



# TTP for Fire Support from an Airborne CP

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The Navy's E-6B TACAMO/ABNCP. Photo courtesy of Raytheon E-Systems

**C**ommand and control during a critical phase of an operation can be greatly enhanced by a battle staff orbiting overhead in an airborne command and control center. The fire support officer (FSO) aboard this airborne command post (CP) is responsible for coordinating fires for the force on the ground during vulnerable periods of reduced or nonexistent fire support communications connectivity. This situation poses unique fire support challenges, but no published tactics, techniques or procedures (TTP) exist to guide the FSO.

This article covers the mission of the airborne CP, the role and responsibilities of the FSO aboard the aircraft and a discussion of the procedures for processing requests-for-fires. While several commands routinely employ airborne CPs and have developed procedures to fit their needs, this article is based on the procedures used by the XVIII Airborne Corps airborne CP battle staff during forcible entry operations.

## Airborne CP Mission

The Airborne CP temporarily can serve as either the primary or an alternate means of command and control during critical phases of an operation. The airborne CP also may enhance command and control by serving as a communications relay between two CPs on land or between a CP on land and one aboard a ship. Contingency forces typically employ an airborne CP to exercise command and control during initial entry operations.

The Air Force acronym "ABCCC," which stands for airborne battlefield command and control center (specific

type of aircraft configuration), is frequently used to describe any airborne CP. I use the term airborne CP as a generic term for any aircraft with a command center capability.

Three platforms in the Air Force inventory can serve as airborne CPs: the EC-130 ABCCC, a C-130 or C-141B configured with the joint airborne communications center/CP (JACC/CP) and the EC-135C (used by the XVIII Airborne Corps). Although Army units have used all three platforms in the recent past, plans call for the JACC/CP shelters to be transferred to the Air Force Reserve and for the Air Force to retain exclusive use of the ABCCC.

The Air Force also plans to phase the EC-135C out of its inventory with its capabilities replaced by the Navy's E-6B TACAMO/ABNCP ("Take Command and Move Out"/Airborne CP). The E-6B is an E-6A aircraft modified to accommodate a CP and accomplish the dual missions of serving as an airborne CP and strategic weapons system. The first E-6B was delivered in late 1997.

The Air Force EC-135C used by the XVIII Airborne Corps is a Boeing 707 modified as a command and control

platform. The aircraft are assigned to the 55th Wing located at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. The EC-135C has five ultra high frequency (UHF) radios, four high frequency (HF) transceivers, four HF receivers and satellite communications (SATCOM).

When an Army unit uses the airborne CP, additional communications equipment can be installed by the G6 to tailor the communications requirements for the unit and mission. Army-installed communications equipment cannot be connected into the consoles at the battle staff work stations and must be monitored using separate headsets, handsets or speaker boxes. The corps fire support nets operate over a HF radio organic to the aircraft and an Army-installed single-channel ground and airborne radio system (SINCGARS).

## Role and Responsibility of the FSO

Up to 14 work stations with communications consoles on the EC-135C are available for use by the airborne CP battle staff. At a minimum, the XVIII



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Position	Staff Element
Airborne CP Commander	Corps Deputy Commanding General
Battle Staff Leader	Corps Deputy Chief of Staff
G3 Operations Officer	G3 Current Operations
Fire Support Officer (FSO)	Corps Fire Support Element (FSE)
G2 Operations Officer	G2 Operations
Communications Officer	G6
Air Liaison Officer (ALO)	Corps ALO

Figure 1: Battle Staff Organization. The XVIII Airborne Corps mans the airborne CP with the personnel listed in this figure. Staff augmentees and component LNOs (as required by the mission) round out the staff.

Airborne Corps mans the EC-135C with the battle staff listed in Figure 1. Staff augmentees and component liaison officers (LNOs), as required by the mission, round out the battle staff.

The battle staff is seated on the aircraft to allow face-to-face interaction among the airborne CP commander, G2, G3 and fire support coordinator (FSCoord). An example of the seating arrangement used in an EC-135C is depicted in Figure 2.

The airborne CP FSO is a normally a major assigned to the corps fire support element (FSE). In a forcible entry scenario, he has four principle functions. (1) He monitors the execution of planned pre-assault fires; (2) He coordinates the attack of targets of opportunity during the pre-assault period and immediately after the initial entry until the entry force can coordinate its own fire support; (3) He monitors the fire support situation and keeps the airborne CP

commander and battle staff updated; and (4) He advises the battle staff on fire support matters.

