

The TF FSO and the Deliberate Attack

by Major Boyd D. Gaines

“Concentration is the massing and synchronization of overwhelming combat power against an enemy weakness. Concentration is achieved by....synchronizing maneuver with combat support.”

FM 71-2 Tank and Mechanized Infantry
Battalion Task Force

Of the four characteristics of effective offensive operations—surprise, concentration, tempo and audacity—concentration is arguably the key to success on the battlefield. Concentration allows a mechanized task force (TF) to destroy a motorized rifle company (MRC), or its equivalent, and maintain enough combat power to prosecute tactical operations.

The integration of fire support is the key to bringing overwhelming combat power to bear on the enemy. Yet during rotation after

rotation at the Combat Training Centers (CTCs), TFs fail to integrate their fire support effectively.

This article focuses on tactics, techniques and procedures for the TF fire support officer (FSO) to plan, prepare and execute a fire plan for the deliberate attack against a dug-in MRC.

Reviewing Doctrine

To paraphrase FM 71-2—

- Deliberate attacks normally include large volumes of supporting fires, main and supporting attacks and deception measures.

- The TF designates support, breaching and assault forces.

- The TF and brigade conduct rehearsals of the fire support plan.

- The TF conducts continuous reconnaissance and schedules a final intelligence update just before the attack.

- Battalion TFs penetrate enemy company defenses to isolate and destroy elements of platoon size or smaller. The TF completes the defeat of the enemy company in detail.

- A coordinated attack is usually a four-phase operation: close on the objective, isolate the site for penetration, breach or penetrate to gain a foothold onto the position and exploit the penetration.

Doctrine is also fairly specific with regard to fire support considerations for the deliberate attack. See Figure 1 for those considerations as outlined in FM 71-2 and FM 6-20-40 *Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Fire Support In Brigade Operations (Heavy)*.

Finally, FSOs need to know the threat. An enemy force capable of employing the doctrine of the former Soviet Army probably would be the most

During the deliberate attack, the FSO should consider—

- Fires for Breaching Operations.** These support the breaching forces, soften enemy forces on the objective before the assault and suppress the objective area.
- Preparation Fires.** Preparation fires, including preplanned close air support (CAS), can suppress, neutralize and destroy enemy positions on the objective.
- Obscuration and Screening Fires.** Fires using smoke assist breaching efforts, hide friendly maneuver forces and can aid in deception efforts.
- Counterbattery Fires.** When manual breaching is anticipated, the FSO should coordinate for counterbattery fires.
- Illumination Fires.** These always are planned for night attacks, but their execution usually is on-order by the task force commander.
- Fires on Priority Targets.** Priority targets are normally allocated to weight the main attack.
- Fires During the Assault.**
- Suppression Fires.** These fires prevent the enemy from observing and engaging friendly elements, and they conceal the movement of friendly companies.
- Concentrated Fires.** These destroy enemy fighting positions near the initial objective.
- Subsequent Fires.** These fires concentrate on deeper objectives.
- Fires During Consolidation.** These fires target likely counterattack routes or enemy withdrawal routes.

Figure 1: The TF FSO must consider the many types of fires he can provide his maneuver forces during the various stages of the deliberate attack.

potent threat our forces could face. The opposing forces (OPFORs) at the CTCs, such as the Combat Maneuver Training



Center (CMTC) in Hohenfels, Germany, or the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, use former Soviet doctrine as their model. Daily, US and Allied TFs are pitted against highly trained and dedicated OPFORs at these CTCs. Having said that, FSOs need to know threat doctrine and tactics to build a successful fire support plan.

For example in preparing for the deliberate attack, the FSO should know how the MRC would dig-in. *FM 100-2-1 The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics*, dated 19 June 1990, states:

A company normally occupies a strong-point 1,500 meters in width and up to 500 meters in depth...normally three platoons defend in one echelon. A reinforced platoon defends a frontage of up to 400 meters...gaps between platoons do not normally exceed 300 meters...distance between vehicles in the MRP [motorized rifle platoon] does not exceed 150 meters. Combat security outposts [CSPs] forward of the company defense deceive the enemy as to the location of the MRC defense...Combat security outposts are within direct fire range of the MRC and withdraw into the MRC defense upon order of the MRB [motorized rifle battalion] commander.

