INFANTRY LETTERS

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

INFANTRY's March-June 1997 issue (page 6) lists a Soldier Enhancement Program proposal for a "machinegun assault bag," which would hold 300 rounds of linked ammunition. Such an assault bag was devised in 1970—and used in combat—by an innovative, young machinegunner in the 2d Battalion, 47th Mechanized Infantry, 9th Infantry Division.

By attaching a shoulder strap to an issue butt pack, he was able to carry a 300-round belt of ammo that was not subject to the damage that typically occurs with belts carried "Rambo style" (that is, exposed, wrapped around the torso).

Reference the M240B machinegun article (pages 8-9), by Captain John Hodge—which says, "The M240B is an excellent example of the Army's commitment to provide the best..."—the Army deserves, perhaps, both cheers and jeers for fielding the best 7.62mm machinegun in the world. . .40 years after it became available!

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SECURING A BASE CAMP

I recently saw your November-December 1996 issue and the article "The Defense of Camp *Able Sentry*," by Captain Craig A. Collier, and felt compelled to write. I saw combat with the 25th MP Company, 25th Infantry Division, in Vietnam and know what I'm talking about:

The defense of this camp in Macedonia is reminiscent of the mentality that led us into Pearl Harbor, the fall of Seoul, Firebase Maryann, Beirut, and Somalia.

Taking 25 minutes to arm 150 men and then with only one magazine apiece is negligence. On a small base like this, from the sound of the siren to having 100 percent manned and ready should take no longer than one minute—30 seconds if you're already on orange alert.

Each man's combat gear should be stored by his bunk, each squad's weapons and triple basic load of ammunition should be kept in the squad area. Members of each squad must be preassigned to their positions and held responsible for their upkeep. Not only must there be fighting positions for all of your men, but each position must have at least one and preferably two fallback positions.

Ideally, the camp should have a berm and trench with bunkers, concertina, claymores, landmines, and punji stakes. Each M113 should be dug in hull-down, or have dirt piled around three sides. An RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) screen should be fixed around three sides and left movable on the back to allow displacement. There should be at least two positions for each M113 on line and an additional position to fall

back to. Each M113 should have a permanent crew assigned to it from the force reaction platoon. The crewmen should live near their vehicle and man guard duty from it at night. Fifty caliber machineguns should be kept with belts in the tray and ready to go. Each M113 should be manned by at least one crew member 24 hours a day.

The men should abandon observation towers and move to prepared fighting positions below them at the outset of hostilities. All personnel on guard duty should be in full combat gear with a triple basic load of ammunition.

Although a berm with land mines and stakes may not be allowed, there is no excuse for not having triple row concertina and claymores.

Assume an equal opportunity defensive position; have positions facing all four sides of the camp. Prepare positions with an eye to the possibility of rear attack.

Better barricades are needed at the front gate. An M113 will not stop a dump truck full of explosives moving at high speed.

Better overhead protection is needed for all shelters; 18 inches of protection will stop small arms but is marginal for aircraft cannon and insufficient for larger shells. Three feet should be the minimum with six feet for C^3, ammunition, and aid stations. A long-term presence in this camp should have resulted in most of the facilities moving underground.

Failure to follow even these basic defensive steps could result in the worst kind of public relations, should the Serbs decide to take action. Looking weak and defenseless is not the way to encourage adherence to peacekeeping policies.

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COMPASS TECHNIQUES

Thank you for sending us the copies of INFANTRY articles on compasses and land navigation.

We, of course, rely heavily on the GPS (Global Positioning System), currently using Silva XL 1000 units, but in a number of situations we use traditional compass techniques for navigation and mapping, in particular in areas with heavy forest canopy.

Although very popular in Europe (including the British Army) and Africa, we find the protractor compasses (Silva) unsuitable for the long sightings necessary for mapping or navigation in desert or similar open terrain and frequently need to use resection techniques, in particular when making our own maps. In many parts of Africa, the only available topographic maps are the U.S. Defense Mapping Agency 500,000-scale, and we have to use these as a base for producing our own local large-scale geological maps.

For navigation and map making, we use the old (World War II) British Army liquid-filled prismatic compass, which is rugged (mine is made of brass!) and reliable. In addition, we use the French Chaix Universelle compass, which is excellent for long sightings as well as geological work, and the U.S.-made Brunton induction damped PRO 5008 for geological work (measuring dips and acting as a hand level) and short sights in particular for mapping in jungle (should I say rain forest?) regions. We have not tried the lensatic compass.

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RANGERS NEED SIDEARMS IN URBAN FIGHTING

When a Ranger is clearing a building, his shoulder weapon is the first thing sticking out into an enemy-held room. The new 21st Century Land Warrior program even brags that its optics will allow the M4 carbine to peer around the corners of buildings to relay a picture to the soldier's helmet display.

Has anyone considered what will happen to the combat effectiveness of that soldier if his weapon is destroyed?

It is common practice for members of U.S. Army Special Forces detachments, elite counterterrorist units, and Navy SEALs to carry at least the issue M9 9mm Beretta pistol in holsters by their sides to serve as a backup in case their main shoulder weapons are rendered inoperable.

The commonsense answer is to issue one of the thousands of M9 pistols the Army owns to each of the soldiers most likely to be sent into a city fight—the Rangers.

The pistol in a city fight would also enable a Ranger to engage and stop an enemy who charges him as he changes his shoulder weapon's magazines. If he needs a hand free to throw a grenade, or if his shoulder weapon is slung as he climbs a rope, he can unholster the pistol more rapidly with one hand and use it against an enemy. Certainly we wouldn't expect him to let go of the rope and fall trying to reach for his carbine.

These M9 pistols could initially be fielded in their issue holsters, but for use in close quarter battle (CQB), small organizations like the 75th Ranger Regiment should buy a commercial off-the-shelf low-riding leg holster for faster access in a fight as well as better interface with the Ranger body armor.

Once fielded, these pistols need to be integrated into tactical CQB training. An evaluator moving with the team during room clearing could call out to the Ranger that his shoulder weapon is inoperable, requiring him to finish the exercise using the pistol. Blank rounds do exist for pistols, though dry-firing could suffice. Soldiers must be ready to switch to the pistol whenever the situation calls for its use, and only constant training can produce this readiness.

This training should include the smooth, safe, and technically efficient presentation of the pistol from the holster in various situations, as is standard training for elite police counterterrorist units that "fight" in cities daily.

The point of contact in the urban fight is often the individual Ranger. We need to issue the side arm and incorporate it into our Ranger CQB training and tactics.

NAME WITHHELD