

The Company FSO TLP and Briefing

Making Fires Happen in the Close Fight

by Major Terry A. Ivester



Officers briefing their fire support plan. (Photo by 2LT Larry Cunningham, C/2-80 FA)

In recent months, the fire support community updated its doctrine through the publication of a white paper “Fire Support Planning for the Brigade and Below.” The publication addresses the military decision-making process (MDMP) as it pertains to fire support officers (FSOs) for the brigade and battalion/task force (TF). However, this document doesn’t adequately address the company FSO’s role as the refiner/executor of the brigade and battalion/TF plan.

This article provides the company FSO with tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) to help him understand his duties and responsibilities, using the eight troop-leading procedures (TLP) as a guide. (See Figure 1.) Additionally, the article introduces a briefing format to help the FSO clearly brief his company commander on the fire support plan and how fires support the scheme of maneuver.

1. Receive the mission. First, the FSO receives the mission as an oral or written order. He accompanies the company commander to the battalion/TF orders briefing, which allows him to hear firsthand what the mission is and how the company fits into the scheme

of maneuver and fires. Of even greater importance, he meets with the battalion/TF FSO.

During the operations order (OPORD) briefing, the S2 describes in detail how the enemy is anticipated to fight; the FSO gathers the information listed in Figure 1. The FSO also determines the capabilities and limitations of the enemy and information the company commander will use in the company intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IBP) as he develops the maneuver plan. The FSO will use this information to help him develop a fire support plan to support the company commander’s plan.

Second, the FSO reads the OPORD, focusing on the brigade and TF mission as well as commander’s intent. This allows him to “visualize” how the brigade will fight and his company’s part in the plan. The brigade/TF commander’s intent provides the FSO a framework of how fire support will be used to support the operation. He gleans the information listed in Figure 1 from the OPORD.

The TF FSO briefs the TF fire support plan as part of the OPORD. During the briefing, the FSO describes the specif-

ics of how the brigade and TF will execute the fire support plan to support the brigade and TF schemes of maneuver. The company FSO learns the essential fire support tasks (EFSTs) and what responsibility his company has for accomplishing which tasks. This information is found in the OPORD’s fires paragraph and associated matrices. The FA organization for combat tells the FSO what FA assets are available to the brigade.

After gathering information from the OPORD, the company FSO asks his commander for a mission statement and the commander’s guidance. The FSO also should be at the company commander’s back brief to the TF commander. During this briefing, the FSO will hear the company mission statement and any task clarification issues.

Before the FSO receives the company commander’s guidance, he should inform and clarify with the commander what EFSTs the company is responsible for executing. This tells the commander how fires are planned for the company, so he can formulate a scheme of maneuver and issue guidance based on the entire plan, not just the maneuver plan.

2. Issue the warning order. (See Step 2 in Figure 1.) After the FSO and commander receive the order, they return to the company area. The company commander then issues a WARNO. As part of the order, the commander addresses the situation/mission, the start time of the operation and the time and place he will issue his OPORD. This allows the company leadership time to begin preparations for the operation and start pre-combat checks (PCCs).

During this step, the FSO issues his own WARNO to the fire support team (FIST) headquarters and platoon observers. The FSO briefs all information available about the upcoming operation using the documents from the battalion OPORD. Additionally, he provides the FIST specific PCCs and pre-combat inspections (PCIs) to complete the operation. He also informs the commander and TF FSO of his equipment status (based on the standing operating procedures, or SOP) and updates that information as the situation changes.

3. Begin planning. After the WARNO is issued, the FSO develops a fire support plan based on the commander's guidance he received and what he knows about the brigade and TF plan. (See Step 3 in Figure 1.)

He reads and analyzes the TF OPORD to determine what targets he's responsible for executing and if the targets need refining. While reading the OPORD, he keeps his company commander's guidance in mind to determine if any brigade or TF targets meet the guidance, eliminating duplication of targets. The FSO plans any additional targets necessary to meet the company commander's guidance based on target allocations. At the same time, he develops the company fire support plan and briefs it to his company commander.

