

# A NEW LOOK AT THE INFANTRY COMPANY



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*Old rules no longer apply. It is not business as usual. This State of War requires us to challenge old paradigms, to be flexible and adaptable to face a cunning and devious enemy.*

— **General Peter J. Schoomaker,**  
Chief of Staff of the Army

**T**he Infantry is the foundation of the Army and everything it does. The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) has said, “Every Soldier is an Infantryman first.” Every Soldier goes through basic training where they learn the basic skills of being a Soldier. That basic training is structured around the infantry squad because it serves as the foundation for learned teamwork.

No matter what job the Soldier performs after basic training, that Soldier will grasp that it is the “grunt” infantryman that deliberately seeks battle with the enemy. A headline on the front page of the 6 September issue of the *Army Times* drove that point home — “Grunts Rule.”

But taking point number one that the infantry is the cornerstone of the Army along with the CSA’s guidance to examine all in this time of war, Sergeant Major of the Army (Retired) Bill Gates and I asked ourselves, “Are infantry small units ready for the combat of today and tomorrow?”

The current infantry squad is nine men. Back in Vietnam, it was 11 men. Still, the design is about the same with the squad leader, team leaders, automatic riflemen, riflemen, and grenadiers. Their mission is the same: close with and destroy the enemy, generally as part of a platoon. What happens when that squad is expected to operate on a sustained basis, either as an independent squad or a formation smaller than a platoon? Is the squad — and most importantly the squad leader — trained, equipped, and organized for noncontiguous operations on the urban battlefield?

Let’s look at the next level of infantry command and control — the platoon. The leader of that platoon is the newest officer in the Army; anecdotes about green second

lieutenants are legion. It has been that way for longer than any of us care to remember. In the past conflicts of the United States — especially the large scale conflicts of WWI, WWII, and Korea — platoons operated on a linear battlefield with contiguous flanks and defined rear areas. Command and control, along with support for platoon operations, came from the next higher and succeeding levels of command. Vietnam saw increased use of semi-independent platoon operations; it also saw particular strains on small unit leaders, officers and NCOs. But generally speaking, the platoon was and still is organized to fight the same direct fire fight given to the squad: to close with and destroy the enemy.

The direct fire mission remains valid. We still expect that platoon leader to direct his platoon in the direct fire mode, but that mission has grown more complex. The platoon leader can call on Army aviation and the Air Force for aerial fires. He can call for indirect fires from artillery or mortars. If he is in a mechanized unit or a

Stryker brigade combat team, he has supporting fire from his vehicles. Even if he is a “light fighter,” he may be able muster armor against his enemy in the direct fire fight.

The contemporary operational environment (COE) and stability and support operations (SOSO) transform the simplicity of the direct fire battlefield for that platoon leader and his squads. Rules of engagement (ROE) mean that first he must decide when a fight is in the cards. He must know his surroundings and the people present, even as they and his situation changes from moment to moment. The platoon leader may be called on the execute national policy through his actions in supporting larger Information Operations. And he not only must maintain battlefield awareness, but must update his higher command of the situation.

“We fight in close combat, hold key assets and terrain, decisively end conflict, control the movement of people, protect resource flows, and maintain post-conflict stability,” GEN Schoomaker has said. Do you think the platoon leader may be in a little over his head? We do. The platoon leader is just learning his trade even as he attempts to tackle tasks formally reserved for War College graduates. That platoon leader is doing an astoundingly good job, but we do think we could set them up for greater success.

We suggest restructuring of infantry squads, platoons, and companies to provide more seasoned leaders. The platoon of today and tomorrow needs a captain as its commander with a lieutenant as executive officer. The captain has the maturity and experience level to coordinate all of the actions on the battlefield. He has more experience in dealing with nontypical missions of COE and SOSO than a lieutenant still learning to apply basic lessons. That same captain along with the platoon sergeant and squad leaders can mentor the young lieutenant. This would also give you a command structure to remain with the support element or vehicles. The lieutenant can then move through the staff sections and return back to the platoon a more experienced leader. Most importantly, experienced leadership is a combat multiplier that would make the platoon capable of greater independence, increased lethality, and overall effectiveness. Put bluntly: teaching green lieutenants would not cost lives, theirs and

those of their Soldiers.

Moving on to the next level of command, the company, we recommend that the infantry company commander would become a major’s slot. A smaller Army coupled with SOSO considerations in the COE means that company commanders face the same challenges that once went to battalion and brigade commanders. If you have any doubt on this point, review the stream of reports coming back from Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Those same trends have been validated at the Joint Readiness Training Center since the beginning of the Global War on Terror. The potential benefits to unit effectiveness are in our opinion exponential. A standard company with three platoons has some 8-10 years total officer experience. Increased leadership in that same three platoon company would give the unit more than 25 years of experience in its officers.

