



Full-Spectrum Indirect Fire Support: Mortars in the FA

An indirect fire support system by any other name is still an indirect fire support system. Those of us who are fire supporters and artillerymen ought to look to where we can further employ our expertise for the betterment of our Army and fighting forces. One such area, which many within our circles often dismiss, is the employment of mortars: the 60-mm, 81-mm and 120-mm mortars.

Mortars have been inherent in Infantry MTOEs [modified tables of organization and equipment] for many years. Despite the evolutionary shift to precision fires, we still need the responsive area fires mortars provide.

Regardless, Infantrymen tend to focus on employing their direct fire systems. They do not prioritize mortars as highly as their primary direct fire weapon systems.

Infantry MTOEs should be modified to fill mortar sections and platoons with 13-series MOS [military occupational specialty] Soldiers. 13B Cannoneers would fill the mortar positions, and 13E Cannon Fire Direction Specialists would staff the mortar FDCs [fire direction centers]. Similarly, officers in mortar platoon leader positions would be 13-series.

Other specialties (Intelligence, Medical and Signal) have embedded their branch-specific Soldiers in Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery units for many years. Why should we be any different?

The crux of the issue is putting those who are best qualified in the job. First, let me say there are many high-quality Soldiers who are mortar men. My point is that those who specialize in indirect fire support should be charged with managing, training, equipping and resourcing all the ground



force's indirect fires, not just a portion of it. For years the Infantry has relied upon their DS [direct support] FA battalions to help train their mortar crews and mortar FDCs. Let's just take it a step further and incorporate Field Artillery personnel into the mortar crews.

Just as the 13F Fire Support Specialist was created almost 25 years ago to include artillery and mortar forward observers, so, too, should the remainder of the mortar equation be transformed.

The time for this change is now. Accurate and timely indirect fire support is the service we provide. We should be the full-spectrum providers of indirect (non-line of sight, or NLOS) fires, not just the keeper of cannons and rockets.

Fire Supporters are committed to supporting the close fight. And with the Army's move toward modularity and the former DS battalions' becoming fires battalions organic to the BCTs [brigade

combat teams], our Infantry brethren should welcome our desire to provide our indirect fire expertise and manning in mortar positions to make the BCT a more ready and capable fighting force.

Clearly this change would take some responsibility away from the Infantry, but the maneuver commander still would own his mortars. Another advantage would be that the integration of mortar fires into the overall fire support plan would be greatly enhanced.

The advent of the 120-mm mortar prompts some questions. An option would be to have two eight-howitzer batteries of either 105-mm or 155-mm howitzers and one battery of 120-mm mortars in each of the BCTs' fires battalions.

It's time for Field Artillery to expand and transition into more responsibility in the new BCTs. We are the Army's all-weather, fully capable providers of fire support. Our mission does not change: we must provide accurate and timely fires to support the maneuver commander. What must change is how we do it.

We need to step forward and enhance fires in the close fight by taking responsibility for mortars in the BCTs. Then we need to give this initiative the horsepower to do it right.

— COLONEL KEITH J. BUCKLEW
Commander,
138th Regiment (Combat Arms),
Indiana Army National Guard

If you have a letter or article you would like to submit to *Infantry*, mail it to P.O. Box 52005, Fort Benning, GA 31995-2005 or e-mail it to rowanm@benning.army.mil.