4. Arrange for movement. The FSO positions his forward observers (FOs), if applicable, and FIST vehicle (FISTV) based on the observation plan and moves with the company/team to the assembly area (AA) or attack position.

5. Conduct reconnaissance. The FSO accompanies the company commander on his reconnaissance of the terrain where the operation will be conducted and goes as far forward as the tactical situation permits. The reconnaissance continues the planning process, confirming or denying the tentative plan. If the commander makes changes to the plan based on the recon, the FSO updates the tentative plan. The FSO con-

1. Receive the mission.

- From the S2 intelligence briefing:
 - Terrain and Weather
 - Enemy Situation and Most Likely and Most Dangerous Courses of Action (COAs)
- From the operations order (OPORD):
 - Brigade and Task Force (TF) Mission and Commander's Intent
 - Concept of the Operation and Scheme of Maneuver
 - Task Organization
 - Tasks to His Company
 - Tasks to the Mortars
 - Copies of Graphics and Execution/Synchronization Matrix
- From the battalion/TF fire support officer (FSO):
 - TF Essential Fire Support Tasks (EFSTs)
 - Organization for Combat
 - Fire Support Execution Matrix (FSEM)
 - Target List Worksheet
 - Fire Support Overlay
- From the company OPORD: Mission and Guidance

2. Issue a warning order (WARNO).

- Participate in the company commander's WARNO.
- Brief all available information on the execution of fires and provide fire support documents to forward observers (FOs), commanders, platoon leaders and mortars with attachments; issue the same information to firesupport team (FIST) headquarters.
- Get the commander's timeline.
- Identify/begin pre-combat checks (PCCs) and pre-combat inspections (PCIs).
- Notify company commander/battalion FSO of changes in status (war stoppers).

3. Begin planning.

- Attach overlays and plot targets.
- Read and analyze the TF plan again and apply company commander's guidance.
- Determine observation requirements.
- Refine targets based on the commander's guidance.
- Plan allocated targets based on the commander's guidance and target allocations.
- Develop the company fire support plan.
- Develop the FSO briefing and advise the company commander.

4. Arrange for movement.

- Position FOs/FIST vehicles (FISTVs) based on the observation plan.
- Move with company/team to the assembly area (AA) or attack position.

5. Conduct reconnaissance. Reconnoiter the area with the company commander for factors influencing the targets/observation plan; consider terrain, target locations, FISTV locations and triggers, at a minimum.

6. Complete the plan. Refine the targets and observation plan based on the reconnaissance.

7. Issue the order. The order is based on the unit standing operating procedures (SOP), scheme of fires and observation plan.

8. Supervise.

- Conduct PCCs.
- Continue to refine the fire support plan.
- Rehearse the plan.
- Develop a sleep plan for 24-hour operations.

Figure 1: Company Fire Support Officer (FSO) Troop-Leading Procedures (TLP). The eight TLP were taken from *FM 71-123 Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Combined Arms Heavy Forces: Armored Brigade, Battalion/Task Force and Company/Team*, Page 1-11.

1. Situation:

- Orient the commander to the map/area of operation:
 - Point out grid north/address and briefly explain key terrain.
 - Point out the battalion's and company's AO (PLs, axes, objectives, EAs, etc.), friendly and enemy obstacles, avenues of approach and mobility corridors, and any known or suspected enemy locations.
 - Point out all locations of your company and other TF elements. Include any attachments to the company or TF as well as other friendly units that will call-for-fires from the DS artillery battalion (i.e., COLTs, scouts and adjacent TF units).
- Briefly explain:
 - The TF commander's mission/intent and concept of the operation, pointing to the map and graphics as you explain.
 - State the TF commander's intent for fires and attack guidance.

2. **Mission:** State the company mission verbatim from the commander's guidance and explain the company scheme of maneuver, pointing to the map and graphics as you explain.

