



# Improving the Responsiveness and Lethality of Fires at the BCT Level

By Lieutenant Colonel Richard M. Francey, Jr.,  
and Major Michael D. Hilliard

In recent years, fire supporters throughout the Army have struggled to maintain the edge against our number one demon—providing responsive fires. Many critics believe fire supporters have lost that edge and become unresponsive and ineffective, failing to support their maneuver commanders.

Some have even said we’ve “walked away from the close fight”—believe we are more interested in the counterfire and deep fights. While these fights are critical to the success on our next high-intensity battlefield, maneuver commanders must be convinced we’re dedicated to ensuring fires are responsive and lethal in support of the close, decisive fight, the focus of the brigade combat team (BCT) commander.

Currently, the principal way we measure success is by deploying and fighting simulated combat vignettes at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California; Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana; or the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) in Hohenfels, Germany. Some say responsive and lethal fires are a replication issue during force-on-force operations. They say we never really get “full credit” for our fires because firemarkers and pyrotechnics lack the shock and fear factor that indirect fires bring to the battlefield. And although there may be some truth to the replica-

tion of fires dilemma during force-on-force operations, we need to refocus on some basic tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) as well as look for innovative ways to improve our responsiveness and lethality.

In the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized), the *Ironhorse* Division at Fort Hood, Texas, we have taken on some initiatives to improve the responsiveness of fires, helping to make our maneuver counterparts more successful and lethal on today’s fast-paced and fluid battlefield. Most of these initiatives are not new but simple modifications of and additions to our current doctrine and TTPs. They do, however, provide the framework for a brigade commander and his fire support coordinator (FSCOORD) to plan training and serve as a “base charge” to build their organization into a lethal combined arms team capable of bringing fire support systems to bear in the most responsive manner possible.

These initiatives include clarifying the commander’s guidance for fire support, streamlining calls-for-fire, employing the close support battery for some task force (TF) missions, establishing habitual relationships, implementing a TF observation planning and integrating the direct support (DS) FA battalion training with the BCT’s combat training. While alone none of these initiatives can fix the responsiveness issue,

collectively they have made us more successful in providing the maneuver commander the fires he needs on today’s fast-paced battlefield.

**Clarifying the Commander’s Guidance for Fire Support.** Although the commander’s guidance for fire support may not be the single most essential element in the delivery of responsive, lethal fires, it is one basic requirement for the success of indirect fires. On the surface, one might ask, “What does commander’s guidance for fire support have to do with the execution of responsive and timely fires?” Guidance for fire support must be clearly articulated by the commander and fully understood by all subordinates in order to execute responsive, lethal fires. If fire support guidance is too general or lacks clarity, it opens the door for the poor execution of fires and, ultimately, the failure of an operation due to a lack of synchronization.

There are several doctrinal sources that outline principles. *FM 6-71 Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Fire Support for the Combined Arms Commander*, dated 29 September 1994, offers commanders fairly simple guidelines for providing fire support guidance.

According to FM 6-71, commanders should address attack and engagement criteria, priorities for target engagement, guidance for special munitions (illumi-

nation, smoke, Copperhead and family of scatterable mines, or FASCAM) and, finally, how, when and where fire support should be employed in the development of courses of action (COAs).

Perhaps the most important part of guidance a commander can offer his fire supporter is what *effects* he wants indirect fires to have on a certain target. Artillery doctrine defines effects as “destruction, neutralization or suppression.” Some Combat Training Center (CTC) observer/controllers (O/Cs) coach “destroy, delay, disrupt, limit or suppress” as effects that should be applied by combined arms commanders in relation to their fire support assets. The challenge we face is quantifying these terms into battlefield effects—clearly understanding what the commander wants his fires to accomplish.

In the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, the brigade commander makes it very simple. During the mission analysis briefing, he tells the FSCOORD and brigade fire support officer (FSO) what targets he wants to attack during each phase of the operation. He then issues fire support guidance in terms of “destroy, delay or suppress.”

The critical part of issuing attack guidance in relation to the term “destroy” is to quantify effects. Simply saying, “I want to destroy the AGMB [advanced guard main body] in the passes west of the main defensive belt” does not provide clarity for subordinate commanders, fire supporters and the DS artillery battalion. This guidance would be much better articulated as, “I want to destroy two tanks and four BMPs of the AGMB west of the choke points as they line up in column formation.”

Finally, the brigade commander determines what systems he wants to attack each target with during each phase, i.e., cannons, multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS), close air support (CAS), etc. This guidance then provides the fire support planners the information they need to begin developing the brigade fire support plan and, most importantly, the essential fire support tasks (EFSTs).

