

The Battle Commander's Fire Support Planning

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Fire support can provide up to 80 percent of a maneuver commander's firepower during a battle. And anyone who has witnessed an artillery "battalion-3" (24 guns firing three rounds each at a single target) knows how destructive and psychologically intimidating massed field artillery fire can be.

Unfortunately, though, few officers and NCOs in heavy maneuver units are well-versed in the planning and execution of indirect fire support. They do not intentionally discard their field artillery, but they often become so involved in the demanding maneuver end of the battle that they neglect their fire support coordinators (FSCOORDs). Even when they have the best of intentions, they rarely achieve realistic integrated fire support training and feedback.

In addition, fire support is complex. It is in the formidable realm of mathematics, survey, digital communications, radar, and satellite positioning, and it has its own terminology. For this reason, many maneuver commanders, instead of trying to master the knowledge to employ the fire support they need to win in combat, simply assume (or hope) that their FSCOORDs are competent and trust them to provide accurate fires. But fire support is still the maneuver commander's responsibility and master it he must. (See also, "The Language of Fire Support," by LTC Robert D. Sander, *INFANTRY*, March-April 1990, pages 21-24, and "Fire Support: The Written Side," by Major Jeffrey W. Yaeger, *INFANTRY*, March-April 1990, pages 25-27.)

Although maneuver battle com-

manders may never fully understand fire support, there are some tools they can use to make the most of their available fire support and their FSCOORDs.

Training Circular 6-71, *The Fire Support Handbook for the Maneuver Commander*, is a useful guide for understanding the fire support system, but it does not adequately address the commander's intent for fire support. His intent for fire support is more than a priority of fires. He must paint a clear picture for his FSCOORD, one that an artilleryman can understand and one that is specifically directed to a fires plan of action. (Just as the maneuver commander may not understand field artillery, artillerymen may not entirely understand the maneuver unit's functions.)

COMMANDER'S INTENT

The commander must specify what he expects to achieve with the indirect fire support assets allocated to him. A task force commander's intent, which is more specific than a brigade commander's, covers the task force's area of responsibility and identifies specific targets for his fire support weapons, especially his own organic mortars. Although time constraints may limit how well the commander expresses his intent, he must establish what he wants his fire support assets to accomplish in the battle — how he wants fire support to influence the battle and support the scheme of maneuver. Then he must link this support to specific areas or phases of the battle or to key terrain:

- Types of targets to be engaged and the desired effect on each (the target damage assessment desired).

- What he wants the fires to do to the enemy (suppress, neutralize, destroy, disrupt, or delay).

- Places and times in the fight when fire support is critical.

- Force protection priorities and counterfire priorities, if applicable.

- Requirements, restrictions, and priorities for special munitions, such as FASCAM (family of scatterable mines), DPICM (dual-purpose, improved conventional munitions), or smoke.

- Any special concerns he may have.

A clear and specific outline of the commander's intent for fire support enables the FSCOORD to plan the points on the battlefield where he can and cannot expect to mass fires.

Fire support planning is the continuing process of analyzing, allocating, and scheduling fire support. It determines what types of targets will be attacked and how the available fire support will be used. Deliberate fire planning is conducted through a formal process (from the top down), with refinements (from the bottom up) as time permits. The goal is to integrate fire support into the maneuver commander's battle plans to achieve maximum combat power at the right place and the right time.

In developing a good fire support plan, the most important factor is the initial integrated wargaming and planning the commander does with the S-2, the S-3, the fire support officer (FSO), the air liaison officer (ALO), and the engineer. Along with the brigade

operations order, the task force receives the brigade fire support annex, which includes a target list, a target overlay, an execution matrix, target attack criteria, and an allocation of targets for planning. The FSO takes the guidance and resources the brigade has provided and plans fires to support the task force's battle.

Before the FSO can develop the task force fire support plan, he must understand the maneuver commander's assumptions, must know how to integrate fire support into the commander's battle plan, and must understand the level of risk that is acceptable to the commander. The FSO must know the special munitions requirements, if any, and he should be familiar with the positioning or movement requirements of the fire support assets.

As he develops his plan, the FSO must explain field artillery combat power in terms that have meaning to the maneuver commander. He must clearly articulate both the capabilities and the limitations of the fire support system.

