



Captain Michael Fogarty, a company fire support officer, and his fire support NCO complete a mission.

Sergeant First Class Reginald Holmes

TEACHING THE LONG ARM SIGN LANGUAGE

Company Fire Support Officer Capabilities in Low Intensity Conflict

CAPTAIN MICHAEL FOGARTY

Congratulations, Commander

The day a company commander takes the guidon there will be much to think about. How to employ the company fire support officer (FSO) will probably not make the top of the list. Not long ago the answer would have been simple:

“The primary duty of the company FSO is being the FSCOORD (fire support coordinator) at company level. He is a full-time fire support advisor to the maneuver company commander, planner, and coordinator. The company FSO advises the commander on the capabilities, limitations, and employment of all fire support assets available to support his operation.”

— FM 6-30, *Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Observed Fire*

However, given the near certainty of an impending combat deployment and the

nature of the counterinsurgency (COIN) fight that awaits, there is no easy answer available. Fortunately, a commander need not reinvent the wheel. There may be a blueprint that suits his needs.

This is a study of a few different ways FSOs functioned in low intensity conflict (LIC). These were actual unit solutions from Task Force 1-30 Infantry during Operation Iraqi Freedom III while stationed in Diyala Province. No approach profiled is completely effective or completely ineffective. They are a product of the environment in which they were created. That being said, there are lessons to be learned. A careful reading may yield useful insight to the astute future commander.

A Note on Fires

Regardless of whatever additional missions the FSO takes on, he is, first and foremost, a fire supporter. His primary

mission is always to provide timely and accurate fires to support the maneuver plan. He is the commander’s “long arm,” a means of influencing the fight beyond direct fire. Even with the best of intentions it is possible to set the FSO up for failure. Trying to do many things well can result in doing everything poorly. The commander simply needs to maintain perspective. A busy FSO is like a juggler with many balls in the air, and fire support is the glass ball. Even if he drops everything else, it had better not be that one.

What Else Can My FSO Do for Me?

Limitless potential exists for variation in the employment of the FSO. Many more concentrations exist than are represented here. The duties described below demanded special consideration for two reasons. First, they are assigned to many FSOs deployed to OIF and OEF. This is a reflection of the

importance of these missions and the lack of resources at the company level to execute them. Secondly, most of these duties, particularly Information Operations (IO), civil-military operations (CMO), and intelligence operations (S2), dovetail very well with the effects-based operations (EBO) model that has become the organizing concept for fire support at all levels.

The EBO concept is often referenced but poorly understood. This working definition offers a concise description. (Please note that emerging doctrine is replacing the term stability and support operations [SASO] with stability and reconstruction operations [SARO]).

Effects-Based Operations: *Offensive, defensive, stability, and support operations planned and executed to achieve the commander's desired effect on a threat element, civil leader (tribal, ethnic, or governmental), or population group. EBO achieves the commander's desired effect through the synchronized, sequential, or simultaneous application of leadership, maneuver, firepower, and information.*

— **Center for Army Lessons Learned Handbook 04-14, Effects-Based Operations: Brigade to Company Level**

The EBO concept applies to all Army operations, but it is especially applicable to fire support. A maneuver commander should not need to describe what assets are needed to put effects on a target. The commander gives the intent and the FSO translates that intent into effects. This applies to lethal and non-lethal methods. As fire support coordinators continue to evolve into effects coordinators (ECOORDs), it will be incumbent upon FSOs to apply non-lethal effects to give their commander that additional dimension.

Information Operations Officer: COIN operations achieve objectives rooted in the populace rather than territory. Placing a key leader in charge of IO keeps big picture goals in focus and a finger on the pulse of the society.

Civil-Military Operations Officer: Civil governance,

reconstruction, elections, and other CMO efforts are instrumental in building sustainable societies and are decisive in SARO.

Company S2: The COIN battlefield is intelligence driven, and integrating collection, analysis, and targeting at the company level is crucial to success. Many military strategists are arguing for more emphasis here.

Headquarters Platoon Leader: As a force provider or support provider, a headquarters platoon has a variety of capabilities that require effective management, though no platoon leader is provided by the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE).

Maneuver Platoon Leader: Many companies find themselves requiring another maneuver element. Under some circumstances, the company FSO can provide leadership and accountability for a maneuver platoon.

Clearly, a brand new FSO straight from the Field Artillery Officer Basic Course at Fort Sill does not arrive as a subject matter expert on all of the duties described here. There are courses to train these concepts. Timing and availability constrain the commander as in any training situation. Where the institutional learning comes up short some apprenticeship and individual learning may have to fill in the gaps. It is critical with all of these missions that commanders evaluate the potential and training level of the FSO to execute any of these missions.

How Might This Work?

The following are several vignettes that demonstrate some possibilities for the FSO position in-country. This section also shows some dynamics of the company commander-company FSO relationship. To reflect these purposes, commanders and FSOs who worked together have been grouped together as “teams.”

