



Maneuver Commander's Guidance for Fire Support— What We Really Need

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Is it really fair to continue to tell our maneuver commanders that fires aren't right because the guidance they provide us is unsatisfactory? Granted, the maneuver commander is responsible for his fires. However, it's time for us to take a hard look in the mirror before pointing fingers at maneuver and ask ourselves, "What can we do to make it easier on the commander?"

The "broken record" guidance trend briefed throughout the Army may be true for some, but it should be put on "sabbatical leave" until we, as fire supporters, clean up our publications, field manuals and white papers. Our white paper "Fire Support Planning for Brigade and Below," dated 1998, is as close to getting it right as I have seen. It links essential fire support tasks (EFSTs) to proper Task terminology (of the EFST Task, Purpose, Method and Effects) and makes it easier for the commander to convey guidance to us.

However, for the most part, we have not been clear about what we need from the maneuver commander and have provided conflicting versions of what we need. The fire support community is making valiant efforts to fix the manuals discussed in this article, and some of the revisions look promising for fire support guidance, but our current arsenal of publications is unsatisfactory.

Publications on Commander's Guidance. The old *FM 71-123 Tactics and Techniques and Procedures [TTP] for Combined Arms Heavy Forces: Armored Brigade, Battalion Task Force, and Company Team* had nothing in it about guidance for fire support. Its replacement, the *FM 3-90 Tactics* followed suit. That's easy to fix. Once we determine the best method for conveying guidance to us, we can get the Combined Arms Command (CAC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the branch schools to insert it in their manuals as part of the planning process. Our combined arms brothers will welcome the addition.

Next is the FM 6-20 series. *FM 6-20-40 TTP for Fire Support for Brigade Operations* is representative. The brief discussion on Page 2-3 puts more effort into addressing the guidance from the higher fire support cell than it does the construct of the maneuver commander's guidance. Hopefully, our maneuver commanders are not reading this page, or we might receive something patterned in the form listed on Page 2-3. It states, "As a minimum, this guidance should include the following: fire support asset allocation and status, commander's target attack guidance, and fires in the zone planned by higher headquarters." Surely we can do *better*.

The *FM 101-5 Staff Organization and Operations*, Appendix B-1 "Commander's Guidance Guidelines," provides a list of what fire supporters need that would burden a maneuver commander if he provided guidance on most of it. To a great extent, it makes a staff officer out of the commander. To its credit, the appendix begins with the disclaimer that none of the items are mandatory and commanders should tailor the list to their needs. The problem is that the most important item on the list, Item Six "Task and Purpose of Fires," is buried in the list with no special emphasis or suggestions as to how to convey it.

The old *FM 6-71 TTP For Fire Support for the Combined Arms Commander* (Pages 3-5 through 3-6) probably does the most to confuse maneuver commanders. FM 6-71 is not all bad and the next version, FM 3-09.31 of the same name, looks promising with not much further to go before it could be used as a stand-alone tool for maneuver commander's guidance.

With that said, the current FM 6-71's engagement criteria advice to the commander to tell fire supporters the "size and type of units he wants engaged at different points in the battle and priorities for target engagement" is sound. However, it misses the mark with attack criteria and the portion specifying how, when and where to attack. It lists "destroy, neutralize or suppress" as the attack criteria and then cautions that FA terms may not mean what the maneuver commander thinks the terms mean. Haven't we confused maneuver commanders enough with this tiring destroy-neutralize-suppress mind bender?

FM 6-71's replacement, while a marked improvement, still falls short of providing a user-friendly format for commander's guidance. The improvement is that it tells commanders to word their guidance for fires in a "Task and Purpose" format. It states, "Consider stating the task as an effect on the enemy formation [per *FM 6-20-10 TTP for the Targeting Process*, *FM 3-09 Doctrine for Fire Support* (final draft), *FM 3-100.40 Environmental Considerations in Military Operation* and *FM 3-13 Information Operations*] (a specific element or sub-element of the enemy) that provides the enemy a function."

The downfall of this section is two-fold. First, it also provides a laundry list of other items that should go in the guidance, which clouds the guidance and becomes staff work. Second, but more important, is that rather than list the Task terms with user-friendly definitions, we refer our commanders to four other manuals.

