



# Commandant's NOTE

**MAJOR GENERAL JOHN W. HENDRIX** Chief of Infantry

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## A TIME OF CHALLENGE

This is an exciting time to assume the responsibilities of the Chief of Infantry. We approach the turn of the century with some of the best-trained and best-equipped soldiers in the world, but at the same time we are confronted with resource reductions that will challenge our ability to maintain an acceptable level of readiness. Technology has enabled us to acquire and engage targets at ranges once thought impossible; our forces have asserted their dominance of the night; and we are developing soldier systems that will extend the Infantryman's firepower, maneuverability, and survivability far beyond the capabilities of any adversary. Our technological edge gave the Coalition Forces victory in the Gulf War; we must maintain that competitive edge, but we will have to make the most of every asset at our disposal. It is in this environment that the Infantry must continue to attract, train, and equip the force that will meet the challenges of the year 2000 and beyond.

The United States Army has undergone considerable change over the past two decades and will continue to evolve as we enter the next century. Evolution is not new to our Army, but the increased constraints under which we must operate will require ingenuity, innovation, and the strictest accountability for the assets entrusted to us, as we prepare to carry out a broader range of missions than ever before.

Operations other than war will occupy an increasing share of our time and effort; in the past, this has taken the form of disaster relief at home and a combination of disaster relief and peace operations abroad. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissemination of comparatively advanced weapons to evolving nations around the world have presented challenges requiring response on the part of America and her allies, while misconceptions as to the United States' military capabilities and resolve have tempted still others into ill-advised courses of action. It is reasonable to expect similar challenges in the foreseeable future, and we must be prepared to respond appropriately.

In this heady atmosphere of technological preeminence, we cannot afford to lose sight of the Infantryman, for it is he who will employ our state-of-the-art systems on the future

battlefield, and it is his success that will determine the continuity of our nation and its institutions. It is therefore our responsibility as leaders to ensure that he remains the best-trained, best-equipped, and best-supported soldier in the world. In this regard, support does not stop at the logistical sustainment of his combat operations; it extends all the way to our concern for his family and their well-being. Details such as family support groups, pre-deployment briefings, effective community programs, and a chain of command responsive to soldiers' needs—to name only a few—have proved invaluable in terms of cohesiveness and the retention of good soldiers. In the coming months and years these will prove even more critical, as we continue to execute our force projection and peacekeeping missions.

Our greatest challenges will lie in the training of our fighting force, and our success in this area will demand our full attention. As leaders, we will have to make some hard choices when we allocate assets, but the training of the force must remain the first priority. Although the development and acquisition of state-of-the-art weapons and equipment will run a close second, the best equipment in the world will be of little use to a force not thoroughly trained in its employment. The technological contribution to the defeat of the Iraqi army three years ago is unquestionable, but it is impossible to ignore the impact of the Iraqis' own serious shortcomings in tactics, discipline, and logistics, all of which reflect a lack of emphasis on training.

Lately, we have focused on the defeat of Task Force Smith as a consequence of unpreparedness; devastating as that loss was in 1950, the potential for even greater disaster exists today, and we must ensure that the mistakes of 45 years ago are not repeated.

This, therefore, is the challenge that I accept as Chief of Infantry, and that I offer to you: We must examine the way we do business, exercise sound judgement in the way we commit our scarce assets, and train the force as if we were going to war tomorrow. We owe no less to our soldiers, and we owe no less to our nation.