



Commandant's NOTE

MAJOR GENERAL JOHN W. HENDRIX Chief of Infantry

FACING THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

At the beginning of this century, the United States Army was completing the transition to a five-shot bolt-action rifle; the machinegun was only in the earliest stage of development; our tactics still bore the imprint of Napoleonic doctrine; tactical communications relied upon wire, courier, or pigeons; and we were cautiously experimenting with the employment of motorized troop movements. The tank was unheard of; night operations—if conducted at all—were limited to small, short-range missions; and logistical support consisted largely of what a unit could carry or forage along its route of march.

We have come a long way indeed. Today's M-16 rifle—the state of the art in small arms when it was fielded—is to be replaced eventually by a new individual weapon that will provide the infantryman with innovations in fire control and bursting munitions of far greater lethality than ever before. The M-60 machinegun has also served us long and well, and its replacement for active Army infantry, armor, and divisional combat engineer units—the M240B—will be even better. Our tactics and equipment have evolved to the point that today's infantryman can execute a wide array of missions ranging from combat in built-up areas to combined arms operations on any type of terrain. The Abrams tank and the Bradley infantry fighting vehicle are an unbeatable combination, as Iraqi ground forces quickly learned in Operation DESERT STORM.

Night operations—once avoided for their complexity and the risk involved—are now the way we do business. At the turn of the century, owning the night was a scarcely attainable goal; today it is reality. The night fighting training facility (NFTF) at Fort Benning is a prototype designed and constructed by our own Training Support Center, using locally available manpower and materials wherever possible to reduce costs. The facility trains soldiers—regardless of branch, grade, or military occupational specialty—to properly use various night vision devices during ground combat operations. The NFTF concentrates on the individual tasks of see, shoot, move, communicate, and navigate.

This program of instruction, which focuses on small-unit leaders, will overcome existing training deficiencies in the use of night-fighting equipment. Soldiers training in the facility first receive instruction on unaided night vision and night vision equipment such as

goggles, weapon aiming lasers, laser pointers and illuminators, infrared markers and lights, and infrared munitions. Subsequent training focuses on three areas: boresighting laser aiming devices and basic marksmanship techniques with night vision goggles; negotiating various environmental lanes while wearing night vision goggles; and interpreting vehicle thermal signatures using a computer-based program of instruction. This training facility, supported by continuing advances in night vision technology, will ensure our sustained lead in this critical area of the tactical spectrum.

The technological achievements of the past century have extended to the fields of communications and logistics as well. Today's soldier will be able to draw upon the full legacy of the information age as he receives and transmits orders, reports, and situational updates over secure systems. Commanders will have a degree of situational awareness that will enable them to get inside the enemy's decision cycle and seize the initiative. Our logistical support systems have also kept pace with other materiel improvements; our research, development, and acquisition community, the U.S. Army Soldier Systems Command, and other agencies are working relentlessly to ensure that today's U.S. infantryman will continue to be the best supported soldier in the world.

But other significant improvements have also been made; we do a far better job of taking care of soldiers and their families today than at any time in history. The Army is indeed a family, and it is one that tries to meet the needs of all of its members. Improved medical and dental care, recreational support facilities, an array of counseling and advocacy programs, family support groups for the family members of deployed soldiers, and the increased awareness of the needs of the military family have all helped attract and retain the quality soldiers to whom the defense of our nation will be entrusted in the next century.

As I reach the end of my tenure as Chief of Infantry, I see a U.S. Army that is far better manned, trained, and equipped to meet the challenges of the next century than it was in 1896. This did not come about by chance but through the hard work, sacrifice, and innovative spirit of soldiers at all levels, and it is these same qualities that will sustain our nation and her Army as we advance toward the year 2000.