

GREEN TAB TO GREEN TAB FIRE SUPPORT

THE BCT COMMANDER'S BEST FIRES ASSET

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Six years of war against a determined enemy has presented us with a number of fire support challenges, however, it also has provided an opportunity for introspection. It is imperative that we examine whether or not our organizational and operational designs and concepts are working as originally envisioned. Under modular force design, the Army's core unit is the brigade combat team (BCT), a unit with organic enablers and capabilities that allow ground commanders to conduct operations that formerly required significant augmentation and/or task organization changes.

During my initial 100 days of command, I spent a great deal of time engaging field commanders — particularly BCT commanders — on the topic of fire support. At the Fires Center of Excellence, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, we are committed to resolving fire support coordination and integration capability gaps that may have arisen as unintended consequences of the transformation to modularity. We must provide BCT commanders with the finest fire support system in the world and allay their concerns and confusion about who best can provide advice, Field Artillery (FA) training and certification support for lethal and nonlethal fires. Modularity has presented some unique challenges for BCT commanders in terms of scope and integration — especially in the fires warfighting function.

Unintended Consequences. The modularized BCT concept empowered the maneuver commander by placing the capability to deliver responsive fires in his operating environment *within* his formation. As with any change, however, it also created unintended consequences that may hinder his ability to integrate and coordinate fires in his area of responsibility (AOR).

One area of concern is the fire support coordinator's (FSCOORD's) role. In the past, the term "FSCOORD" was attributed to the senior commander of the firing unit supporting the maneuver commander. The FSCOORD was responsible for all aspects of fires — from coordination through delivery.

Redefined roles and missions of critical fires personnel in the BCT also have redefined the FSCOORD's position. He is now a staff officer organic to the BCT, without command authority which inhibits his ability to coordinate training and certification for subordinate battalion fire support assets.

Other areas of significant concern are fire support training,

certification and professional development. Under modularity, because fire support personnel are organic to maneuver battalions, the subordinate maneuver commanders have training, resource and oversight (TRO) responsibility for all fire support personnel in their units. It is here that the unintended consequences of modularity seem to have "struck a chord" with BCT commanders.

The following are summarized comments from BCT commanders regarding unintended consequences of modularity. Modularity placed fire support training and certification directly in the BCT commander's lap — a task that he is not trained to supervise or execute. It increased the BCT commander's span of control to the point where, because his attention is captured by other command issues, he cannot focus energy on holistic fire support training. A third consequence of modularity centers on professional development.

BCT commanders have expressed some frustration about handling the training management and leader development of their fire support assets. They realize that fire supporters are being retained in units longer than they should be due to a fear that replacements will not be forthcoming. They also are aware that, because in many cases there is no lethal or core FA mission, these adaptable Soldiers now are performing BCT-critical, non-FA functions that have been short filled by other branches, and subordinate commanders do not want to lose them. Further, the maneuver commanders are not as cognizant as they feel they should be with respect to correct assignment patterns and appropriate professional development training for their fire supporters.

Continued dialogue with active BCT commanders has reinforced that their most pressing concerns are:

- 1) Defining the roles and functions of the staff FSCOORD and the fires battalion commander; and
- 2) Addressing who best can provide fire support professional development, training and certification.

As BCT commanders experience these issues, I continue to receive inquiries from the field. Among them are: "What should I expect from my FSCOORD? What role does he play with my staff? With my other battalion commanders? How much advice is he capable of giving? What role should my fires battalion commander fulfill? Isn't *he* the senior fire supporter in my brigade? How can I best take advantage of his special skill set for the good of the formation?" These are logical questions and concerns, and it is instructive to examine our doctrinal sources for guidance and consideration before making recommendations.

FSCOORD. The BCT FSCOORD executes critical fires tasks for the BCT commander. Field Manual (FM) 3-90.6, *The Brigade Combat*



- Directs fires section operations.
- Recommends essential fire support tasks to the commander.
- Recommends fire support coordination measures to the commander.
- Coordinates the commander's fire plan with the fires battalion, the fires brigade and the division fires section.
- Facilitates the targeting meeting.
- Accompanies the BCT commander, deputy commanding officer or tactical command post to assist in the execution of tactical operations.
- Advises the S3 on positioning of fires units.