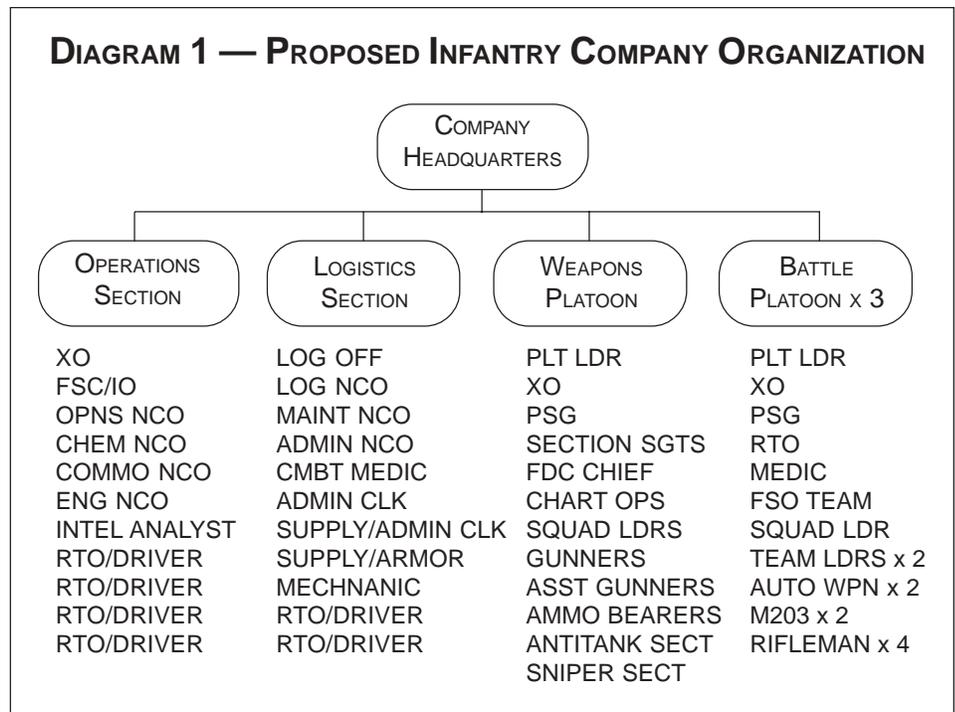
We also believe that such a structure would improve the current progression of an infantry officer. He will start out as a platoon leader for about a year; possibly go to a specialty platoon or staff and then maybe a company XO slot. As a captain, he will be a company commander for about two years. Most captains only get to command one company then they are on to school or staff before going to school. A major is staff and as a senior major a battalion XO. Once he makes lieutenant

colonel, he could be selected to be a battalion commander. Changing the progression as we suggest would give infantry leaders greater opportunity to command Soldiers.

As GEN Schoomaker said, “We train and equip Soldiers and grow leaders. We deliver relevant and ready land combat power to the combatant commanders and the joint team.”

Diagram 1 shows one of our suggestions. The configuration can be modified to fit the unit. We do think that this will allow the company to meet any enemy force current and future, engage them at the lowest level, and defeat them.

Let’s flesh out our design by first looking at the officers in the company. As stated above, a major commands the company; he has 11-12 years experience. As a lieutenant, he first learned his trade under the wing of the experienced captain who commanded his platoon. After serving as an platoon XO, he went to company staff before returning as a captain to command his own platoon. As a captain with platoon command under his belt, he served on battalion and/or brigade staff. Now a major, he has attended all of the schools that he is suppose to including the career course and Command and General Staff College (CGSC). His executive officer is a senior captain who also is the operations officer for the company. A career course graduate, he has had his platoon command and been successful. All of the



platoon leaders are captains who have had time on the staff and possibly have attended some schools. The fire support officer is a first lieutenant and is also the intelligence officer for the company operations. The logistical officer is a 1LT. The weapons platoon XO is a senior 1LT who is school trained in mortars and anti-tank. The rifle platoon XOs are 2LT or 1LT, learning their trade.

