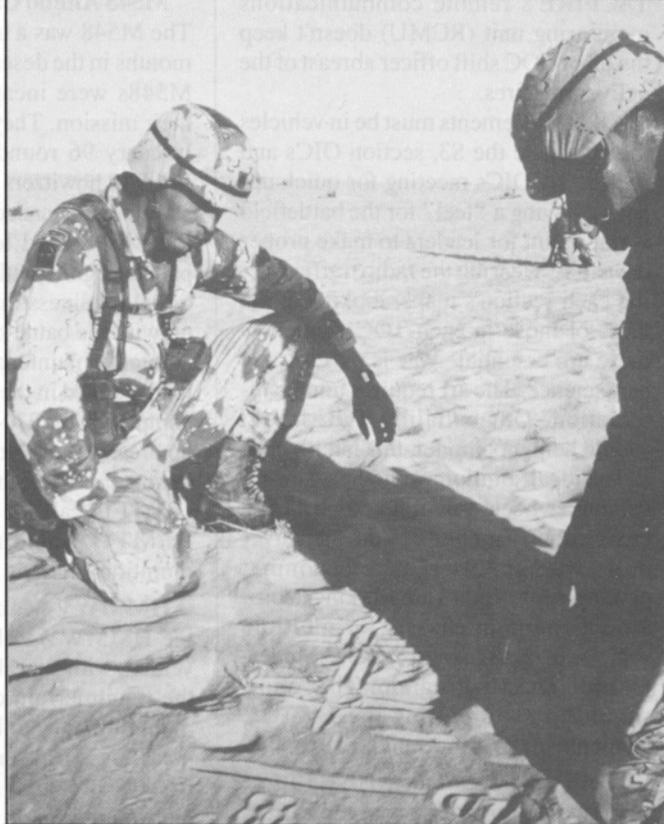


Company Fire Support Operations

by First Lieutenant John A. Ford and
Second Lieutenant William Lockard



Throughout Operation Desert Storm, Field Artillery (FA) played a critical role in the speedy victory. The 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) relied heavily on its artillery assets to prepare and, in some cases, solely defeat objectives during its assault into the Euphrates River valley. At the basic level of artillery, the company fire support officer (FSO) and his fire support team (FIST) were at the heart of the battle and were responsible for triggering the effects of the FA.



FSOs in Desert Storm saw firsthand how fire support doctrine played out in AirLand Battle doctrine. We learned what did and didn't work and found new ideas for developing our teams. Hopefully, other FSOs and their teams can gain from our experiences.

With six months in the desert before the war began, there was time to wargame different ways to conduct fire support operations. Several areas proved to be of utmost importance: the FSO's relationship with his maneuver company, and the need for precise standing operating procedures (SOPs) and for several technical "tricks of the trade" to make operations run more smoothly.

The Maneuver Company

Once you, as the FSO, are attached to the maneuver company, you must become an active, contributing member. The company commander must realize the importance of your work and just what the FA can do for him—Desert Storm showed just how devastating the artillery can be. For example, our preparation fire on one of the 24th Infantry Division's brigade objectives, Jalibah Air Field, 270 kilometers into Iraq, was so massive that enemy prisoners of war

(EPWs) later said they believed they were under a full scale air attack. These fires made it possible for elements of the 24th Division to roll up to the perimeter of the airfield without being detected.

In Desert Storm, we learned several lessons about FSO relationships with our maneuver companies that helped us provide this excellent fire support in combat. First, don't be intimidated by your maneuver commander. You're the fire support expert. When there's a question about company fire support, the FSO should have the answer. Tell the commander what you know—and then abide by his final decision.

This responsibility demands you be completely familiar with the capabilities of all artillery assets. Some will expect the FSO to rattle off facts and figures at a moment's notice. But don't be afraid to use references. A good FSO won't meet with the maneuver commander unless he has a copy of the *Fire Support Handbook (ST 6-20-20)* in his hip pocket.

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate expertise is by educating the maneuver unit. Key leaders must understand artillery capabilities and doctrine, and every soldier must know how to call for fire. With this knowledge, the unit will better understand how the artillery works

and the skills to execute a fire support plan in the absence of the FIST.

