

other important function and is not really able to act as company XO much. The HHC First Sergeant, who is usually in the combat or field trains, often just cannot be responsive enough. As a de facto separate company, the mortar platoon should be able to talk directly to the support elements (maintenance, communications platoon, S-4, and the like) without going

through anybody.

A Division 86-style, six-gun, two-section heavy mortar platoon can be either a potent combat multiplier for a battalion task force or a frustrating ne'er-do-well unit that adds nothing. The key elements that determine which it will become are the competence of the mortar platoon leader and the way the battalion com-

mander views his mortars—as stepchildren unworthy of his full attention, or as his own “hip-pocket artillery.”

Captain Terry L. Duran, a 1982 graduate of Texas A & M University, has served as a mechanized rifle platoon leader and a 4.2-inch mortar platoon leader. He is now a battalion S-4 in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)

Light Artillery

LIEUTENANT CARL R. MOORE

The U.S. Army has traditionally been organized to counter heavy conventional forces, but with recent increased instability throughout the world, there was a need for some modification of conventional operations. To fill this need, the Army created the light infantry, a force capable of negotiating all types of terrain and operating during day and night in all geographical regions. With the emergence of the light infantry concept, the traditional role of the Field Artillery also had to be modified. This new fire support organization is the light artillery.

Light artillery differs from traditional field artillery in several ways. While the normal infantry brigade is supported by an artillery battalion, here in the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, there are no supporting artillery units. The chief source of firepower is the 81mm mortar at battalion level and the 60mm mortars in the companies. With such limited fire support assets, a company fire support officer must carefully consider engaging targets with the proper type and amount of munitions.

Another difference comes in the area of fire support personnel. In conventional units, fire support personnel are consolidated at the artillery battalion, which permits little coordination between the artillerymen and their infantry counterparts. In this brigade, however, the fire support personnel are organic to the

infantry battalion and attached directly to the rifle companies they support. Because of this attachment, a unique relationship is formed between company commanders and their fire support officers (FSOs), who also serve as company headquarters platoon leaders. Because of this close contact, the FSOs can formulate their fire support plans to suit their commanders' intents with little or no guidance.

Another distinction of the light artillery in this brigade is the rating scheme. The infantry leaders have a direct role in writing the efficiency reports of artillery officers and NCOs—the battalion S-3 and commander rate the battalion FSO, the company and battalion commanders rate the company FSOs, and the company commanders endorse the ratings of company fire support NCOs.

In the light artillery, an artilleryman must train to become a good infantry soldier as well as a good artilleryman. This dual-training is accomplished through two field exercises—Light Fighters Courses I and II.

During Light Fighters Course I, the artillerymen receive training in the basic soldiering skills: common task training, construction of defensive fighting positions, tactical road marches, and land navigation. During Light Fighters Course II, the emphasis changes from infantry training to forward observer training. The major event in this exercise is a cer-

tification of forward observer skills, which involves an evaluation of basic communications skills, day and night land navigation, and observed fire procedures. The fire support teams also operate with their supported companies in tactical missions, developing an awareness of the value of stealth, noise and light discipline, and cover and concealment.

At the conclusion of these two courses, the artillerymen are qualified forward observers and infantrymen, ready to tackle any light artillery mission. They know light infantry tactics, appreciate mortar capabilities as well as artillery capabilities, can go where the light infantry goes, do what the light infantry does, and maintain an ability to shoot, move, and communicate.

The light artillery has moved into the limelight alongside the light infantry. These two comrades-in-arms hold the key to success on the modern, low intensity battlefield. A soldier in the light artillery faces many difficult challenges, but if he has what it takes, he emerges as one of the most powerful forces on the battlefield.

Lieutenant Carl R. Moore is fire support officer, Company B, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division. He is a 1985 ROTC graduate of Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
