



## Artillery TTPs for the Danger-Close Fight:

# LID in the Movement-to-Objective and Initial Contact

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*This article is the first in a series of three on artillery tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) for danger-close combat in the light infantry division (LID) by Captain David D. Hollands, US Army Reserve. Until recently, he was on active duty, last stationed with the 7th Infantry Division (Light).*

*The second article in the series will cover danger-close artillery TTP for the LID in the attack; the third will discuss TTP for preventing LID fratricide in the danger-close fight.*

The successful conclusion of Operation Desert Storm generated a renewed interest in large-scale fire support operations and new tactics and doctrine. Those members of light forces who were out of the spotlight have continuing needs for techniques to execute fire support plans on other types of battlefields.

During 1991, the 7th Infantry Division (Light), Fort Ord, California, renewed its emphasis on fighting "the last 1,000 meters to the objective," focusing on TTPs for the danger-close fight. This article summarizes the danger-close skills needed by company fire support teams (FISTs). The fire support procedures addressed are generally not found in doctrinal publications. They are the product of combat experience, Combat Training Center (CTC) lessons learned, observations from external evaluations and other military experiences. I present them, not as the only solutions to tactical problems, but as options.

Almost all offensive operations consist primarily of movement. Gaining contact with the enemy, deploying to more advantageous positions and seizing objectives are common reasons for movement. The FIST members have several responsibilities during movement: communications, reporting, navigation and the preparation of responsive fires.

The first three tasks are procedures common to FISTs whenever they go "walking in the woods" with the infantry. All four tasks are closely linked. Without communications, it's difficult to report and almost impossible to prepare responsive fires. Without proper navigation, reports become worthless and fires become hazardous. But the bottom line is that without responsive fires, all other efforts are meaningless. This is the primary reason forward observers (FOs) and FISTs are present.

This discussion of techniques during movement centers on the use of priority targets to increase responsiveness.

Priority targets are special instructions to firing units requiring them to lay on specific targets. Generally, a unit assigned priority of fires for an indirect fire system may establish priority targets with that system. Controlling authorities may allocate targets to subordinate units: the company commander allocates 60-mm mortar targets, the battalion commander allocates 81-mm mortar targets and the brigade commander allocates direct support (DS) artillery targets, which battalion commanders usually sub-allocate. The purpose of priority targets is to increase the responsiveness of fires on critical targets. Response time is a few seconds, not the several minutes required for an initial call-for-fire (CFF).

All fire units in primary support of a company should receive priority targets. If the FIST doesn't establish priority targets, it fails at one of its basic tasks: maximizing responsiveness. During movement, priority targets provide the easiest means of rapidly delivering fires onto the enemy during initial contact.

Example: as your platoon is moving, you take fire from your direct front. As the FO, you hear the platoon leader demanding suppressive fires on the enemy positioned 100 meters ahead of the lead element. As you look to your map and formulate a CFF, the clock is ticking. Because of your skill as an observer, you transmit your CFF in one minute.

The fire direction center (FDC) now begins its work on the target, and in 90 seconds, a round is on its way to your general vicinity. Depending on your skill at map reading under pressure—on the ground, under attack (throw in darkness to really complicate things)—the round will, hopefully, impact where you want it. You pray the two to three minutes it took to get there isn't that important to the lead squad you're trying to help.

Now consider this alternative: as FO for 1st Platoon, you coordinated for a priority target with the battalion mortars on Hill 460, 600 meters to your front. After moving 100 meters, the lead squad makes contact. You hit the ground with the rest of the platoon.

As the platoon leader calls for you to suppress the enemy, you simply transmit either a voice command, "Fire Priority Target Blue," or press the transmit button on your digital communications terminal (DCT), which is programmed for the target. Seconds later, mortar men drop rounds

into tubes already oriented on your target. Twenty-five seconds later, four mortar rounds crash down on Hill 460, and you notice an immediate lessening in the enemy's volume of fire.

