

# Task Force Fire Support Evolution: FIST Employment Concepts

By Captain R. Reed Anderson

**T**ime and time again brigade combat teams (BCTs) at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) in Hohenfels, Germany, learn the cruel reality that the fire support team vehicle (FIST-V) is an outdated target acquisition (TA) platform. The reason for this is twofold. First, the vehicle is unable to keep up with maneuver; it lacks survivability and maneuverability; it has a high silhouette; and it uses older, slower technologies, for example, its north-seeking gyro (NSG) alignment times. Second is the vehicle's lack of flexibility, both from the company commander's perspective and from the FIST's ability to execute essential fire support tasks (EFSTs).

This article addresses solutions to mitigate FIST-V limitations using the Bradley fire support team vehicle (BFIST) and the Striker high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV). It then suggests employment tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) for the proposed solutions.

**Equipment and Manning.** To mitigate the failings of the FIST-V as quickly as possible and then for the long term, I propose two FIST employment concepts—one using the Striker HMMWV and one using the BFIST—as outlined initially by its equipment and manning requirements.

*Striker HMMWV Concept.* The Striker HMMWV concept is similar to that of the Interim Brigade Combat Team's (IBCT's) use of wheeled vehicles as the primary platform. The Striker HMMWV combines proven components of the BFIST mission equipment package (MEP), the technical TA and processing brains of the system, with the mobility, flexibility and the stealth of the HMMWV. Engineered Support Systems, Inc., the manufacturer of the Striker HMMWV, announced in November 2000 it had received final approval for full-rate production of the Striker HMMWV with the Army planning to purchase more than 800 systems during the next 10 years.<sup>1</sup>

There are two versions of the Striker HMMWV. Striker II adds a remote controlled multi-sensor suite to the Striker advanced fire support package.<sup>2</sup> This suite, although useful for the combat observation lasing team (COLT) mission, would not be necessary for a FIST Striker

HMMWV. All the other components of the MEP planned for Striker II are applicable.

The Striker HMMWV is a viable solution to replace the FIST-V for several reasons. First, it provides the same capabilities as the FIST-V plus uses more advanced technology for self-location and has interfaced mission-processing software. Second, the stealth of the HMMWV is significantly increased—not only over the FIST-V's stealth, but also BFIST's. The HMMWV has a lower silhouette, drives quieter, idles quieter when required to run the engine for power production and is easier to hide and dig-in. Granted, it does not have the self-defense platform that comes with the BFIST, but the FIST vehicle was never intended to be a direct fire platform.

In recent experiences at the CMTC, HMMWVs were used when FIST-Vs were not operational; the HMMWVs gave the FIST a greater ability to infiltrate to planned observation posts (OPs) and is a more survivable platform. Therefore, the HMMWVs will give the task force (TF) commander greater flexibility in positioning his fire support acquisition assets in the battle where and when he needs them.

Manning under the Striker HMMWV concept would remain unchanged from the FIST-V: fire support officer (FSO), the fire support NCO (FSNCO), a radio/telephone operator (RTO) and driver. Their responsibilities would mirror their responsibilities in the FIST-V.

The advanced technology and increased abilities of the Striker HMMWV over the FIST-V make this concept a viable one for integration in the near



Striker HMMWV



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future. With 800 systems potentially available within the next 10 years, the Army could easily refit the six heavy divisions with Striker HMMWVs fairly quickly: nine FISTs and six COLTs per maneuver brigade for a total of 15 Striker HMMWVs required per brigade times three brigades for a total of 45 for a division and 270 to refit the six heavy divisions. For those units still resourced with the FIST-V, we could field the Striker HMMWV to them first and get the older, more ineffective technology out of the fight first; this would enhance our ability to find and kill the enemy—provide timely and accurate fire support for our maneuver commanders.

**BFIST Concept.** The fielding of the BFIST<sup>2</sup> is already mitigating the lack of survivability and maneuverability of the FIST-V. However, not all heavy divisions have or are scheduled to field the BFIST.

Additionally, it is doubtful that company commanders will be any less reluctant to allow the BFIST the flexibility to maneuver freely to execute FIST EFSTs. The company commander often relies on the company FSO for execution of the fire support plan and uses the FIST-V as a communications and intelligence platform. This impedes the FIST from completing its dual mission of TA and fires integration.