When teaching calls for fire, try to make the classes simple and realistic. One method is to start with the basic immediate suppression mission. When the FIST isn't present, this is the type of mission a maneuver soldier will need the most. You can teach more advanced missions once the leaders and soldiers grasp the basics. If you're training in garrison, you can use the observed fire trainer for realism. However, we found the field environment also provides opportunities for realistic training. We traced a make-shift grid system on the ground. Then we simulated artillery rounds by throwing rocks at various "targets." We complemented this system by using AN/PRC-77 radios to give the soldier the feeling of talking to a fire direction center (FDC).

Your unit must have a basic understanding of FA capabilities and doctrine. But try to keep the discussions limited to what company-level personnel will have to deal with. In terms of capabilities, subjects should include weapon systems and the FIST vehicle (FIST-V). Doctrinal discussions must include topics such as artillery radio nets, target numbering systems and the FA organization for combat. In addition, key leaders need to understand the principles of the commander's intent and priorities of fire. These subjects help them understand why we fire artillery at certain targets and times.

Another subject which is critical for discussion among key leaders is the employment of the FIST-V and the FSO. Artillery is the most vital combat multiplier available to the company. The leaders must understand it's their job to provide security and protection for your vehicle. The FIST-V can be the commander's wingman when enemy contact isn't likely, but once in contact, the FIST-V must drop back to a concealed position where the FIST can best see the battle. In terms of FSO employment, the FSO needs to ride where he has quick access to all his assets. In other words, the FSO rides in the FIST-V.

It's important to establish with your company commander where you'll ride if your vehicle isn't mission capable. One recommendation is in the executive officer's (XO's) vehicle, either in the loader's hatch of an M1A1 Abrams tank or the gunner's hatch of an M2A1 Bradley fighting vehicle. We don't recommend

the commander's vehicle because that puts too many company assets in one place. You then must discuss with the XO how much equipment you can carry in his vehicle. Take the time to prioritize the equipment needed for the mission and ensure your team and the XO rehearse the scenario.

Team Operations and SOPs

Desert Storm was a fast-paced operation that required FISTs to be well-rehearsed in all procedures. Every team needs to have a set of SOPs to use from receipt to completion of a mission. Each team will have a unique approach to collective tasks based on the size and in-

dividual abilities of the team. The following ideas are meant to serve as basic guidelines that you can refine to suit the capabilities of your team.

One method for easy dissemination of a fire plan is by using a company fire support matrix. A blank matrix written on a 5x8 index card works well. (See the example in the Figure 1.) The card is designed according to the needs of the unit. At a minimum, the card should contain a target list execution matrix and signal operating instructions (SOI). The target list negates the need for overlays that can be very time-consuming on extended and rapidly changing missions. You can put additional information on the card, such as the commander's intent, close air support (CAS) available and

Front

CALL FOR FIRE:

_____ DE _____ IMMEDIATE SUPPRESSION, GRID _____ (K)

SOI	MORTARS	BN FSE	FA FDC
DAY _____			
DAY _____			

Back

EVENT	TGT# / LOCATION	EXECUTION

Figure 1: Example of a Company Fire Support Matrix on a 5x8 Index Card.

priorities of fire. This is the card the key leader will look at when he needs fires, so keep it simple.

The FSO and his NCO need to take the time to establish the procedures their team will use in a particular situation. An easy way to do this is to make a list of various scenarios and then list what each team member will do. A quick reference for these scenarios is the *Mission Training Plan For The FA Cannon Battalion Fire Support (ARTEP 6-115—20-MTP)*. Once a routine is established, it's absolutely essential to rehearse it so each team member fully understands his role in any situation. (For some additional team skills you need to develop, see Figure 2.)

- How well can your team operate the FIST-V while it's buttoned-up?
- How quickly can your team stop the vehicle, don their protective masks, hook up their communications and air hoses and get moving again?
- If you were involved in extended operations, what would your rest plan be?
- Who takes which role when one or more of the team members is wounded?