**Streamlining Calls-for-Fire or (Getting Rid of the Middle Men).** In an effort to increase our responsiveness to the brigade commander, we reduced the amount of friction and number of intervention points (IPs) that characterize cumbersome and slow fire mission processing. At the NTC, it is not unusual to see fire missions that take 10,

20 even 30 minutes to execute from the initial call-for-fire to rounds on the ground. This is disturbing when you familiarize yourself with time standards for fire mission execution as outlined in *Army Training and Evaluation Plan (ARTEP) 6-115 Mission Training Plan (MTP) for the Cannon Battalion*. Too often, observers initiate a fire mission and then each fire support element (FSE) stops the mission and reviews and approves it before the mission reaches the firing unit.

We fully understand there may be times when centralized fire mission processing is necessary; however, routinely processing fires this way is clearly a stumbling block for responsive, lethal fires for the BCT. Therefore, we streamlined the call-for-fire process. During planning, the brigade fire support planner articulates in the fire support execution matrix (FSEM) which TF has priority-of-fires in each phase of the battle. This order is based on priority-of-fires guidance issued by the brigade commander and FSCOORD.

Then the TF commander and TF FSO determine which subordinate unit in their TF will have priority-of-fires during that particular phase of the battle. Based on that allocated resource to the subordinate TF, the subordinate observer—fire support team (FIST), maneuver shooter, TF scout, Striker, etc.—processes all calls-for-fire directly to the battalion fire direction center (FDC) for execution of his mission. In some cases, the observer sends his mission directly to a firing unit for execution.

This decentralized means of fire support execution is just one method of increasing our responsiveness and lethality.

**Employing Close Support Battery in TF Operations.** In addition to stream-

lining the call-for-fire process, we increased the responsiveness to the maneuver TF commander during the close fight by employing a close support battery. We chose the term “close support” battery and not “dedicated” battery, thus allowing the brigade commander and FSCOORD more flexibility when employing fires throughout the breadth and depth of the battlefield.

The term “close support” battery describes a nonstandard tactical mission and support relationship whereby a Field Artillery battery organic to a DS artillery battalion fulfills a modified and prioritized list of inherent responsibilities with a battalion-sized maneuver unit or TF. It is important to understand that the close support battery is not a battery “dedicated” to the supported TF.

The brigade commander, relying on the FSCOORD’s recommendation, approves the close support battery mission. There are several factors that determine the need for a close support battery. (See Figure 1.)

Once the decision is made to employ the close support battery, there are several questions the brigade fire support planner must include as part of his portion of the brigade’s second warning order (WARNO) sent out to subordinate units during the brigade’s military decision-making process (MDMP). The fire support planner also must include the close support battery mission directives in Annex D to the brigade operations order (OPORD). (See Figure 2 on Page 24 for the questions asked in the WARNO and the directives in the OPORD).

**Establishing Habitual Relationships Between Firing Batteries and Maneuver TFs.** To further enhance the execution of close support battery rela-

**Units Employ a Close Support Battery—**

- In a movement-to-contact to support the lead task force when responsive vice massed fires are critical.
- In an attack to support a task force when the chance of losing the ability to provide responsive fires is high (e.g., losing long-range communications to the task force or when the task force is attacking through a distant mobility corridor).
- In the defense to provide immediately responsive Copperhead fires to the main effort task force.
- When the chance of unanticipated enemy fires is high, such as an ambush.
- When command and control from the task force to brigade to FA battalion probably *won't* be jeopardized.
- When the brigade scheme of fires and execution of essential fire support tasks (EFSTs) demand the FA battalion be able to mass fires during critical events.

Figure 1: Considerations for Employing the Close Support Battery

### Questions for the WARNO-

- Which battery will support the designated task force?
- What time or event triggers the start of the close support relationship with the supported task force?
- What time or event triggers the end of the close support relationship with the supported task force?
- In which phases and (or) specific events should the task force *not* rely solely on the supporting battery for fire support? [This is usually based on EFSTs that require the force FA to mass fires or when the task force is engaged in a support effort.]
- In which specific events must the task force plan for additional fires from the remainder of the force FA? [These events are usually the EFSTs in which the task force has primary execution responsibility.]
- What is the initial supporting battery movement and position area guidance? [These are based on the brigade EFSTs, communications, survivability and logistical requirements, etc.]

### Information for the Fire Support Annex-

- The specific brigade fire support events during which the supporting battery will provide fires.
- The supporting battery movement and position area requirements for each event. [The task force FA battalion must know exactly when and where the supporting battery must move to or be in position to support the brigade scheme of fires.]

Figure 2: Close Supporting Battery Questions and Information Required in the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP). The brigade fire support planner includes these questions in the brigade warning order (WARNO). He must include the other information in the fire support annex of the operations order (OPORD).

tionships, it is vital to develop habitual relationships between firing batteries and the TFs they may support during combat operations. As a matter of standing operating procedure (SOP), we aligned each firing battery in the DS artillery battalion with a maneuver TF in the BCT.

