



# FIST Training Tropic Lightning Style

by Major Joseph P. Nizolak, Jr.

**T**hroughout its history, the 25th Infantry Division Artillery (Div Arty) has employed the widest range of fire support assets imaginable—everything from quad-.50 caliber machine guns to 8-inch howitzers, both towed and self-propelled. From flat, dry terrain to mountainous jungle, the Div Arty has successfully supported light and mechanized infantry, armor and cavalry missions throughout the Pacific theater.

Today, the 25th Div Arty (Tropic Thunder) continues to meet the challenge of providing fire support in the low-, mid- and high-intensity conflict environment. Like Div Arty's of other light infantry divisions, Tropic Thunder has to be prepared for many contingencies in its area of responsibility and must be "wheels up" within 18 hours of notification. To "hit the

ground running," Tropic Thunder trains hard and realistically.

One of the prime training tools used for fire support training is the fire support team (FIST) Battle Run. The Battle Run provides training while evaluating and developing fire support and leadership skills. Through this challenging training, Tropic Thunder develops FISTs who can provide effective fire support.

## FIST Battle Run

The FIST Battle Run focuses primarily on fire support training and teamwork. Under the direction of an officer and NCO instructor team, FISTs navigate through a 10-kilometer course consisting of eight to 12 stations. The runs are based on a tactical scenario, and company fire support officers (FSOs) are required to prepare

and brief a fire support plan. FISTs navigate through the Battle Run course using a map and compass, stopping at each station to complete the designated tasks. FIST members rotate through leadership positions during Battle Run, normally at the completion of the even-numbered stations.

Instructors accompany the FISTs to train and evaluate them on designated tasks. Instructors also act as company commanders, first sergeants, battalion FSOs, fire support NCOs (FSNCO), air liaison officers (ALOs), etc. They conduct after-action reviews (AARs) at each station and at the conclusion of Battle Run.

All Tropic Thunder FISTs complete the Battle Run, conducted by the division fire support element (FSE), in conjunction with their direct support (DS) battalions'

**Critical Tasks**

- a. Perform land navigation.** 071-329-1006
  - Identify terrain features. - 1001
  - Identify map symbols. - 1000
  - Determine grid coordinates on map. - 1002
  - Perform resection. - 1015
  - Perform intersection. - 1014
  - Measure distance on map. - 1008
- b. Adjust naval gunfire.** 061-284-3221
- c. Direct a close air support (CAS) strike.** 061-283-3031
- d. Conduct observed-fire procedures/Send calls-for-fire.**
  - Prepare terrain sketch. 061-283-1052
  - Determine target direction. - 1001
  - Locate target by grid method. - 1002
  - Locate target by polar method. - 1003
  - Shift from known point. - 1004
  - Request and adjust area fire. - 1011
  - Conduct immediate suppression mission. - 1014
  - Request and adjust final protective fires. - 2002
  - Conduct immediate smoke mission. - 2021
  - Conduct fire-for-effect mission. - 1015
- e. Plan fire support (FS).**
  - Plan for offensive operations. 061-284-3222
  - Plan for defensive operations. -3223
  - Coordinate/prepare FS plan. -4219
  - Develop/execute quick FS plan. -3224

**Critical Tasks**

- f. Employ fire support coordinating measures (FSCM).**
  - Position info on map. 061-284-1011
  - Recommend and disseminate FSCMs. - 4040
  - Advise cdr on use of FSCM. - 4040
  - Coord fires across boundaries. - 3043
  - Pass info to lower units. - 3046
- g. Perform nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) tasks.**
  - React to NBC Hazard. 031-503-1018
  - Put on M17 mask. - 1002
  - Wear protective equipment. - 1015
  - Recognize and react to NBC threat. - 1019
  - Administer first aid for nerve agent. - 1030
  - Use M-8 paper. - 1004
  - Use latrine and drink. 031-503-1009
  - Use an M256/M256A1 kit. TM 3-6665-307-10
  - Perform unmasking procedures. FM 3-4, pg 5-2
- h. Use communications-electronics operating instructions (CEOI).**
  - Encode and decode message. 113-573-4003
  - Enter and leave a net. 113-571-1019
  - Send meaconing, intrusion, jamming, interference (MIJI) report. 113-573-7017
  - Recognize electronic countermeasures (ECM) and apply electronic counter-countermeasures (ECCM). 113-573-6001

Figure 1: Example List of Tasks for a FIST Battle Run

external evaluations (EXEVALs). Brigade FSEs also use battle runs to train their FISTs on critical fire support tasks during training exercises throughout the year. Pyrotechnics and a fire-marker system for indirect fire are used in the battle

runs so they can be conducted in any of the division's maneuver training areas.

**Preparing for Battle Run.** One month prior to the DS battalion's EXEVAL, the brigade FSO provides a list of tasks he wants included in Battle Run to the divi-

sion FSE. The FSE then prepares instructor packets with sub-tasks, conditions and standards for each of the selected tasks. See Figure 1 for an example list of tasks trained during Battle Run.