The task force FSO must ensure that target lists are concise and that each target has a purpose and is tied to both the commander's intent and the task force scheme of maneuver. He must restrict target allocation to three to five planned (scheduled or on call) targets per company. A few well-placed targets are more effective, and more often exploited, than numerous scattered ones. The FSO should employ massed fires through the use of target series or target groups integrated with the intelligence preparation of the battlefield and the decision support template.

Finally, the FSO must know where the maneuver commander wants him to be during the execution of the battle. Whether at company or task force level, the FSO must be at the right place on the battlefield from which to orchestrate the indirect fire battle. He does not need to be bonded to the unit commander.

Once the FSO has completed the TF fire plan and before it is published, the S-3 must ensure that the plans and graphics for fire support, maneuver, and obstacles and barriers are mutually supporting, and that they all meet the

commander's intent. As more information becomes available and as the tactical situation changes, the fire plan should be updated and refined.

The task force fire support execution matrix, produced by the FSO, shows how the task force will fight the fire support battle (Figure 1). This matrix, together with the task force fire support graphic overlay and target list, shows the critical information that the maneuver commanders and the fire support officers and NCOs will need. Again, the most critical portion of the TF fire support execution matrix is the commander's intent for fire support.

The fire support matrix is tied to the phases of the operation; it assigns target

execution responsibility and allocates fire support resources to the maneuver company teams. It is prepared in an easy to understand format similar to that of the operations order execution matrix in Appendix B of Field Manual 71-2, The Tank and Mechanized Infantry Battalion Task Force.

A maneuver company team FSO takes the guidance and resources the task force has provided and plans his fires to support the team's battle. The team commander's intent for fire support outlines, in explicit detail, his concept for the execution of targets as he maneuvers the team.

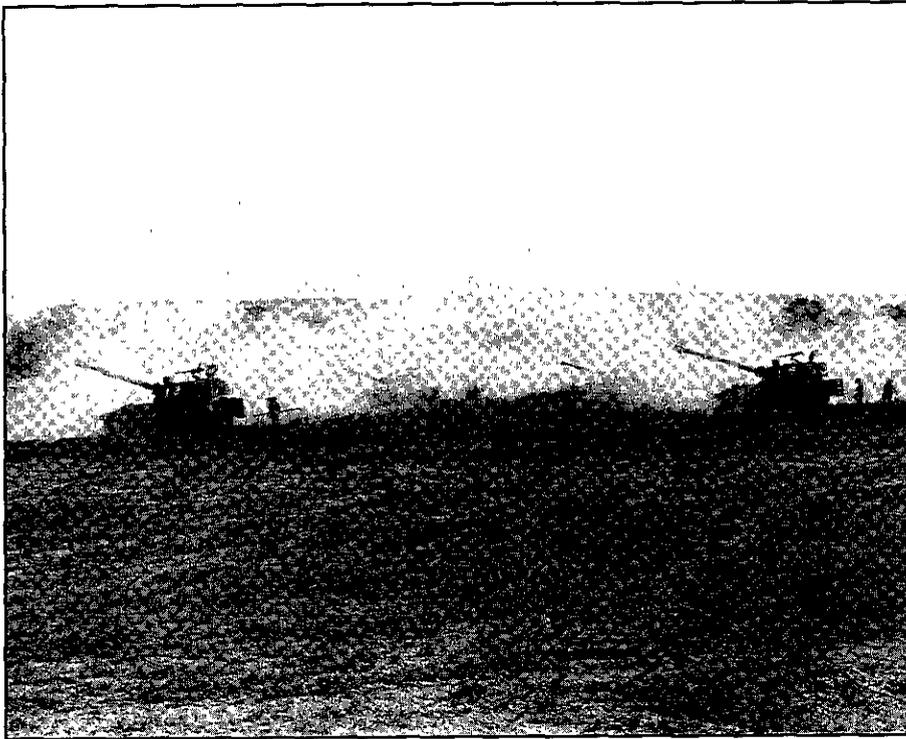
Because the team executes the brigade or TF fire support plan, as the company