Three of the four manuals lead our maneuver commanders down the ambiguous path of which terms are proper. Only FM 6-20-10 makes it abundantly clear that "disrupt, delay, limit, divert, and damage" (disrupt, delay and limit are usually the most appropriate) are the proper Task terms when addressing the effects on enemy formations' functions.

The manual goes on to tell commanders not to use or confuse "suppress, neutralize and destroy" with the proper terms when referring to enemy formations. "These terms are used as attack criteria to determine the degree of damage or duration of effects on a *specific target*." [Emphasis added.] In other words, the targeting team will determine which individual targets need to be destroyed, neutralized or suppressed in order to achieve the commander's guidance of disrupt, delay or limit for a enemy function.

In its discussion of EFSTs and commander's guidance, the white paper "Fire Support Planning for Brigade and Below," poses a better way of verbalizing Task terminology. It says the commander should use "disrupt, delay or limit" in the Task portion of the Task, Purpose, Method and Effects parts of the EFST. These Task terms, in conjunction with the commander's Purpose, lay the maneuver groundwork. The design for the commander's guidance has been in front of us all along—just not in writing other than in the white paper.

The Guidance Design. The Task and Purpose design of the guidance have some underlying assumptions.

First, the maneuver commander should not have to do staff work. He shouldn't have to tell the staff which delivery system to use. The staff should do this for him in the course-of-action (COA) development phase of the military decision-making process (MDMP). The Method portion of the EFST also details the delivery systems during this phase.

Of course, some commanders may want to direct their assets; this is their prerogative. But the point is that commanders shouldn't feel compelled to do it.

Next, we need to maximize the commander's guidance with maneuver terms. This means his guidance should be effects-based but defined in maneuver-based effects.

The commander does this in two ways. First, he uses Task terminology that is maneuver-based: "disrupt, delay or limit" to apply to an enemy formation's ability to perform its functions and, subsequently, to alter the enemy's COA. (See Figure 1.)

Second, he conveys a well-defined maneuver Purpose (wordy is Okay). The staff uses his Purpose to determine the Effects (end state). In other words, the more vivid the Purpose, the easier it is for the staff to determine "how many of what needs to be destroyed, neutralized, or suppressed" to meet the guidance. This then drives the Method of how fire support (lethal and nonlethal) fulfills the Task and Purpose.

The commander must not feel hamstrung by trying to word the maneuver Purpose to describe how the Effects contribute to the mission only in terms of friendly maneuver. He should convey the Purpose in terms that will be easiest to *see* during execution. Sometimes this is best conveyed in terms of friendly forces; other times it is best conveyed in terms of the enemy.

Limiting Purpose to one or the other often has left maneuver commanders

tongue-tied for meaningful words. The result is the ever-popular yet meaningless "...to facilitate maneuver" Purpose.

A clear maneuver Purpose is invaluable. During execution of the battle, validating the Purpose was met is easier to do and a better measure of whether or not the EFST was accomplished than validating the Effects were achieved.

In summary, we need the commander's guidance format to be Task and Purpose. The Task terminology should be "disrupt, delay or limit." In the Task, we need to know the formations/functions the commander wants attacked and where the attack is to occur. The "where" helps the staff pick the right attack asset. In addition, we need a well-defined maneuver Purpose. And this is *all* we need in the commander's guidance.

During mission analysis, additional items (as tailored to a unit's standing operating procedures, or SOP) are the commander's approving the high-payoff target list (HPTL) and force protection priorities.

Examples of Maneuver Commander Guidance. The following are examples of the maneuver commander's guidance (Task and Purpose).

- *Commander's Guidance in the Defense in Terms of the Enemy.* The brigade commander realizes the enemy regimental forward detachment (RFD) is a lynchpin for the regiment. He knows that while the RFD is terrain-oriented, the regimental commander's Task and Purpose of having it establish a breach for the main body battalions warrants special attention. If the friendly maneuver commander can take away the RFD's ability to breach, the enemy will lose momentum and the regimental commander could be forced to employ a main body battalion to assume the breach mission, hope the enveloping detachment can breach or look for bypasses.

