

# INFANTRY LETTERS



## "I'LL TAKE THE '60"

I found the two articles in INFANTRY's November-December 1995 issue on the machinegun's role both informative and thought provoking (*see "Machineguns in the Infantry," by Major James B. Baldwin, pages 7-8; and "Thoughts on the Medium Machinegun for the Light Infantry Company," by Captain Matthew M. Canfield, pages 9-12*). As a rifle platoon sergeant in the 41st Infantry Brigade, I have some points to make that are worth considering in the evolution of this extremely important part of the infantry's firepower.

There is a great deal of argument about the relative merits of the M249 and the venerable M60. Proponents of the M249 argue that the high-powered NATO 5.56mm round has roughly the same ballistic properties as the 7.62mm ammunition used in the M60. They also tell us that an M249-equipped team can carry a larger basic load of ammunition than a team using the M60. Taken at face value,

these would seem to be good reasons to replace the M60 with a newer and more reliable weapon. When considered in total, however, it seems clear that, although the M249 is an important part of the squad's firepower, it does not meet the platoon leader's need for a medium machinegun.

The medium machinegun evolved on the basis of the need to place accurate, long-range, automatic fires on a target. The M60 was the weapon the Army selected for this role, and it has served us well since its adoption, years before many of today's soldiers were born. Now, the M240 appears slated to replace it (at least in the Active Army). This is an intelligent and logical decision. The idea of supplanting the M60 with the M249 is not.

The use of one weapon to perform dissimilar roles has never met with a great deal of success. For example, how many of us can honestly say that an M16-equipped automatic rifleman truly accomplished a mission different from that

of a rifleman carrying the same weapon? Doctrinally, there may be important differences in roles and missions at the lowest (and most important) level, but these differences often blur under the pressure of operational necessity. While the M249 might perform some of the requirements for a medium machinegun, it will inevitably be forced to perform in a support role that is better handled by a heavier weapon.

The argument for a larger basic load flies in the face of current doctrine. The ability to carry over 800 rounds is important, but the really important factor is to put steel on target, not to carry an unrealistically large number of bullets. The soldier's load is already too heavy. If we have to carry something, let's make it powerful enough that the payoff outweighs the negative aspects of getting that weapon onto the objective. When the supporting position opens up with M60s to initiate an assault, there will be no doubt that rounds are moving downrange. I do not think the effect from the M249



will ever match that, ballistic tables notwithstanding.

We now have an extremely effective supporting weapon in the rifle company—the 60mm mortar section. The medium machinegun is certainly capable of firing in the indirect role, as Captain Canfield explained, but it is not nearly as well-suited to this role as the mortar and other weapons presently in the Army's arsenal. In my unit, every soldier already load. I doubt that the addition of the ammunition needed for indirect machinegun fire will "add value" to our load. The creation of another specialized MOS does not seem like a good idea either.

Large machinegun-equipped units were established by the World War I combatants to address the seemingly insurmountable obstacles presented by barbed wire, trench fortifications, and heavy artillery. In terms of manpower and control of the battlefield, medium and heavy machinegun battalions represented a logical solution to defense-oriented warfare. But under the fast moving conditions of our current style of war, this kind of unit would be left in the dust.

The answer clearly is not the creation of a new doctrine or MOS. Every answer to the question of the machinegun's role lies within the foundation of our tactical doctrine—from Field Manual 7-8, *The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, through Lieutenant Colonel William C. David's series of articles in *INFANTRY*. (See "Preparing a Battalion for Combat: Physical Fitness and Mental Toughness," May-June 1995; "Marksmanship," July-August 1995; "Maneuver Live-Fire Training," September-October 1995; and *Combat Leadership Lessons Learned*," November-December 1995.)

We know how to use machineguns. The concept of increasing the amount of machinegun training is a solid step and one that will pay huge dividends in execution. Training, along with effective and reliable weapons that put maximum firepower on target, is the key to combat power.

While I would definitely like to see a replacement for the aging M60, I don't want my platoon's "pigs" replaced with weapons that do not offer the flexibility or the psychological effect of a 7.62mm machinegun. If it's a choice between the M60 and an M249 with a tripod, I'll take the '60, thank you.

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### THANKS FROM CROATIA

Thank you for the excellent articles in recent issues. Several of them could not be more relevant to us here in Croatia; specifically, "Convoy Live-Fire Exercises" and "Preparing a Battalion for Combat: Marksmanship" (July-August 1995); "Route Clearance Operations," "Preparing a Battalion for Combat: Maneuver Live Fire Training," and "PIRS: What They Are...and Are Not" (September-October 1995). These issues in particular will stay in our unit library. Keep up the good work.

**EDWARD STEELE**  
MSG  
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*EDITOR'S NOTE: By now, these units should have received two more issues of INFANTRY, with additional articles that*

*we believe will be equally relevant—on countersniper missions in operations other than war (OOTW), riot control, and cold weather operations in the January-February 1996 issue, and on law of war training and infiltration techniques in this March-April issue. Coming up are also articles on training the rules of engagement and military operations on urban terrain.*

*INFANTRY would welcome articles on tactics and lessons learned from soldiers currently serving in Bosnia.*

### LOOKING FOR COMMENTS ON DMA MAP PRODUCTS

My newly formed team of cartographers with the Defense Mapping Agency (DMA) recently completed team training. As a result, we are now looking for input from the users of DMA products to help us improve the products we create. Already, one soldier has told me that, on 1:50,000 and 1:100,000 scale TLM maps, he uses a magic marker to mark the grid values to make them easier to see.

There must be other ideas out there that enable one person or a small group to outperform others. These new ways, if adopted by all, could help make everyone more successful. They might save us money, or you, lives.

If you would like to learn more about DMA products, use E-mail: coghlant@dma.gov. Or send me your ideas through E-mail: carlsonw@dma.gov; or write me at the Defense Mapping Agency, 3200 South Second Street, St. Louis, MO 63118-3399.

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