

Company FIST in the Desert— 1st Cav in Kuwait

Desert operations are the most challenging of any for company fire support teams—the featureless terrain makes navigation and distance judgment extremely difficult while affording few good observation posts. During the 2d “Black Jack” Brigade (1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas) deployment to Kuwait for Operation Intrinsic Action, we learned many valuable lessons specific to fire support execution in the desert. With the possibility that the desert may well be the stage for a future major conflict, we hope these tips will help other company fire support teams (FISTs) deliver “indirect destruction.”

- *Use the precision lightweight global positioning system receiver (PLGR) to report the forward line of own troops (FLOT).* Desert navigation often involves traveling long distances in relatively straight lines. Because the FIST vehicle (FISTV) travels a set distance behind the lead element in a company formation, use the FISTV’s PLGR grid, adjusted to reflect that distance, to report the FLOT to the battalion fire support element (FSE). This takes the guesswork and map spotting out of movement.

- *Use company waypoints as triggers.* Because they’re much more frequent than phase lines (which vary widely, depending on who copied the graphics), PLGR waypoints make excellent triggers. Using PLGR-to-PLGR data transfers allows every vehicle to have the exact same waypoints; we commonly integrated PLGR transfers into the com-



SGT Kirchoffer with the FIST's ground/vehicular laser locator designator (G/VLLD) in Kuwait.

pany troop leading procedures. During execution, the fire support officer (FSO) can execute fires by monitoring the lead platoon as it reports successive waypoints to the company commander.

- *Use ground burst illumination to mark target reference points (TRPs).* This technique is effective both at night and during the day, allowing the maneuver unit to quickly orient its direct fire weapons in an environment with few natural reference points.

Fire ground burst illumination targets as a group, timing it to land just as the company is rolling into position and

preparing to engage. End the mission as soon as all platoons are set. This aids the commander both in orienting his platoons and controlling the direct fire fight.

- *Use the targeting head to define triggers in the defense.* Because the desert has so few prominent terrain features, triggers for brigade and task force targets are often imaginary—for example, “the lead MRC (motorized rifle company) crosses 17 Easting.” The FIST can use its vehicle’s targeting station control display (TSCD) with its range, direction, vertical angle and azimuth ring features to quickly identify triggers on the ground and observe them. This takes the guesswork and map spotting out of defense execution.

- *Use mortars aggressively.* Because mortars are more responsive and controllable than Field Artillery, commanders can fire them “danger close” in the attack. Ceasing FA suppression fires on the objective during the assault just as maneuver elements are within a few hundred meters of it buys the commander precious minutes at a critical time. Mortar fires then can be shifted quickly beyond the objective, forcing a counterattacking enemy to deploy prematurely.

The key to success with mortars is a good terrain analysis and well planned triggers and rehearsals at all levels from sand table to mounted. This ensures accurate timing in ceasing the suppression mission, creating, in turn, a truly synchronized battlefield.

The desert, with its harsh environment and lack of many garrison range restrictions, creates unique training opportunities. By making productive use of equipment—the PLGR for reporting the FLOT and defining offensive triggers, the targeting head for emplacing defensive triggers and mortars for suppression and TRP marking—the company FIST can shape the battlefield to support the maneuver force. Units can prepare for future desert war by integrating some or all of these lessons into home station training.

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