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Evolving Tactics, Techniques and Doctrine for Fire Support in Peace Enforcement Operations

by Lieutenant Colonel Peter S. Corpac

30 December 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina—"Ready Six, this is Blackhawk Six. There has been a mine strike, at least one casualty; more information to follow." Simultaneously, an AH-64 pilot reported his helicopter was being painted by an SA-6 radar and Redlegs were detecting multiple mortar acquisitions—fire missions were sent to the guns.

These FA battalions must operate divisional style counterfire headquarters, serve as a power projection force and execute presence missions—all of which are extremely important to the success of Task Force Eagle's peace enforcement mission in Bosnia.

The FA's mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina is to provide fire support for peace enforcement operations to implement the military provisions of the Dayton Peace Accord and to ensure force protection. This is a very broad fire support mission. Foremost in this mission is protection of the force. That means we first establish a counterfire system that acquires and tracks all potential targets and indirect fire systems that threaten the NATO implementation force (IFOR) and take actions to dissuade the former warring factions from using artillery and mortars.

Then, if a decision is made to fire, we must attack the target with the right wea-

Although to date we have not fired a "shot in anger," that was our welcome to Bosnia. Fire support for Operation Joint Endeavor requires maneuver and artillery commanders use fire support and firing units in dramatically different ways than in conventional missions. The goal in Bosnia-Herzegovina is to compel the former warring factions to comply with the Dayton Peace Accord—if possible,

without resorting to combat. In this environment, the artillery battalion is a maneuver force as surely as an armor or infantry battalion.

The ability to provide quick and accurate fires remains the most important aspect of the fire support mission in Bosnia; however, the direct support (DS) FA battalions of the 1st Armored Division (part of Task Force Eagle), also must execute non-standard missions.

pons system. The weapon could be tanks or Bradleys, attack helicopters in close air support (CAS) as well as mortars or artillery. The first choice always will be to attack the target with precision fires with observer eyes-on-target whenever possible.

The brigade fights its artillery battalions like one of its maneuver task forces. The DS FA battalion's primary mission is fire support—but moving, positioning and employing artillery is integrated into and synchronized with the brigade peace enforcement operations.

For example, a firing platoon was positioned recently in the strategic town of Bok. It was in that town to provide an IFOR presence and show commitment at a critical time. The position was far from ideal for firing, but it had the intended effect and freed maneuver platoons to man checkpoints and clear the zone of separation (ZOS).

If we have to fire, the effects of our fires will be felt around the world, so accountability is crucial. There's no doubt that CNN would assess the battle damage for the world. Therefore, the system is in place to document the fire mission process—from target acquisition through mission approval to execution. We have to be prepared to show beyond a doubt that the target was legitimate, the fires were accurate and we made every effort to minimize collateral damage.

Organization for Combat. The mission and terrain in Bosnia-Herzegovina dictate that the DS artillery battalions in Task Force Eagle be organized differently than a conventional battalion. (The task force is comprised of the US 1st Armored Division with two of its brigades, a Russian brigade and a multinational Nordic-Polish brigade and is commanded by the 1st Armored Division's Commanding General.)

The DS FA battalions in Task Force Eagle have many of the assets of a conventional division artillery. Each battalion has a target acquisition battery with three Q-36 and two Q-37 radars, a multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS) platoon and a meteorological section attached to it. Firing platoons are prepared to be cross-attached to their sister battalion if the situation warrants it.

Mortars are an important fire support asset in peace enforcement operations. The artillery commander recommends positioning of the task force's mortars so their coverage and effects are integrated into the brigade's indirect fire coverage.

Counterfire Operations. The DS artillery battalion, with its attached TA battery, is responsible for counterfire operations in the brigade. To accommodate this and other requirements, tactical operations center (TOC) operations are unique. The TOC fights the close fire support battle, conducts counterfire operations and handles verification duties. We found that, at the DS battalion level, there isn't a lot of in-depth knowledge on counterfire operations or an understanding of the internal workings of radars and how they acquire targets.

Force protection is the radars' mission. They are positioned and oriented to detect indirect fires that threaten the IFOR, civilian population centers and ongoing operations. High-value targets are identified and possible firing positions for the weapons systems available to each side are plotted. The radars are oriented on those possible positions. A radar's difficulty in tracking rounds fired away from it complicates coverage. Many times, we must use two radars looking from different directions to cover an area.