**Mission Preparation.** Mission preparation should be ongoing continuously with the airborne CP battle staff officers compiling and updating battle books that correspond with contingency plans that may require an airborne CP. Preparation for a specific airborne CP mission begins during execution planning when the potential need for an airborne CP is identified, and it ends with movement to the departure airfield for the joint mission brief.

The FSO's preparatory tasks vary depending on the overall mission and role of the airborne CP, but the following tasks are standard when preparing for a forcible entry scenario.

- The FSO collects and (or) prepares the equipment and materials required for the mission. He also updates his battle book (see in Figure 3 on Page 28).

- The FSO discusses the planned pre-assault fires with the component providing the fires. Normally, pre-assault fires are air-delivered, so the FSO coordinates with the air liaison officer (ALO) and JFACC LNO. Key information all three battle staff officers must understand are the targets to be struck and the communications links between observers, command and control platforms and shooters.

- The FSO develops and wargames fire support contingency plans. He includes a plan on how to adapt to losses of pre-assault fires assets and changes to forcible entry times. He develops flow charts or checklists explaining how to execute the contingencies. For example, if the forcible entry is delayed, he must know who he contacts (and how) to coordinate changes to pre-assault fires.

- The FSO compiles a fire support execution checklist. The list is a single document that consolidates critical fire support events and other operational events influencing fire support, such as the weather decision time, drop times and station times for aerial fire support assets. The primary source of information for the checklist is the operations plan (OPLAN).

Other relevant information can be obtained from the headquarters staff. For example, information about station times and refueling times for air assets are available from the ALO or JFACC LNO. The events should be integrated by time and the document should be laid out in an easy-to-read format.

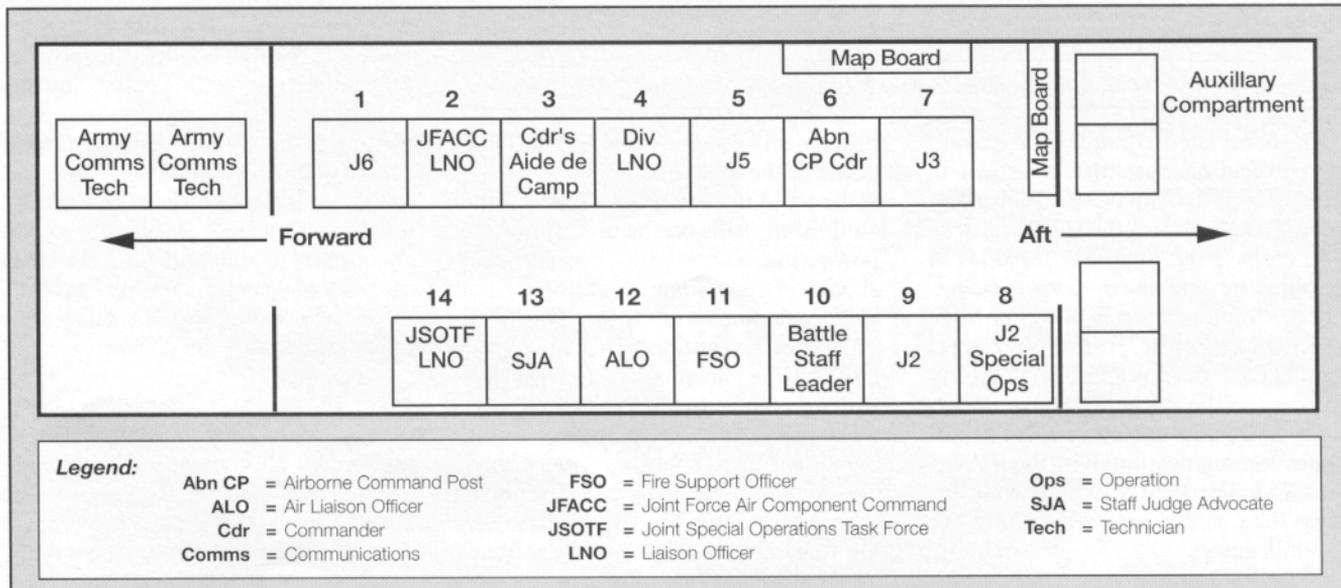


Figure 2: This figure shows the XVIII Airborne Corps Airborne CP designed for the Joint Task Force for forcible entry into Haiti (Air Force EC-135C).

