

Planning Fires for Brigade Success

Simple, Well Rehearsed and Violently Executed

By Colonel William L. Greer



Combined arms operations are the key to success at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana. Infantry-on-infantry is a costly way to do business. As the integrator of fires (lethal and nonlethal), fire supporters provide our maneuver commanders the combat power to succeed.

Fire planning must support the commander's scheme of maneuver and defeat mechanism for the enemy. To start the process, we must pull concise guidance from the commander and then translate it into essential fire support tasks (EFSTs)—eventually, each will have a Task, Purpose, Method and Effects. This article provides some tools for a brigade fire support officer's (FSO's) kit bag to simplify fire planning during the military decision-making process (MDMP): Receive the Mission, Analyze the Mission, Issue a Warning Order (WARNO), Commander Determines Intent and Guidance, Develop Courses-of-Action (COAs), Wargame the COAs, Commander Decides on the COA, Brief Operations Order (OPORD), Rehearse and Execute.

Extracting the Commander's Guidance. Fire planning is a continuous process that's energized with renewed fervor upon *Receipt of a Mission*. The fire support coordinator (FSCOORD) and FSO then provide the combined arms commander critical information during *Mission Analysis*. They identify the resources available to the commander early in the process to ensure the plan includes them in the operation. Mission analysis begins to identify all requirements placed on the brigade by higher headquarters.

Perhaps the most important information identified in mission analysis is the EFSTs. The FSCOORD and maneuver commander develop the Task and Purpose for the draft of the EFSTs in the brigade commander's initial guidance for fire support during the upcoming operation. "Task and purpose" is a familiar format for the brigade commander as he uses this format to develop his initial brigade guidance. This information will be in the *WARNO* he issues and is the heart of the *Commander's Intent and Guidance*.

In some instances, the brigade commander won't provide usable guidance. For example, he might say, "Insert the Q-36 radar early," which doesn't give enough information to execute the task and achieve the commander's intent. Often, fire supporters will need to walk the commander through what he wants and then translate that into what indirect fires can provide.

A FSCOORD or brigade FSO can help the commander provide concise fire support guidance by asking him leading questions about the operation. For example if the commander says he wants "the Q-36 inserted early," the FSCOORD could ask "Why early?" and "To do what?" to discover the Task and Purpose. The brigade commander might explain that he's worried about the enemy surrounding the flight landing strip (FLS) with 81-mm mortars and preventing the friendly engineers from improving the airfield for follow-on forces. The commander's bottom line is he wants to limit the 81-mm mortar's capabilities to interdict engineer FLS improvement operations.

Therefore, the Task and Purpose for this phase of the operation is stated as, "Limit the enemy's ability to use his mortars, thus allowing our engineers and infantry the freedom of maneuver to clear and repair the FLS." "Insert the Q-36 radar early" is part of the Method to accomplish the Task and Purpose.

With this information, the FA battalion can begin parallel planning with the brigade, focusing on supporting the brigade's critical tasks. (See the Fort Sill white paper "Fire Support Planning for the Brigade and Below," 12 May 1998.)

Refining EFSTs. With the initial guidance to focus his efforts, fire supporters immediately can transition to *COA Development* in the MDMP. COA development focuses primarily on refining the Task and Purpose part of the EFSTs and adding any EFSTs peculiar to the COA under consideration.

In the example, the brigade will conduct an airborne (or air assault) operation to secure the FLS before the engineers repair the airfield. This mission requires suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) to facilitate insertion of the brigade combat team (BCT). The additional EFST Task and Purpose could read "Disrupt enemy air defenses with SEAD to allow aerial freedom of maneuver for our assault aircraft enroute and at the landing zone."

As we finish the COA development phase, we have a clear vision of how fires will be used to influence the battle. A good technique to ensure the FSCOORD or FSO understand the initial guidance before moving on is for the

FSCOORD or FSO to back brief the brigade commander on the vision of how fires will support the scheme of maneuver.

At the end of COA development, the brigade publishes another WARNO to subordinate units, identifying their tasks and responsibilities for executing the brigade's probable plan—the plan that is an “80 percent solution.”

In *Wargaming*, fire supporters begin to flesh out the Method and Effects portions of the EFSTs with detail. The Method describes how the Task and Purpose will be achieved while Effects portion attempts to quantify the successful accomplishment of the Task. As we wargame, we spend the time and resources necessary to completely develop the COA against an enemy that will do his best to accomplish his mission. EFSTs should clearly plan for both lethal and nonlethal fires.