Figure 1 — The FSCOORD's Responsibilities as Outlined in FM 3-90.6

Team, defines the BCT FSCOORD as, "...the special staff officer responsible for BCT fires, which include Army indirect fires and joint fires. He advises the BCT commander and staff on all aspects of indirect fires planning, coordination and execution in support of BCT operations. He assists the BCT S3 to integrate fires into the maneuver commander's concept of operation." Figure 1 lists some of the BCT FSCOORD's responsibilities.

Similarly, *Joint Publication 3-09 Joint Fire Support*, dated 13 November 2006, defines the U.S. Army FSCOORD as "... the senior Field Artillery (FA) officer permanently assigned as the full-time fire support staff advisor to the commander and staff. The FSCOORD performs all the staff functions associated with fire support."

There is no specific mention of the experience level or qualifications of the BCT FSCOORD lieutenant colonel (LTC) assigned to the position. Based on current assignment priorities, patterns and the fact that the demand for FA LTCs far exceeds the inventory, the reality is that a LTC serving as a staff BCT FSCOORD will be the *exception* rather than the rule. BCT commanders should anticipate that this position likely will be filled by an FA major. Ideally, he will have served as a fires battalion operations officer or executive officer and be an intermediate-level education (ILE) graduate, but even that is not assured. Thus, the experience level of the officer assigned to the BCT FSCOORD position ensures an able staff officer, but may not provide an experienced leader to cultivate the fire support advisor relationship that a BCT commander desires.

Fires Battalion Commander. The fires battalion commander executes a number of critical tasks for the BCT commander. The

fires battalion commander controls all the tactical, logistical, administrative and training activities of the fires battalion. He directs employment of the battalion in accordance with assigned missions from the BCT commander. Figure 2 lists some of the fires battalion commander's duties.

The fires battalion commander can serve also as a maneuver battalion commander when directed by the BCT commander. While this utilization augments BCT capability on the ground, it does not eliminate the requirement for effective fire support advice.

In addition, the fires battalion commander should assist the BCT commander with personnel management and leader development for FA Soldiers and leaders within the BCT. The fires battalion commander is uniquely aware of professional development "gates" and timelines for Artillerymen and can help the BCT commander assign leaders to various developmental jobs.

A thought for the BCT commanders — in terms of leadership experience, the fires battalion commander has been selected by a Department of the Army board. It is most probable that he has served as a fire support officer at some level from company to division and has acquired the requisite brigade and higher-level fire support experience in previous assignments. He is not simply a peer battalion commander within the brigade, but one with a special skill set

— he is an expert in lethal and nonlethal fires integration and coordination. He brings other assets and skill sets to the table to help the BCT commander solve current "fire support training gaps" identified by a number of BCT leaders. He would be my recommendation as the BCT commander's personal fire support advisor.

Addressing Training and Certification Gaps. In examining the functions of the FSCOORD and the fires battalion commander, we see that neither has TRO responsibility for fire support personnel within the brigade. It appears that the staff FSCOORD will be unable to perform this task in the foreseeable future. His newly assigned nonlethal tasks and duties will demand all of his available time. In my view, the best asset to resolve this gap is the fires battalion commander. He has a staff, assets and resources to execute effective training. Of course, the BCT commander will need to emphasize the importance of fire support training to his subordinate maneuver battalion commanders, but it seems logical for a BCT commander to synchronize and consolidate fires system training under a single commander who answers directly to him.

