INFANTRY LETTERS

RESTORE THE BALANCE

I want to comment on Lieutenant Colonel Martin N. Stanton's article, "The Javelin and BFV Infantry" (*Infantry*, January-April 1998).

I agree with his assessment that BFV infantry is too overloaded with heavy weapons, but I disagree with his solution of creating a battalion-level Javelin platoon. I suggest that the real solution is to have fewer infantrymen mounted on BFVs and more mounted on APCs to restore balance to the mechanized infantry battalion.

Combined arms is a proven concept and needs no debate. But with BFVs we combined the arms at too low an echelon. A BFV is not so much a squad carrier as it is a light tank with a stowed security element. The BFV and its infantry are too close to be mutually supporting. Instead, they form a single combined target.

If you want more infantry in the mechanized battalion, bring back the APC and keep fewer BFVs, to serve as fire support systems. I propose one-third BFVs and two-thirds APCs. Whether this mix is at company level, battalion level, or higher really doesn't matter, and you can always task organize as needed. The key is to get infantrymen out of their vehicles, away from the excess crew-served weapons, and put them back on the ground where they are needed.

There is a precedent for this move:

Early World War II experience revealed that armor divisions had far too many tanks and far too few infantrymen. The solution was a division with three tank, three infantry, and three artillery battalions organized into two (later three) "combat commands" (later brigades).

Likewise, World War II tank destroyer (TD) battalions were conceived under a flawed doctrine that could not be executed, but they were far too potent to ignore. As combat continued, TDs were used more and more as infantry-accompanying assault guns, a role that proved successful.

After World War II, when TDs were replaced by tanks entirely, infantry regiments had tank companies (standard tanks) and cannon companies (tanks with 105mm howitzers). Likewise, the infantry division had an organic tank battalion. Altogether, the infantry division had almost as many tanks as an armored division, but they were distributed throughout the regiments where they could most effectively support the infantry battalions.

We must restore mechanized battalions to the infantry role, and use the BFV as an infantry support weapon (assault gun) to balance the combined arms team.

CHESTER A. KOJRO
LTC, Armor, USAR
Rolla, Missouri

13-MAN RIFLE SQUAD

I was pleased to see the letter on the 13-man rifle squad (*Infantry*, July-December 1997, page 3).

When I was a squad leader in the 511th Parachute Infantry, 11th Airborne Division, in Japan in 1948, our rifle squads consisted of 13 men. The squad was broken down (as best I remember) into three elements, Able, Baker, and Charlie. The squad leader was #1. The Able team (#2 and 3) acted as scouts when the squad was on the point and as flank guards when the squad occupied the platoon flank. Baker team (#4, 5, and 6) was the fire support team, consisting of an M1919A6 machinegun, with gunner, assistant gunner, and ammunition bearer. Machineguns were sometimes supplemented by two Browning automatic rifles. Charlie team (#7-13) was the maneuver element, directed by the assistant squad leader. The 4th Squad was a six-man 60mm mortar squad that was in direct support of the platoon but could be pulled back to be in direct support of the company. Upon contact, Baker team joined Able as a base of fire, under the squad leader. Charlie, under the assistant squad leader, conducted the maneuver. One or two squads could be designated the platoon base of fire or the maneuver element, as the situation dictated.

Later, during the Korean War we often heard someone say, "Let's go back to the 13-man squad." While serving in Special Forces as a civilian irregular defense group company commander early in the Vietnam War, I juggled the TO&Es and reorganized my rifle squads along these lines. Again they were effective.

I can clearly remember returning to Camp Campbell, Kentucky, from Japan in 1949 and reorganizing into the new airborne regiment with its nine-man squad. When asked why nine men, a fellow squad leader who had fought in World War II replied, "Somebody who has never been a squad leader decided nine men was the most one man can lead, that's why."

As a range officer at the MPRC in Korea, I now see the understrength squads training daily and think how nice it would be to have the old 13-man squads back, where a few missing members would not affect the mission.

JASON T. WOODWORTH

WORST DEFEAT

I am writing in reference to a statement in "From the Editor" in your July-December 1997 issue: General Custer's defeat was *not* the U.S. Army's worst defeat in Indian warfare

Major General Arthur St. Clair lost 657 killed and 271 wounded out of approximately 1,400 men in a battle on 4 November 1791. That battle took place on the Wabash River, just east of what is now the Indiana--Ohio border. This defeat is magnified by the fact that most of the entire U.S. Army was involved in the battle.

DAVID B. LEBER
MSG, U.S. Army Retired
Conley, Georgia

EDITOR'S NOTE: You are absolutely correct. While the loss of Custer's command may be the best-known U.S. Army defeat at the hands of the Indians, General St. Clair's was far greater, both in terms of the losses suffered and in the involvement of a greater percentage of the then-extant U.S. Army.

Thanks for keeping me honest!