

# INFANTRY LETTERS



## UPGRADE BATTALION MORTARS

The article "120mm Mortar in Light Forces," by Richard E. LaRossa (INFANTRY, May-June 1989, p. 15-16), reflects a dangerous misconception of the needs of light infantry on modern battlefields. Mr. LaRossa's proposal essentially trades decreased range for increased explosive weight. It does not go far enough toward answering the problems light infantry fire support faces.

The M102 105mm howitzer does need to be replaced. The Army recognizes this and plans to buy the M119 105mm howitzer as an interim until a new lightweight 155mm howitzer is operational. The M119 can reach out to 19,000 meters with rocket-assisted projectiles (RAP) compared with the maximum range of 15,000 meters for the 102's RAP rounds. The lightweight 155mm howitzer will have an even greater range and a more powerful warhead.

Using the 120mm mortar in a field artillery unit would provide only one-fourth of the coverage of the M102 and would force the artillery to move closer to the fighting. The artillery would then be vulnerable to virtually all forms of artillery counterbattery fire and to being overrun by enemy assaults. It would also have to stay on the move to keep up with fast-moving attacks and would increase the crowding of the maneuver and staging areas close to the battle.

I don't believe that one battalion of 155mm howitzers, as Mr. LaRossa proposes, would be capable of handling the counterbattery desires of a division at war. Too, the large shipments of the Soviet-developed M120 120mm mortar to client nations could easily overwhelm the mortars deployed by all the U.S. light infantry divisions. Other nations, such as Israel and France, also sell

120mm mortars in great quantities.

The artillery readily available to most nations has ranges that exceed 30 kilometers, greater than the range of the M198 155mm towed howitzers now being used by our light infantry divisions. Most nations also field multiple rocket launchers that provide extremely heavy and instantaneous fire support. This important capability has been missing from our light infantry divisions since their formation; the divisions must have it if they are to remain competitive. Unless the Air Force or Navy is directed to attack enemy artillery positions, using 120mm mortars to equip field artillery battalions would assure that enemy artillery could gain fire superiority.

I am struck by the impression that the 120mm mortar would be used primarily as an antitank weapon. (The author says, "Of primary importance is the 120mm mortar's potential as a deadly antitank weapon....") Our artillery battalions would then become specialized antitank battalions, and this is a poor reason for employing a 120mm mortar. The use of antitank artillery rounds remains the exception and not the rule. The difficulties in targeting moving tanks, the expense of ammunition, the limited training possibilities, and the countermeasures limit the utility of precision-guided munitions. I would rather see the Army develop a good re-

placement for the Dragon antitank missile.

The Army still needs a good 120mm mortar, but it should be deployed in place of the 81mm mortar at battalion level. If need be, the 81mm mortar could be retained alongside the 120mm mortar and used when the 120mm mortar could not deploy in the rough terrain light infantry battalions operate in. This would be rare, because the mortar platoon in a light infantry battalion still needs eight HMMWVs to deploy four 81mm mortars with shorter ranges. The 120mm mortars surely could be towed using HMMWVs. This would provide four mortars for each light infantry battalion, or a total of 36 120mm mortars.

The division artillery needs 155mm lightweight howitzers in each of the three artillery battalions that support the maneuver brigades. The general support battery could then be equipped to provide a multiple rocket launcher capability. The towed MLRS or the Israeli 160mm Light Artillery Rocket System would be excellent for this unit.

The time has come to stop decreasing our firepower to meet the Air Force's airlift capability and start developing the airlift transports to meet our firepower requirements. Also, transporting ammunition to artillery units in light infantry divisions on the battlefield must not be a problem. A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter transport unit should be formed to ensure fast resupply of ammunition to any unit in the division. This unit should have about ten helicopters and should be dedicated to ammunition transport. This unit would not replace ammunition transport trucks, but would supplement them. (Of course, a whole book could be written on that subject.)

CHARLES J. HAAS  
CPT, Military Intelligence  
Fort Ord, California

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## MAP COURSE DISTANCES

In "Map Course Distances" (INFANTRY, July-August 1989, pages 11-15), Major Charles F. Coffin III offers his idea of a better way to verify the accuracy of distances when setting up or running through an azimuth-and-pace land navigation course. He suggests that we teach soldiers to treat the distance between two points as the hypotenuse of a right triangle, then to use a geometric formula to arrive at that distance. He claims this is a more accurate method than others currently in use.