Packets for the instructors include all scenario information (orders, overlays, special instructions, etc.), navigation information (map, compass, station grids and distance), leadership position changes, checklists for the tasks, and blank forms the FIST will complete for certain tasks, for example shelling reports (SHELREPs), terrain sketches, etc.

To preclude instructors from carrying an unwieldy packet, checklists and blank forms are prepositioned at each station in a waterproof container. Instructors take the checklists out, use them to train and evaluate the FIST and then put the completed checklists and forms back into the containers. The instructors collect the packets at the end of the day. While walking the course, the instructors only carry a packet consisting of the scenario, navigation information, leadership position changes and comment sheets.

Executing Battle Run requires a minimum of eight personnel to run one lane (Figure 2).

**Starting—The Fire Support Plan.** Battle Run always begins with fire support planning. The officer in charge (OIC) or senior instructor briefs the company

Position	Rank	Number	Remarks
OIC	MAJ/CPT	1	Controls Battle Run from the briefing area. Briefs VIPs.
NCOIC	SFC/SSG	1	Assists the OIC. Supervises the radio telephone operator (RTO).
RTO	SPC/PFC	1	Monitors the Battle Run net. Replicates the scenario-based stations that the FIST would contact.
Fire Marker	SGT/SPC	1 per lane	Replicates fire missions during Battle Run by expending pyrotechnics at the call-for-fire grids.
FIST Instructor	CPT/1LT	1 per lane	Should have BN FSO experience. Trains and controls the FIST during Battle Run.
FIST Instructor	SFC/SSG	1 per lane	Should have BN FSNCO experience. Assists the officer FIST instructor during Battle Run.
Lane RTO	SPC/PFC	1 per lane	Monitors the Battle Run net.
Medic	N/A	1 per lane	May be positioned at the briefing area if a dedicated vehicle is available.

Figure 2: Personnel Requirements for the Tropic Thunder Battle Run. One Battle Run lane requires a minimum of eight personnel who provide support and perform instructor functions.

FSO and FSNCO on the scenario and operations order (OPORD) the day prior to the run. His briefing follows the five-paragraph field order and provides guidance and requirements for the next day's briefing and other administrative instructions (e.g., briefing times). The OIC requires the FSO to brief back the commander's intent and scheme of maneuver before he departs the briefing area.

At the end of the briefing, the OIC or senior instructor issues the FSO a copy of the battalion OPORD, company OPORD and forms to complete during the planning process, such as the fire support execution matrix, attack guidance matrix, close air support (CAS) requests, etc.

Receiving the briefing one day ahead provides time to plan and conduct troop-leading procedures. The company FSO briefs his fire support plan to the senior instructor before crossing the line of departure (LD) while the assistant instructor checks pre-combat inspections and soldier loads. After a station AAR, the FIST leaves the briefing area and begins the Battle Run course.

**Moving Between Stations.** The instructors move with the FIST as they navigate between stations. Instructors monitor the direction and pace count to prevent the FIST from becoming disoriented and poor land navigation skills from becoming a training distraction. Problems with land navigation also provide excellent training opportunities. Instructors note these problems in their feedback to the company FSO.

Movement between stations offers the opportunity to train on various tactical movement techniques. By adjusting the tactical scenario, the instructors can require the FIST to execute tactical road marches, land navigation or even air assaults.

Every area on Battle Run offers a training opportunity. There are also opportunities during movement for the instructors to check individual soldiers' knowledge. By having "hip pocket" questions ready, the instructor checks soldiers' understanding of weapon capabilities, FSCM and other fire support information. However, instructors should avoid disrupting tactical movement when questioning soldiers.

**Taking Action at the Stations.** When the FIST arrives at a station, the instructors brief them on the station scenario and the tasks, conditions and standards. Instructors issue any forms the FIST must



The focus of Battle Run is training and every soldier gets a chance to lead. Here a FIST navigates to the next station. Movement between stations offers the opportunity to train on various tactical movement techniques.

