

TRAINING NOTES



Indirect Fires First : *The American Way of War*

An interview with Major General Paul D. Eaton

Interview by Patricia Slayden Hollis,
Field Artillery magazine editor

This interview was conducted May 30 at Fort Benning, Ga., when Major General Eaton was Chief of Infantry. He handed over command of the U.S. Army Infantry Center and School June 9. He is currently serving as Commanding General of the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team, which is responsible for manning, equipping and training the new Iraqi army. This article was also published in Field Artillery magazine.

Q As the Chief of the Infantry, you and the Chief of Field Artillery have joined to send the message throughout the Army “Indirect fires first is the American way of War.” What does that mean?

A Another way to say it is, “Never send a Soldier, when a bullet (of some caliber) will do.” The intent is for the infantry to engage the enemy with somebody else’s ordnance — indirect fire or close air support (CAS) or some other means — and we need to apply those effects to avoid having to commit Soldiers in the close fight.

Now, that’s not to say we are “walking away from the close fight” — we’re not. The close fight is what the infantry is about.

The close fight has been called the “Red Zone.” I like the “Last 100 Yards.” It’s that direct fire rifle range of Soldiers’ eyes on target, day or night. The infantryman is our “final answer” after we’ve done all we can with indirect fire effects.

So, what prompted the need for that message? We’ve had some training problems

that surfaced at our Combat Training Center (CTCs) for any number of reasons. By reflex, infantrymen and tankers understand their direct fire systems. We train at the individual level all the way up to the collective level on our direct fire systems. We spend a lot of time on tank gunnery, Bradley gunnery, rifle marksmanship and antitank missile systems. That’s great — that’s what we do and we must do it well.

But when things get busy leading into the Last 100 Yards, the first thing we need to do is call for indirect fire ... and that also needs to be by reflex. We’ve got to apply indirect fire and CAS planning to kill the target with anything from the M203 40-mm high explosive (HE) through 60-mm, 81-mm and 120-mm mortars into the artillery of 105-mm, 155-mm to MLRS (multiple-launch rocket system) to ATACMS (Army tactical missile system) — the entire panoply of indirect fires.

Part of the problem is that we don’t reward the use of indirect fires at our training centers well enough, particularly mortars. There’s work to be done to replicate the real effects of fires in training. We have fire markers, but there is a delay.

In comparison, the Soldier has immediate satisfaction when he lays a gun tube of some sort on a target and executes direct fire. He gets the kill indicator, the blinking lights, immediately.



Feedback on indirect fires for the attacking Soldier in training is not quite as sophisticated. We’re moving in the right direction, but we’re not there yet.

In the Last 100 Yards, the 11B NCO looks to his lieutenant to arrange for killing fires from somebody else’s asset, not just apply direct fires, and rightly so. This is particularly true of light infantrymen who can’t carry all of the killing power available on their backs.

As it is, every light infantryman carries two, three, four 60-mm mortar rounds to bring them into the area of operations. But he can’t carry enough “stowed kills” to deliver all the effects he needs. We have to train our infantry lieutenants to call for and adjust indirect fires and captains to plan and execute indirect fires by reflex.

Q What aspects of integrating and synchronizing fires and maneuver in the close fight make it so difficult?

A In training when Soldiers are pressing toward an objective, we shift from 155mm to the 120mm to 81mm, 60mm and 40mm to ensure the last thing the enemy sees is an indirect round before our infantryman is on him. The desired end state, of course, is to kill the enemy or render him unable to respond to our infantry assault. That takes practice.

We don’t practice integrating and synchronizing fires in home station training often enough to execute them by reflex.

When Major General Dave Petraeus, CG of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), was a brigade commander, he

started “walk and shoot” home station training to practice those skills. He walked around the impact area and presented dilemmas to his leaders, for example how to take an objective in certain circumstances. Then he had indirect fire systems live fire to help the leaders take the objectives. This made the lieutenant or captain react immediately to a combat dilemma and execute a fires and maneuver mission. (For more information on this training, see the article “Walk and Shoot Training” by Colonel David H. Petraeus and Major Robert A. Breman, *Infantry*, January-February 1997.)

Q What are the initiatives in the Infantry School to ensure the Soldier uses indirect fires first?

A The first thing we did was recognize we had a problem. Then we took a long look at three leader development courses: officer’s basic course (OBC), captain’s career course (CCC) and the precommand course (PCC). What we found is that we focused a lot of training at the individual knowledge level as opposed to the application of fires — how to integrate fires with a maneuvering force that is constantly changing. For example, we were teaching the lieutenants how to call for and adjust fires and the captains indirect fire capabilities and the basics of static indirect fire planning. If you want to synchronize fires and maneuver in an overall fight, you’ve got to get beyond these “Skill-Level Two” tasks.

