

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



An Interview with General James T. Hill *Commander, U.S. Southern Command*

Infantry Magazine Editor Russell A. Eno sat down with General James T. Hill, commander of the U.S. Southern Command at the Marshall House, Fort Benning, Ga. Here is a transcript of that interview:

Q What do you see as major priorities for SOUTHCOM during your tenure?

A When I came in, I developed three major priorities where I put my personal investment: the war on terrorism; Colombia, what happens in Colombia and the concomitant support for democracy throughout the region; and thirdly expanding the knowledge of my area of responsibility within the community.

Q Two of SOUTHCOM's major tasks are the defense of U.S. interests within your geographical area of responsibility and assisting the development of foreign militaries within that region. How have the attacks of September 11, 2001 and subsequent events affected those missions?

A Well, I think they certainly have galvanized it, and they have allowed me to discuss with other militaries and governments in the region that, just like the United States, all of those countries must transform their militaries to meet the real threats in the world — the threats of the 21st century, not the threats of the 20th century. And I think that (with) the experiences of 9-11, (there's) the realization that what used to be a drug war is really a counter-terrorism war, and that it affects everybody in the region.

Q One of the priorities for the Army Transformation is the fielding of the Stryker Brigade Combat

Teams (SBCT). What potential do you see for their employment in the execution of SOUTHCOM missions?



A Well, short of some major confrontation in Cuba, I don't see U.S. armed forces at war or in battle in Latin America. If they were, if there was a major confrontation, either in Cuba or in some other place, the Stryker brigade as designed is a perfect fit because of its focus on smaller scale contingencies and its ability to operate in complex and urban terrain.

Q Over the last two decades, at JRTC, NTC and in accounts of ground actions in Afghanistan, we have seen what appears to be a decreasing reliance on the use of indirect artillery fires, with something like a 20-percent utilization with a corresponding reduction of reliance on mortars, in favor of close air support. How can we better train and condition our infantry leaders to understand and effectively employ artillery?

A I've been concerned about that whole issue for a long time. When I was the FORSCOM G-3, that 20-percent utilization rate during the first five days' search and attack phase certainly was the norm, in fact that was a pretty good unit. There were lots of units that were well below that. In my view, what has to happen — and what is increasingly happening, I believe — is a better understanding that

indirect fire is the artilleryman's problem. What do I mean by that? I mean I am Company Commander Hill or Platoon Leader Hill, and I am out and engage in a firefight. The artilleryman sitting around waiting for me to direct him to shoot is making a mistake. His whole role in life is indirect fire, and he needs to be screaming that in the infantryman's ear. And I see less and less of that, unless the infantry unit commander really puts his finger on it and forces that artilleryman to begin to do that. It was a lesson we learned in Vietnam, and somehow we forgot over time. It has a lot, I think, to do with fear of rules of engagement, and not using ROE aggressively enough, and it also has a lot to do — in my opinion — with how we measure success at JRTC.

What we have done is teach a lot of young infantrymen that it's OK to play laser tag, that it's OK to conduct fire and maneuver or fire and movement before establishing a solid base of fire. And a solid base of fire includes everything you've got, direct and indirect. Once you've achieved fire superiority, then you can in fact maneuver on the battlefield. But we too often begin maneuvers at JRTC without using that indirect fire, and it costs casualties at JRTC, and I think we're teaching a bad lesson. A lot of it has to do with MILES and how you count it, and I've heard all of that. In my mind that's an excuse; we ought to do better with that.

Q As we prepare to engage the enemy in urban settings, how can we better incorporate the employment of artillery fires to support the MOUT fight?

A I think we have to practice it more, and we're not doing that in some areas, and you have to have better precision

weapons systems which you're coming to in the Stryker brigades. If you look at a Stryker brigade, I think you'll see them making better use of it. It's got the systems to use them, it practices a little more, trains with them more, and makes greater use of them.

Q WHINSEC recognizes the criticality of remaining relevant to your theater engagement plan, and designs their curriculum accordingly. In order to ensure this relevance, is there a systemic recurring way for your subordinate commands to transmit their needs to WHINSEC?

