

From The Editor

INTEROPERABILITY—SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

The fact that operations other than war will occupy a great deal of our Army's time and effort in years to come should be no surprise. The United States and her allies have been involved in actions of this nature for some time, and have developed considerable expertise along the way. American, British, Belgian, Canadian, French, German, and Italian soldiers—to name just a few—have served with distinction in most of the world's hotspots, either alone or under the auspices of the United Nations.

The success of these operations is remarkable when one considers the language differences among the nations involved, and the cultural diversity of the areas in which these forces are deployed. The key to success in this area has been the ability of the participating nations' forces to plan, coordinate, and execute an array of complex operations in spite of—in most cases—the lack of a common language.

Interoperability is the name of the game, and we need to get good at it if we intend to remain a credible player. The Army of the 21st century, currently referred to as Force XXI, will have the challenge of meeting our worldwide commitments as the United States enters the next millennium, and the effort we will put into fielding Force XXI must include foreign language proficiency as part of the equation. While other nations have long included foreign language instruction—particularly English—as part of their leader development, we have placed less emphasis on this skill, relying instead on the ability of other nations to communicate in our language. This has often placed us at a serious disadvantage. Industry has long recognized that it must speak the host nation language if it is to remain competitive, and it is time for the Army to follow suit, for in a military context the word *competitive* translates into force protection and mission accomplishment.

The successful conduct of operations other than war will include noncombatant evacuation operations, human intelligence gathering, host nation support, and interoperability with nations that speak a language other than English; this will demand a much higher level of foreign language proficiency than we presently enjoy.

So how do we improve the foreign language skills of the force in the face of dwindling defense budgets and reduced manpower? We do it by making the most of the skills we already have on hand. Soldiers who are proficient in a foreign language can retain or increase that proficiency through reading, using tapes available at many libraries and education centers, and through contacts with others who also speak the language. (These language skills need to be reflected in soldiers' personnel records as well.) Tuition assistance, G.I. Bill benefits, grants, and any scholarships offered by local colleges are among the ways motivated soldiers can support their enrollment.

Local education centers can provide information on programs available, but it is up to the individual to take the initiative and determine the best course of action. Soldiers who have the motivation and initiative to learn a foreign language will become more versatile and broaden their assignment possibilities. They will also learn a skill that will serve the Army and our nation, and continue to be of value whenever they choose to leave active duty.

The Bill Mauldin cartoon on this month's cover—based on the U.S. 45th Infantry Division's landings on Sicily in July 1943, and in September 1943 on the coast of Italy itself—exemplifies the American soldier's ability to find humor even under the stress of combat. For that reason it has been selected for the issue commemorating the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944.

RAE

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