



## FSCOORD CHALLENGES FOR FIRE SUPPORTERS IN THE BCT

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Today's brigade combat team (BCT) fire support coordinator (FSCOORD) faces many new challenges commensurate with BCT transformation and the evolving roles of fire supporters in the field artillery. The BCT's FSCOORD (traditionally the title applied to the direct support field artillery battalion commander) is now applied to the FA lieutenant colonel billet on the brigade staff — one of three lieutenant colonels on the BCT staff (executive officer [XO], and the S3 are the other two).

The FSCOORD is responsible for properly manning, equipping and training all fire support personnel in the brigade on both

traditional fire support tasks as well as non-traditional civil-military operations (CMO) and information operations (IO) tasks. He also builds a fusion cell in the BCT headquarters, the fire support cell (FSC). This FSC is comprised of traditional lethal fires and the Air Force tactical air control party (TACP) personnel and integrates IO, CMO, public affairs (PA) and the staff judge advocate (SJA) personnel and functions.

In these changing times, the FSCOORD must develop methods to work with maneuver commanders and their senior NCOs to seamlessly integrate all fusion cell enablers from the brigade to the platoon levels by way of the maneuver battalion fire support channels in support of an evolving brigade campaign plan.

To help current and future FSCOORDs, this article explains the processes and challenges within the fire support channels of the 2nd Infantry BCT (IBCT), 2nd Infantry Division (2nd ID), Fort Carson, Colorado, during the last 10 months as it prepared for its Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) deployment.

**Transformation.** In 2004, the 2nd IBCT, 2nd ID, deployed to Iraq from Korea. After a one-year tour, the unit

Photo by Staff Sergeant Jeffrey A. Wolfe, USAF



deployed to Fort Carson in August 2005. Soon after, the brigade began transforming from a heavy brigade to a modular IBCT. With restructuring, reflagging and the introduction of six new battalion commanders and one new brigade commander, “muddy boots” training did not begin until January 2006. Part of this restructuring included the movement of all fire support personnel from the fires battalion to their respective maneuver battalions.

The new modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) for the IBCT has a battalion FSC in both the BCT’s infantry battalions and in the reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition (RSTA) battalion. (See Figures 1, 2 and 3, the latter two on Pages 40 and 41, respectively.) In addition to the FSCs, each battalion also has a fires platoon made up of three to four company-level fire support teams (FISTs) along with their respective forward observers (FOs). Even the brigade special troops battalion is allocated three fire support personnel to augment its S3 shop: an E7 (battle staff), E6 and E5.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 2nd IBCT, has a robust brigade FSC led by the IBCT FSCOORD that includes four combat observation lasing teams (COLTs) and a nonlethal effects cell.

In the transformation process, the 2nd IBCT maneuver units were eager to accept their fire supporters. Each maneuver battalion then dissolved its fires platoons and quickly attached each company FIST down to its companies.

The challenge is evident. How does the BCT FSCOORD ensure all fire support personnel are adequately manned, equipped and trained to support the traditional fire support mission as well as the nontraditional IO and CMO missions?

The answer is “*Carefully.*”

**Manning.** In the 2nd IBCT, the fires battalion commander, in conjunction with the brigade commander, coordinates all FA officer moves. The FSCOORD makes recommendations, but the fires battalion commander decides which officer in the BCT enters or leaves the fire support world and which enters or leaves the artillery world.

Initially this was a sticking point with maneuver battalion commanders who inadvertently may have approved personnel actions (branch transfers, career course

attendance, etc.) for “their” FA officers without consulting with the fires battalion commander. Also maneuver commanders become attached to their FA officers and may not want to lose them when the fires battalion commander, for example, thinks an officer’s movement to the fires battalion is optimal for the officer’s career progression.

Enlisted personnel manning is more problematic. In the 2nd IBCT, the fire support operations NCO (senior 13 series NCO in the BCT FSC) works closely with the brigade command sergeant major (CSM) to recommend enlisted sourcing to specific battalions for inbound gains and also recommends senior NCO moves for professional development.