A Yes, and in fact, I just left a WHINSEC Board of Visitors meeting where we talked about that. We do have almost continuous interface with SOUTHCOM headquarters and WHINSEC. Yearly, we bring together the Security Assistance Officers (SAO) out of the region, gather them in my headquarters where we discuss their goals for their countries and how that fits into both the Secretary of Defense's theater engagement activities and mine. Then we will bring those SAO's together with the WHINSEC people and together we do a thorough curriculum review to ensure that what we see as plans for country X are in fact being married up with what is being done at WHINSEC.

Q What advice would you offer to U.S. Army infantry captains considering applying for an assignment in SOUTHCOM?

A SOUTHCOM is a terrific place. The whole region, Central and South America and the Caribbean, are wonderful places to be. I think the officer needs to decide if he's going to be an infantryman or a foreign area officer (FAO). The SOUTHCOM in theater assignments, except for a few PEP assignments, are almost all FAO-related. Therefore, an individual structuring his career ambitions and his goals as he's coming out of the Infantry Captains Career Course needs to make his mind up as to what he wants to do as he continues his career.

Q How can Fort Benning and the other branch schools better prepare officers, NCO's, and enlisted soldiers for assignments within SOUTHCOM? Do you feel, for example, that the soldiers coming into SOUTHCOM are adequately trained in languages?

A I think that essentially all FAO's that come to us and go downrange are pretty skilled in languages. You have to make a commitment to that, and you have to say to a soldier that he has to go off to language school and do all those things that are necessary for this, but I see this as being beyond the capabilities of Fort Benning. That would fall to the service schools such as the Defense Language Institute.

Q Reading General Hagenbeck's interview in Field Artillery magazine, and based upon the experience of 10th Mountain Division, we note that the most responsive close air support was from the Apache, followed by A-10's, and at night by AC-130 gunships. In dealing with the nations within your area of responsibility, do they regularly plan and/or train for the employment of such assets in contingencies?

A Not well enough. The Colombian Army Chief and I have an ongoing discussion about greater use of indirect fire systems and close air support. They don't have enough of it to go around. I encourage all the countries in the region to think more combined arms and think more joint. And I always tell them that the United States military became joint at the point of a congressional gun in 1986 — we were dragged into it. If we're honest with ourselves, we're still not as joint as we ought to be. I have seen the Colombian military in particular making some pretty good headway in that regard.

Q As we continue to refine our continental U.S.-based contingency forces as a response to crises around the world, what capabilities do you think we should stress more than we are doing presently?

A I think that philosophically we've all got the right approach. The

Army, in my view, has led the way with the development of the Stryker brigades. If we did anything wrong, it was in not stressing earlier and stronger that we were going to move the Stryker brigades by air and sea. As the I Corps commander, I developed plans and sold them to both of the last two Pacific Command commanders, including the current one, that using a combination of air and sea, C-17's and fast sea lift, I could in fact move a Stryker brigade with all its combat capability and a corps controlling headquarters anywhere in the Pacific faster than you could get a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) there, assuming the MEU was not already afloat.

Now, that's not to say that we want to take over the MEU's mission. We don't. The MEU, the 82d Airborne, the Rangers, all of those people are wonderful for forced entry, but as soon as that airfield or that port — or a combination of the two — can be available, you can move a Stryker brigade in a hurry anywhere in the Pacific. That in my view is strategic mobility, and if we — and by this I don't mean just the Army — do anything, we get too caught up in the discussion of moving stuff by air, and we're not going to move it all by air. There isn't enough air to go around. We need to do a better job at this. And we're beginning to do that. At the end of Millennium Challenge, we used the Joint Venture — a 313-foot ocean-going, high-speed Australian-built catamaran — to move 14 Stryker infantry carriers, about 20 soldiers, and other equipment from California back up to Fort Lewis, and it's a superb transportation system.

Q In some of our readings, I'm getting a sense that we're having some problems changing our mindset on purely combined arms operations in favor of joint coalition-type operations. What is your assessment of the progress we've made in shifting the paradigm that we're now following as we prepare for joint operations?

A I think that we are, that we've made great strides with that as well. You can make too much out of the Afghanistan experience in terms of coalition forces, and take too much away from those lessons learned. That was a very unique experience. But no matter where

you go you're going to have to fight in a joint and a combined atmosphere. So you must train for it. As we develop technology, though, there is a problem here, and that is that our technology so far outstrips the forces that we'll be fighting alongside. This may create problems for us, I believe, in terms of synchronization, command and control, and other areas. We even have it today in the digital world. If you are in the digital Army at Fort Hood, you would assume that as soon as the digital Stryker brigades roll in there that they could communicate. And the answer is they cannot. They can, but there are some major adjustments that have to be made to the digits and some tuning that must be done. And that's us now, in a highly technical world.

