

Fire Support Battle Command

The Dual Role of the DS Battalion Commander

by Colonel Richard P. Formica

Fire Support is What We Do

That means we ensure the combined arms commander has massed or precision fires where he wants them and when he needs them—both FA and fires from other fire support assets. To achieve this, the direct support (DS) battalion commander must focus all elements of his FA battalion—gun sections, fire direction centers (FDCs), supporting sections and teams—and his fire supporters to provide timely, accurate and lethal fires. As the DS battalion commander, he plays a dual role: FA battalion commander and brigade fire support coordinator (FSCOORD). Each role brings unique responsibilities and distinct expectations.

As the FA battalion commander, he holds a special position in the battalion and division artillery. The soldiers expect a lot from him. He must lead from the front and by example. He must be visible. He must be present to personally look his soldiers in the eye and know they're being taken care of and are ready for the fight. The command sergeant major (CSM), the battalion executive officer (XO) and the operations officer (S3) assist him, but he alone exercises command. Leaders care for and serve soldiers and their families.

As the FSCOORD, he holds a special position in the brigade combat team (BCT). He maintains a personal relationship with the brigade commander, is normally afforded tremendous access to him and serves as one of his closest tactical advisors. He is assisted by the brigade's fire support officer (FSO), but he alone brings the profes-

sional maturity, the wherewithal and the authority to focus the effects of fires throughout the brigade area of operations. This brings a price: time and energy that otherwise would be devoted to commanding his battalion.

Is this a dilemma for the FSCOORD? Is he operating at a disadvantage because of these two seemingly mutually exclusive demands on his time and energy? I don't think so.

The DS battalion commander must master the art of fire support battle command. This article addresses how the commander-FSCOORD does that before, during and after the fight.

Before the Fight. Competing demands on the DS battalion commander's time begins before the fight—during the military decision-making process. (MDMP). There's a multitude of activities occurring simultaneously, each with a claim on his time and energy: brigade planning; the corresponding DS battalion planning effort; fire support planning and preparations; battalion and battery preparations for combat and sustainment operations; combined arms, fire support and FA technical rehearsals; and pre-execution checks.

It all begins with brigade planning. This is a critical time for the FSCOORD to be able to understand the brigade commander's intent and see how the brigade plan is developing. This first-hand information helps him prepare the fire support plan and anticipate DS battalion activities that will represent what the battalion can (and cannot) do in the upcoming operation.



Three of the brigade activities in the MDMP are critical for the FSCOORD and demand his personal involvement: the mission analysis briefing to the brigade commander, receipt of the brigade commander's planning guidance and the brigade course of action (COA) wargame.

It is during the mission analysis phase of planning that the battle staff begins to shape the brigade's approach to the upcoming operation. While the brigade S2 and S3 are predominant during mission analysis, the brigade FSO also develops and presents his estimate of the situation and gives the commander an update on the current and projected fire support status. The FSCOORD can discuss that status with the brigade commander and issue guidance and priorities to the FA battalion as necessary. More importantly, the FSCOORD is present to hear the staff estimates and get his "head in the game." He starts the MDMP in synch with the brigade battle staff and BCT commander.



After receiving the mission analysis briefing, the brigade commander issues his initial planning guidance. For the FSCOORD to be in tune with the commander, it's imperative he be present to hear the guidance in person. The FSCOORD can discuss any issues with the commander, obtain clarification where necessary and provide immediate feedback and guidance to the brigade FSO and then to the DS battalion S3 at the tactical operations center (TOC).

Armed with the brigade commander's guidance and in synch with the battle staff, the FSCOORD can shift his attention to the DS battalion TOC. If time is available, this is a good opportunity to go to the TOC, receive the mission analysis briefing and issue his guidance in person. The artillery battalion S3 and S2 then complete mission analysis and begin developing COAs for the FA support plan. This visit to the TOC provides an opportunity for the commander to meet with the battalion lead-

ership and battery commanders and check on the status of the battalion and its soldiers...to exercise command.