	PL GOLD	PL BLACK	PL RED	PL BLUE
TM COBRA		BB 0007 BB 3001	BB 0013 BB 0009 BB 3010	BB 0015 FPF THUNDER
SCOUTS	BB 0029 BB 3004	BB 0017		
MORTARS	POS A1,A2	BB 3001 POS B1	BB 0009 POS B2,C1	POS C2
ATK CRITERIA NEUTRALIZE RECON ELEMENTS SUPPRESS ARMOR PLATOONS DESTROY ADA		MORTAR POS A1 GR123455 A2 GR124456 B2 GR127456 C1 GR011456		AMMUNITION AVAIL 12 BN 3 RDS DPICM 20 PLT 6 RDS HE 15 Min ARTY SMK 20 Min MTR SMK 30 Min ARTY ILL 20 Min MTR ILL
CBT ORGANIZATION 2-5 FA (155, SP) DS				

Figure 1

TGT#	GRID	DESC	TRIGGER PT	EXECUTION	
				PRIMARY	BACKUP
BB 1001	GG123456	Smoke OP	When 1st Plt is ready to cross LD	1st Plt	FIST
BB 1002 (GrpB1B)	GG123567	Suspected IN Squad	2d and 3d Plts cross PL BLUE	TM CDR	2d Plt
BB 3108 (GrpB1B)	GG135467	AT Pos	2d and 3d Plts cross PL BLUE	TM CDR	2d Plt
Priority Fires:		Cross LD	PL BLUE		
		FA 1Plt MTR 1Plt	FA 2Plt MTR 2Plt		
Priority Targets: BMP-2, AT-5 Positions, T-80, ISU 23-5					
Ammo Avail:		FA DPICM 10 BN x 3	CEOI: FA 56.15	FA FDC 07L45	
		MTR HE 22 pt 6	MTR 32.00	MTR FDC 033	
		MTR SMK 20 min			
Coord Instr: 1. Shoot MTR SMK on BB 1001. 2. Grp B1B TGTs are FA priority targets.					

Figure 2



M109 155mm self-propelled artillery in battery live fire.

FSO develops the team fire plan he also refines the TF fire plan to meet the team's fire support requirements (refinement from the bottom up). His primary concerns are planning priority targets and final protective fires and physically validating target locations.

The team fire support matrix (Figure 2), similar in organization to the TF matrix, is a maneuver document and is designed so that all key leaders in the team understand and execute the fire support battle. It is developed by the company FSO with his fire support team, and it is detailed enough to enable the team commander, the platoon leaders and sergeants, and the infantry fighting vehicle and tank commanders to execute the fire plan on their own.

The team's fires matrix is locked into the team commander's maneuver plan. It establishes who will be responsible for each target along with when, where, and under what conditions. Copies of the matrix are distributed down to the IFV and tank commanders to give them the critical information they need to fight the battle.

The final critical measure in fire support planning is a combined arms rehearsal. Observations from the combat training centers emphasize the value of

good rehearsals. In addition to reinforcing both the scheme of maneuver and the fire support plan, a strong rehearsal results in more effective and better synchronized fires during the execution phase. The maneuver commanders, support commanders, specialty platoon leaders, key staff members, and FSCoord and FSOs rehearse the fire support plan at the same time they rehearse the maneuver plan.

A rehearsal is not the same as war gaming, because the decisions have already been made and the operations order issued. It is an exercise to ensure that each key member of the task force knows when, where, and how he will execute his part of the operations order. Task force and team commanders talk through each phase of the battle — the timing, position, and movement of their elements on the battlefield. At the same time, their respective FSOs indicate the fires that will be employed as set forth in the fire support execution matrix.

Rehearsals depend primarily upon the time available. They can take the form of battlefield vantage point rehearsals, terrain model rehearsals, map and graphics rehearsals, or secure voice net backbrief rehearsals. Regardless of the form, the effort expended will

reflect directly on the execution of the battle and the synchronization of combat power.

One of the commander's greatest challenges is to synchronize and concentrate all of his combat power at the critical time and place. But the commander alone will not have the time to integrate all the weapons available to him. The FSO helps the commander by developing a fire plan that integrates the firepower of mortars, close air support, and field artillery to support each phase of the maneuver plan. During the battle, the FSO monitors fire support execution to ensure that the support is continuous and that it will accomplish the commander's intent.

Field artillery is the greatest killer on the battlefield. Employed to its fullest, it can provide the maneuver commander with superior combat power to win the battle. If it is neglected, defeat will surely follow.

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