When I was at Fort Lewis, I went on an exercise with the Marines, and we couldn't even talk FA tasks to each other. We worked it out after about a day and a half, but they were in a different software package than we were. And so if we take an Advanced Field Artillery Tactical System to Pakistan and you want to talk to their artillery, how do you link the two together — with great difficulty... So it does create problems for you, but it's just another challenge to overcome, and you've got to continue moving forward. Again, every time we were working the Stryker brigades out at Fort Lewis the nay sayer would say, "Well, you won't be able to talk to this unit, or that unit ... what happens if your computers crash..." Well, you know, those are challenges to overcome, not to be afraid of. Your option at that point is to stand still, unless you're not afraid to take some of those risks. You've got to push the technology envelope out there in reasonable ways, and I think that the Army, in particular again, has done a wonderful job of that. We don't get enough credit for it, but we've sure done it.

Q We've touched on the issue of lessons learned, and in reading some of our professional publications I'm sensing that too many things based upon isolated events are getting labeled as lessons learned rather than being treated as observations. How do you see that?

A I think that's a true statement. We as a military jumped to conclusions, for example, after Kosovo. And we can leap to some of the same conclusions over Afghanistan. What took place in Afghanistan may or may not take place in Iraq. So what that says to me is that you had better still have a pretty good conventional thought process in your mind if events do not take place in the way you want them to. I get very uncomfortable about making leap-ahead conclusions over one small battle.

Q What message would you send to combined arms soldiers worldwide?

A I would tell combined arms infantrymen worldwide that it is truly combined arms, and that when you go to war take your artillery. When you go to war, be able to talk to the Air Force. When you go to war, be able to talk to the Marine Corps and the Navy and be sure that you've practiced with them. Long, long gone are the days when we could all do this by ourselves. I just finished reading a great new book, Rick Atkinson's *An Army at Dawn*. It's great reading in terms of combined and joint activities — and the lack thereof — in the North African campaign,

and the resultant loss of life. While it's true that we have come a long way since then, some of the teaching points we see over and over again are:

- Never underestimate your enemy,
- Don't assume things away, and
- Be able to communicate with your forces and with other forces.

It really is great reading. It's gotten great reviews. He's the same author who wrote *Crusade*, which I believe is the best book to come out of the Gulf War. He does his homework, and it's a good read. It's good history and pretty quick reading.



General James T. Hill assumed command of the United States Southern Command on August 18, 2002. General Hill previously served as the Commanding General, I Corps and Fort Lewis. He is from El Paso, Texas, and was commissioned into the Infantry following graduation from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, in 1968. A graduate of the Command and General Staff College and the National War College, he also holds a Master's degree in Personnel Management from Central Michigan University.

After completion of the Infantry Officer Basic, Ranger, and Airborne Courses, and an initial assignment at Fort Hood, Texas, General Hill served with the 2-502d Infantry (at that time, part of the "Always First" Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) in the Republic of Vietnam as a rifle platoon leader, recon platoon leader, company executive officer, and company commander.

General Hill's other key assignments include: Company Commander, 3d Ranger Company, Fort Benning, and Commander, Company A, 2d Squadron, 7th Cavalry, Fort Hood; Battalion Operations Officer and Battalion Commander, 1-35th Infantry, Schofield Barracks; Staff Officer, Strategy, Plans, and Policy Directorate, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, HQDA; Aide-de-Camp to the Chief of Staff of the Army; and special Project Officer for the Chief of Staff of the Army. General Hill commanded the "Always First" Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) from August 1989 until July 1991, including service in Southwest Asia during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. General Hill served as Chief of Staff of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) from August 1991 through October 1992.

He then served as the Assistant Deputy Director for Politico-Military Affairs on the Joint Staff from October 1992 to July 1994, when he assumed duties as Assistant Division Commander (Support), 24th Infantry Division (Light), including service in Haiti as Deputy Commanding General, Multinational Force, and Deputy Commander, United States Force, Haiti, United Nations Mission, Haiti. He later served as Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, Forces Command, from June 1995 until June 1997. In June 1997, he became Commanding General of the 25th Infantry Division (Light) and served in that position until he was named Commanding General, I Corps and Fort Lewis, in September 1999.