We’ve found that the maneuver battalion

CSMs are very concerned about their fire support NCOs and Soldiers, especially in reference to moves for NCO professional development, i.e., moving an NCO to a COLT at brigade or moving a promotable sergeant to another battalion to assume the role of company fire support NCO. We’ve found that a move is facilitated when the final decision comes from brigade CSM to the maneuver battalion CSM.

A unique challenge with the new MTOE structure is the battalion FSC NCOs often are not fulfilling their roles as platoon sergeants because their platoon is dispersed throughout the maneuver company. In addition, these FSC NCOs have limited visibility of their company fire support NCOs and platoon FOs. This makes fire support mentoring from

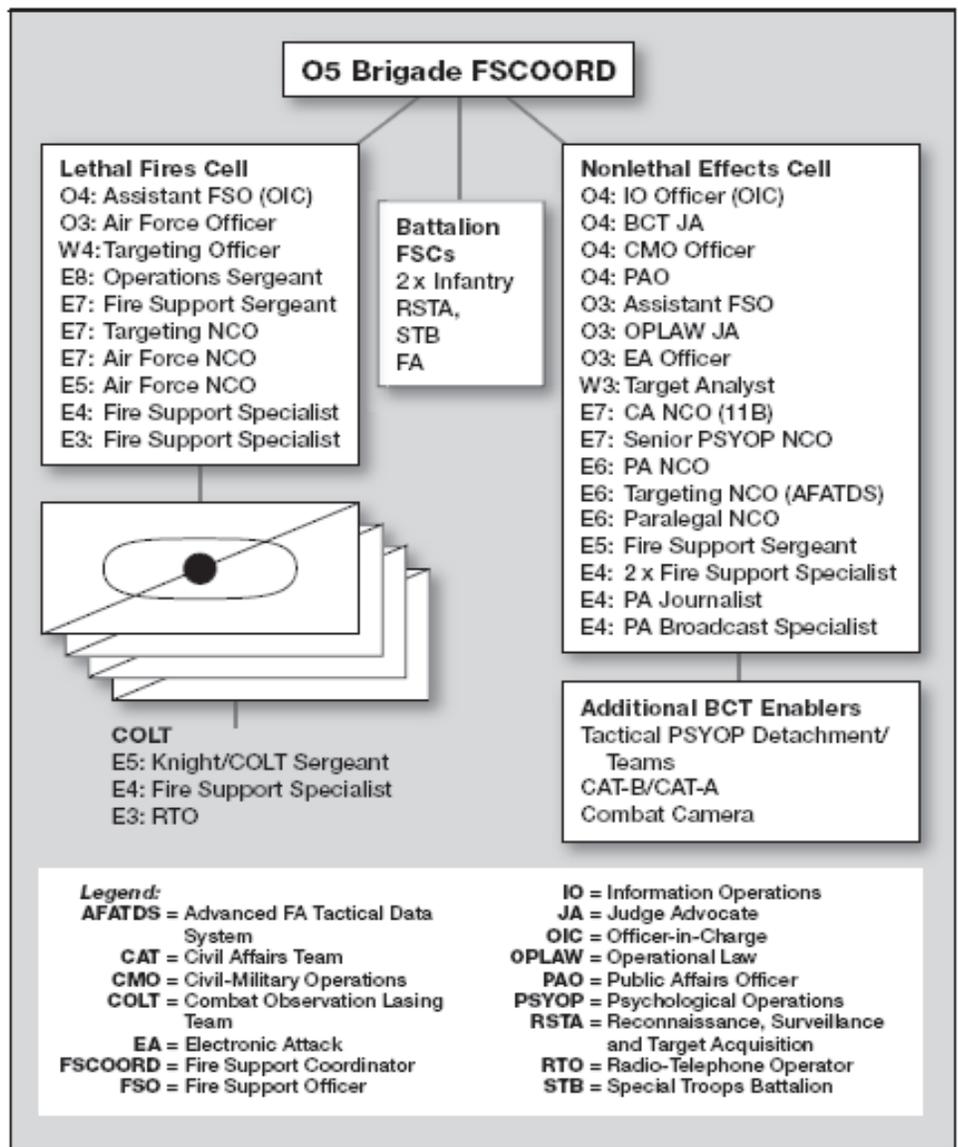


Figure 1: Brigade Combat Team (BCT) Fire Support Cell (FSC)

senior NCO to junior NCO extremely difficult.