However, the FSCOORD must return to the brigade TOC for the COA wargame, the pivotal event for fires in the brigade planning process. The wargame is truly the brigade's first and most formal targeting team meeting. The entire battle staff comes together and identifies enemy high-value targets by battlefield operating system (BOS), determines which are high-pay-off to the brigade and selects the right attack system with which to kill them.

During the wargame, the FSCOORD and his FSO solidify the essential fire support tasks (EFSTs) for the fight. Engagement areas (EA) and targets are selected—and more. The brigade observation plan is developed. The delineation between the brigade deep and close fight is made. Moreover, the FSCOORD can begin planning the critical FA tasks (CFATs) required to execute the evolving fire support plan.

The wargame is critical for the synchronization of the brigade plan and is essential for the development of the fire support plan.

As the brigade orders process continues, the FSCOORD splits his time between the (1) brigade TOC where the FSO completes the fire support plan, (2) maneuver battalion TOCs where he can personally give guidance and instruction to the task force FSOs and (3) DS battalion area where he can guide the development of the FA support plan or visit batteries to supervise preparations for the fight.

Once the plans are finished and briefed, the FSCOORD turns his attention to preparation for the fight. Again, there are competing demands for his time. He must check the brigade observation plan, review the task force fire support and observation plans for fidelity with the brigade plan and issue the FA support plan to the batteries.

Rehearsals are critical elements of the preparation phase. They allow the DS battalion commander to wear both hats: FSCOORD and FA battalion commander. Rehearsals are conducted at all levels. There are several that demand the FSCOORD's attention. He must attend the division rock drill and monitor the division fire support rehearsal on the radio. The FSCOORD uses the brigade's combined arms rehearsal to check the synchronization of the brigade plan with the fire support plan and the DS battalion's FA support plan. He employs the brigade FSO and the targeting officer (TO) to conduct the fires portion of the brigade rehearsal. The DS battalion S3, fire direction officer (FDO) and S2 also participate. They portray the DS battalion's role in the brigade fight. This approach allows the DS battalion commander to perform as the FSCOORD for the brigade and commander of the supporting FA battalion.

In addition, the FSCOORD participates in the brigade fire support rehearsal and monitors the FA technical rehearsal. Both usually are conducted over the radio net, giving the FSCOORD the opportunity to participate from any location.

The maneuver battalions and FA battalion also conduct rehearsals, usually in the form of rock drills. Ideally, the FSCOORD would attend them all. The reality is that he can't. Often they are scheduled unavoidably at the same time.

1. Is the force protected?

- 100% of soldiers are accounted for. CSM/S3
- 100% of sensitive items are accounted for. CSM/S3
- Battle buddies are assigned. CSM
- Adequate water is on hand- also, ice. XO
- RFAs, NFAs and ACAs are planned and rehearsed. Bde FSO/S3
- CFZs and CFFZs are planned and sent to the radar. Bde FSO/S3
- CASEVAC is rehearsed. XO
- Religious support plan is in place. XO
- Sleep plan is in effect. XO/S3

2. Are the EFSTs identified?

- Brigade commander's intent is understood. FSCOORD/Bde FSO
- Brigade commander knows what fires can/cannot do. FSCOORD
- Tasks are communicated to DS and R battalion TOCs. FSCOORD/Bde FSO
- CAS is planned and available. Bde FSO

3. Is the fire support plan adequate?

- Brigade fire plan meets the commander's intent. Bde FSO
- Eight elements of a target are determined.* Bde FSO
- Fire plan is linked to R&S plan. Bde FSO
- Focus of fires is on HPTs. FSCOORD
- Transition targets are identified. Bde FSO
- FSCM are planned. Bde FSO

4. Are we ready to fight the plan?

- FA technical, FM fire support and combined arms rehearsals are completed. FSCOORD/Bde FSO/S3
- Observers are in position with G/VLLDs checked. Bde FSO
- Communications is operational, both voice and digital. Bde FSO/S3
- Retransmission is in place and operational. S3
- FISTVs are operational. Bde FSO/XO
- CAS availability is confirmed. Bde FSO