The Q-36 and Q-37 radars are great. But while they even pick up AK-47s being fired into the air, this makes a terrible New Year's Eve as just about every native in the country fires his weapon into the air to celebrate. Our radars picked up hundreds of acquisitions, each deemed celebratory fire. But this capability allows us to detect fires originating from the ZOS, a treaty violation, and to vector maneuver forces to halt the activity. With the first target acquisition in Bosnia, our training and procedures paid off. We did *not* put 72 high-explosive (HE) rounds on some guy celebrating his birthday.

When a radar acquisition is received in the TOC, it's analyzed to ensure the target is legitimate. The S2's map is checked to see if there are weapons or suitable firing positions in the area from which the "fire" could come. Weapons characteristics must make sense—mortars in the area shooting 40 kilometers or an artillery round traveling one kilometer is not believable, indicating the acquisition is caused by something else.

Once we confirm the target is legitimate, we must have permission to fire. The decision maker must have the impact location, shooter location and details about the effects the fires would have. The probability of civilian deaths and collateral damage are always fac-

tors in receiving permission to strike a target. "Striking" a target can mean anything from maneuvering a Bradley platoon into position as a presence for deterrence, firing HE high in the air as a show-of-force or destroying the target with a Copperhead round.

Power Projection. The mission is to compel compliance with the Dayton Accord and facilitate peace in the region; attacking and destroying the three factions' units and equipment won't necessarily accomplish this mission. While we must remain prepared to shoot on a moment's notice, the best way to accomplish the mission might be to demonstrate our capabilities for accurate, deadly indirect fires to the factions. We must be seen as a tough, disciplined and professional force capable of detecting and destroying threats with little or no collateral damage.

Most of our training in stability operations emphasized fixed firing positions in base camps with little or no interaction with the faction military or civilian population. But employing artillery in this manner did not support the Task Force Eagle's commander's intent. The artillery had to be aggressive and seize the initiative—show the factions just how good we can be if we need to be. So we sought out the professional artillerymen of each faction and demonstrated the indirect fire capabilities of the American Army.

The senior artillery leader of each faction was invited to a separate demonstration. Each was shown a firing platoon occupation and spent time on the howitzers. The fire support team (FIST) and fire direction center (FDC) demonstrated the fire mission crew drill, emphasizing the speed of digital communications and the computer capabilities. We discussed the radars' capabilities and then complained of the problem of acquiring AK-47 weapons firing in the air—this helped confirm in their minds the effectiveness of the radars.

The final event was watching the speed of a digital fire mission from acquisition to firing the howitzer. The full MLRS platoon then occupied a nearby position and, in minutes, were ready to provide devastating reinforcing fires.

These unclassified presentations were a tremendous success. Every faction officer was absolutely amazed at the speed at which we can process missions, the variety and lethality of our munitions, the effectiveness of our armor protection and most important, our ability to

acquire targets. Ironically, some of the faction leaders offered to buy our equipment.

The demonstrations provided a side benefit. It established a professional relationship between us and the artillerymen of each faction. We got to know them—discussed fire support tactics and techniques used by the different factions in the war. On more than one occasion, this working relationship helped to defuse a potentially explosive situation.

There's a kinship among artillerymen around the world. It is amazing how we

all seem to gravitate toward the aiming circle and talk of celebrating Saint Barbara's Day.

Presence Missions. Strength and power are respected in Bosnia-Herzegovina—looks count. Our mission analysis quickly showed that there were not enough maneuver forces for the tasks. We concluded that moving and positioning artillery would convey our intentions, determination and professionalism—much the same as having an American carrier group patrol just off shore. Moving the guns within the brigade, emplacing them and pointing

the tubes at a faction's verification site or positions sends a powerful message to the citizens and soldiers of all sides. The guns demonstrate IFOR's commitment to the peace process and serve as its instrument to deal with those who seek to disrupt that process.

There is a tremendous psychological impact when four huge cannons and ten armored vehicles go thundering through small villages. *Everyone* knows when the cannons or MLRS are moving and where they are positioned.

The *Ready First* Brigade Combat Team (1st BCT of the 1st Armored

The FA “Presence” Mission

Of all the non-traditional artillery missions encountered since crossing the Sava River in Operation Joint Endeavor, the presence mission has been the biggest leadership challenge. The mission for a 155-mm M109 howitzer platoon is to move out of the safety of the established base camp, position itself within the zone of separation (ZOS) and project an Implementation Force (IFOR) presence. The platoon must be prepared to fire in support of friendly forces and provide adequate force protection for three or more days. Implied is the need to move through an unstable area, coordinate with maneuver forces in the area and establish contact with the local population. Although new, the presence mission is becoming the backbone of FA peace enforcement operations.