The best solution to completing the dual mission is to operate under a split-based system. The BFIST stays with the company commander, giving him immediate access to his company FSO, yet frees elements of the FIST to accom-

plish the mission. This also gives the TF commander flexibility in planning fires.

Instead of manning the BFIST with a four-man team, it should be manned with a six-man team. The company FSNCO would serve as track commander (TC), the FSO as the gunner (only uses the 25-mm gun to disengage from the enemy) and 13F10 Fire Support Specialists as the RTO and driver. These four would man the primary fire support platform.

The remaining two soldiers would be a 13F20 or senior 13F10 and an additional 13F10. They would allow the FIST to operate in a manner similar to that of the infantry forward observer (FO) teams in some mechanized infantry fire support elements (FSEs), dismounting a team of two from the BFIST at a strategic location to observe the enemy. These positions are scheduled to fall off the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE).

The BFIST would retain its primary purpose to acquire targets, and the FIST would retain its primary duties and responsibilities.

**Employment TTPs.** The HMMWV and BFIST concepts have different TTPs.

**Striker HMMWV TTP.** FIST control options for the Striker HMMWV remain the same as with the FIST-V: centralized or decentralized, although execution of the mission in each control option is slightly varied.

Under centralized control, the TF commander and FSO develop an observation plan to position the FISTs where the TF commander needs them to execute his scheme of fires. In this option,

the FISTs could be integrated into the reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) plan and deployed in conjunction with the TF scouts.

Under decentralized control, the company commander and company FSO develop an observation plan synchronized with the company scheme of maneuver that allows the FIST to execute its EFSTs. The company commander has two options under decentralized control for FIST employment. First, to enable the FIST to position itself on the battlefield in the right place and still provide fire support integration for the company commander, the FIST would use its stealth and infiltration capability with the HMMWV to position two members of its team forward in a dismounted OP. The FIST HMMWV might need a small security force provided by the company commander (e.g., section of Bradley fighting vehicles), as dictated by mission, enemy, terrain, troops and time available (METT-T).

The FSNCO and RTO would man the dismounted OP and would take all necessary equipment to carry out the mission, to include the lightweight laser designator rangefinder (LLDR). The HMMWV and security force then would return, and the HMMWV would move to a position from which it could provide fire support integration for the company commander and still process missions from the dismounted OP. The FSO and driver, who is now acting as an RTO as well, would man what would be a fires integration and communications platform for the company commander.

The second option is to release the entire FIST with the HMMWV to execute its observation plan using its stealth and infiltration ability to get to the right place at the right time. Use of a security force to get the team safely into position would be METT-T dependent. In this option, the commander loses his “hip pocket” FSO, but he does not lose his fires integration capability as long as the FIST remains in communications range—a necessity so it can talk to the TF FSE. The advantages of this option over the dismounted option is that it allows more flexibility for the FIST to reposition to execute its EFSTs and to meet the needs of the fluid battlefield and any changes to the TF commander’s scheme of fires.

Either option provides the TF commander and FSO the flexibility to put the TA assets in the right place on the battlefield at the right time.

**BFIST TTP.** Under centralized control, the BFIST concept is similar to the Striker HMMWV concept except the TF commander and FSO have the option of infiltrating the FO teams with TF scouts or assigning infiltration responsibilities to one of the FISTs. If the FO teams infiltrate with the TF scouts, then the FO observation plan must be fully integrated into the R&S plan as well as the fire support plan.

Under decentralized control, the BFIST would be used as the primary fire support vehicle at the company level. The company FSO would make an aggressive observation plan that positions the FIST to execute EFSTs and integrate fires for the company commander. Likewise, the company commander must be willing to allow the FIST to execute its observation plan and provide security, when METT-T dictates.