As shown by the black portions of Figure 2, the MRC covers its obstacles with direct and indirect fire designed to force the Blue Forces into the fire sack where concentrated fires of all weapons destroy him. They construct dummy positions for deception as to the location of their MRC. Division and regimental reconnaissance observation posts (OPs) are situated forward of the MRC defense. Finally, the MRC is supported by a combined arms reserve whose mission is to conduct counterattacks against any enemy penetration.

Planning the Deliberate Attack

It isn't enough to destroy a dug-in MRC with fire support assets if the TF assaulting the objective sustains heavy casualties and is rendered combat ineffective. Synchronization continues to be the key to minimizing friendly casualties while destroying the threat.

Targeting and the Concept for Fires. Planning to support a deliberate attack starts with the commander's concept for fires. What does he want fire support to do for the TF?

The following is a commander's concept for fires that the NTC uses as an

example: "I don't care if any fires get executed as long as targets AB1001, AB1002 and AB1003 are executed as Team A moves to SBF-1 [support by fire], then target AB1004 as Team B breaches vic [in the vicinity of] NK 123456." This example shows the level of specificity needed that, when executed effectively, supports a successful deliberate attack.

Initial targeting for a deliberate attack is fairly straightforward. As shown by the gray portion of Figure 2, one technique is for the TF FSO to target the TF S2's template (the black portion). The template shows the S2's assessment of the most likely location of the defense. The FSO targets each templated OP, MRP, the combined arms reserve and the likely counter-attack or withdrawal routes.

The TF engineer provides input into this template, showing obstacle locations based on threat doctrine. The FSO uses this information to plan smoke targets, as necessary, and to calculate the amount of smoke needed to support the scheme of maneuver. The engineer also plans the family of scatterable mines (FASCAM) targets, if allocated.

The FSO shouldn't spend much time on the initial targeting effort. More than likely, his targets aren't the exact locations of the MRC, but they do form the basis for a tentative plan.

Once again, the concept for fires is crucial. No matter where the MRC is on the ground, the concept for fires stays the same. A portion of the commander's concept for fires might read, "CSPs encountered will be engaged with Copperhead." Based on the template, the FSO will plan fires to focus the company/team responsible for executing the targets. In this example, wherever the task force finds the CSPs, it will engage them with Copperhead.

The top-down fire plan from brigade must be detailed enough to identify the critical phases of the battle. For example, the brigade could place one target on each MRC location that the brigade S2 templates, knowing that the TF FSOs will expand the one target per MRC to one per MRP, smoke for obscuration and breaching, etc. This lets the brigade weave a concept for fires for the entire brigade without getting bogged down in targeting that's best conducted by the TF battle staff.

The responsibilities for targets will become clear when the target overlay is superimposed over the scheme of maneuver and the concept of the operation is

