

The Company FSO

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Since the introduction of the fire support team (FIST) in 1977, both the maneuver and the artillery communities have closely examined the concept. In most cases, this scrutiny has been a positive attempt to improve upon the FIST, but it has also resulted in a few misconceptions. These misconceptions stem primarily from the way a maneuver company commander perceives the role of his FIST as part of his combat team. Too often, this means that fire support is not effectively integrated into a company's scheme of maneuver.

One of these misconceptions holds that the company fire support officer (FSO) has overall responsibility for integrating that fire support. Many company commanders, believing this, take little or no interest in it themselves. Unfortunately, this lack of interest may result from a corresponding lack of professional knowledge about fire support. A brief review of the evolution of the FIST concept may help do away with that misconception.

Before World War II, the field artillery did not have forward observers (FOs) with the maneuver elements. Instead, each battery had a reconnaissance officer who established a battery observation post from which he could call fires. Thus, fire support had to be integrated into the scheme of maneuver by the maneuver commander.

During World War II, field artillery batteries provided one FO to each supported maneuver battalion, but he had to move from one company to the next. Again, the maneuver commander routinely performed fire planning and observation.

Between World War II and the Vietnam conflict, there was an attempt to

relieve the company commander of the FO role and put it in the hands of his trained artillery or mortar observers. A three-man FO party was developed to acquire and attack targets. Although this party also did some limited planning of fires in support of maneuver operations, the company commander for the most part still had to do integrated fire planning.

This attention to fire support detracted from the commander's ability to plan, coordinate, and supervise the maneuver operations. Thus, the FIST concept was



developed to relieve the company commander of detailed fire support planning and coordination. It did not, however, relieve him of the responsibility for *orchestrating* all of his available combat power.

This concept also expanded the artillery lieutenant's responsibilities, because he no longer acted as a forward observer but became the coordinator of all company fire support.

Today, the company commander is ultimately responsible for the fire support plan and for its integration into his maneuver operations. He gives his FSO guidance, and the FSO in turn integrates the available fire support—including

mortars, close air support, naval gunfire, and artillery—into the company's scheme of maneuver. As the maneuver plan is executed, the FSO continues to plan and coordinate fires and triggers the plan when and where the commander calls for its execution.

A second misconception arises from the statement that the company commander should keep the FSO in his hip pocket. Many commanders have interpreted this to mean solely in close physical proximity. In fact, even the U.S. Army Field Artillery School has adopted as standard procedure the idea of locating the company FSO in the commander's vehicle.

From my experience, this has resulted in a significant degradation of fire support at the maneuver company level. In many cases it has reduced the FSO to being little more than the commander's personal forward observer. No longer does he have the necessary tools immediately available to him to coordinate and trigger the company fire support plan effectively and quickly.

Other commanders have taken this idea to mean leaving the FSO in his own vehicle but travelling within a few meters of the commander's. This not only causes an obvious signature problem, but it also substantially limits the fire support team's ability to see the battlefield. When moving, commanders wisely use the terrain for survivability, but this often puts them at a disadvantage in trying to see the battlefield clearly.

Commanders need to allow their FSOs to move about the battlefield, staying relatively close but positioning his team where he can best control fires. After all, an FSO does monitor the company command net and stays in close communica-

tion with the commander.

The statement about the commander's hip pocket was intended to point out the fact that a commander must fully and continuously keep his FSO abreast of the situation and his own intent in executing the mission. For his part, the FSO must totally understand the concept of the operation and how the commander envisions integrating fire support—especially during the execution phase.

It is surprising, therefore, that some of the same commanders who insist on having their FIST chiefs right in their "hip pocket" during a battle ignore them during the planning process for that battle. Some commanders may even fail to take their fire support coordinators to hear the battle order. But just as the battalion order is where the planning process begins for a company commander, it should also be where the company FSO conducts his face-to-face coordination with the battalion FSO, who is, essentially, his second boss. Just as the battalion commander gives guidance to his com-

pany commander on his plan, so the battalion FSO briefs the company FSO concerning the battalion's fire support plan. This coordination must take place in order for the battalion FSO to execute the fire support tasks directed by the battalion commander.

The final misconception is that the burden of responsibility for developing the relationship between a company commander and his FSO rests with the FSO. That responsibility belongs to both. In fact, the company commander has the final responsibility. After all, as the leader and trainer of lieutenants, he is just as responsible for teaching the FSO to apply what he has learned in school as for teaching his other young lieutenants to apply their knowledge to the battlefield.

This is not to say that the commander should try to teach his FSO artillery tactics and techniques, but he should teach maneuver tactics and how he, the commander, fights battles. In turn, the FSO should be able to discuss with the com-

mander how fire support systems can be integrated into the planned maneuver. Through this dialogue, the maneuver company commander and the FSO will succeed on the battlefield because they will have achieved the understanding that makes an effective combat team possible.

In today's peacetime Army, because of the limitations on training realism and the obvious safety considerations, it is sometimes difficult for maneuver company commanders to see how well fire support complements their schemes of maneuver. But any commander who fully understands the FIST concept, and who employs his FIST as it was meant to be employed, will be able to integrate fire support effectively into his maneuver operations.

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COHORT Housing Program

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A light infantry battalion preparing to receive its COHORT soldiers fresh from one-station unit training (OSUT) faces several challenges. One of these is helping the married soldiers find housing, plan budgets, and integrate their families into the Army community. The ultimate goal is to accomplish this mission as effectively, easily, and quickly as possible.

During March 1986, the 3d Battalion, 14th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division at Fort Benning faced just such a challenge. Through creative thinking, foresight, and hard work, the battalion met this chal-

lenge by developing a comprehensive housing assistance and sponsorship program. This program could also be of great value to other units preparing to receive COHORT soldiers in the future.

First, an informative and detailed housing packet was produced that provided the relevant financial and rental information as a guide for incoming married soldiers who might be searching for off-post housing. In addition, married soldiers were matched with dedicated sponsors in a program designed to help them consider feasible housing alternatives, find neces-

sary points of contact on and off post, and make responsible decisions.

In planning the housing packet, which would go to each soldier while he was still in OSUT, members of the battalion contacted all local apartment complexes, real estate companies, and trailer parks, and checked classified advertisements in local newspapers. Most of the managers and real estate agents were glad to help. Once the information had been collected from these sources, a simple off-post rental and sale packet was constructed. A three-column table was made up listing