**Equipping.** If you are a new BCT FSCoord, don't assume everyone follows the MTOE. The allocation of fire support personnel down to the company level causes additional friction because fire support equipment comes from the battalion's HHC MTOE authorizations. Without proper coordination, usually the FSCoord's face-to-face meeting with a battalion XO, equipment intended for a battalion FSC, company FIST or platoon FO team may never make it to the intended user—especially optics, vehicles and radios.

The MTOE may address the need, but the maneuver commander at the battalion or company level can quickly reassess the need to fit his mission. On more than one occasion, unless the FSCoord was specific about radio/vehicle/optic requirements, FISTs arrived at a training event under-equipped.

**Training.** Training is more of a challenge today because fire support personnel are expected to know their traditional roles (calling for and adjusting indirect fires) as well as their non-traditional roles (understanding and implementing IO and CMO). All this training must occur in the BCTs new decentralized structure.

Coordinating the training for fire support personnel in 11 separate maneuver companies and five headquarters companies can be problematic. Early planning solves many problems. When the FSCoord works closely with the BCT S3 to ensure all training is included on the long-range training calendar and is followed up with an operations order (OPORD) or fragmentary order (FRAGO), most personnel attend.

As the FSCoord, I focused the BCT training into three quarters. First quarter (January to March) was dedicated to the 13F Fire Support Specialists' validating their traditional fire support tasks. Second quarter (April-June) was dedicated to IO/civil affairs (CA) training and the employment of both lethal fires and nonlethal effects in maneuver platoon- and company-level operations. Third quarter (July-September) was dedicated to establishing the brigade FSC and systems to fuse all the BCT enablers (lethal fires, TACP, IO, CMO, PA and SJA) in support of brigade- and battalion-level operations at the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, California. We then took those lessons learned to prepare for the deployment.

*Always a Fire Supporter.* First quarter trained the fire support fundamentals. Each company FIST underwent an arduous certification process composed of a written test, guard unit armory device, full-crew interactive simulation trainer (GUARDFIST); and pre-combat checks (PCCs) and pre-combat inspections (PCIs); followed by an exercise in dismounted military operations in urban terrain (MOUT).

We conducted the certification exercise on Fort Carson's main post and had the opposing force (OPFOR) dress in civilian clothes and drive around in privately owned vehicles

(POVs) to blend in with the local population. We tested each team's observation and situational awareness abilities as well as their fundamental fire support skills. A compass, binoculars, radio, map and heavy rucksack were the only authorized items for this certification.

After FIST certifications, in February, we took all the FISTs and FO teams to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for a week of joint fires and effects simulator training. Building on their FIST certification, the teams were ready to use the new simulators and video after-action review (AAR) facilities to drill further on their fire support fundamentals.

In conjunction with this training, the BCT and battalion FSCs received their new advanced FA tactical data system (AFATDS) tadpoles and effects management tool (EMT) new equipment training (NET) while the BCT fires battalion was fielded its M119A2 howitzers. These events set the conditions for the BCT's first artillery live-fire exercise in March, finishing the quarter with all fire supporters trained and validated.

*IO and CMO.* Second quarter trained IO and CMO skills. Building on the current operations in theater, we provided IO and CA training to each maneuver battalion FSC and maneuver company FIST, including those in the BCT's fires battalion and two line batteries. (The fires battalion transitioned its battalion FDC to into an FSC after it was determined it would perform as a maneuver mission in theater.)