Integrating Targeting. The FSCOORD and FSO must integrate targeting into the MDMP. The resulting maneuver and fire support plans then will determine what targets or capabilities must be attacked, how to detect them, what munition to deliver, what defines success and how to determine success.

Wargaming refines the Method used to achieve the objectives. It is the part of the MDMP in which fire supporters identify engagement areas (EAs) and target areas of interest (TAIs), including groups and series of targets. The reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) plan is the key to synchronizing targeting with the fire support plan. Named areas of interest (NAIs), triggers for engagement and other observation plan requirements must support the fire support plan.

Sensor-to-shooter linkages should be identified in enough detail to ensure fires can be delivered at the critical place and time. If multiple shooters will have to call for fires from the same assets simultaneously, the plan has a problem. In the wargaming and COA decision portions of the MDMP are the times to resolve the problem by getting additional assets or sequencing fires differently; fire supporters won't be able to deconflict multiple calls for the same assets during the heat of battle.

The Method also should identify and plan the movement of fire support assets, such as combat observation lasing teams (COLTs). The FSO should keep a running total of munitions for the FA battalion S3 to ensure the plan is supportable from a logistical standpoint.

Once the COAs are wargamed and the *Commander Decides on a COA*, the maneuver commander and FSCOORD have a clear vision of how fires will influence the operation. This information is covered in the *OPORD Briefing*.

The brigade fire support element (FSE) clearly articulates the fire plan in the fires paragraph of the OPORD: the fire support execution matrix (FSEM); the target synchronization matrix (TSM), which includes the high-payoff target list (HPTL); the attack guidance matrix (AGM); and the target list. Target selection standards (TSS) also must be developed and disseminated as part of the modified TSM or as a separate document to confirm what sensors are acceptable as target sources vice target indicators.

If the wargame is done correctly, the fires paragraph of the OPORD tells subordinate maneuver commanders their responsibilities for executing the brigade's plan. Also, the FSEM is in sufficient detail for subordinate FSEs to understand and use it as a tool for rehearsing fire support (and combined arms) operations as well as for executing the fire plan. These documents and the rehearsal process provide a clear understanding of the scheme of fires.

Rehearsing and Executing. As the unit publishes the OPORD, the fire supporter's job is really just beginning. *Rehearsing* the plan is critical to successful execution.

Colonel James T. Hill, Commander of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) [currently Lieutenant General Hill, I Corps Commanding General, see the interview in this edition] discussed his unit's successful operations during Operation Desert Storm. He said the key to success is “Detailed, yet simple plans, rehearsed to the point everyone understands his piece in the fight and is confident in his ability to execute and then decentralized execution.”

As the Senior Observer/Controller at the JRTC, I often ask unit commanders in rotations if they would execute a danger close live fire without rehearsing it. Most would not consider it. So, why do so many units fail to rehearse fires for simulated combat at the JRTC—leave it out of training for actual combat? The simple plan must be well rehearsed before the brigade can violently execute it with success.

The FSO facilitates the brigade fire support rehearsal using the FSEM. He covers in detail the execution of the observer plan and communications network. Each observer must clearly un-

derstand his task and purpose, have an established trigger, know the engagement criteria—in other words, know the “who, what, when and how” to deliver the required fires.

As fire supporters plan and rehearse fire support, they must never forget the enemy will have “a vote” as to the effectiveness of the plan during execution. Fire supporters must build flexibility into each plan to deal with branches and sequels as required in reaction to the enemy.

If the fire plan is simple and rehearsed in detail, it can succeed—even when the enemy's main effort appears where the brigade expected his supporting effort.

Conclusion. Keys to success at the JRTC are really straightforward. Early, clear commander's guidance helps focus fire supporters development of EFSTs and enables the FA battalion to conduct parallel planning. Throughout the MDMP, fire supporters further develop and refine the EFSTs, keeping the plan simple, integrating targeting and building in flexibility. Once the fire plan is understood and rehearsed by all, indirect fires will be able to quickly shift across the battlefield to deal with the enemy's chosen COA.

Fire supporters must remember six words—“simple plan, well rehearsed, violently executed.” They are the essence of fire planning for success.

JRTC Fire Support Home Page:
www.jrtc-polk.army.mil/fsweb



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