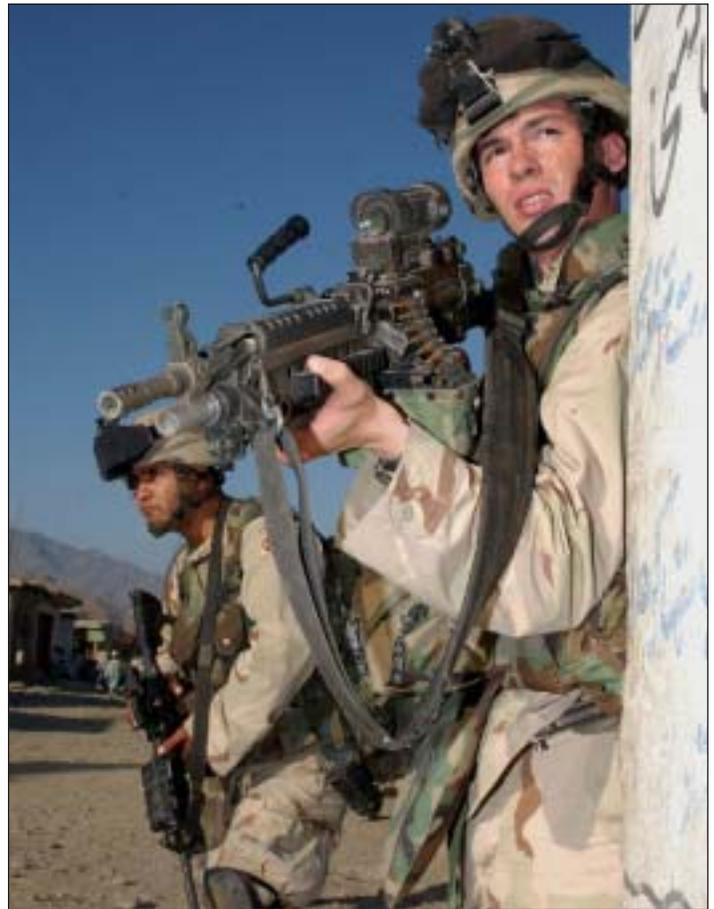
We see the need to do the same for the NCOs and other enlisted Soldiers of the company. The first sergeant we will now call the Battle 1SG. He will be able to be on the battlefield with the unit and go where he is needed to solve problems. Historically, he was the "Beans and Bullet" person. The platoon sergeants should be the Battle PSG again so they can be at the tip of the spear with the platoon commander to assist him better.

There are other sergeants first class within the company that are not maneuver platoon sergeants, but their duties are just as valuable like the operation sergeant and logistical sergeant. Both of them should be battle staff qualified. The operations section and the logistical section should have as many as possible battle staff qualified people in them in order to produce a better product for the company and the battalion.

The Weapons Platoon should have three section sergeants all staff sergeants, one for the mortars, anti-tank, and sniper teams. The rifle platoons squad leaders should be staff sergeants and they should be cross trained in intelligence and operations. The squad leaders for the mortars should be sergeants and all should be cross trained in intelligence and operations. The gunners should be specialist and cross trained in medical, communications, and weapons maintenance (armor). The assistant gunners should be cross trained in AT weapons and engineer. Ammo bearers would be private to specialist and well trained in their duties. The team leaders for the rifle squads should be sergeants cross-trained in engineer and/or medical training. The automatic rifleman should be a specialist cross-trained in intelligence and weapons maintenance. The M203 gunner should be a specialist and cross-trained in communications and fire support. The four riflemen should be private to specialist cross-trained in one of the following: vehicle maintenance, medical, engineer, and fire support.

As you can see, this will give everyone more experience as they progress to the different levels. By cross-training, we mean Soldiers would be school trained with a secondary MOS. For example, a Soldier cross-trained in intelligence would have a secondary MOS as a 96B. We further suggest that the courses for the infantry Soldier should only be what he must know, which would reduce the time the Soldier is away from the unit or if possible conduct the course online or through distance learning.

Today, we are asking platoon leaders to do what company commanders did at one time and we are not giving them the resources to accomplish the mission. We are asking company commanders to do what battalion staffs do and they do not have a staff. The work that these leaders are doing now is outstanding. We see their resourcefulness daily at being thrown into new complex situations and continuing to make things happen. The young squad leader who has to go into town and deal with the local people must still know how to fight his squad. The American Soldier is truly a magnificent human being for all that he does and is expected to do. We think with this new look and the new make up of the units and a three-year life cycle this should allow a Soldier to move up within his squad. They should have



Specialist Harold Fields

*Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment conduct a presence patrol in Asadabad, Afghanistan, October 5, 2004.*

promotions and challenges for him to continue to learn.

Major General James Fry said, "There is no type of human endeavor where it is so important that the leader understands all phases of his job as that of the profession of arms."

We agree. We think that bringing the leaders up both commissioned and noncommissioned officer in this manner we have provided them with the tools for success. Being successful is not only winning the battles, but keeping our great Soldiers alive. We have purposely not gone through each unit by type and have not addressed equipment issues. We understand there would be some variations due to units make up and missions. We are sure we have not arrived at the 100-percent solution, but we have provided another look at an Army that is in the process of change for the future. We know people do not like change; however, change is the only way to survive.

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