As the platoon leader begins to maneuver the squads, you send the FDC the direction to Hill 460 (which you can get from your compass, even lying on the ground at night) and shift the fires 200 meters closer to the enemy. A minute later, the tubes reward you with another platoon volley just behind the enemy position. A correction of "Drop 100, 50% WP [white phosphorus]" both blinds and suppresses the enemy. The enemy fire abruptly ceases, and the platoon routs the remnants of their forces.

The effect of immediate firepower directed against an enemy ambush seizes the initiative from the attacker. He begins to question the success of his attack, particularly as fires creep closer to his position. In two or three minutes, an enemy could destroy a platoon in a well-prepared ambush or disappear to hit the unit again later. If 30 seconds after the enemy attacks indirect fires impact near his position, he'll seriously question who has the upper hand.

The lead platoon of a company should try to maintain a priority target on a visually identifiable feature 300 to 700 meters away. This requires established procedures and preplanning (Figure 1 below).

- The company allocates priority targets to platoons.
- The platoon FOs coordinate their targets, either directly with the firing units or through the FIST headquarters.
- The FSO plans for shifting priority targets during movement. The FIST and firing units rehearse and war-game this plan before execution.
- Firing units understand the maneuver scheme and aggressively track unit progress.

Figure 1. Requirements for Maintaining Priority Targets While Moving. Following established procedures and preplanning will allow the lead platoon to maintain a priority target on a visually identifiable feature 300 to 700 meters away.

## Shifting Priority Targets During Movement

There are several methods for shifting priority targets during movement. You can



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(1) shift from planned target to planned target, on order; (2) shift from planned target to planned target, event triggered or (3) shift to visible features identified during movement.

Method 1, shifting from planned target to planned target on the order of the FO, requires a series of targets established along the march route. As targets are no longer needed, the FO calls the fire unit and orders it to shift to the next target.

Event-triggered shifting (Method 2) ties priority targets to control measures, such as phase lines. As a unit reports crossing a phase line, the firing unit automatically shifts its tubes to the next scheduled target. Using a fire support matrix greatly facilitates this technique by clearly presenting triggers and targets to the firing unit.

FOs using Method 3 select subsequent priority targets based on identifiable features selected during their movement. It requires providing new grids to the firing unit each time the target shifts.

**Advantages.** The easiest for FOs to execute is Method 2. Standing operating procedures (SOPs) generally require them to report phase lines anyway; this system imposes no new burden upon them.

Method 3 requires the least initial coordination because FOs select targets during movement. It also ensures targets are clearly visible to the observer while pre-selected targets aren't.

FISTs can improve the reliability of their target selection in Methods 1 and 2

by using sand tables or visibility diagrams to analyze vantage points and target observation before selection.

**Disadvantages.** For Methods 1 and 2, there will be many targets (a six-kilometer move would require eight to 15 targets). The large number of targets can tax a generally overburdened targeting process. In addition, these planned targets may not be readily identifiable to FOs on the ground, negating their value.

Method 2 relies on FDCs and fire support elements (FSEs) to closely follow friendly movements. Failure to report a trigger point or monitor or respond to a report creates the potential for fratricide.

Method 3 requires proactive FOs who are constantly evaluating the terrain, selecting subsequent targets and coordinating the shifting of assets. At night, fatigued by the heavy loads imposed on FO parties and struggling to keep up with the platoon while monitoring its position, this task can stress an already preoccupied observer.

**The Choice.** Choosing an approach depends on the training level of the FOs, planning time available and factors of mission, enemy, terrain, troops and time available (METT-T). The most important points are that properly using priority targets greatly enhances fire responsiveness and employing them during movement-to-contact or infiltration should be routine. Thoroughly briefing and rehearsing all elements of the fire support system is critical for success.



## Initial Contact with the Enemy

The culmination of movement during offensive operations is usually contact with the enemy. When we know his location and are able to control when contact occurs, it's an attack. But most times, the initial contact is a surprise. This type of engagement requires special techniques to maximize the chance of success.