Part of the friendly maneuver commander's guidance could sound like this: "I want to disrupt the RFD west of the passes, in the passes and east of the

Disrupt: Preclude the efficient interaction of enemy combat or combat support systems. More important, it means to keep the enemy formation from performing a certain function: not let it do what it's supposed to do.

Delay: Alter the time of arrival of a specific enemy formation or capability. It focuses on keeping the enemy from doing some function when he wants/needs to.

Limit: Reduce an enemy's options or courses-of-actions. It normally focuses on keeping the enemy from doing some function *where* he wants to.

Figure 1: Tasks in Commander's Guidance. *FM 6-20-10 TTP for the Targeting Process* also includes "divert" and "damage," but "disrupt, delay or limit" are more appropriate.

passes in order to deny it the ability to establish a breach for the main body battalions in EA Bronco and to force the regimental commander to use his main body battalions to establish their own POP [point of penetration].”

This guidance does a lot for the staff. Priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) can be developed to ensure the brigade can attack the RFD early and throughout the battlespace until the RFD culminates. Analysis can be done to keep fires focused on the RFD rather than some other formation. The “where” (west of the passes, in the passes and in EA Bronco) probably points the staff in the direction of employing CAS early, rockets and cannons in the passes, and cannons in EA Bronco.

This maneuver Purpose tells enough for the Brigade S2 to determine how much of what needs to be destroyed to satisfy the commander’s guidance (the EFST’s Effects). In this example, the commander wants to ensure the RFD cannot breach for the main body battalions. The S2’s estimates will drive which delivery systems to use and the number of volleys they will have to deliver.

A residual benefit of a well-defined maneuver Purpose is that, during execution, it is easier to *see* if it was achieved than to determine if the battle damage assessment (BDA) had the Effects the S2 estimated would achieve the commander’s intent. The S2’s estimate is just that: an estimate. If he is wrong and we achieve those incorrect Effects, we could begin transitioning to the next EFST before we should. If we use the commander’s Purpose as the measure of success, then we won’t transition to the next EFST until we see we have achieved that Purpose.

At this point, perhaps some maneuver readers are questioning why we even need to know Effects expressed in terms of systems/personnel affected. The reason is we still have to line up the right delivery system(s) and plan for the right number of volleys and range to achieve the desired Effects—which are calculated to accomplish the commander’s Purpose.

In the majority of cases, the true measure of whether or not we have met the commander’s guidance (and can end an EFST) will be if we accomplished the maneuver Purpose—not whether or not we achieved the Effects defined in terms of number of items destroyed. The commander on the ground is often the best judge of whether or not the enemy for-

mation/function has culminated (Purpose in terms of enemy maneuver forces) or whether or not he is postured in accordance with the friendly maneuver Purpose (a Purpose in terms of friendly forces).

- *Commander’s Guidance in the Offense in Terms of Friendly Forces.* In a movement-to-contact, the brigade commander recognizes that while the enemy forward security element is force-oriented, the enemy commander wants it to operate on advantageous terrain. An L-shaped ambush joined by the enemy’s advanced guard main body (AGMB) on terrain the forward security element chooses would set the conditions for the regiment’s success. The friendly maneuver commander recognizes that by delaying the forward security element with fires, his brigade could deny the regiment the key terrain and establish contact on its own terms.

His guidance would sound something like this: “I want to delay the forward security element 20 minutes west of TIR [Terrain Index Reference] 40 in order to allow the advanced guard company of our lead task force to reach the key terrain vicinity TIR 41 first.”

The commander’s guidance provides the staff everything it needs for this formation. In addition, because the maneuver Purpose is so well-defined, it will be clear during execution that once the advanced guard company of the lead task force reaches TIR 41 first, the staff can start implementing the maneuver commander’s guidance for the next formation/function.

- *Commander’s Guidance in the Defense Using the Task Term “Limit.”* The two previous examples of commander’s guidance used the Task terms “disrupt” and “delay.” “Limit” is another powerful Task term that is often appropriate yet sometimes confuses staffs and leaders.