These habitual relationships serve several purposes. First, they enhance deployability. In our role as the Forces Command (FORSCOM) division ready brigade (DRB), each maneuver TF may deploy to a theater of operations as a division ready force (DRF). A DRF is a combat battalion TF (part of a DRB) with combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) units included in its deployment package. As a part of that DRF package, each maneuver TF may deploy with a supporting firing battery. Therefore, we have standardized which of the three firing batteries will deploy with each of the three maneuver TFs in the BCT.

Additionally, habitual relationships provide a foundation for combined arms training at home station. Such training further solidifies the relationship of the close support battery and its maneuver TF during combat operations.

Home station training between habitually related firing batteries and supported maneuver TFs helps increase the

responsiveness of fires during combat operations. It allows the firing battery commander, TF FSO, TF operations officer and TF commander to begin developing their relationships well before they are organized for combat on foreign soil. Before combat operations begin, the habitual relationship allows the firing battery commander to “get into the TF commander’s head” and understand how he fights and what his expectations are of the firing battery commander.

One example of this team building training at home station is the execution of Abrams tank and Bradley fighting vehicle tables and the integration of indirect fires into live-fire training. Each habitually supporting firing battery is built into the live-fire training plan of his TF. The artillery battalion S3 (operations) and TF S3 coordinate the training plan that includes the integration of indirect fires into platoon-, company- and battalion-level direct fire tables.

This is just one way to improve home station training to build the BCT into a stronger, more lethal fighting force.

**Implementing a TF Observation Plan.** While delivering responsive fires is critically important, the use of observers in the execution of the brigade commander’s fire support plan must have the undivided attention of all fire support leaders to synchronize all as-

sets. Strikers, company FISTs and maneuver shooters are all critical to the execution of fires across the 21st century battlefield. And although these assets are not new, we are leveraging their capabilities to their fullest potential in the *Ironhorse* Division.

First, we examined how we were using the company FSO during the execution of fires and found we needed to modify his traditional role during certain missions. When executing the observation plan, company FSOs are often out of position to be able to observe critical targets that support the TF and (or) brigade commander’s EFSTs.

If the mission is an offensive operation, the company FSO often follows the company commander’s tank or Bradley and does so at his own peril. The bottom line is that a tank or a Bradley and a fire support team vehicle (FIST-V) should not be trying to get to the same piece of terrain. Unfortunately, those units still equipped with the M981 FIST-V are at a marked disadvantage when trying to maintain the same tempo as that sustained by their maneuver brethren.

Additionally, there are times when company FSOs don’t understand the overall intent for fires in the TF or BCT zone or sector, namely the purpose of those fires as outlined in the EFST. They tend to be more focused on serving as a company-level FSCoord as opposed to providing the eyes necessary to execute the TF or brigade fire support plan.

Taking these failings into consideration, we implemented “TF FISTs.” The TF FIST’s role is similar to that of a brigade Striker team. The FSO gives the TF FIST specific observation missions. He positions the TF FIST to observe and execute a TF- or brigade-level target or group of targets.

During such missions, the TF FSO does not work for the company commander or serve as his FSCoord. It is essential for the TF commander to understand that the company FIST is his resource to inject into the fight as he sees fit.

We have not completely abandoned employing the company FIST in its traditional role. However, there are times when a TF commander or FSO must position one or more company FIST to improve responsiveness of fires within the BCT zone or sector.

Additionally, we are leveraging the technological advances of the M1A2 system enhancement program (SEP) tank, M1A1D and the M2A3 Bradley

fighting vehicle. Maneuver shooters have always played a vital role in the execution of indirect fires at the company level. However, the ability to obtain an accurate target location was often difficult at best. Now with the improvements to the far target locating devices in these combat vehicles, the maneuver shooter's ability to obtain an accurate target location is significantly enhanced.

The maneuver shooter simply identifies a target that meets the tactical trigger and quickly determines its 10-digit location by lasing the target. The vehicle commander then transmits his call-for-fire rapidly to the company FIST via the digital Force XXI battle command brigade and below (FBCB<sup>2</sup>). The company FIST's FBCB<sup>2</sup> automatically transmits the call-for-fire to the forward observer system (FOS) lightweight computer unit (LCU). The LCU operator then transmits the call-for-fire to the battalion FDC's advanced FA tactical data system (AFATDS) for processing to the firing unit.

Special Note: When receiving a call-for-fire via FBCB<sup>2</sup>, the FIST must input the target's altitude manually before sending the data to the FDC. If maneuver sends the 10-digit grid via FBCB<sup>2</sup> using the "short form" call-for-fire, then the message will not include the altitude. In that case, the FOS automatically will enter the last self-location altitude of the FIST. If maneuver sends the data directly to the battalion FDC (or FSE), it will enter the altitude of the firing unit. If maneuver sends the data via FBCB<sup>2</sup> using the "long form" call-for-fire, the altitude is optional—again, the FIST should ensure the target's correct altitude is entered.