3. Execution:

- State the company commander's guidance for fires verbatim:
 - Briefly address how the guidance was met.
 - Address and explain any part of the guidance you are unable to meet.
 - Ask the commander for any changes or additional guidance he may have.
- State the fire support assets available:
 - At a minimum, state what assets the company can request fire support from, i.e., DS battalion, TF mortars, company mortars (light companies only) and naval gunfire. Brief other assets available to the brigade, such as a reinforcing battalion and CAS, but emphasize that unless the TF has allocated them, the company can't request fires from these assets.
 - *Priority of Fires.* State the TF priority of fires (which company) by phase, followed by the company priority of fires (which platoon) by phase.
 - *Priority Targets.* State the number of priority targets the company has and point them out on the overlay.
 - *Final Protective Fires.* State the number, size and asset for each FPF as you point them out on the overlay.
 - *Special Munitions Allocations.* State the quantity, if any, of each special munition the company is allocated (i.e., 15 minutes of FA smoke). The munitions to discuss are smoke (FA and mortar), Copperhead, illumination, FASCAM and DPICM.
 - *Any Other Allocations.* The number of targets allocated by the TF by asset (FA or mortar) for planning. State if the company is allocated CAS sorties (by aircraft type and ordnance, if known).
- State the scheme of fires:
 - Brief the FSEM; brief the scheme of fires target by target, by phase and in the chronological sequence you expect them to be executed. Point to each target on the overlay. Cover all the elements of the EFST (task, purpose, method and effects) or, at a minimum, the task and purpose for each target.
 - Explain in *detail* why each trigger, observer and location was chosen for each target. Explain how each target supports the company's plan and how it relates to enemy forces and time.
- Brief the FSCM and restrictions: Brief all FSCM, when they are in effect and other restrictions on fires, i.e., the TF commander's approval required to fire illumination.

4. **Service Support:** Brief the status of company fire support personnel and equipment, i.e., the number of personnel available and the G/VLLD, radios, weapons, FISTV and amount of fuel available. For light infantry companies, brief the ammunition load for the 60-mm mortars on hand and expected resupply.

5. Command and Signal:

- Point to the location of the FISTV and brief its movement and positioning plan as well as the employment option you have chosen.
- Brief and point out the locations of the platoon FOs, their movement and positioning plan and control options.
- Brief what nets you will be operating on, who you will be talking to and the call signs for all fire support assets.

Legend:

AO = Area of Operations	EAs = Engagement Areas	FOs = Forward Observers
CAS = Close Air Support	EFST = Essential Fire Support Task	FPFs = Final Protective Fires
COLTs = Combat Observation Lasing Teams	FASCAM = Family of Scatterable Mines	FSO = Fire Support Officer
DPICM = Dual-Purpose Improved Conventional Munition	FISTV = Fire Support Team Vehicle	G/VLLD = Ground/Vehicular Laser Locator Designator
DS = Direct Support	FSCM = Fire Support Coordinating Measures	PLs = Phase Lines
	FSEM = Fire Support Execution Matrix	TF = Task Force

Figure 2: Company FSO Briefing Format

siders terrain, target locations, FISTV location and triggers, at a minimum.

6. Complete the plan. Based on the reconnaissance, the FSO makes the appropriate changes to the plan, including new guidance by the company commander and his other changes.

Next, the FSO briefs his company commander in a clear and concise manner, explaining how fires will support the scheme of maneuver. The instructors of the FA Officer Basic Course at the FA School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, use the format shown in Figure 2 to teach lieutenants how to brief their commanders.

Although the format appears that the briefing will be rather lengthy, the FSO should be able to brief his company commander using this format in about 20 minutes. In a time-sensitive environment, the format can be prioritized and modified based on the time available.

7. Issue the order. Next, the FSO forwards the plan to the battalion/TF FSO for approval and briefs his FIST. He briefs the fire support portion of the company OPORD according to the unit SOP. The information is in the FSO's briefing to the company commander, specifically the scheme of fires and observation plan.