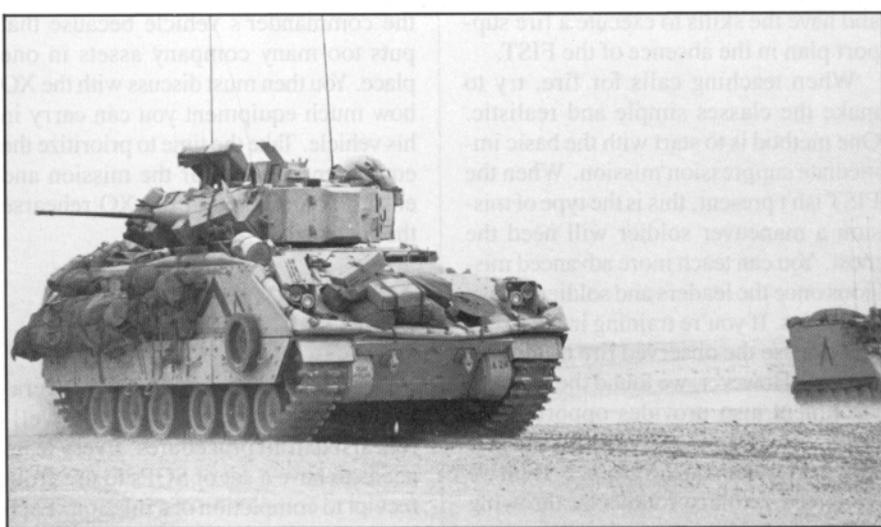
Figure 2: Additional FIST Skills. Here are some questions you should ask about your team's skills, which could point out the need for additional training. These skills, like any others, must be rehearsed to maintain smooth operations.

Technical Tricks

The length of Operation Desert Shield allowed us time to experiment with FIST-Vs in various configurations. Here are some of the successful results.

Superwhip. By attaching two or three antenna elements of an RC-292 to the lower base (AS-1730/VRC) of a vehicle antenna, we increased radio range without actually setting up the RC-292 external communication. We hooked up a TA-1 field telephone to the external wire jacks on top of the vehicle. We then connected the internal jack to the "LINE" connection of the AM-1780 amplifier, allowing dismounted communication to the AN/VIC-1 intercommunication set.

Night Vision. While wearing the AN/PVS-7s with the head harness, you can use a hand-held AN/GVS-5. This allows for magnified night vision and nighttime lasing capabilities.



An M2A1 Bradley moves out in Desert Storm. If the company FSO has to ride in a Bradley, one recommendation is to ride in the gunner's hatch of the company executive officer's vehicle.

Dual Digital. By running a wire from a forward observer digital message device (FO DMD) to the FIST DMD, you can run multiple missions more quickly. You can power the FO DMD by the source above the battery compartment.

Maps. During extended offensive operations, we used many map sheets. It's best to laminate individual maps and then put sets of four together with strips of acetate. This allows you to pull the maps apart more easily when you no longer need them. The side access engine panel provides a quick, flat surface for laminating maps. You also must be familiar with the map numbering system.

DMD 5x8 Cards. A set of laminated 5x8 cards by the FIST DMD make operations more efficient. The top card should have the blank mission buffers listed, which you can fill in before each mission. The other cards can have various digital mission procedures in accordance with your battalion's tactical fire direction SOP. You can put an additional card in the turret with azimuth ring direction and vertical angle to various targets on it. This helps the targeting station operator shift between targets, especially at night.

Summary

Artillery played a vital role throughout Operation Desert Storm. Without confident and competent company FISTs, the FA wouldn't have been as effective as a combat multiplier.

While serving in Southwest Asia, we

learned many lessons about conducting FIST operations. Above all, the FSO's ability to work with his maneuver commander is key to success. You must establish a habitual relationship with your company commander. Also, you need working SOPs. With the non-stop pace encountered in the Southwest Asian desert, there's no time to have doubts about what each team member must do. So train and rehearse now. Finally, with seven months in the field, we discovered many tricks of the trade to help FISTs run more efficiently.

What your FIST does or doesn't do can have tremendous impact on the FA's effectiveness and, more immediately, the effectiveness—even survivability—of your maneuver company. We hope that new FSOs will benefit from our experiences and help continue the FA's tradition of awesome firepower, on time and on target.



First Lieutenant John A. Ford, assigned to the 3d Battalion, 41st Field Artillery (3-41 FA), 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized), was a Company Fire Support Officer (FSO) during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He was attached to A Company, 3d Battalion, 15th Infantry. He's currently assigned as an Ammunition Platoon Leader in the 3-41 FA at Fort Stewart, Georgia.

Second Lieutenant William Lockard, assigned to the 3d Battalion, 41st FA, was an FSO attached to D Company, 3d Battalion, 15th Infantry during Desert Shield. He's currently a Company FSO for 3-41 FA at Fort Stewart.