Advances in technology allow maneuver shooters to have a significant impact on the execution of indirect fires.

Company FISTs and maneuver shooters bring a tremendous capability to the battlefield. However, there are no more lethal indirect fire killers in the BCT today than the brigade reconnaissance troop (BRT) and their Striker platoon. These soldiers give the brigade commander a significantly enhanced means to take the indirect firefight to the enemy.

The Striker platoon's primary mission is to execute the brigade commander's deep fight and then hand off targets to the TF scouts and TF FISTs. Recent technological advancements have improved the lethality of the BRT and the Strikers.

The addition of the long-range advanced scout surveillance system (LRAS<sup>3</sup>) to the BRT gives the brigade commander a significant advantage in executing his observation and surveillance plans. Our BRT scouts now can gain and maintain surveillance as well as attack the enemy with indirect fires well beyond 15 kilometers. The Striker platoon still has the ground/vehicular laser locator designator (G/VLLD) with a range out to 10 kilometers.

When organizing the BRT and Strikers for combat, one scout team is with a combat observation lasing team (COLT) and has the LRAS<sup>3</sup>. The LRAS<sup>3</sup> allows the observers to begin to attack targets at longer ranges. The capabilities of this tremendous system provide the brigade commander another tool to increase the lethality and responsiveness of fires.

**Training the DS Battalion for Combat.** As we prepared for our upcoming Paladin Table XVIII (battalion-level live-fire qualification) and NTC rotation, we examined the types of fire missions we needed to train to best prepare for our NTC rotation or combat, whichever came first.

We focused the training on missions for the howitzer sections, FDCs and fire supporters in a scenario-driven live-fire exercise. We broke the scenario down into offensive and defensive missions. This allowed the DS battalion staff to work through the military decision-making process (MDMP) and issue an FA support plan (FASP) to the battery commanders. Once we began executing the mission, observers provided intelligence calls via spot reports, enabling the battalion fire direction officer (FDO) and S3 to anticipate the battalion's next significant event.

During the defensive scenario, we executed missions, such as firing FASCAM, marking rounds for CAS, suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) for CAS and (or) attack aviation and at linear targets (the enemy delayed at an obstacle). Once we transitioned to the offensive scenario, we focused on suppression, obscuration, security and reduction (SOSR) actions, such as firing obscuration smoke, continuous suppression as well as group and series of targets.

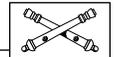
Additionally, each battery had a close support role during the Paladin Table XVIII and fired fire missions in support of its TF. As part of the close support evaluation, the observer requested additional fires on the target through the

brigade FSO or FSCCOORD; once they were approved, the battalion FDO massed the remainder of the battalion on the close support battery target.

We also tested the battalion's fire-for-effect shift times. The observer initiated a battalion fire-for-effect and in the middle of the mission, sent an "end-of-mission" message and then initiated another fire-for-effect mission.

Training on these types of missions not only allows the FSCCOORD to assess the effectiveness of his organization during live-fire conditions, but also enhances the responsiveness of the BCT FISTs.

Fire supporters must strive continually to increase the effectiveness and lethality of fires. Leaders at all levels must be adaptive, conduct innovative training and increasingly provide our maneuver brethren the most responsive, lethal and devastating fires—when and wherever the BCT needs them.



Lieutenant Colonel Richard M. Francey, Jr., until recently, commanded the 4th Battalion, 42d Field Artillery (4-42 FA), part of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Hood, Texas. Currently, he is the Senior Fire Supporter (Wolf 07) at the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, California. Among other assignments, he was the Deputy Fire Support Coordinator for III Corps, also at Fort Hood; Executive Officer (XO) of the 17th Field Artillery Brigade, part of III Corps Artillery at Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Deputy Fire Support Coordinator for the 101st Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, the same division in which he was the S3 of 2d Battalion, 320th Field Artillery. He was a Brigade Fire Support Officer (FSO) in the 7th Infantry Division (Light) during Operation Just Cause in Panama.

Major Michael D. Hilliard, until recently, was the S3 of 4-42 FA at Fort Hood. Currently, he is the XO of the 4th Infantry Division Artillery. Also at Fort Hood, he was the Assistant Fire Support Coordinator and FSO for the 1st Brigade Combat Team, both in the 4th Infantry Division. Major Hilliard was a Firing Battery Combat Trainer on the Werewolf Fire Support Training Team at the NTC, Fort Irwin. He commanded A Battery, 3d Battalion, 1st Field Artillery, part of the 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized) in Germany, the same division in which he served as a task force FSO. During Operations Desert Shield and Storm, he was the S1 for the 4th Battalion, 5th Field Artillery, 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized) out of Fort Riley, Kansas. He is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.