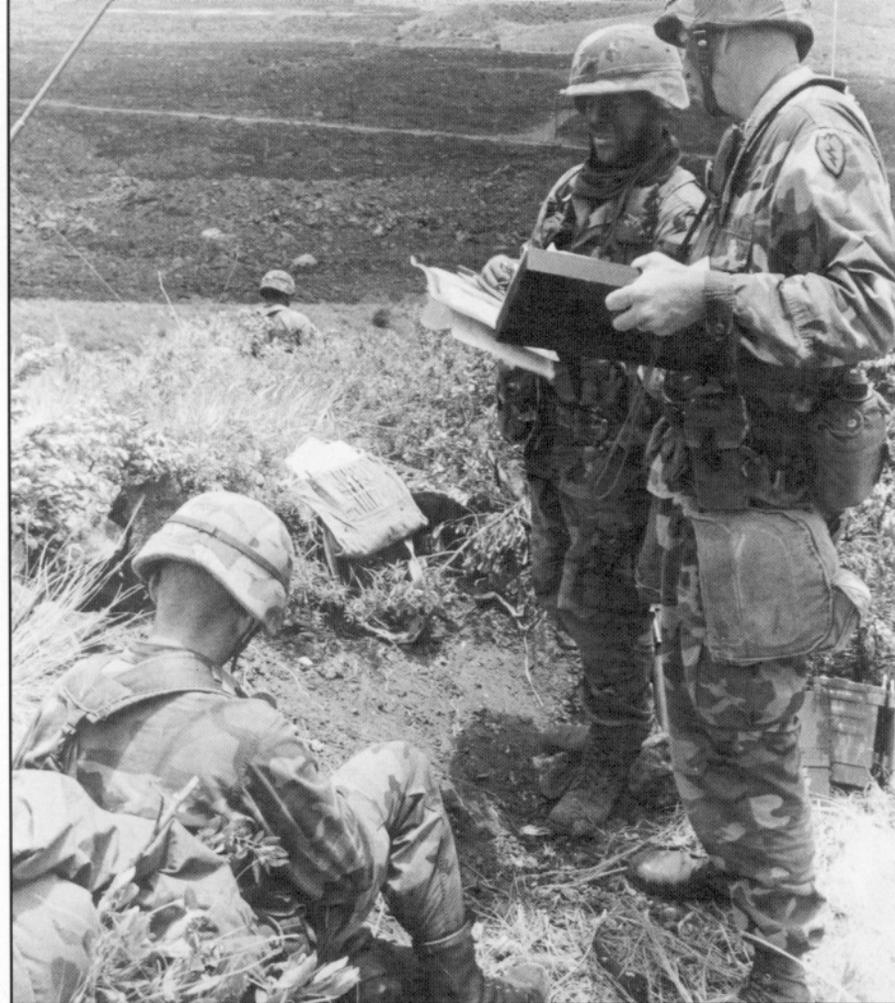


Simultaneous tasks stress organization and leadership skills. Here incoming artillery requires SHELREPS, first aid and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) requests.

complete and give them a time limit for completion. They monitor the team's progress and provide training as necessary. When the tasks are complete, the instructors conduct a brief AAR. At the completion of the AAR, they collect any results, change leaders (if appropriate) and issue navigation instructions. The

FIST leaders then organize for the move and navigate to the next station.

An important aspect of Battle Run is that instructors allow soldiers to use references to perform the tasks to standard. The degree to which the FIST relies on the reference is an appropriate comment for the AAR. Total reliance on a manual



Small-group AARs reinforce success and identify areas that require further training. Instructors conduct AARs after each station and at the end of Battle Run.

indicates the FIST requires further training. Using the manual to accomplish the tasks on the run, however, is an excellent *first* step in this type of training.

**Rotating Leadership Positions.** Instructors obtain a roster of the personnel in the FIST before executing Battle Run. They then map out leadership position changes for the run. The goal is to give every soldier the opportunity to perform the functions of the FSO or FSNCO. Changing positions about every other station facilitates accomplishing this goal. Once the new leaders are in position, former leaders become team members.

While the main objective is training soldiers, instructors apply common sense to these position changes to ensure the skills required don't outweigh the training benefits and leave the soldier frustrated. For example, an instructor would not place a junior enlisted soldier in the FSO position during the CAS mission unless the

actual FSNCO remains in his position so he can assist the "FSO."

**Conducting AARs.** One of the most important parts of the FIST Battle Run is the AAR. Instructors conduct AARs after each station and at the end of the run. These are not fault-finding sessions; they are interactions between the instructor and FIST, with FIST members "discovering" their errors through the instructor's leading questions.

The instructor and FIST discuss the tasks: how they were accomplished, and if not to standard, how they could have been done better. FIST members answer the AAR questions and, if necessary, are *guided* to the correct procedures in accordance with our published doctrine and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs). The AAR concludes with a summary of section performance and recommended improvements. Instructors stress the positive, identify weaknesses and end on a positive note.

**Instructor Techniques.** FIST instructors recognize the objective of the FIST Battle Run is training and teamwork. They look at themselves first as trainers and second as evaluators. Instructors present challenging training situations that cause the FIST to solve a problem and perform a task to standard. They always allow the FIST to try to complete the tasks. If the soldiers can't perform the task to standard, the instructor then trains them.

Instructors take copious notes on FIST performance during Battle Run. While the task checklists provide the source of specific Go/No Gos for each task, the notes provide comments on the team's confidence in performing the tasks, teamwork and other input appropriate for the AARs. The AARs are key for planning future training.

## Conclusion

The Tropic Thunder Battle Run provides training that builds on individual-level training and begins the collective training process for the FIST. Skills trained through the use of this course are indispensable to the overall mission of providing timely and effective fire support to the Tropic Lightning Division.

The history of the Tropic Thunder Division reflects its ability to move rapidly, shoot accurately and communicate effectively. Training systems like the FIST Battle Run provide trained and ready fire supporters, continuing the Tropic Thunder tradition of excellence.



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