**Initial CFF.** Instead of adjusting rounds from a secluded hilltop several kilometers away, most initial FIST CFFs will be for a platoon in contact with an enemy within small arms range (50 to 300 meters). The FO initiates the CFF while prone, trying to avoid enemy fire, or while moving with the platoon headquarters to maneuver against the enemy. These conditions don't lend themselves to detailed target analysis, referencing terrain sketches or conversing at length with fire direction personnel.

What the lead man in the lead squad of the company's lead platoon needs is immediate fire support to suppress and destroy the enemy weapon systems arrayed against him. The entire fire planning process at the company level must facilitate this requirement.

As discussed in the movement portion of this article, the most responsive technique for providing fire support while moving is firing established priority targets. Figure 2 outlines the requirements to fire these targets while in contact.

A significant problem in responding to initial contact is the reluctance to engage targets close to friendly forces. Light infantry combat dictates that danger-close fires are the rule, not the exception. FOs and maneuver personnel must become accustomed to using indirect fires at very close ranges. During training, AR 385-63 Safety Policies and Procedures for Firing Ammunition for Training, Target Practice and Combat allows artillery and mortar firing well within the 600-meter range, which defines danger close (exact range depends on several factors). This should indicate that smaller buffers apply during combat operations.

- The FOs constantly track their progress in relation to priority targets. FIST headquarters monitors the company's priority target plan.
- The FOs know the exact locations of priority fires. If an FO can't visually identify the targeted area, he knows the basic direction and distance to the target.
- The FOs or FIST headquarters have communications with units firing priority targets.
- The FOs refine priority targets to ensure firing units lay on the point most advantageous for bringing rapid fire on the enemy.

Figure 2. Requirements for Firing Priority Targets While in Contact. The most responsive technique for providing fire support when in contact is to fire priority targets.

**Adjustment Procedures.** If the FO uses priority targets to initiate fires, shift procedures are the quickest way to move the fires to the enemy. The tendency among FOs is to rule out fire support when the enemy engages friendlies within 50 to 200 meters. In fact, precise adjustments progressively closer to enemy positions are extremely effective in reducing the enemy's will to fight. *FM 6-30 Observed Fire Procedures* cautions observers to use creeping techniques that call for no more than 100-meter corrections. Depending on the situation, using smoke can decisively alter the course of an engagement at that range and defeat the enemy's plan.

Put yourself in the shoes of the leader of an *ambushing* force: after preparing concealed firing positions for all your men, you wait for a suitable target. An enemy infantry company moves into your kill zone, and you unleash your devastating firepower, confident that surprise and your cover and concealment will provide the margin of victory over a superior force. You watch the initial panic hit the enemy unit as your men rake the kill zone with fire.

Suddenly, mortar rounds land several hundred meters behind your positions.

This surprises some of your men, who stop firing to look in the direction of the explosions. Sensing a letup in firing, you shout to the men to focus on the kill zone. The stunned enemy is now gathering strength, and your reduced fire allows them some maneuver room.

A second volley of mortar rounds lands 150 meters behind your men. Concern ripples down the line as interest shifts from the kill zone to the new threat to their rear. You detect an enemy squad maneuvering out of the kill zone, setting up flanking fires. Enemy fire has intensified, just as your fire has slackened.

Another volley lands just 50 meters away, and you realize your ambush is a failure. You order the men to fall back to the objective rally point, but enemy fire now makes movement difficult. A steady stream of mortar rounds now falls just feet away, causing casualties when men leave their holes. Troops freeze in their positions, squeezed by small arms fire to their front and a wall of steel to the rear. Now smaller rounds impact near the machine gun position. A shower of steel knocks it out of action.

The enemy systematically targets key positions with his 60-mm mortars while the 81s hold you in place. Alas, all is *lost*.

If this story isn't running through the head of the last commander you fought in an ambush or meeting engagement, the corrective action is simple: keep priority targets where you need them; prepare yourself for the unexpected by thinking through actions on contact every few minutes; and act decisively and aggressively.

Winning or losing a fire fight depends on the few critical minutes it takes one side to break the other's will.



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