The need to maintain an IFOR presence within the ZOS was identified early during planning. There are not enough Bradley and Abrams platoons to meet all of the commitments. Moving howitzer platoons out of base camps and into forward positions conveys our commitment to enforcing the Dayton Peace Accord. Thus, artillery platoons became diplomats of sorts, dealing directly with the people effected by the accord.

The positions are usually along or in the ZOS, the strip of land that separates the Croats, Serbs and Muslims. The fighting has stopped, but many

towns have been divided or cut off by the zone from the faction they hold allegiance to. Pre-war feelings and new frustrations are alive in the ZOS, making it a potentially dangerous area.

Position Selection and Preparation. Platoon position selection is more important here than on any other missions. Although a remote, secluded area might do well in a high-intensity theater, it does not meet the requirements here. The area should be open enough to showcase the platoon's firepower and capabilities. This provides good fields of observation for perimeter security. The position also should be near a highly trafficable road the brigade has cleared for movement, a road oversized logistics vehicles can use. Recently, we cut the logistic convoy travel by getting support from the closest maneuver base camp.

To find a good position, we start with the populated towns and work our way out. Talking to the Bosnians, using a translator or speaking German, gives us a good “feel” for the town and how they'll accept our presence. Reactions have varied from welcoming us into their homes, to keeping a safe distance, to standing their ground and challenging our resolve. The Dayton Accord grants us freedom of movement, and in some cases, local civilians and military units must be reminded of that and shown that an IFOR unit will not back down. Usually people are very cooperative.

Our chief concern is to find an area that isn't mined. Local Bosnians are familiar with this requirement and have helped us select safe positions. In one case, a Serbian military commander walked in front of me into a field to demonstrate its safety.

The battery commander and platoon leaders conduct the initial route and position reconnaissance using an M992 combat ammunition transport vehicle (CATV). This serves many purposes. It provides a secure convoy, gives the platoon leaders a chance to see the area and tests for suitable roads and positions for tracked vehicles. Coordination with the task force is critical to verify cleared routes, the current situation, maneuver positions and future operations. We make a point of coordinating with adjacent units for protection with a combined quick reaction force or tie into their fire support plan.

Route selection is important. We use the platoon's movement into the position as part of the show of presence. A route must take the platoon throughout an occupied town or region to give the inhabitants a full show of the platoon's combat power.

The advance party consists of the battery commander, platoon advance party, a survey position and azimuth determining system (PADS) team and a CATV. Once at the site, the CATV positions itself to cover the advance party and orients toward the release point for the platoon. With the CATV in place, the gunnery sergeant is free to conduct advance party operations and have the PADS team establish a survey control point. The advance party also can use the CATV as a rally point to meet the oncoming platoon.

Division) is responsible for more than 3,800 square kilometers and 115 kilometers of the ZOS. This vast area cannot be covered by fires from base camps.

Therefore, at all times, at least one howitzer platoon is deployed in a forward position. The platoon moves to provide coverage throughout the sector and reinforce key areas at critical times. Mortars provide close-in fires for base camps and are positioned with distant checkpoints for fires beyond artillery coverage.

In employing the artillery battalion, one must strike a delicate balance be-

tween providing conventional fire support coverage and an imposing presence.

Fire Support Operations. Fire support operations has gotten a lot tougher. Every task force, company, platoon, checkpoint, patrol and logistics convoy must know the fire support plan and be prepared to call-for-fire. We no longer have the luxury of only the company FIST planning and executing fires. Artillery maneuver and fire support execution is decentralized. Every track commander at a checkpoint must have a sector sketch and map with targets plotted and know how to call-for-fire.

The observation plan, already a critical part of any fire support plan, is even more important in stability operations. Task force fire support elements (FSEs) track the locations of each trained observer team and lasing system. Whenever possible, we want a trained observer team with a ground/vehicular laser locator designator (G/VLLD) positioned to observe potential targets. This has brought back the old forward observer (FO) teams for patrols. Experienced observers, usually a company FIST, deploys with each task force quick reaction force. Precision strikes are al-



The howitzer's position must be open enough to showcase its firepower and capabilities.

