
Defense Report

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The Light Infantry Division — The Right Stuff, at the Right Place, In Time

Volumes have been written documenting the continuing inadequacies of our strategic mobility assets and the fact that we “can’t get there from here,” either in time or with adequate forces if a crisis occurs in many of the current world flash points.

The Army’s solution to these inadequacies is the development of forces that require less airlift but retain the strength and capability to be effective. The Light Infantry Division is the most obvious of the Army’s efforts.

This new division is under development and many months will go by before the arguments about the size of the rifle squad, the caliber of the artillery pieces, and the need for combat support are settled. When the professionals who are charged with the responsibility for this development arrive at acceptable solutions, the Army will have a fighting unit of 10,000 men instead of 16,000 and the ratio of fighters to backup will be 3-to-1 compared to the current 2-to-1 ratio in standard Army divisions. By comparison, the new division will be capable of deployment in fewer than one-third the aircraft and one third the time required to move a conventional unit.

The critics who maintain that the modern battlefield is too lethal and too sophisticated to be an infantry milieu are dead wrong. No terrain on earth is too inhospitable if it must be defended from an enemy or must be taken from him. Wars are still won by the man with his feet planted firmly on the ground, who controls the land and denies its use by the enemy. The infantryman is that man, and any steps that are taken to get him to the point where control of the land is required are steps toward winning wars.

The Army is to be comended for this effort, and the nay-sayers need to be reminded that more than 90 percent of the forces engaged in World War II were light infantry; they covered a lot of ground, they moved quickly, and they prevailed in deserts, in jungle swamps, in mountains, in cities, in the arctic and the tropics, and everywhere in between. The Army’s new Light Division will play its role in any future war the same way.