At least 10 BCT commanders have conveyed to me that they are considering consolidating the FA fire support assets either at the BCT headquarters and headquarters company level or giving them directly to the fires battalion for training and oversight. Such a situation certainly would enable better fire support training, but the

Figure 2 — Some Duties of the Fires Battalion Commander from FM 3-09.21, *TTPs for the Field Artillery Battalion*

- Oversee the training of the entire battalion with particular emphasis on those elements directly concerned with delivery of fires.
 - Continually assess the needs of the battalion in terms of its ability to sustain its internal operations and to support assigned missions.
 - Establish clear and consistent standards and guidance for current and future operations. Ensure the battalion staff and battery commanders understand the battalion commander's intent.
 - Establish policies to promote discipline and morale within the battalion.
- Provide for the administrative and logistical support of the battalion.

commander would need to ensure that his fires battalion commander clearly understands that *support to maneuver battalion commanders is his first priority*. Because the BCT commander now owns all the assets in question, his guidance will be followed.

An added benefit is that the fires battalion commander, as a “green tabber,” is experienced and, therefore, can provide the higher-level fire support perspective and advice that the BCT commander needs and desires.

Under modularity, the staff BCT FSCoord *should* be the senior FA officer within the brigade, but current inventory and personnel management priorities cannot support this concept. So who should the BCT commander look to for advice on fires matters? *FM 3-90.6* offers us an opening: “The fires battalion commander is no longer the BCT fire support coordinator (FSCoord). *The BCT Commander must clearly define the roles of his fires battalion commander and his staff FSCoord*, and ensure that they clearly understand their respective responsibilities.”

In the foreseeable future, the fires battalion commander, without question, will be *the* fire support expert within the BCT. He is a centrally-selected commander, often with sufficient experience to function as the BCT commander’s indispensable right hand for fires. He also has a number of other assigned tasks related to the employment of a fires battalion that lend themselves to effective fire supporter training, certification and professional development. He is a valuable tool for the BCT commander with a critical skill set who can help with fires integration, coordination and execution.

A strong interactive relationship between the BCT commander and his fires battalion commander is paramount. It must be based on confidence and competence — a relationship in which the fires battalion commander enables the maneuver commander to dominate his AOR through the effective application of both lethal and nonlethal fires.

Our fires battalion commanders are self-assured in their abilities and willing to help the BCT commander manage fires across his AOR. The fires battalion commander must be “that guy” on whom

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everyone can rely for all matters related to fire support. The fires battalion commander should be responsible for the fires warfighting function within the BCT. He should be accountable to the BCT commander to ensure all lethal and nonlethal fires assets and organizations are trained and proficient. To that end, we at the Fires Center of Excellence will ensure we provide current and cogent training on lethal and nonlethal fires application and integration to future fires battalion commanders so that they are competent and confident in their roles as the BCT commander’s primary fires advisor.

This is an excellent topic for discussion, and I have included it in our agenda for the Fires Seminar in June. The theme for the conference is “Artillery Strong: Challenges and Opportunities in an Era of Persistent Conflict.” I know that all FA leaders will arrive well prepared to discuss innovative solutions to a number of issues regarding the branch.

If you have insights to share, please visit the Fires Knowledge Network Web site at <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/130700>, and provide your thoughts so that we can capture them for use during the Seminar. It is critical that we also receive input from our many respected maneuver leaders who can help us frame the issues because, ultimately, we are the maneuver commanders’ 24/7 fire support force. *Anticipate – Integrate – Dominate! Artillery Strong!*

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2008 FIRES SEMINAR TO BE HELD JUNE 3-5

The 2008 Fires Seminar will be held at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, from June 3-5.

The theme for the seminar is “Artillery Strong: Challenges and Opportunities in an Era of Persistent Conflict.” The conference will focus on two subject areas: leader development and the integration and coordination of fires in the contemporary operational environment.

Joint, allied, retired, active and Reserve Component senior leaders of the Army Air Defense Artillery and Field Artillery and Marine Corps Field Artillery should receive invitations via e-mail. Invitees who haven’t received an e-mail invitation may contact the Seminar Support Center at atrz-cva@conus.army.mil. Information about the seminar is available at www.mhli.org/fortsill2008.

A Soldier pulls the lanyard on the M-777A2 during the first firing of the Army’s new GPS-guided Excalibur round February 25 at Camp Blessing, Afghanistan

Photo by SGT Henry Selzer