5. Is the FA battalion set?

- Battalion and platoon FDOs understand the brigade targets. S3
- EFSTs are understood down to the platoon level. S3
- CFATs are developed and understood down to the platoon level. CSM/XO/S3
- FA positioning plan is set and synchronized with brigade and the radar. S3

- Five requirements of accurate, predicted fires are met. CSM/S3
- Ammunition is on the guns with the right types in the right platoons. S3/XO
- Guns are safe and ready. CSM/S3

6. Are we prepared to survive the fight?

- Firing batteries' defenses are set as well as the battalion TOC's and combat trains.' CSM/S3
- POCs have ADA warnings. S3
- Platoons know where the minefields are. S3
- Appropriate MOPP level protection is in effect. S3/CSM
- Chemical alarms are out and working. S3/CSM
- Decontamination plan is in place. XO/S3
- Combat lifesavers are equipped and ready to go. XO/S3
- Each platoon has rehearsed CASEVAC. XO/S3

7. Can we sustain the battalion?

- Enough fuel is on hand and in the guns. XO
- Personnel replacements are on hand. XO
- Howitzers, FISTVs and M577s are in the fight. XO
- Replacement parts and system are in place and access is rehearsed. XO
- Emergency ammunition is in the combat trains. S3/XO

8. Can we communicate with each other?

- Digital communications is established. S3
- Bde CMD, Bde FS, Bn CMD and D/A CMD nets are operational. Bde FSO/S3
- Retransmission is functional and rehearsed. S3
- FIST communications is operational. Bde FSO
- All have practiced jumping the net. Bde FSO/S3

9. Have we coordinated with the right folks?

- Div Arty knows our requests for additional fires. S3
- Adjacent brigade and division FSEs know our plan. ... Bde FSO
- We have the division FSCM. Bde FSO
- Maneuver units understand our FA positioning. S3
- Have coordinated with the ALO, EWSO, brigade aviation officer and engineer. Bde FSO

10. Are we postured for the next fight?

- Next mission is anticipated. FSCOORD/Bde FSO/S3
- DS and R battalion TOCs have our WARNO. Bde FSO
- Brigade and Div Arty have our forecasted RSR. S3
- Brigade and the FSB have our casualty and battle loss projections. XO/S3
- Consolidation and reconstitution is planned. XO
- Troops are disciplined, fed, rested and motivated. CSM/XO

*Purpose, Engagement Criteria, Trigger Point, Desired Effects, End State, Primary Executer, Alternate Executer and Delivery Asset

Legend:

ACAs = Airspace Coordination Areas	DS = Direct Support	G/VLLDs = Ground/Vehicular Laser Locator Designators
ADA = Air Defense Artillery	EFSTs = Essential Fire Support Tasks	HPTs = High-Payoff Targets
ALO = Air Liaison Officer	EWSO = Electronic Warfare Staff Officer	MOPP = Mission-Oriented Protective Posture
Bde = Brigade	FA = Field Artillery	NFAs = No-Fire Areas
Bn = Battalion	FDOs = Fire Direction Officers	POCs = Platoon Operations Centers
CAS = Close Air Support	FIST = Fire Support Team	R = Reinforcing
CASEVAC = Casualty Evacuation	FISTVs = FIST Vehicles	RFAs = Restricted Fire Areas
CFATs = Critical FA Tasks	FS = Fire Support	R&S = Reconnaissance and Surveillance
CFZs = Critical Friendly Zones	FSB = Forward Support Battalion	RSR = Required Supply Rate
CFFZs = Call-for-Fire Zones	FSCM = Fire Support Coordinating Measures	TOCs = Tactical Operations Centers
CMD = Command	FSCOORD = Fire Support Coordinator	WARNO = Warning Order
CSM = Command Sergeant Major	FSEs = Fire Support Elements	XO = Executive Officer
D/A = Division Artillery	FSO = Fire Support Officer	
Div Arty = Division Artillery		



Before the fight, the DS battalion commander is very busy planning fires for the BCT and ensuring the FA battalion can help deliver them.

