

From The Editor

KEEPING THE STANDARD

On 7 October 1993, Fort Benning will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Infantry School in its present location. The precursors of the school had been at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri; Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; The Presidio of Monterey, California; and Fort Sill, Oklahoma. It was not until the closing months of World War I that the Infantry School of Arms commenced operations on its present site south of Columbus, Georgia. Within weeks of its dedication, units and activities from various Army locations began arriving at Camp Benning; first came the 740-man contingent of the Small Arms Firing School from Camp Perry, followed by a class of 100 West Point cadets. The 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry, arrived in March 1919, followed in less than two weeks by 200 officers, instructors, and students of the Camp Hancock Machine Gun School, who were also soon assimilated into the Infantry School.

But the expansion was not without its problems. With the end of World War I came the perception that further expansion at Camp Benning was unnecessary. Congress withheld appropriations for further construction and directed that the site be abandoned. Fortunately, wiser heads prevailed, and work continued—although at a slower pace—on base support facilities and the infrastructure needed to sustain the installation. Over the next two decades, Fort Benning evolved into the center for the research and development, doctrine, and training that were to be the foundation of success for the U.S. infantry in World War II.

In the years following World War II, Fort Benning was on the cutting edge of such combat developments as airborne and ranger training, airmobility, the testing of new weapon systems and equipment, and the doctrine to guide leaders in the employment of these new dimensions of combat. Even today, as we approach the turn of the century, the Infantry Center and School continue to perform these diverse missions.

Fort Benning's most far-reaching contribution during these 75 years, however, has been as a repository of institutional knowledge that fosters progress while avoiding repetitions of the failed experiments of the past. The installation's historical and archival files—as exemplified in the Donovan Technical Library—provide the documentary records to guide doctrine writers, combat developments personnel, and staff and faculty members in their research. At the same time, the collective knowledge and experience of the military and civilian work force at Fort Benning provide the continuity necessary to speed coordination, lend urgency to time-sensitive projects, and ensure that support to the field is timely, technically correct, and adequate to the needs of today's infantryman.

The significance of Fort Benning's 75th anniversary goes beyond simple longevity; it lies instead in the continuity of our institutions, in the professionalism of the men and women who have trained here, and in the incalculable effort and personal sacrifice of the installation's military and civilian personnel during the past three-quarters of a century.

Throughout our history, economic realities have forced our armed forces to confront austerity. At times, the recognition of dangers abroad has been dimmed by more immediate—and hence more urgent—needs at home. This does not mean, however, that the threat is not real, or that we will not be called upon to respond to challenges of a type and magnitude not yet imagined. It is here that the roles of the service schools—in our case, the Infantry School—become crucial; it is here that the ideals that have always guided the force must be sustained.

This task will certainly not be easy, but Fort Benning will meet the challenge as it has all others, by using our defense dollars responsibly, by thinking innovatively, and by putting the interests of our Nation first. The past 75 years are part of our history; we must now concentrate on what we are going to do in the future.