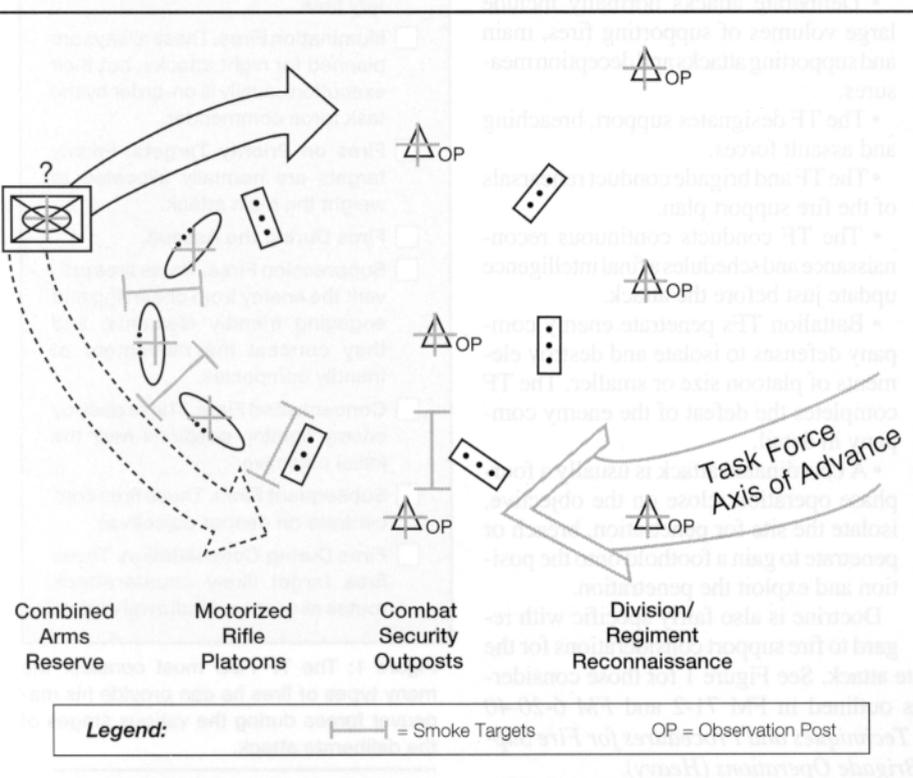


Figure 2: The gray parts of this figure are the task force FSO's targeting on the S2's template (the black).

war-gamed. Doctrinally, the TF scheme of maneuver will have a main and supporting attack. Each company/team will have different responsibilities. *FM 71-1 Tank and Mechanized Infantry Company Team* gives the overwatch or SBF element the mission of placing "destructive, suppressive fires on known and suspected enemy positions, adjust indirect fires to support the maneuver force..." The SBF is the element the TF FSO gives responsibility for controlling and adjusting fires on the objective. (The scout platoon also can do this.)

SOSR. The TF organizes to conduct in-stride or deliberate breaches. (*FM 90-13-1 Combined Arms Breaching Operations* is an excellent reference for TF FSOs. It addresses in detail how a TF conducts breaching operations.)

The task force organizes into breach, support and assault forces. Normally, a company/team has one of these missions. If the company/team has the breaching mission, it will *suppress* the enemy, *obscure* the enemy's view of the obstacle and then *secure* and *reduce* the obstacle (SOSR). The company/team responsible for breaching obstacles will be assigned smoke targets planned on the templated obstacles.

Smoke to screen the TF movement, for deception, for breaching obstacles and on the objective all adds up to a potentially heavy requirement. The TF FSO must plan smoke targets and estimate the number of rounds needed to support the deliberate attack; he then must coordinate with the brigade FSO for artillery smoke. Smoke generators and smoke pots need to be integrated into the plan to make up for the potential shortfall in the amount of smoke needed to accomplish the plan.

The assault force company/team is responsible for lifting and shifting fires as it assaults across the objective. The reserve fire support team (FIST) or combat observation lasing team (COLT) can augment the SBF FIST to provide redundancy (leaving the reserve company FSO and a working radio with his company commander).

Scout Fire Missions. The fire plan needs to address all phases of maneuver, starting with the reconnaissance phase. Several techniques for accessing scout fire missions have been discussed in previous editions of this magazine and are not the subject of this article. But a recommended solution is to send a reserve FIST or COLT with the scouts as a dedicated set of eyes on the objective area. If the scouts go

dismounted, a forward observer (FO) team can go with them—the FIST vehicle becomes a communications platform to relay scout fire missions.

The FSO must take care to maintain contact with the scouts and ensure they can get into a position to call for and adjust fires on the MRC defense at the appropriate time. The FSO should consider retransmission requirements.

He also must plan restricted fire areas (RFAs) around the scouts' final locations to preclude fratricide. The RFAs need to be planned before the scouts depart, so if the TF loses contact with them, the scouts know the area (or areas) they can go to and be reasonably protected from indirect fire fratricide.

While the FSO plans "safe" RFAs, the final RFA depends on what the scouts find and how deep they go. This point alone stresses the need for good communications with the scouts.