Task Force 1-30 IN had several different commander-FSO teams throughout OIF III. Each profile in this section consists of one of those teams. Without exception, each commander-FSO dynamic produced a different approach. The following segment reviews some salient characteristics of each case study.

Team 1: Fires

Team 1 was a company of mechanized infantry. Because of its lethal effects focus, it was a control for the rest of this study. It originated from the same task force as the rest of the teams. However, it did not share the same battlespace or mission. At the beginning of the deployment, the company was detached from the battalion and placed under brigade control to act as a quick reaction force (QRF). The company then moved from Diyala to ar Ramadi in the Al Anbar Province to augment one of the brigade's task forces.

While used as a brigade QRF, the team responded to several incidents where coalition troops were in contact with insurgent forces. By nature, the QRF role is reactive. Therefore, the FSO's focus was on bringing lethal assets to bear in situations that were already ongoing. In one incident, the FSO was able to bring artillery fires on an insurgent position and cut off enemy egress routes that infantry couldn't reach in time. In other cases, he was able to control



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The author, Captain Michael Fogarty, briefs the mayors and city councils of Muqdadiyah and Wadjihyah on civil-military cooperation.

close combat attack (CCA) aviation to provide additional firepower to ground forces. While fighting from Ramadi, he was able to develop fire plans to support company operations and likely contingencies.

Throughout its deployment this team's focus was lethal effects. As a QRF force, it owned no battlespace, projects, or sphere of influence (SOI) contacts. While in Anbar, defeating insurgent maneuver attacks consumed the bulk of its efforts. The result was that the FSO was principally concerned with fires from beginning to end. That emphasis, and the nature of the security environment, precluded a heavy CMO, IO, or intelligence effort.

Team 1's situation highlights important lessons. A more intense maneuver fight generally decreases opportunities to pursue non-lethal effects. Fire support becomes the top priority. Another closely related point is that the enemy has a vote. The operational environment in the commander's battlespace may provide constraints that limit options in employing the FSO.

Team 2: IO Heavy

Team 2 was a commander-FSO pairing from a task-organized mechanized infantry company team. Its AO was typical of many in Diyala during OIF III. Insurgents attacked frequently but with less commitment than the enemy faced by Team 1. Reconstruction efforts were in full swing, as were efforts to win the trust and cooperation of the populace.

Team 2's FSO spent a great deal of time identifying the key stakeholders in his company AO. At every meeting he attended, he ensured that he knew who everyone was and what interest each represented. Armed with this knowledge, he created unique products with a sharp focus on the concerns represented. He also spent a great deal of time interacting with average Iraqis who were not in positions of influence. Consistent interaction with these people gave him a measure of how well the local leadership represented the thoughts of the average citizen. CMO, interpreter management, and headquarters platoon administration rounded out the



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Private First Class Brandon Bramblett operates the Fire Support Sensor System (FS3).

remainder of the FSO's duties.

At this stage in the deployment, the battalion fire support element (FSE) supported most fires. Maneuver leadership was firmly in place. The commander and FSO had trained together for some time prior to the deployment. They shared a confidence in the power of non-lethal effects to shape the fight. Furthermore, the commander assessed that the FSO had an aptitude for IO.

Team 2 demonstrated that a committed commander and FSO can make non-lethal effects a priority. The commander's focus freed the FSO from areas that entangled others. The endstate was a strong IO focus at the company level.

Team 3: Maneuver

The AO that Team 3 worked in was similar to that of Team 2. The approach, however, was very different. Although it was a mechanized infantry company like the others, a platoon was detached, leaving it somewhat short on combat power.

This commander elected to realign elements of his two remaining platoons to create a third, smaller platoon. He chose the FSO to lead this element. This platoon differed from the other two. It was motorized while the other two were mechanized. It also carried a primary role as the QRF platoon while the company was in cycle as the task force's QRF. His element responded to improvised explosive devices (IEDs), direct fire contact, emergencies with Iraqi Security Forces, and any other

situation for which the task force commander required additional combat power. In this role, the FSO functioned similarly to the infantry platoon leaders, but was largely separated from his company fire support team (FIST). In this company, the FIST was primarily in charge of the company's operations center.

Eventually, the task organization changed and the detached platoon returned. The FSO then redirected focus on fires, IO, and administration but retained some duties as a maneuver patrol leader. During this stage, the FSO would patrol regularly with infantry elements.

When one dismounted patrol made contact without its vehicles nearby, he was able to call in fires on an insurgent element from the FOB's direct support 155mm howitzers.

This option was born out of the needs of the maneuver force. The commander believed that the company retained strong fire support capabilities with the FSO forward. By necessity, this option precluded a more in-depth, non-lethal approach. The opportunity cost was justified by added maneuver flexibility.

