

Commandant's Note



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The Army is hard at work readying itself for the large-scale combat operations (LSCO) likely to comprise the nation's future engagements. Producing the Army of 2030 requires changes to doctrine, organization, training, materiel, and more. LSCO will differ in many respects from this century's earlier counterinsurgency campaigns. Still, the United States Army Infantry will remain the world's premier maneuver fighting force. The Army's valuable experience gained over the past two decades of operating in the complicated landscape of the mountains, deserts, and cities of Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq will undoubtedly contribute to the organization's future success in the complex physical terrain of future warfare. In this issue of *Infantry*, we look up to the mountains.

When most people consider the characteristics relative to mountainous terrain, a cold climate is usually the first to come to mind. After all, the Army conducts much of our mountain training in the snow-capped mountains and hills of upstate New York, Vermont, Colorado, and Alaska. And our doctrine, like ATP 3-90.97, *Mountain Warfare and Cold Weather Operations* and ATP 3-21.50, *Infantry Small-Unit Mountain and Cold Weather Operations*, jointly address this as well. However, the new FM 3-0, *Operations*, released in October, makes clear that "mountainous terrain can be found on jungle, Arctic, and desert islands." Extreme heat or cold, dryness or humidity, lush jungles, or sparse vegetation are all possible. Afghanistan, for example, has several different mountainous environments within the same area of operations.

It is impossible to predict where the men and women of the Infantry will fight the next battle. In his aptly named book *Out of the Mountains*, Dr. David Kilcullen argues that future combat will shift toward coastlines and urban areas. Yet almost every country has mountains, and nearly every war has included some form of mountain operations. Mountains comprise 25 percent of the globe's dry surface, and 10 percent of the world's population calls them home. One-quarter to one-third of those mountain populations live in cities. Fighting to, in, and through these spaces requires careful attention to the terrain.

Mountains introduce a vertical terrain challenge to an already crowded battlefield, making medical evacuations and lines of communication more complex. The need for technical climbing expertise and specialized equipment become prerequisites along with the additional physical training required for Soldiers maneuvering at altitude before firing a single shot.

Recent fighting by other nations should inform our thinking about mountain operations. Armenian and Azerbaijani forces fighting in the rugged Nagorno-Karabakh area claimed some 7,000 lives in 2020 and another 300 this past September. The effective use of small unmanned aircraft systems (SUAS) to target armor, air defense, and dismounted targets is a lesson with implications far beyond the Caucasus. In June 2020, dozens of soldiers died in close combat in the mountains along India's 3,000 kilometer disputed border with China. Two nuclear powers

fighting hand-to-hand in the mountains is a sobering reminder that no technological progress eliminates the need for strong and capable Infantry formations.

The topography of our adversaries likewise proves the relevance of mountain operations for our Infantry formations. The Himalayas along China's southwest border contain some of the highest elevations on earth. Iran's territory is 55 percent mountainous, principally on its borders. Russia's Ural Mountains sharply divide the country's east and west. Mountains make up 70 percent of the Korean Peninsula. To think about the landscape of the future battlefields is to consider the likelihood of combat in the mountains seriously.

The Army today is taking necessary steps to prepare for future mountain operations in several ways. For example, the Army Mountain Warfare School in Vermont provides numerous courses focused on individual Soldier mountaineering skills and training, such as Basic and Advanced Military Mountaineering, Rough Terrain Evacuation, Mountain Rifleman, and the Mountain Planner Courses. The 5th Ranger Training Battalion in the north Georgia mountains trains students on the collective mountaineering skills and training of units through the execution of the Ranger Course program of instruction. These two organizations, along with the Northern Warfare Training Center, the Sapper Course, the 25th Infantry Division's Lightning Academy, and other organizations from around the force, make up the Army's Mountaineering Board. These organizations come together multiple times throughout the year to discuss lessons learned from the operational force and training centers to improve the instruction required for the Army to operate within such complex terrain.

But, as with all specialized training, mountains must not cause us to lose sight of the Infantry's fundamentals. Per ATP 3-21.50, vii, "While the Infantry rifle company is an organization not specifically designed for mountain ... operations, it is well suited for this environment." So long as we continue to provide our Soldiers with appropriate equipment and training, the men and women of the Infantry will implement the principles of land warfare into any environment to fight and win.

I am the Infantry! Follow me!