squad or the enemy column that is attacked from an unexpected direction at an unexpected time.

WILLIAM B. CREWS
CPT
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FIRING PORT WEAPONS

The firing port weapon on the M-2 Bradley IFV is indeed a problem. This weapon is an extra one for the rifleman to clean, and it cannot be aimed but must be "walked" onto the target, wasting half of the ammunition it fires.

In the letter from Lieutenant Stewart W. Bentley, Jr., in *INFANTRY*'s November-December 1987 issue (pages 3-4), however, the proposal to discard these weapons and fire modified M16s through the ports is impractical on several counts.

First is the cost. In a time of shrinking defense budgets, even refitting the existing rifles would cost several million dollars that would be better spent on

more antitank ammunition. The rifle system we have doesn't work very well, but it does work. Ask your riflemen whether they would rather have one weapon to clean instead of two or an adequate supply of tank-killing missiles. If we could change the production of new M16A2s to what Lieutenant Bentley calls M16A3s tomorrow, we could issue them to units that are just converting to the Bradley, but a new rifle would mean years of development, by which time the production of Bradleys would be completed.

Second is the tactical implications. Lieutenant Bentley proposes screwing the rifles into an adaptor. This means that once the Bradley has reached the objective, the troops will have to take valuable seconds to unscrew their M16A3s from the firing ports. And upon dismounting, they will have to carry weapons that have just fired several hundred rounds and that are still red hot. Not a very practical prospect.

Lieutenant Bentley's proposal for shoulder holsters for crewmen is logical. Tank commanders have had them for years now. An alternative would be to have a rifle rack for an M16 or a carbine on the outside of the turret, but that would be complicated and (due to damage from shell fragments) less effective.

STEPHEN V. COLE
Tiger Publications
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BOOK ON SNIPERS

I am an Army Reserve major and a former Marine and am writing a book on snipers, a subject about which little has been written.

Having served as a sniper in Vietnam in 1966 during a test program, I am well versed in the accurate depiction of events that occurred there at that time. The book will start, however, with the earliest history of the use of sharpshooters and progress through the wars to the latest experiences.

So that I can give credit where credit is due, and keeping in mind that any

work in journalism often becomes history, I am attempting to locate any individuals who served as snipers during combat.

Each man who has a good story will have a chapter in the book portraying his experience, and he will be given proper credit in the book. The context of the work will also include the weapons and equipment used and any unique tactics.

I would like to either interview or correspond with as many combat snipers as I can find, whether they served in Vietnam, World War II, Korea, the Dominican Republic, or Lebanon. My address is 2812 S. Hudson Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74114.

WILLIAM C. ROBERTS

PROVERBS AND RULES

In "14 Proverbs Gleaned From A Damp Foxhole" (INFANTRY, January-February 1988, pages 42-46), the late Charles Black offered reinforcement for many things infantrymen should know but often forget, if they ever knew them in the first place.

While I would not think of expanding those Proverbs, I do have some Rules to offer. (Remember that these are Rules, not Laws. An example of a Law is: "Your radio will always fail when you need it most.")

Anyway, Rules Learned Through More Than A Few Years of Experience:

1. Never volunteer. (All soldiers know this rule exists, but few practice it.)
2. Never ask for volunteers. (If every soldier practices Rule 1, then asking will do no good. Besides, things get done a lot faster if you select soldiers for a job instead of waiting for them to debate among, or with, themselves on whether they want to volunteer.)
3. Cash the check. (If the Army wants its money back, someone will tell you. Months later, of course. I sent a check back. Once. I sent a cover letter, too, explaining the overpayment. Sixteen months later, there is still paperwork to be done.)

4. It is easier to get forgiveness than permission. (Usually, but only if what you did was right.)

5. Make a range card. (No explanation needed.)

6. Always recon. (The key word is *always*—every time, in any situation. Even when you think recon isn't necessary, do it anyway. After a while, recon becomes addictive.)

7. Never miss a legitimate chance to eat or sleep. (You never know when you will get another opportunity. Remember, though, the key word—*legitimate*.)

8. Know the difference between incoming and outgoing. (If you need an explanation for this Rule, you will never get a chance to learn the difference.)

9. Camouflage everything. (That's *everything*—trees, shrubs, bushes, dirt, whatever might give your position away.)

10. Always know how many rounds are in your magazines. (Few things are as frustrating as popping away, then having your bolt suddenly lock back because you *thought* the magazine was full.)

11. NCOs are right 99.9 percent of the time, if not more. (If you can't remember any of the other Rules, remember this one. Good NCOs will remind you of the others.)

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ATTENTION DINFOS ALUMNI

The Defense Information School (DINFOS) is compiling an alumni list for its 25th Anniversary observance in June 1989.

If you are a DINFOS graduate from Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, or any of its predecessor schools—the Armed Forces Information School at Fort Slocum, New York; the Air Force Information School at Craig Air Force Base, Alabama; or the Navy Journalist School at Great Lakes, Illinois—please send your name, armed service, course and school attended, graduation date,

present occupation, and address.

Mail this information to Public Affairs Office, Defense Information School, Building 400, Fort Benjamin Harrison, IN 46216-6200.

EDWARD M. McDONALD
COL, U.S.A.
Commandant

TET OFFENSIVE 1968

I am presently collecting detailed, first-hand accounts of military actions associated with the 1968 Tet Offensive for a book on the subject.

Anyone who was in Vietnam between 29 January and 1 April 1968 and who is interested in providing his or her account should write to me at 1149 Grand Teton Drive, Pacifica, CA 94044.

ERIC M. HAMMEL

SHAEF/ETOUSA REUNIONS

The SHAEF Veterans Association (European Theater, World War II) will hold its Fourth Annual Reunion in San Francisco, 8-9 October 1988.

At the same time, in conjunction with the SHAEF reunion, the ETOUSA Headquarters Command (ETO, World War II) will hold its First National Reunion.

For further information, anyone who is interested may call me at (201) 842-4206, or write to me at the address given below.

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