8. Supervise. The FSO next focuses on tracking and completing the PCCs and PCIs initiated in Step 1. The TF FSO ensures the FSO receives all the changes and (or) updates to the plan through constant communications.

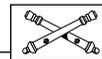
The FSO supervises subordinates on completing their tasks in the fire support plan. He gives them a reasonable time to execute the orders and then checks them by a combination of back briefs, inspections and rehearsals.

The most important thing the FSO does before executing a fire plan is to rehearse. Rehearsals improve the total comprehension of the plan at all levels. Participants who are unclear on specific portions of the plan gain answers through the repetitiveness of rehearsals.

At the company-level, the FSO ensures the fire support plan is rehearsed in conjunction with the maneuver rehearsal, if possible. If the company commander doesn't conduct a rehearsal, the FSO should conduct a fire support rehearsal of his own. The rehearsal includes, at a minimum, all members of the FIST and the fire support assets. FSOs use the target list and execution matrix to "walk through" the operation.

The FSO must determine a sleep plan for his soldiers in 24-hour operations or executing fires will suffer due to fatigue.

The company FSO is an important asset to the company, TF and brigade. He gathers information and works with his company commander to plan and execute fires to win the brigade fight.



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Hasty Astro: Taking the Needle Out of the Equation

The Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana, has witnessed a trend over the last several years in units' abilities to conduct hasty survey. Field Artillery batteries generally don't know how to perform hasty astro techniques, which is the second best means of getting survey data. The leaders in the batteries have had no institutional training on the tasks, and hasty astro procedures are not referenceable in the manuals common to the FA cannon battery leaders.

Batteries typically deploy initially into an area of operations at the JRTC without survey support. This forces the battery commander to decide what method of lay he will use to establish directional control for his battery location. In many cases, the battery commander elects to lay the safe by grid azimuth—which should be the last resort. The grid-azimuth method can lead to fratricide because of the error that magnetic attractions can introduce into the data.

FM 6-2 Tactics, Techniques and Procedures [TTP] for Field Artillery Survey with Change 1, Chapters 7, 10 and 13, contains the procedures for conducting hasty astro, but most platoon leaders/execu-

tive officers (XOs), chiefs of firing battery (CFBs) and gunnery sergeants (GSGs) don't have this manual. Instead, they use *FM 6-50 TTP for the Field Artillery Cannon Battery* and *ST 6-50-20 Battery Executive Officer's/Platoon Leader's Handbook* as references, but these publications don't cover the hasty astro procedures. In addition, hasty astro procedures aren't taught in the advanced NCO course (ANCOC), and lieutenants in the officer basic course (OBC) only get a limited exposure to the survey method. So a baseline knowledge of hasty astro isn't prevalent. As a result, leaders don't have confidence in hasty astro.

A firing unit can obtain directional control day or night (weather permitting), using a celestial body to an accuracy of plus or minus two mils with the forward entry device (FED), hand-held terminal unit (HTU) and precision lightweight global positioning system receiver (PLGR). This is not the Polaris-Kochab or Polaris-2 methods, which are time-consuming or obsolete. When trained on hasty astros, the Big Three (XO, CFB and GSG) can perform a hasty astro as quickly as they can "float the needle" to use the grid azimuth method.

Hasty astro is a proven survey technique that eliminates the error associated with the magnetic attraction inherent in laying by grid. It is a simple and quick method, more accurate than grid azimuth but requires training so leaders are proficient in its use. If the FA introduces the technique to our battery-level leaders at the schoolhouse, a baseline knowledge will be established. Next, we recommend the FA School update *FM 6-50* and *ST 6-50-20* to include the procedures so users can readily reference the technique. In the interim, FA units should develop and execute a training plan to raise the abilities and confidence of FA users to perform the hasty astro, using *FM 6-2*, Chapters 7, 10 and 13.

If properly trained, leaders can competently use the hasty astro method the next time survey is unavailable and "take the needle out of the equation."

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