A commander who uses “limit” correctly knows exactly what he wants. He is not saying he wants to keep a certain formation from *ever* performing its Task and Purpose. To accomplish that can be resource-intensive. “Limit” translates into “I don’t want this enemy formation to perform its Task and Purpose where he wants to.” Better yet, “I don’t want the enemy to do it where I don’t want him to do it.”

In the defense, here is an example of the commander’s guidance using “limit.” The friendly maneuver commander expects to see an airlifted light infantry company with AT-5s enter his

battlespace with the task of fixing/defeating a mechanized or armor company. He does not want this light infantry to emplace the AT-5s on a particular piece of high ground that overlooks the EA where the brigade commander wants to defeat the main body battalions. He recognizes that while, ultimately, he does not want the light infantry to be able to perform its Task and Purpose anywhere, he absolutely cannot accept giving away the high ground. Doing so could result in the AT-5s targeting one of his companies in the battle position (BP) that defends EA Wrangler—a BP that defends along an anchor point in the brigade obstacle. With that company ineffective, the RFD could breach almost unopposed.

An example of the commander’s guidance would be: “I want to limit effective light infantry AT-5 fires from the high ground vicinity A in order to keep the company in BP B intact to deny a breach and remain at 90 percent combat power.”

The “where” portion of commander’s guidance is somewhat taken care of with the term “limit,” but the commander should emphasize that he expects the staff to develop a plan that attacks the enemy as soon as identified.

With this guidance, focused PIRs and a portion of the observer plan will be dedicated to finding the light infantry in the air. Sentinel radars could provide early warning for air defense artillery (ADA) to attack first. Targeted, templated landing zones could be assigned to a combat observation lasing team (COLT)/Striker or task force observers, and fires (direct and indirect) could be focused on limiting the light infantry’s ability to get AT-5s into position. This could mean the brigade either destroys the AT-5s or forces the light infantry to occupy somewhere else that does not concern the commander—achieving the conditions under the term “limit.”

- *Commander’s Guidance in Counterfire in the Offense Using the Task Term “Limit.”* “Limit” is also the most viable term to use when a commander wants to focus his counterfire fight. Most often, commander’s guidance and EFSTs addressing the counterfire fight are worded incorrectly. They usually are conveyed as “...neutralizing the RAG [regimental artillery group].” Once again, we use attack guidance for a specific target instead of a correct Task term geared at affecting a formation’s function.