Our brigade and battalion FSC leadership took advantage of the 1st Cavalry Division's mobile training team (MTT) from the 1st IO Command at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, while battalion targeting officers and company fire support officers (FSOs) took Fort Sill's three-week Tactical IO Course. The BCT had the 1st IO Command's MTT at Fort Carson in late May for fire support personnel new to the BCT. We provided additional IO training down to the battalion level during this time frame, including electronic warfare (EW) training (EC-130H and EA-6B) to one member of each maneuver battalion FSC at the Navy's Electronic Warfare Officer (EWO) School in Whidbey Island, Washington.

To exploit this training, the BCT conducted a pre-NTC mission rehearsal exercise (MRE) at Fort Carson. One of the training

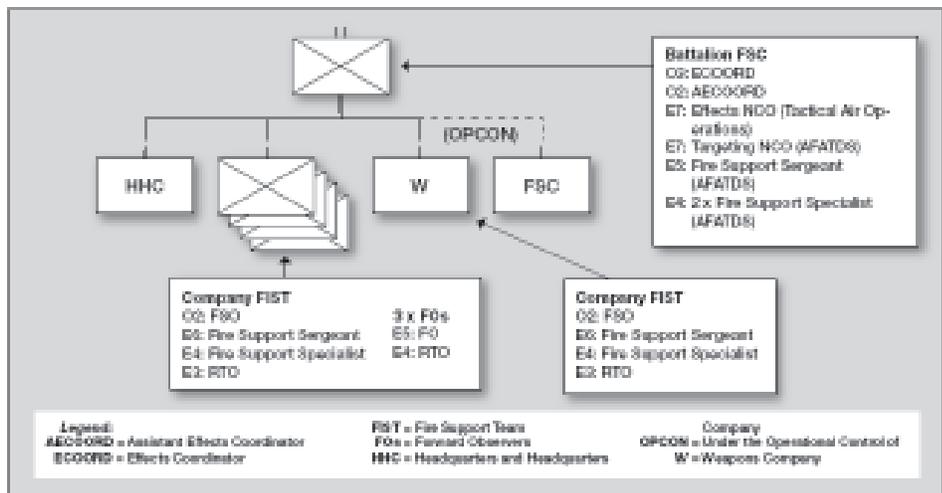


Figure 2: Fire Support Personnel in the BCT Infantry Battalions. In the 2nd Infantry BCT (IBCT), 2nd Infantry Division (2ID), at Fort Carson, Colorado, they are the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry (1-8 IN) and 242 RL.

modules was designed around integrating IO at the company level. Also, to retain the fundamental fire support skills learned in the first quarter, another training module included kinetic operations in which each company conducted both day and night MOUT raids with live close air support (CAS), artillery and mortar fires. The BCT provided both the CAS and artillery in direct support roles to each of the evaluated maneuver battalions.

*Development and Integration of the Brigade FSC.* Third quarter's focus was on developing the BCTs FSC and integrating this cell with the battalion FSCs down to the company FIST and platoon FO levels. Most nonlethal staff enablers did not arrive until just before the July NTC rotation. The challenge was to integrate them into a cohesive group without inundating the battalion FSCs with new requirements initiated by such a robust brigade staff.

**Today's Challenges and the Way Ahead.** Today's FSCOORD coordinates and synchronizes all efforts within the FSC and integrates those efforts with the BCT S2 for collection assets and the BCT S3 to ensure required actions are supported in daily FRAGOs. The BCT FSC fuses all enablers, including the battalion FSCs that provide the linkage from the Soldiers on patrol to the BCT for further analysis and integration into future operations.

The battalion FSC is more robust than the pre-transformation battalion fire support element (FSE), and its functions are much more complicated. Maneuver commanders today expect their battalion and company FSOs to understand IO and CMO. Aside from a few classroom hours in the schoolhouse, most FSOs (and NCOs) were unaware of their new nonlethal role, unless they recently redeployed from OIF or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

The brigade has an IO officer, a CMO officer, a PA officer (PAO) and an SJA among many other functional area specialists. These positions are not replicated at the battalion or company level. The FSCOORD coaches and mentors his battalion FSC personnel to understand and implement these new functions daily on today's battlefield.