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, not a right triangle. Take a strip of paper, align it with the two points, make your tick marks, and you have the distance between those points—just as accurately and far more simply than Major Coffin's method.

His method suffers the same source of perceived and real inaccuracies as any other method; it does nothing to alleviate poorly plotted points. It ignores the obvious: Map distances do not accurately equal ground distances. A soldier who walks up and down hills all day on a compass course will never agree on distance with someone who sits behind a desk and plots that same course using a calculator and a geometric formula.

Major Coffin's ultimate goal in all of this is to improve the instruction that leads to good land navigation skills among soldiers. Since he is currently assigned in a position where this skill is taught, I offer him the following suggestions. Teach your students the source of inaccuracies, not how to find precise distances or azimuths. They should mark their points and measure their distances carefully and use very thin pencils. If they understand where land navigators go wrong, they will learn to be more careful.

Teach them that land navigation requires judgment, not geometry. They will not follow an azimuth and pace to within five feet of a camouflaged case of MREs. Azimuth and pace will only get them closer to it. Terrain association, resection, the use of intermediate points to guide on, and an appreciation of the foliage in the area and the elevation they

traverse will also help them in their search for the correct location.

And never imply that the course is precise and perfect. The course is man-made, and man has yet to achieve perfection.

PATRICK J. CONLON  
LT, Infantry  
Fairbanks, Alaska

## SOVIET INFANTRY

The informative article "Soviet Motorized Infantry" in the July-August 1989 issue of INFANTRY (pages 42-43) was a bit misleading in stating, "The Soviets do not field any light infantry units."

The Soviets do indeed field "light" infantry units. A valuable companion article might be written to cover the various motorized rifle units converted to "mountain" units, the dozen or so air assault brigades, the many airmobile battalions, and all of the smaller specialty units such as Ranger and commando.

WALTER D. MILLER  
SSG, Ohio Army National Guard  
Xenia, Ohio

## LIGHT FIGHTERS

I read with interest the article by Colonel (Retired) Philip D. Grimm ("Infantry in Action: Saturation Operations," July-August 1989, pages 28-33). I was a member of Company A, 4th Battalion, 3d Infantry during that time and can vividly remember when he took command.

At first, many soldiers did not like the operational techniques employed, but after our first operation we could see real results, and we didn't lose people. Many of the soldiers were skeptical because we were short-handed, and they felt we couldn't fight without superiority in numbers. But Colonel Grimm's plan of engagement soon disproved this idea.

I am now a first sergeant in the 205th Infantry Brigade, which is the round-out brigade for the 6th Infantry Division in

Alaska. Colonel Grimm's plan is definitely "light fighter tactics," and the Army should look at it as such.

SCOTT E. THOMPSON  
1SG, Infantry  
St. Cloud, Minnesota

## MECHANIZED AND AIRMOBILE

In "Airmobile Operations for Mechanized Units" (INFANTRY, July-August 1989, pages 40-42), Captain Mark W. McLaughlin reports the complexities of planning and executing his company's air assault operation during an ARTEP as an element of the 1st Armored Division's air assault training plan. His clear, concise report carries some cogent lessons and recommendations.

You may be sure that I read the article in great detail, because as a major with the 1st Armored Rifle Battalion, 6th Infantry, Combat Command "A", 1st Armored Division, I wrote "Airlanded Armored Infantry," which appeared in the January-February 1959 issue of *Armor*. (That's three decades long gone.)

I wrote that article to report the results of a troop test that had been put into the scenario for Exercise STRONG-ARM, conducted from Fort Polk, Louisiana, in May 1958. The stated object of the article was "to present, from the participant's view, an approach to conducting airlanded operations with the Armored Rifle Battalion.... For *Armor* and Armored Infantry commanders, present and future, the subject is worthy of continued study and experimentation."

In his foreword to my article, Colonel Delk M. Oden, who commanded Combat Command "A" during the test, wrote, "While our current *Armor* series manuals soundly state in general terms our capabilities for helicopter-borne operations, I am convinced that we must develop our *actual* readiness to perform such operations...."