- Fire Support Execution Checklist (Example in Figure 4)
- Target List (Target locations must be identified by both latitude and longitude and UTM coordinates. If limiting collateral damage is an issue, a column addressing the collateral damage risk—high, medium or low—should be added.)\*
- Execution Checklist (G3 Plans)\*
- Go or No-Go Criteria for Forcible Entry (G3 Plans)\*
- Decision Support Matrix (G3 Plans)\*
- Mission Statement and Commander's Intent (G3 Plans)
- Sketch of Anticipated Enemy Forces at H-Hour (G2)
- CCIR and PIR (G2)
- Operational Sketches of the AO and Concept for Forcible Entry (G3 Plans)
- Objectives, Endstates and Tasks of Each Subordinate Unit by Phase (G3 Plans)
- Synchronization Matrix (G3 Plans)\*
- General Information on Airflow (This includes the number of personnel and heavy-drop aircraft and the time frames for the drops.) (G3 Air or G3 Plans)\*
- Communications Reference Sheet (This is a graphic and/or matrix depicting the nets, subscribers, call signs/call words and frequencies.) (G6)
- Time Line for the Aircraft Mission and Seating Chart (G3 Operations)
- Fire Plan (Include conditions under which fires may be employed.) (FSE)\*
- ROE Summary (SJA)
- No-Strike/Protected Target List (G5)
- General information on Pre-Assault Fires (This includes aircraft station times for assets; refuel times for aircraft, as applicable; capabilities of assets; and a list of problems that may be encountered along with possible solutions.) (G3 Plans and JFACC LNO)\*
- Fire Support Annex from the OPORD
- Tabs with Target Graphics (This includes imagery, description and significance of the target, enemy units and weapons at the target and a discussion of specified collateral damage risk.) (G2)

\*Provides detailed back-up data for the Fire Support Execution Checklist.

**Legend:**

<b>AO</b> = Area of Operations	<b>OPORD</b> = Operations Order
<b>CCIR</b> = Commander's Critical Information Requirements	<b>PIR</b> = Priority Information Requirements
<b>FSE</b> = Fire Support Element	<b>ROE</b> = Rules of Engagement
<b>JFACC LNO</b> = Joint Force Air Component Command Liaison Officer	<b>SJA</b> = Staff Judge Advocate
	<b>UTM</b> = Universal Transverse Mercator

Figure 3: Contents of Airborne Command Post Fire Support Officer (FSO) Battle Book

An abbreviated example of a fire support execution checklist is shown in Figure 4. The example depicts an operations-other-than-war (OOTW) scenario. The corps is the joint task force (JTF) headquarters and the division conducting the forcible entry is the army force (ARFOR). The airborne CP is the alternate JTF CP but has approval authority for fires in the ARFOR area of operations (AO) until the entry force establishes communications with the JFACC ABCCC. The JFACC will provide the only fires assets available during the forcible entry.

• The FSO prepares for and participates in rehearsals, brief backs and the joint mission brief. As always, fire sup-

port rehearsals are critical. If the actual phase of the operation the airborne CP is involved in cannot be rehearsed, the battle staff drills on the procedures for processing requests-for-fire. The drill should include some tasks to test the staff's reaction to unexpected events.

**Mission Execution.** This phase begins with the joint mission brief and ends with the completion of the mission.

The FSO's first action upon boarding the aircraft is to check the fire support log. All battle staff officers are required to maintain a log. They don't limit the log to actions occurring in their functional areas but log all reports and actions in the airborne CP to stay fully informed of operations. In particular,

each battle staff officer tracks every event on the execution checklist.

Prior to takeoff, the FSO ensures the communications panel is set up for the HF net and SINCGARS is operational and secure. Upon release of communications systems to users, the FSO conducts communications checks on both nets.

During the flight, the FSO keeps the battle staff apprised of the fire support situation. The airborne CP battle staff conducts an update over the intercom on a regular basis (i.e., hourly). During these updates, each battle staff member briefs key events that occurred in his functional area since the last update.

The FSO monitors the execution of planned pre-assault fires and coordinates changes as required. He stays abreast of the fire support situation as it develops—targets attacked, any battle damage assessment (BDA) reported, fires assets available and changes to fire support coordinating measures (FSCM).

When the airborne CP is the primary command center, it hands off command and control to the assault CP or another specified surface-based CP after completing the forcible entry. Before going off station, the FSO ensures the fire support personnel at that CP can communicate with all other stations on the fire support HF net

## Processing Requests-for-Fire

A forcible entry operations can be viewed as having three distinct events that may require the airborne CP to coordinate fires. The first is the pre-assault event that begins at a specified time before the forcible entry. The purpose of pre-assault fires is to destroy or neutralize threats to the entry force and its airlift. The second event is during the airborne assault when heavy equipment drops are occurring. The third event, the actual entry, begins with the insertion of personnel and continues until the entry force has communications established to coordinate fires on its own.