In theater, every company or battalion operation will require some sort of bilateral negotiation, IO application, possible damage

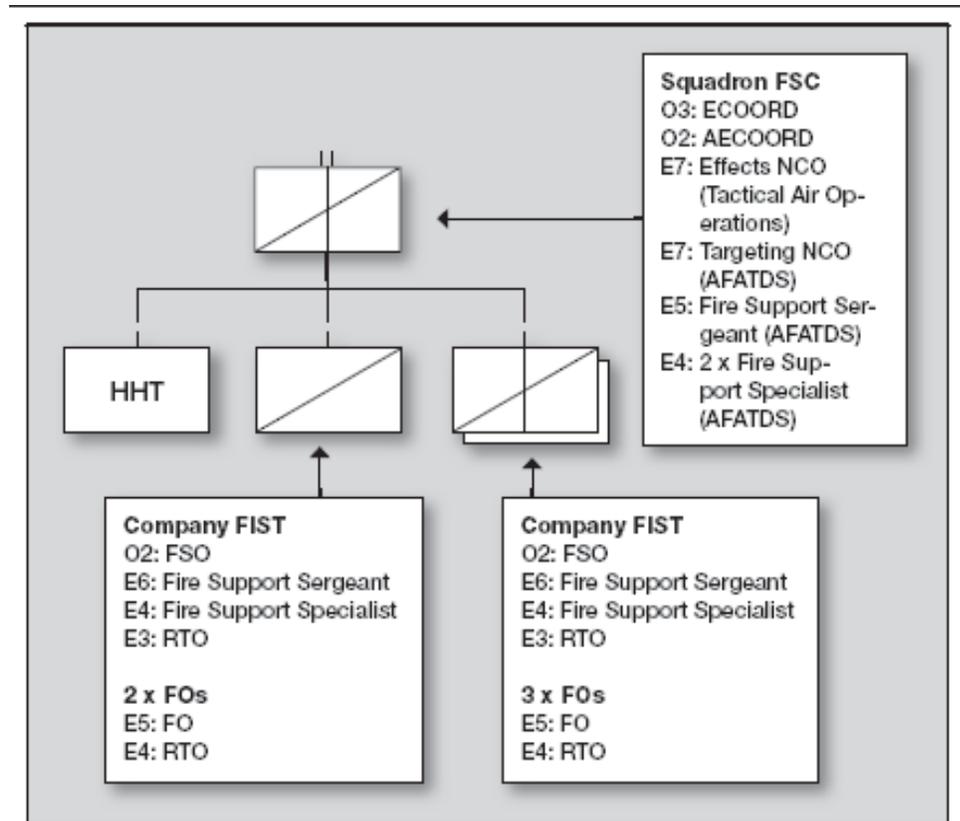


Figure 3: Fire Support Personnel in the RSTA Squadron. In the 2nd IBCT, 2ID, the squadron is 3-61 Cav.

claim to a local civilian, quick-turn anti-propaganda story or exploitation of a recent success in the company or battalion area of operation (AO). All are synchronized by the battalion FSC or company FIST. These FISTs provide data from their FOs attached to each maneuver platoon up to the brigade FSC. The BCT experts analyze the data and produce products for the battalion, keeping the BCT focused on the overall campaign plan.

The 2nd IBCT is ready for our future deployment. The *Strike Force* fire supporters are practiced in the fundamentals of integrating lethal fire support from traditional artillery and mortar. This training included employing precision munitions, such as CAS and guided multiple-launch rocket system unitary (GMLRS-U) in an environment respectful of collateral damage. Our fire supporters are also rehearsed in the practical application of IO and CMO at the tactical level. Our battalion FSCs are integrated with the brigade FSC and have rehearsed the process of turning complex data from the maneuver company FISTs into an analyzed and synchronized product for future operations in concert with the

brigade's campaign plan.

The BCT FSCOORD, charged with some new responsibilities and a new decentralized manning, equipping and training structure, has many challenges that require careful and dedicated coordination across the BCT and the successful coaching and mentoring of junior maneuver and artillery officers as the new modular BCTs continue to take shape.

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