Of course, the commander wants to win the counterfire fight and would be

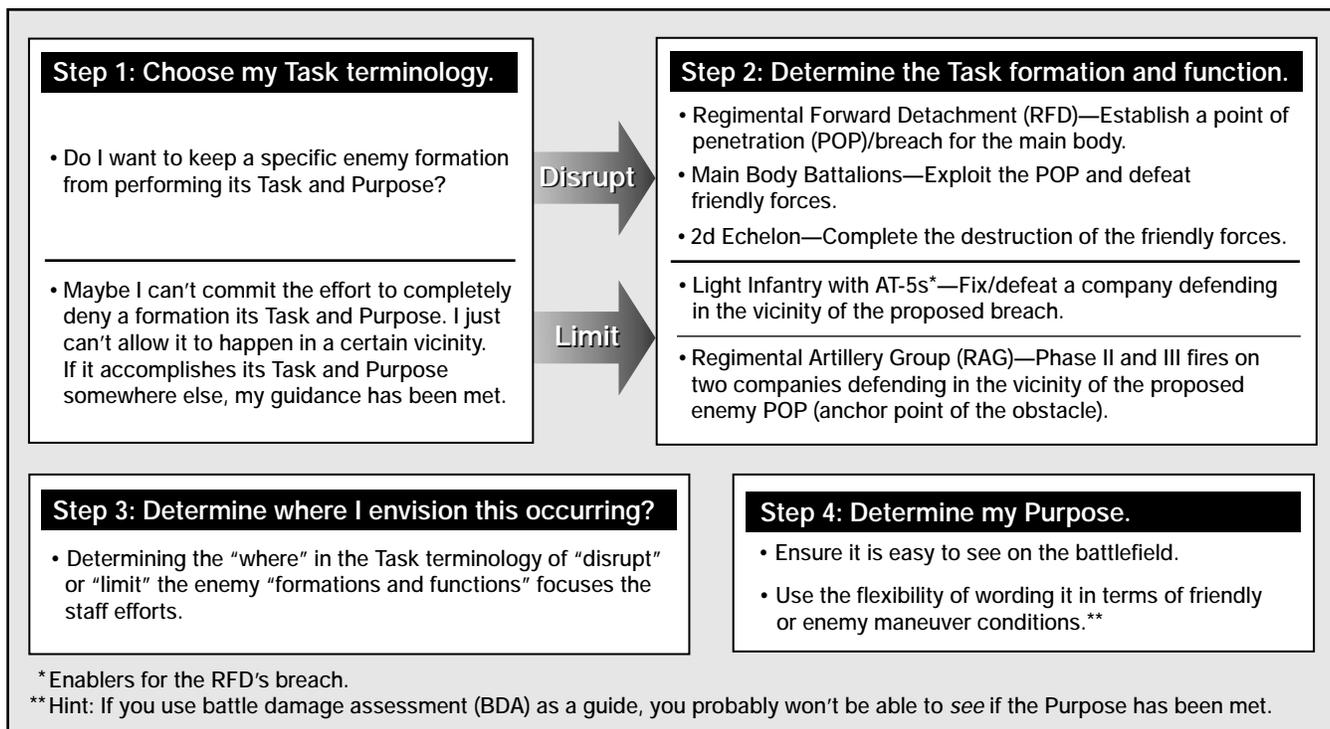


Figure 2: Example of Steps the Maneuver Commander Takes to Determine His Guidance (Disrupt or Limit in the Defense). This shows the process maneuver commanders go through to determine their Task and Purpose for fires (commander's guidance).

happy if it occurred before he crossed the line of departure in an attack. But short of an incredibly effective proactive counterfire effort, that probably won't occur. The commander expects us to wage and win the counterfire fight; telling us that is unnecessary. However, in his guidance, he can express where he will not accept losses to enemy indirect fire. “Limit” is the term to use.

In the attack, he could say: “Limit effective enemy artillery and mortar fire against the support force when it occupies SBF1 [support-by-fire position 1] and the breach force in order to sustain the momentum at the breach site and keep the support force at 90 percent when the assault force passes through the lanes.”

In this example, the commander expects enemy artillery fire in many places before his force defeats it but wants it stopped immediately on his breach force and support force. Notice that the crucial difference between “limit” and “disrupt” is that in the “limit” examples, we only take away the enemy's ability to perform its Task and Purpose at a specific location or event of the maneuver commander's choosing. “Disrupt” denies a particular formation the ability to achieve its Task and Purpose and may mean culminating the formation at all costs. Sometimes “disrupt” is necessary.

The commander who can visualize the difference and uses the two properly

will be the commander who will better focus his fires. (See Figure 2.)

The Fixes. We need to establish one method for the maneuver commander to convey his guidance in our publications. The format of Task with a well-defined maneuver Purpose should be in-grained in our maneuver commanders as the proper method to use.

Concurrently, fire supporters should talk their commanders through maneuver-based Task terminology, as outlined in the FM 6-20-10 and the white paper. Using these terms is more powerful—they have a universal meaning. Maneuver commanders should feel more comfortable wielding them.

Third, as fire supporters, we should use the commander's Task and Purpose as the EFST's Task and Purpose. What I have done is work the white paper's method of developing EFST backwards to link it to the part it scantily addresses: the commander's guidance.

Fourth, the brigade S2 should add translating the maneuver commander's Purpose into Effects as a step in the early stage of COA development. He determines the number and types of systems within that formation/function that need to be “destroyed, neutralized or suppressed.” After all, brigade S2s are the experts we rely on during wargaming in the action/reaction/counteraction drill to assess casualties after

an event (usually with the brigade executive officer). When the S2s add the step, the system will work and commanders' guidance will be more meaningful and congruent across all brigades—getting maneuver commanders out of the business of guessing what fire supporters need.

Let's allow maneuver commanders to give guidance in maneuver terms and staffs to do their jobs and put the mystery of commanders' guidance for fires to rest.



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