What did we change? In the basic course, we pared down the knowledge-based instruction and gave them disks with that information to study on their own. Now we focus on not only the call-for-fire and adjust fire tasks —because those are a big part of what they need to know — but also on risk estimate distances (REDS) and the concept of the spatial relationship between maneuver and fires so they can continue to echelon fires as they maneuver. The idea is to ensure the lieutenant understands indirect fire is not an afterthought when his initial reaction fails — indirect fire is first.

Also, we just opened our GUARDFIST (guard unit armory device, full-crew interactive simulation trainer) facility and are exploiting its capabilities to train lieutenants to execute indirect fire missions. Before GUARDFIST, our only virtual

simulation with indirect fire was the CCTT (close combat tactical trainer), which is great for collective training, but not ideal for what we are trying to teach the lieutenants.

We would like to institute walk and shoot training, but resources are an issue, in terms of ammo, time and indirect fire assets to implement the training. That’s a long-term goal.

In the CCC, we raised the standards of our indirect fire instruction. We hold the students responsible for the information taught in OBC and encourage them to refresh their knowledge via the Internet. We’ve also reduced the classroom ratio from one instructor for every 200 students to one over 40 for the knowledge-based portion of indirect fire instruction. We focus the classroom instruction on concepts — echeloning fires, determining tactical triggers, working with REDS, determining what rounds will give them the effects they want, etc.—before they go into the execution phase in small group instruction. Certainly, these captains will have FSOs (fire support officers) to help them in their companies, but they’re on their own during the course.

During small group instruction, the SGIs (small group instructors) train the captains to be rabid disciples of indirect fires. The captains have to plan operations for a variety of organizations, such as light infantry, mechanized infantry and SBCT (Stryker brigade combat team) infantry, in a number of different environments so they understand the factors that affect the fight, including direct and indirect fires. If they can’t demonstrate the ability to integrate fires into their plans, they don’t graduate.

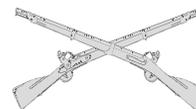
The students also execute their plans using constructive simulations, such as Janus, BBS (brigade/battalion battle simulation), MPARS (the mission, planning and rehearsal system) and the developmental full-spectrum command (FSC). Right now, we are the only school with MPARS, a great new system championed by Lieutenant General (Richard A.) Cody when he was the CG of the 101st. Unlike Janus and BBS, MPARS provides students a virtual look or “fly through” capability during the fight as opposed to the old top-down God’s eye view. It allows student company commanders to see their simulated infantrymen, tanks and Bradleys along with the effects of indirect fires as they fight — see the results of their planning, their execution of fires and maneuver, their decision making.

The key is to prepare them to employ not only mortars and artillery, but also Army aviation and CAS — all forms of fires available to them — before committing their infantrymen. We are drawing on the recent experiences of our 75th Ranger Regiment’s use of CAS in Afghanistan.

We also are using and continuing to develop FSC to provide an urban operations simulations program that’s interactive virtual combat training against a thinking enemy, thanks to FSC’s artificial intelligence capability. FSC allows students to employ company-level mortars, but we need more funding to fully integrate indirect fires, CAS and Army attack aviation — our major complaint about an otherwise excellent program.



In partnership with **Major General Eaton, Major General Michael D. Maples,** Chief of Field Artillery, is working to improve



the integration of fires in the close fight. He is instituting a number of initiatives to improve the confidence and competence of leaders and fire supporters. These include “walking” shoots vice static call-for-fire training; increasing the rigor on instruction, such as in the two-day Light Fire Support Officer (FSO) Lane Training exercise for FA Officer Basic Course (FAOBC) lieutenants and 13F Fire Support Specialists; integrating close air support (CAS) into the mounted lane training for FAOBC lieutenants; increasing the tactical focus of the FA portions of the Precommand Course; increasing the outreach to/interface with the Combined Arms Center (CAC), Combat Training Centers and Infantry School; and pushing for Infantry, Army, Aviation and Engineer officers and NCOs to be assigned to the FA School to work on combined arms exercises and instruction.

We depend on simulations to train the synchronization of fires with maneuver in the schoolhouse and build the skills needed for combat. You can do all the planning and visualizing of time-distance factors “on paper” you want, but you must see and direct the dynamic synchronization of fires and maneuver repetitively to be able to do it in combat — recognize when things start to break down and practice resynchronizing them.