Captain McLaughlin, still carrying the colors of the same infantry regiment in the same armored division, seemed to face many of the same considerations

and concerns for a complex operation that his predecessors had encountered back in the outer boondocks of Fort Polk.

But wait a minute! Captain McLaughlin's Company C, 7th Battalion, 6th Infantry, made an air assault by *computer simulation*. He writes:

*Although we were unable to execute an air assault mission during the actual ARTEP, the simulation exercise validated the concept of an air assault by a dismounted company. The company and task force commanders were confident that, in an actual operation, such a mission would succeed. We did learn several important lessons from the simulation.*

Long before the computer came along to enable The Great "Let's Play Like," the 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry actually and in person took 'em out of the tracks and put 'em in the choppers for three quick operations: A 12-mile lift at 0430 on 7 May to control a road network in a small town; at 1630 the same day, an 18-mile trip to seize a piece of critical terrain; and at a very dark 0230 on 9 May, another 12 miles for a road junction on the combat command's objective. (If you want some thrills and chills, try that night hop after only a minimum of training for both lifters and liftees!)

I do not want to appear as the armchair imposter who grumps, "You kids should have been there in the old days when we got out there and *did it!*" It is very likely that having our airlanded armored infantry experiment implanted in STRONGARM as an official test requirement gave us a rare training opportunity. We encountered command and staff problems that couldn't have been programmed into a computer, even if we had been blessed (or burdened) by one.

Regarding the basic troop leading procedures, I wrote, "In this period, Armor's well-known *deliberate planning, violent execution* may of necessity be amended to *violent planning, violent execution!*" All would agree that a present-day computer simulation would be superior to no exercise at all, and certainly Captain McLaughlin reported it in fine professional style.

What really grabs me is the feeling that there should be some means in the system that would make the experiences of the past more readily available to those who are, again and again, learning the same lessons the hard way. Or, in the case of computer simulations, maybe learning them the easy way.

I keep up fairly well with the service journals that deal with ground combat, and I didn't see an article on airlanded armored (mechanized) infantry during that 30 years between 1959 and 1989. Were there others? Have other units regularly conducted such air assaults in ARTEPs, whether computer simulated or real? I would appreciate being brought up to date by readers who have been there.

ROLFE L. HILLMAN, JR.  
COL, U.S. Army, Retired  
Arlington, Virginia

## MILITARY HISTORY WRITING CONTEST

The Army's 1989 Military History Writing Contest is open to all students who attended officer advanced courses and the Sergeants Major Academy during calendar year 1989.

Entries must be previously unpublished manuscripts of 2,000 to 3,000 words in length (approximately 7 to 10 pages), typed and doubled-spaced. The papers should develop a historical theme related to military history. Documentation is required, but footnotes or endnotes do not count as part of the length requirement.

Some suggested topics are:

- The noncommissioned officer in peacetime or wartime.
- The black experience during the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, or Korea.
- Leadership training related to combat—for example, Ridgway in Korea.
- Training—for example, Civil War or other training programs in war or peace.
- Light infantry forces—development, training, employment.
- Mexican border operations, Indian campaigns.

- Unit cohesion and stress in combat.
- Fighting surrounded and winning—for example, the Ardennes or Vietnam.
- Logistics.
- D-Day and the invasion of Europe (45th Anniversary in 1989).

Entries for the 1989 Military History Writing Contest must be submitted by midnight 31 December 1989. They should include the title of the Sergeants Major Academy or advanced course the author attended, the course number, the dates attended, and forwarding address upon completion of the course. Entrants for 1989 should contact their command historians for assistance in writing their essays to conform with acceptable historical standards and methodology.

Two copies of the manuscript, along with any accompanying photographs, maps, or other graphics must be sent to U.S. Army Center of Military History, ATTN: Writing Contest, Washington, DC 20314-0200. For additional information, anyone who is interested may call me at AUTOVON 285-1279 or commercial (202) 272-1278/1279.

A panel of three military historians will judge each entry on the basis of usefulness to today's Army leader, originality; historical accuracy/documentation; and style and rhetoric.

The prizes will range from \$500 to \$100, or as the judges direct. Contest winners will be announced approximately 31 March 1990.

BILLY A. ARTHUR  
Chief, Field Programs  
Center of Military History  
Washington, D.C.

