



Saddle Up... Tonight We Ride

"Though this be madness, yet there is a method in't." — Hamlet

Well, what do ya' know, June 14th came and went without the volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, or mass mutinies promised by some over the donning of black berets. What are the repercussions of last October's infamous beret announcement and this past June's donning? It takes those of us who have never worn the beret a bit more time to put it on, and certainly there has been pain involved in watching and correcting the many interesting ways some of us have worn it, but life has gone on. My personal fashion experts (read older daughters) have given the beret a thumbs-up over the BDU cap, describing the beret with their favorite modifier, "cool." An additional fallout from the switch is that soldiers driving POVs now keep their covers on. Previously many of us whipped the BDU cap off once inside a POV; now, given the amount of time it takes for new beret wearers to put it on correctly, it's easier to simply leave the beret on.

The amount of press, angst, anger, and controversy over the decision and execution of beret-donning fascinated me. Granted, there were a few less-than-brilliant public affairs decisions that thickened the plot: the announcement that a rites of passage test would be required to earn the beret, followed by a quick recantation. And the revelation that China supplied many of the berets, this on the heels of the P-3 downing. (Apparently, there are now literally thousands of these berets languishing in a warehouse somewhere, looking for a home.) Swept up in the beret controversy, it seemed to me, many of us misread the demonstration as the main effort while the OPFOR's main body swept around our flanks. In the midst of a revolution in the Army, one that impacts dramatically on the mounted force, many were more concerned about a change in the Army's headgear.

There is much going in the Army as it advances along three axes toward transformation. The nuts and bolts of the objective force, interim force, and legacy force should dominate professional discussions. As we speak, Interim Brigade Combat Teams (IBCT) boasting the Interim Armored Vehicles are standing up. The IBCTs contain Medium Gun System platoons (see LT Hurley's article, p. 7) and a new cavalry organization. The ripples from the IBCT wave are being felt throughout our branch, impacting the mounted force in manning, doctrine, etc. The Interim Force also includes planning and development for an interim cavalry regiment, an organization that will serve today's corps and later shape cavalry forces in the objective force.

With regard to the objective force, the tip of the transformation spear, dialogue ought to be focused on the Future Combat System (FCS), which will serve as common platform for all the battlefield functional areas. We know the defining characteristics of this system — simply said, it should do everything and not weigh anything — and this should make for some interesting discussions.

Which brings us to the final piece of the triad, the legacy force. LTC Dave Pride does an outstanding job in this issue (p. 39) illustrating the relevancy of this force. Pride points out that the Abrams tank will continue to evolve via upgrades, and that tankers will cross LDs on this tank until 2031. There is a tremendous amount of activity with the legacy force, again a lot of grist for the mill.

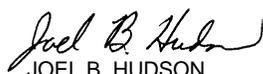
So with the beret controversy in our dust, it's time to glance toward the horizon and sort out the future of mounted warfighting.

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