The company FSO also must develop an FO team observation plan from which the FO team can execute its EFSTs, provide early warning and (or) target engagement, as well as target hand-off from COLT or TF scouts. Once the company commander approves the observation plan, the company FSO uses the BFIST to deploy the FO team to a determined location from which the FO team then would infiltrate dismounted to its OP. The FO team would go light, carrying with them the basic resources required to survive and acquire and engage targets: mini eye-safe laser infrared observation set (MELIOS), precision lightweight global positioning system receiver (PLGR), forward-entry device (FED) and radio. The BFIST still would retain responsibility for target designation.

The end state using this concept is twofold: the company commander has fire support resources to execute EFSTs and integrate fires, and the use of the FO teams (three per TF) gives the TF commander greater flexibility in his observation planning to position observers to execute EFSTs.

**A Common Caveat to all Concepts.** A potential key aspect for all these concepts is the integrated training of the TF fire support assets with the maneuver unit. Simply stated, all three FISTs and the TF FSE would need to be organic assets assigned to the headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) of the maneuver battalion as they are in the new IBCT. Similar to medics and maintenance sections, the fire support platoon would maintain a habitual rela-

tionship with maneuver companies, thus giving the company commander ownership of his FIST.

The TF FSNCO and TF FSO would retain responsibility for fire support training for the FISTs and integrate their training plan with that of the company commanders and the maneuver battalion. This would allow the TF FSO to fully integrate fire support training into the company commander's training plan, helping to develop the idea of ownership of fires, and still provide the 13Fs their essential fire support training. In addition, the TF FSO would be an integral part of the battalion staff.

An additional and vital element to this is the integration of the fire supporters with the direct support (DS) artillery battalion. This can be accomplished through weekly brigade FSE meetings to synchronize all fire support training. During these meetings, the brigade FSO and DS artillery battalion S3 would integrate gunnery and other related training events with the TF FSOs. In addition, to facilitate maintenance of today's digital battlefield skills, weekly digital sustainment with all FISTs, FSEs and firing unit elements would be a must.

The result would be well-trained and -integrated fire support teams, which in turn would facilitate synchronization of fires on the battlefield.

**A Proposed Near- and Long-Term Plan.** There is no one right way to solve the challenges created by the FIST-V. A proposed immediate and, perhaps, long-term solution follows.

First, units with the BFIST or programmed to field the BFIST (i.e., funds have already been allocated) would continue to field and use the BFIST. However, personnel authorizations would be adjusted to provide a two-man FO team to each FIST.

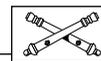
All other units, minus the IBCT that would continue with its plans, would field the Striker HMMWV. With the number of Striker HMMWVs scheduled for production in the next 10 years, all heavy divisions could be fielded either the BFIST or Striker HMMWV in the next four years, thus negating the combat ineffectiveness of the antiquated FIST-V.

A key aspect here is that no matter what platform a unit uses, the MEP is the same, thus providing a common technical TA platform requiring common training for all heavy units.

**Conclusion.** The proposed plan strives to solve our FIST-V challenges by providing a modern, survivable, maneu-

verable and practical platform for TA and fires integration. In addition, organic relationships with maneuver units will facilitate integrated training and make the most effective use of our time to learn how to maneuver with our combat arms brethren and integrate fires. Anyone can learn the technical skills of fire support in a classroom, in a fires simulator or sitting on an OP. To learn how to maneuver and infiltrate our new fire support platforms, the FIST must maneuver on a regular basis with its unit.

Based on lessons learned over and over again at the CMTC and other CTCs, the current fire support resources (minus those units with the BFIST) and configuration of mechanized task forces are essentially ineffective. We must be creative and adaptive to find better ways to accomplish our mission of TA and fires integration. The possibilities discussed using new assets and adapting employment TTPs to facilitate execution of fires, would provide greater flexibility and adaptability and would also save in operations tempo (OPTEMPO) dollars (the HMMWV costs much less to maintain than a FIST-V or BFIST). By configuring FISTs to provide eyes in depth and giving them proper resources, they will better influence and shape today's battlefield and that of the future.



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#### Endnotes:

1. Engineered Support Systems, Inc., Press Release, dated 20 November 2000, located at the Systems and Electronics, Inc., web site at [www.seistl.com](http://www.seistl.com).
2. Systems & Electronics, Inc., web site contains product information on the Striker series and the BFIST at [www.seistl.com](http://www.seistl.com).