The FSCOORD should attend those rehearsals that best enable him to influence the fight. He might attend the rehearsal of the main effort task force or that of a task force whose fire plan is essential to the brigade fight. Or he may opt to go to the artillery battalion TOC to supervise the FA battalion rock drill. Anytime he's back in the battalion area, he can check on the status of the battalion, meet with leaders and commanders and visit soldiers.

Before the fight, the FSCOORD is busy. To ensure the battalion is ready for the fight, the commander participates where necessary and delegates where appropriate. He must balance his time between his FSCOORD and commander roles and depend on his subordinates to do their part.

One of the tools the FSCOORD can use to help focus his dual-role efforts is the "FSCOORD's Top Ten" (see the figure). It's a checklist that identifies each of the EFSTs and CFATs and the battalion's field grade officers responsible for planning and executing them. The FSCOORD's Top Ten is generic and must be adapted to a specific mission. Certain tasks take on more or less importance in different missions and in the various phases of the fight.

During the Fight. The FSCOORD must position himself where he can best observe the effects of fires and direct them as needed during the fight. That means positioning on the battlefield near the brigade commander. In the future, as we exploit information technologies, this could mean in the brigade TOC or some other digitized command and con-

trol facility. But today—and for the next several years—that means he must be forward positioned to see and influence the fight.

This is a problem for the FSCOORD. The brigade commander directs the fight from his battle track, an M113-series vehicle equipped with the communications network necessary to command the brigade. The FSCOORD must be collocated. He must see and understand the battle as the brigade commander sees and understands it. Therefore, the FSCOORD needs to fight from a forward-positioned battle track. Current tables of organization and equipment (TOEs) don't recognize this requirement. Many units have taken M113s "out of hide," equipped them with radios and other equipment and resourced them with fire support specialists—also "out of hide." From this forward-positioned battle track beside the brigade commander's track, the FSCOORD can see and direct the fires.

This surfaces another TOE problem. As the FSCOORD goes forward in his out-of-hide battle track with the minimum number of radios and without a digital device, his advanced FA tactical data system (AFATDs) designed for his high-mobility, multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) is in his HMMWV parked back at the brigade TOC. This means that while the FA battalion and its fire support structure strive to improve responsiveness of fires through digital systems, the FSCOORD operates in the voice mode only. The effect on the fire support system is that fires must be directed and focused on the voice net. Until the FSCOORD is doctrinally equipped with a battle track and adequate voice and digital systems, the brigade fire support system is destined to remain on the voice net—or until situational awareness matures to the point that he has the information he needs to focus fires from another location.

Collocated with the brigade commander, the FSCOORD is in the best position to direct and coordinate the massed, lethal effects of fires. As the FA battalion commander, he maintains contact with the battalion and battery leaders on the battalion's command net. He is attuned to the battalion scheme of maneuver, maintains visibility of its available combat power, and tracks its casualty, ammunition and maintenance status. During the fight, the FSCOORD ensures safe, accurate,

timely and lethal fires as he exercises fire support battle command.

After the Fight. After the fight, the DS battalion commander maintains his dual focus. As the FSCOORD, he assesses the status of the brigade's fire support assets and issues orders and priorities to begin reconstitution and recovery operations. He also issues initial planning guidance to posture the brigade's fire support systems for the next operation. As the FA battalion commander, he returns to the battalion TOC and issues the orders to focus the battalion's recovery operations. He also provides the battalion leadership his initial planning guidance for the next operation in person.

Once he has met with the CSM and XO, the commander assesses his battalion's support status. He checks and reinvigorates the battalion's administrative and logistical systems.

He visits the batteries and soldiers. Face-to-face, he reassures them of their contribution to the previous fight, assesses and influences their welfare and begins their preparation for the next fight. Only by this face-to-face contact with soldiers can the battalion commander maintain a good fix on the pulse of the battalion.

After some rest, the battalion commander is ready to return to the brigade TOC and resume his role as the brigade FSCOORD for the next fight. He plays a challenging but critical role in providing timely, accurate and lethal fires in support of the brigade's combat operations.



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