Q How are you preparing brigade and task force commanders to better integrate all their available assets in combined arms operations — including indirect fires and CAS assets?

A Not well. We only have them for two weeks before they go to Fort Leavenworth (Kansas) for the final part of PCC.

We’ve added a two-hour block of instruction on how to give commander’s guidance for fire support. We also introduce them to essential fire support tasks (EFSTS) to allow them to communicate with their technical advisors, their FSCOORDs (fire support coordinators) and FSOS. These new commanders went to CGSC (Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth) back in the mid-1990s, and the concept of the EFST wasn’t even in “white paper” yet. I admit that two hours is not adequate if they are not already prepared.

We are developing instruction for PCC students to teach them how to plan and conduct walk and shoot training at their home stations. Ideally, I’d like to resource a walk and shoot with lieutenants and captains playing all the fire support roles and align it with the PCC instruction as an observed execution event. But, again, this is a long-range goal.

Top priorities that will help commanders in home station training are increasing mortar STRAC (standards in training commission) allocations to resource walk and shoots and increasing STRAC for our family of full-range mortar training rounds. Walk and shoot training is becoming standard in our light divisions. The Field Artillery has been resourcing this training very well, but we are behind on mortar rounds. Right now, units have to “harvest” mortar rounds from individual and squad training to have only a few to fire during

walk and shoots — not enough rounds to be effective.

We have rewritten our combined arms training strategy to recommend that any time a platoon or higher trains in any FTX (field training exercise) or LFX (live-fire exercise) indirect fires be integrated—mortars and artillery. Our mortar STRAC recommendation will resource this strategy fully.

The family of full-range mortar training rounds will mitigate the limitations of training at our posts where the impact areas are either offset from our direct fire ranges or not adjacent to them at all. Because the rounds don’t explode, they don’t produce duds. The rounds will allow commanders to turn virtually any live-fire exercise into a CALFEX (combined arms live-fire exercise) using organic mortars. We already have a full-range training round for 120-mm mortars with the 60-mm round being fielded as we speak; the 81-mm round is awaiting material release.

Q Based on what you’ve seen in the news about Operation Iraqi Freedom and read in initial reports, did units apply indirect fires first?

A Yes. The feedback is that units applied indirect fires far more agilely and at a faster pace than we’ve been used to seeing. We should note that these Soldiers trained intensely and had the luxury of some pretty sophisticated live-fire training before they embarked on combat operations.

The 75th Rangers’ ability to draw upon “over the shoulder” assets was very effective — hence, our interest in CAS and indirect fires.

Q What subject haven’t we discussed that we should?

A We need to be able to employ ACAS in infantry and armor formations when we don’t have a TACP (a USAF tactical air control party). We need to proliferate the TACP function so that when we don’t have enough Air Force ETACs (enlisted tactical air controllers) in our ground force units, we can supplement with fire supporters trained in the ETAC skill sets.

Afghanistan showed that we need the ETAC function at much lower levels than

we are resourced for. We already have most of the training tools needed to train fire supporters in that function, or they are inbound. We must train and do the hard work up front — not wait until we deploy our ground forces into combat when they’ll need timely CAS.

Q What message would you like to send to Army and Marine Field Artillerymen stationed around the world?

A You’re doing the Lord’s work, and we appreciate it. To illustrate the infantryman’s expectations for lethal indirect fires swiftly delivered, we recently had to deploy a mobile training team to field the 120-mm mortar to one of our divisions in Afghanistan because it did not deploy with artillery.

We absolutely must have a combined arms approach to prosecuting warfare. Indirect fires, in fact, are the American way of delivering killing power while the infantry closes on the objective.

Major General Paul D. Eaton served as Chief of Infantry from October 29, 2001 until June 9, 2003. He is currently the Commanding General of the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT) under the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Eaton’s previous assignments include commanding the 1st Brigade in the 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized) in Germany; 3d Battalion, 14th Infantry of the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) at Fort Drum, New York; and C Company, 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry in the 8th Infantry Division (Mechanized), also in Germany. Additional assignments include serving as the Assistant Division Commander (Maneuver) in the 1st Armored Division, Germany, where he deployed to Bosnia in support of the Stabilization Force (SFOR); Deputy Commanding General of Fort Benning and Assistant Commandant of the Infantry School; Deputy Commanding General for Transformation at Fort Lewis, Washington; G3 (Operations) of the 10th Mountain Division during Operation Restore Hope in Somalia; and Executive Officer to the J3 of the Joint Staff at the Pentagon.

He holds a master’s degree in French Political Science from Middlebury College in Paris, France, and is a graduate of the class of 1972 at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.