Two sources can request fires during the pre-assault and heavy drop events. One is special reconnaissance (SR) or long-range surveillance (LRS) teams inserted earlier. The second are supporting aircraft. In many cases, these sources will report an observation rather than actually request fires. The airborne CP battle staff assesses the report and determines if the potential target should

be attacked. During and after the entry, observers on the ground from the assaulting force might be a third source for fires requests.

**Fire Coordination.** Two critical coordination issues affecting fires are compliance with the rules of engagement (ROE) and clearance of fires. To ensure target attack is in compliance with the ROE, a Staff Judge Advocate (SJA) officer should be part of the airborne CP battle staff.

Clearance of fires considerations correspond to the three events: pre-assault, heavy drops during an airborne assault and actual entry. The FSO's principle concern during the pre-assault is ensuring no-fire areas (NFAs) are not violated. During an airborne operation, the AO becomes the responsibility of the assaulting force when the heavy drop begins. From this point on, the entry force clears fires. LRS teams may be able to provide clearance, but in many cases, aerial observers from the entry force have to clear the fires. For example, if AC-130 gunships are providing pre-assault fires and an LNO from the entry force is aboard the aircraft, prior coordination should be made for him to clear fires.

Once the third event, the entry of personnel, occurs, prevention of fratricide becomes the overriding concern. As al-

ways, fires aren't delivered until clearance is received from the unit assigned the AO.

**Steps in Processing Requests-for-Fire.** The following procedures were used in by the XVIII Airborne Corps in its airborne CP in the same exercise as the fire support execution checklist (Figure 4).

1. Because the most likely sources for pre-assault targets of opportunity are SR teams, LRS teams and aircraft crews, the battle staff officers who receive requests for fire are the J2 battle staff officer, the JFACC LNO and the joint special operations task force (JSOTF) LNO.

The battle staff officer receiving a request-for-fire announces, "Fire Mission" and states the net over which the mission is being sent. He then records the date/time group of the request, the location, target description and activity. He loudly announces the target location, description and activity to the battle staff.

2. The FSO reads back the target location and plots it on the map. The J3 battle staff officer verifies the plot.

3. The FSO verifies (and verbally affirms to the airborne CP commander) that the target is in the appropriate component AO and that established NFAs are not violated. He then evaluates the target description and activity against any stated conditions and recommends if the target should be attacked.

4. If troops or equipment are already on the ground, clearance is obtained from the appropriate unit.

5. The SJA representative observes the plot of the target and evaluates the target description and activity against the ROE. If a potential ROE violation occurs, he states so to the airborne CP commander.

6. If the airborne CP commander approves the target, the JFACC LNO passes the appropriate information to the JFACC ABCCC, which then directs an attack asset to the target.

## Conclusion

The events of recent years show that contingencies are arising in areas of the world where the US does not have forces in place. Force projection, to include possible forcible entry operations, may be needed to respond to a crisis.

The airborne CP is a proven means of ensuring continuous command, control and communications during force projection operations. One critical function aboard the airborne CP is fire support. In fact, some commands use their airborne CP aircraft principally as fire support coordination platforms.

This article is an example of TTP for fire support from and airborne CP that was devised and tested by one unit, the XVIII Airborne Corps. These TTP begin the process of "filling in the blanks" for airborne CP operations—operations that, predictably, we'll see more of in the future.



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Time	Event
H-2	Make weather decision.
H-1	Make decision to launch OH-58D helicopters.
H-:10	Airborne CP assumes responsibility for approving fires in ARFOR AO.
H-:05	AC-130 aircraft are on-station.
H-Hr	Pre-assault fires window opens. (See list of planned targets.)
H+:10	Pre-assault fires end; heavy drop begins. Entry force assumes responsibility for approving fires in ARFOR AO.
H+:20	Personnel drop begins.
H+:30(T)	Communications established with assault CP.
H+3 to H+4	AC-130H refuels; AC-130A assumes coverage.

### Planned Targets (ARFOR AO)

Target #	Location	Conditions
AB0001	UTM: _____ Latitude/Longitude: _____	Armed Personnel/Crew-Served Weapons Present
AB0002	UTM: _____ Latitude/Longitude: _____	Air Defense Weapons Present

#### Legend:

ARFOR = Army Force  
AO = Area of Operations

CP = Command Post  
UTM = Universal Transverse Mercator

Figure 4: Example of a Fire Support Execution Checklist