Team 4: Jack-of-All-Trades, Master of None

This company was also composed of mechanized infantry in an AO similar to Teams 2 and 3. As in all cases, the operational backdrop included a national constitution referendum and a national election.

To address the importance of the constitutional referendum and the national election, the company commander designated the FSO as the point man for election issues. This led to action in several areas: the FSO read and disseminated election materials, attended local and provincial government meetings to synchronize efforts, and conducted patrols to establish security measures at polling sites in the company AO. In other arenas, he developed fire plans for company missions, briefed the commander on intelligence findings of the S-2 and tactical human intelligence (HUMINT) team (THT), and conducted IO meetings with key communicators on the company SOI

list. He also patrolled with the commander wherever he traveled.

As a former S-5 (CMO), the commander was keen to bring non-lethal effects to the company level. The FSO had also served on staff, working closely with enablers such as the THT, the Civil Affairs (CA) team, and the tactical psychological operations (PSYOP) Team (TPT). Both parties were eager to incorporate situational awareness that was frequently ignored or unavailable at the company level. This included intelligence, societal atmospherics, and reconstruction efforts. Civil governance became a pillar due to the ongoing election efforts. The commander also sought a headquarters platoon that could conduct its own patrols.

The result of the wide net cast by this team was breadth rather than depth. The commander was satisfied that he maintained awareness of many aspects of his AO. The apparent tradeoff for this strategy is the difficulty of attaining excellence in any area.

Team 5: Intelligence

Team 5 represents another outlier for structural reasons. The armor company represented by Team 5 was an attachment to TF 1-30 IN from Task Force 2-34 Armor, which had in turn been task organized to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. FSOs in TF 2-34 AR had specific guidance to focus on intelligence-related matters. Though it had part of the same AO as Teams 2-4, this team had a different approach.

To achieve his intelligence focus, the FSO tied in frequently with the battalion S-2 and the THT. Whenever possible, he attended meetings in the company's AO to try to mate the intelligence picture painted by the intelligence summaries with ground truth. He interviewed local government officials and community leaders under different pretexts to draw out information he saw in the intelligence reporting. He also used all available opportunities to visit reconstruction projects in the company's AO to restore essential services and better understand the link between reconstruction and the insurgency.

Constant updates brought detail to the picture of insurgents, allies, and fence-sitters living in the towns and villages assigned to the company. The commander also directed the FSO to act as a primary liaison with all host nation personnel, to include interpreters, Iraqi Army (IA), Iraqi Police (IP), and civil government officials.

The efforts to develop the intelligence and CMO picture

provided insight, but the team wasn't always on the same page. The commander was frequently tied up in the lethal aspects of the fight. Consequently, although the information was available, lethal and non-lethal operations were somewhat out of synch.

What Kind of FSO Do I Need?

Every company finds itself with a different situation. Therefore, no two commanders will use their FSO in exactly the same way. The following ideas are considerations and recommendations that may help you, a new company commander, employ that FSO to the maximum potential.

What is my mission? The importance of a thorough mission analysis should not be new to anyone. What may seem new is the idea that this could shape a key leader's job description. This would apply more directly to a deployed unit. In garrison, METL (mission essential task list) training tends to crowd out new missions. A deployed commander has more freedom to innovate. Consider the battalion commander's intent and how you plan to execute it. That may drive your requirements for the FSO. Are lethal fires the decisive operation in your AO, or is it IO?

What kind of hand was I dealt? Mission is a key component of METT-TC, but so is troops available. The commander will need to assess what kind of FSO he was given. Ability to pull his own weight should be a given, but does he have any important strengths or weaknesses? Is this an IO savant or a born leader of Soldiers? How can I use those abilities to best accomplish my mission?

Be proactive. Although the operational environment will influence how your company fights, you will also have opportunities to exercise influence. Knowing your environment does not mean being passive. If you want to make CMO a priority, providing the FSO with that guidance may help realize that vision.

Integrate lethal and non-lethal operations. This is EBO in a nutshell. It should also be one of your FSO's primary duties. The commander is responsible for the intent, but you should be able to count on the FSO to help you synchronize efforts and coordinate assets. COIN operations require company grade officers to grasp the civil dimension of operations in detail. If it suits your mission, make the FSO responsible for keeping you abreast of developments and concerns.

Stay engaged. You may have a capable FSO, a solid mission analysis, and detailed guidance. That alone will not accomplish your mission. Just as no plan survives first contact, the FSO will not operate at maximum effectiveness without your feedback and involvement. Likewise, if the FSO is providing you information, use it. It is useless to perform IO, CMO, and intelligence analysis if you don't incorporate them into your plans.

Although it may not occur to you the day you take the guidon, don't forget about the role of the FSO. Company commanders in high intensity conflicts learn to love what their FSO can do for them. With the proper guidance and feedback, you can learn to love what your FSO can do for you in any operational environment.

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