Mortars. The FSO needs to position the mortars to support the scouts in the reconnaissance phase. Techniques include putting the mortar fire direction centers (FDCs) on the scout internal radio frequency to accept calls-for-fire or using a roving gun to support illumination and suppression missions. The scouts' primary mission is reconnaissance, and to survive, they need fire support.

Illumination. If the TF sends out dismounted patrols, this requires special attention. The FSO can plan illumination on a fixed, known site to provide orientation (but *not* on the dismounted avenue of approach). He also can use illumination rounds to deceive the enemy. The FSO can place it on a route that's opposite of the one the TF is going to use or shoot it early in and around the objective area. Finally, it can be used for battlefield illumination and for marking points on the ground (such as target reference points). The TF FSO should coordinate with the TFS4 for extra white phosphorous rounds, as necessary.

Preparatory Fires. The FSO has several employment considerations if preparatory fires are to be used. Preparatory fires degrade surprise and start the survivability clock for the firing platoons shooting the prep. Such fires need to be tied to a battlefield event, such as the beginning of the TF assault—as opposed to the TF just crossing the line of departure (LD) or a phase line. Finally, the FSO must strive for observed, adjusted fires (possibly as part of the reconnaissance effort).

Preparing for the Attack

Preparing for the deliberate attack boils down to two critical areas: refinements and rehearsals. Refinement of targets for the deliberate attack comes from the TF reconnaissance effort and the S2's updated situational template.

Refinement by company/team FSOs should be minimal. Company FSOs devote their efforts to ensuring their portion of the plan will be successful. They build redundancy in communications, survivability and visibility into the plan.

The TF FSO must ensure the company FSOs understand the target locations will probably change, based on the TF recon effort but that the concept for the targets will stay the same. Sometime before LD, the TF S2 will refine his situational template. The TF commander will change the TF scheme of maneuver, as needed, to attack the actual MRC location. The updated situational template and any changes to the scheme of maneuver become the basis for refining the fire plan.

Target refinement is a task critical to the success of the operation. The challenge to the TF FSO is to disseminate the refinements to the direct support (DS) battalion, mortars and the FIST in a timely manner. Time will determine how many changes the TF FSO can make.

To illustrate, company FSOs must send the changes to the FOs and platoon leaders during a very busy time—usually when the company/team is preparing to leave its tactical assembly area (TAA) on the way to the LD. After the DS battalion gets the refinements, it still has to distribute the new targets and grids to the firing batteries...and so on.

The second critical task during the preparation phase is rehearsals. Synchronization of the battlefield operating systems (BOS) is made possible through the rehearsal process. Many articles about the importance and process of conducting rehearsals have been written for this and other journals. But a few important points need to be reiterated.

- The company/team commanders responsible for executing specific portions of the fire plan must take the time to make it work.

- Company FSOs must participate in detailed company rehearsals that emphasize the integration of fires with maneuver. Rehearsals (maneuver and fire support) at all levels should focus on the critical parts of the plan. Synchronizing the BOS

for the close assault, obstacle breaching and consolidation on the objective are examples of such tasks.

- Critical primary and backup observers must rehearse. Backup observers enter the appropriate fire direction nets and check communications and fire support responsibilities before LD.

Executing the Deliberate Attack

FM 6-20-20 Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Fire Support at the Battalion Task Force and Below states, "Synchronized, violent execution is the essence of decisive combat."

For a deliberate attack to be successful, the TF must know the location, disposition and orientation of all weapons systems in the MRC before it crosses the LD. The reconnaissance effort must get a scout or attached observer in a position overwatching the MRC defense. He becomes the eyes to observe and adjust the prep, if used. RFAs for elements forward of the LD are put into effect.

The prep is normally part of a larger brigade prep, so there could be periods when fires don't fall on the MRC (because they're being massed on the sister TF's objective). Also, any deception measures that require fire support participation (smoke, false prep, etc.) will be happening.

The enemy divisional and regimental reconnaissance observation posts encountered on the way to the objective are engaged in accordance with the engagement criteria and concept for fires. These OPs must be neutralized; otherwise, the TF will be pounded by observed fire as it moves to the objective. As the TF approaches the first obstacle belt, the company FSOs use suppressive fires and smoke to assist the breaching efforts (the suppress and obscure of SOSR).

