

THIS IS NOT YOUR FATHER'S, OR MOTHER'S ARMY!

Dr. Douglas V. Johnson II

It would probably strike the average observer as odd or even irrational for the Army to reorganize just as it engages in war, but that seems to be normal for the American Army. In at least three wars, that is exactly what has happened and it is happening again. Had you been an infantry company commander on April 1, 1917, you would have commanded a company of about 58 soldiers armed with 1903 Springfield rifles. By July of that year the company would be 250 strong and equipped with Springfield or possibly British Enfield rifles, heavy and light machineguns, mortars, hand and rifle grenades, and a host of other devices of war new or previously unknown to the U.S. Army. All these were added to give the unit punch and staying power. Had you been assigned to an armored division in 1942, you would have gone off to North Africa with a large, basically "Square" tank division. Had you been wounded and returned to another armored division in time for the Normandy invasion 2 years later, you would have found a much lighter "Triangular" division designed for tactical agility and speed. Many of us who went to Vietnam in the mid-1960s found the air-mobile model of the 1st Cavalry Division to be the most advanced organization ever fielded by the U.S. Army, with a similar emphasis on agility and speed, but a totally new organization with new tactical doctrine, as well. Today, the 3rd Infantry Division is leading a similar transformation, to be followed shortly by the 101st Air Assault and the 82nd Airborne divisions. Gone is its "traditional" three maneuver-brigade structure supported by a Division Artillery, Support Command, and Aviation Brigade. The Transformed Army that is emerging in the midst of our present war is being converted into modular, brigade-sized formations currently being called "Units of Action." The driving purposes of this transformation are once again agility and speed, albeit with strategic and operational focus this time. From each three-brigade division, the Army is creating four Maneuver Units of Action. These, in turn, will be controlled by redesigned headquarters to be called "Units of Employment." "Units of Employment" will control as many Units of Action as the situation warrants.

Further changes are also underway. The U.S. Army, having borne the criticism of a dysfunctional replacement system for several generations, and the recognition that it is now and will likely be for the foreseeable future an "Expeditionary" force, is about to put in place a new manning system. Building on the well-known fact that units fight better when the soldiers, staffs, and commanders know one another, the Army Stabilization Task Force has recommended a system that will foster that condition through the stabilization of soldiers and many of their noncommissioned and commissioned officers in a "parent" unit. Today's soldiers (or at least their families) will find themselves stabilized at one installation for up to 7 years. They will remain members of a parent unit for as long as possible. Consequently, they will deploy and serve with others they know and have served with, and especially with whom they

have trained. There will be fewer “Newbies” arriving in a unit in the middle of the night as the unit prepares to go into mortal combat the next morning. This change will go a long way toward solving one of the Army’s longest standing dysfunctions and the one that impacts soldiers most personally.

With each change, new wrinkles appear that have to be worked out. The supporting logistics system failed the huge WWI divisions. The punching power of the WWII triangular armored divisions proved insufficient without significant augmentation from higher echelons. The strategic mobility of the 1st Cavalry Division (in Vietnam) was hampered by the shipping difficulties of the very vehicles that gave it such fantastic tactical mobility, the helicopter fleet. Today, even as the force transforms, doubts have arisen about how the new force will really work. Soldiers and their officers are asking tough questions in the field and in the seminar rooms. Will the search for speed and agility again compromise punch? Where is the balance point between the need to be “there” (wherever “there” may be) and to be able to do the job at an acceptable level of risk? The last Army Chief of Staff, GEN Eric Shinseki, set the U.S. Army on the path to Transformation, noting that the most lethal part of the Army was too heavy to get “there” in time, and the fastest part was too vulnerable once it got “there.” It had to be transformed. The present Army Chief of Staff, GEN Pete Schoomaker, is pushing that Transformation forward as rapidly as conditions permit.

In today’s Transforming Army, sergeants will still get in the faces of soldiers to make certain they really do know what they are supposed to do as members of a fighting team. Lieutenants will still be green and Captains at 32 will still be known as “The Old Man,” and both will be more technologically savvy than the “Ancient” 42-year old Colonels who command them. Yet all of these will be savvy in the use of computer-based tools of war that were only science fiction a decade or so ago. What the infantryman encounters on the ground will be no different. He will be tired, unwashed, hungry, and fighting fear as he seeks to kill without being killed himself. The tools soon to be in his hands will be the envy of all “old soldiers” as he will be able to see through walls rather than having to break down a door and rush into a room to discover whether the enemy is there or not. He won’t have to fear killing a friend or being killed by one as both will be certain of the other’s location. One day, he may even be able to detect booby-traps, mines, and improvised explosive devices before coming too near them. Even now, some of the most dangerous jobs, in a profession that dwells in perpetual danger, have been given to robots. Soon these robots will be able to do many more tasks with greater efficiency. The panoply of tools that will soon be available to soldiers is growing swiftly. As the WWI soldiers adapted quickly to the introduction of new weaponry, so today’s soldiers will adapt and adapt again as change and transformation increasingly become a new way of life.