

Commandant's Note

BRIGADIER GENERAL BENJAMIN C. FREAKLEY

ORGANIC FIRES: Critical Component to the Infantry Combined Arms Team

"If there is one thing a Dogface loves, it is artillery — his own!"

— Audie Murphy

Audie Murphy understood the importance of organic fires. In fact, he is quoted as saying, "I believe in the force of a hand grenade, the power of artillery, and the accuracy of a Garand." Today, as in the past, Infantrymen deployed around the world must understand the principle of fire — direct and indirect — and maneuver as they fight the global war on terror.

The world we knew before 9-11 is changed. We are no longer an Army at peace that occasionally goes to war; we are an Army at war fighting to restore a just and lasting peace. Within this context, we are also transforming the Army, using new technologies and organizations to anticipate and meet emerging and evolving threats. We are in a time of war while changing. However, one aspect that will never change is the need for infantrymen to understand the principle of fire and maneuver as they close with and destroy the enemy.

There has been a lot of discussion over the last few months on the increasing use of joint fires to supplement organic fires and make our organizations more lethal. There is no question that better access to joint fires enhances the lethality of the maneuver force. In fact, we will not go into battle without them. Interdependency on joint fires, not just augmentation, is our objective. But while we refine our ability to unleash the fires of our sister services we will retain organic fires at all echelons and train to apply the combination of both organic and joint fires on the battlefield. As recent history has shown, the synergy of both is devastating. However, the accurate, timely fires of the field artillery and mortars provide the immediately responsive steel on target and the flexibility that the commander on the ground needs on a rapidly changing battlefield, and this gives him the means to



close with and destroy our enemy.

Ground forces in contact and in close combat require responsive fires, and the most responsive fires today and in the future are the cannons and mortars organic to the combined arms team. For years, the fire support community has worked tirelessly to improve responsiveness. The most significant improvement in responsiveness does not come from the computers we now use or the improved delivery systems, but from the transition to top down fire planning and bottom up fire refinement and the creation of the Essential Fire Support Task (EFST) methodology. The EFST

methodology focuses delivery assets and observers to accomplish the difficult task of synchronizing fires and maneuver.

Recent combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq prove that the methodology ensures responsive fires. There is no more queue, where missions are fired in the order they are received. Now, based on command guidance, all facets of the organic fire support system (observers, mortars, cannons) are focused to accomplish a given task and purpose. Mortars at one echelon can be used to substitute for what cannons are doing for another echelon. It truly is evolutionary and extremely effective if understood and properly executed. Infantrymen of OIF have seen it work, and are believers.

Can other joint fire assets be part of this? Absolutely. However, we cannot assume that these joint fires can guarantee the same level of responsiveness and precision as our organic fire support. They are not as close to the ground situation as are organic assets. There is no question that air power can achieve an EFST. Our desire is to use fires throughout the battle space, attacking the enemy in depth and width simultaneously to drive him to his knees. Furthermore, our organic fire support assets are truly the most responsive all weather fire support that we can rely on. One need not look any farther back than to late March of 2003, during the

“Mother of all Sandstorms,” when the cannons and mortars of the 3rd Infantry Division, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and the 1st Marine Division continued to take the fight to the enemy, supported by the relentless pounding of organic indirect fires. In this case, our organic fire support assets were our hedge against bad weather.

Flexibility is another critical element of the fire support equation. There is no question that we enjoyed a tremendous amount of air power during both OEF and OIF. Our Air Force brethren proved their commitment to close air support. But — depending upon conditions — air power may not always be as available or as flexible as the cannons and mortars that are already in the maneuver force. Noncontiguous operations are the norm in the Contemporary Operating Environment (COE) of today and will be in the future. We plan operations in detail, but in the noncontiguous battle space, any formation will be in contact and require supporting fires. Air power will be available, but again we cannot afford to rely on this as our only option. Organic fires in the form of the 60mm mortar, the 81mm mortar, the 120mm mortar, and cannons assure that a fire support platform can rapidly shift to provide fires for the unit in contact, regardless of the limitations that ROE, terrain, weather, and the enemy can impose on the employment of air assets.

The human factor is yet another facet of the flexibility of organic fires. The leaders and Soldiers of our organic fire support units are part of our formations. They attend our orders briefs, they attend rehearsals, they develop personal relationships with us, and there is never any doubt that they will be there for us when we are in contact. Ask any company commander with OIF experience, and he will confirm this. Air power and other joint assets will

surely become more flexible as technology evolves and our formations become more joint, but organic fire support assets remain our most flexible.

Closing with and destroying the enemy — the core tenet of the Infantry — requires a combined arms effort. Infantrymen must employ all available fires to destroy and suppress the enemy to facilitate maneuver to a position of advantage from which to launch that decisive, intensely personal final assault. We know not to close with the enemy until the conditions are set. This use of tactics demands both organic and joint fires. Each brings its own unique strengths to the fight. Organic fires are uniquely suited for providing suppression. They are always within range, and they carry a suite of munitions that can be used in any environment. When it comes to destroying the enemy, organic fires accomplish the task, especially with precision munitions. Joint fires can also accomplish this task, but nothing is better than the combination of both.

Infantrymen have never gone into battle without organic mortars and cannons, and they never will. From the American Revolution to World War II to Desert Storm, up to today’s fights, the Infantry understands the importance of employing all available fires to achieve decisive maneuver. Today’s OIF and OEF-experienced infantrymen have refined the art and science of fire employment. Fires first, often, and throughout the operation are a must, and the more fire support assets we can muster, the better off we will be. Infantrymen do the Army’s heavy lifting and are always the point of the spear. We welcome the challenge. As we transform, much will change, but the use of fires remains a critical component of the infantry combined arms team fight.

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