As the TF closes on the MRC, fires are continually adjusted on the MRC by elements of the scout platoon. When the SBF element gets into position, priority of fires switches to this element and the scouts become a redundant set of eyes to control and adjust fires on the objective.

The SBF FIST (possibly reinforced by a COLT or other observation asset) continues to engage the MRC defense as the assault force gets into its position and prepares to assault. The SBF element builds a smoke screen that isolates from the rest of the MRC the single MRP the force is going to assault (see Figure 3).

The maneuver intent here is for the assault force to attack one MRP or, preferably, one BMP (Soviet amphibious infantry combat vehicle) squad at a time. This allows the combat power ratio of direct fire systems to be at least 3:1 and preferably 6:1 or 9:1. To achieve overwhelming combat power, the SBF element must isolate and destroy (with direct and indirect fires) one MRP, while suppressing the rest of the MRC. Dual-purpose improved conventional munition (DPICM) is probably not the round of choice due to the possibility of duds on the objective the TF infantrymen must clear.

The SBF element continues to call indirect fires on the isolated MRP and the adjacent MRP until the assault force signals it's ready to assault and to lift and shift fires. At this time, the SBF FIST ceases the fires on the isolated and adjacent MRPs and takes the third MRP under fire. The reason the FSO shifts the indirect fires off the adjacent MRP is to prevent the effects of friendly fire from hampering the assault force (this is obviously terrain and mission dependent). Direct fire continues to suppress the adjacent MRP.

A restricted fire line (or final coordination line) is put into effect to protect the assault force from the effects of direct and indirect fire. This "line" must be mutually understood by the SBF and assault forces and their respective fire supporters. Smoke is maintained to degrade the MRC's system of interlocking or mutually supporting fires and to allow the assaulting forces to penetrate the MRC's defense.

After the first MRP is overrun, the assault force signals "lift and shift" (using FM or visual signal), and direct fire is shifted to the third and final MRP. A new restricted fire line is put into effect.

As the integrity of the MRC defense is threatened, the location and status of the combined arms reserve becomes the TF's primary concern. At this point, the TF scouts would be in the best position to observe the reserve's activities. Indirect fire is laid on the reserve's likely counterattack route or the MRC's withdrawal route.

Smoke is continually adjusted by the SBF company/team to isolate the adjacent MRP. As the mortars expend their basic load of smoke, they switch to high-explosive (HE) rounds to suppress the enemy antiarmor systems as the artillery is shifted off the objective. The final consideration for the TF FSO is orienting his FISTs and the mortar platoon for the follow-on mission.

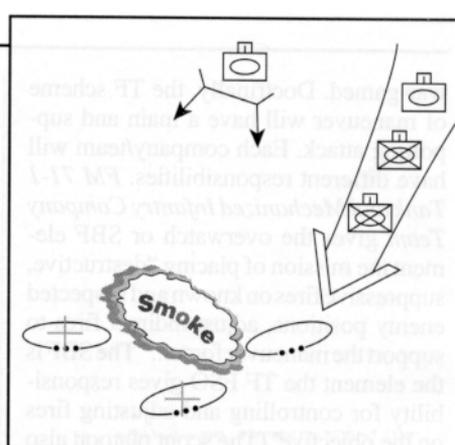


Figure 3: An enemy motorized rifle platoon is isolated by a combination of smoke and direct and indirect fire.

For the sake of brevity, this article does not discuss the roles of other fire supporters key to the success of the deliberate attack, such as the fire support coordinator (FSCOORD), brigade FSO and DS battalion S3. Discussions about close air support (CAS) and radars also were omitted for the same reason.

This article focuses on what the TF FSO does to help the commander synchronize fires with maneuver in the deliberate attack. Integrating fire support in close operations is an art and requires intensive coordination and practice. While nothing substitutes for experience, FSOs can prepare themselves by being well-grounded in maneuver and threat doctrine.



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