Road March. The platoon must pay considerable attention to the main body's road march. Most of the roads cleared for traffic in Bosnia are narrow; in some cases, they don't support two-way movement. Much of the road system has been damaged during the war, yet to be repaired. The roads that are usable are filled with sharp and blind curves. The road conditions combined with the influx of refugees returning home can impede movement or cause a vehicle to go off the road.

The first sergeant plays a valuable role during self-recovery operations. In the event a vehicle breaks down, the first sergeant and recovery and maintenance assets stay with the vehicle—self recovery here in the former Yugoslavia can be a daily occurrence. The inadequate roads notwithstanding, the "thawing" climate in the spring and

soft ground can leave a vehicle stuck in place.

Occupation. The platoon occupation should be well planned, well rehearsed and well executed. As always, we have one chance to make a first impression, to demonstrate our capabilities. During occupation procedures, the commander and first sergeant must be prepared to react to any group of spectators that shows up. Most are amazed at the organized effort a well trained platoon can exert during occupation. However with many tracked vehicles moving at once with civilian spectators in the area, there is a real potential for an accident, so safety is paramount.

Once the platoon is in position, we go and meet our neighbors. We find a church, school or store that looks to be the center of activity and strike up

conversations with the townspeople. Anything said there is likely to spread throughout the town. With the aid of the translator, we quickly convey our intentions to the people.

We like to field questions from the inhabitants. This helps put everyone at ease about our mission. It also helps to generate conversations that inevitably lead to some useful information about the area. There is always concern about rogue elements, terrorists, undetected mines and snipers. Generally, the artillery platoon is the only IFOR element in the area for any period of time.

The most critical factor of the presence mission is the protection of the platoon. Although the majority of the people have accepted the IFOR presence and acted very professionally, the platoon could have to deal with multiple threats. We have encountered rogue elements, terrorists, undetected mines and independently operating snipers since we arrived. For each position, we prepare and continuously improve a strong perimeter defense.

In the presence mission, battery leaders face unique challenges. The threat of unexploded land mines and sniper attacks overshadow reconnaissance, movement and occupation. Our platoon-based operations must strike a delicate balance between force protection and force projection yet promote interaction with the local population to gather intelligence, calm fears and open the channels for commerce and facilities for soldiers.

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Platoons move out on presence missions about every two weeks. Once in position, the guns go through every target in the fire plan to ensure they can use secondary aiming references and that there are no site-to-crest problems. 6400-mil, high-angle fire missions are the standard.

Leaders go through the planning process for each mission. They prepare fragmentary orders (FRAGOs) and FA support plans for operations. They also conduct rehearsals, especially fire support rehearsals.

Evaluations and competitions provide an added incentive for soldiers. The Gunner's test, Senior Radar Operator exam and other evaluation means help keep individuals focused. Section evals for howitzers, self-propelled launcher-loaders (SPLLs), FDCs and FIST teams as well as platoon competition, enable us to maintain trained units and recognize excellence.

The batteries develop and brief their quarterly training—yes, QTBs in Bosnia. Section chiefs brief the battalion commander on how they will prepare their soldiers for individual and section evaluations.

These initiatives are designed to combat complacency, to keep "soldiers' heads in the game." They also allow us to perfect our individual and collective skills as well as develop leaders.

We hope our presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina will enable the factions to reach a lasting peace. But whatever the outcome, this will not be the last peace enforcement mission for the US Army. We all must be prepared to execute that mission.



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The platoon-based operations we employ in Bosnia are challenging—but critical.

ways the first choice. Lasing systems, to include FIST, combat observation lasing teams (COLTs) and OH-58D and AH-64 helicopters, identify targets for potential indirect or direct fire systems.

The possibility of having to execute fires in this decentralized manner drives a continuous maneuver training program. Platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, track commanders and even logistics convoy leaders are taught call-for-fire procedures, the use of the target overlay and clearance-of-fire procedures.

Fire support targets are planned for execution by each base camp, check-point, observation post and patrol. These targets are resourced with observers, and the plans are rehearsed. Targets also are planned on known positions and along critical routes. Main supply route (MSR) targets are primarily for convoy commanders to shift fire onto until help arrives.

But fire support planning and execution is not necessarily designed to kill targets. We may want to defuse a situation by sending a message, short of lethal fires. Maneuver commanders can fire illumination or smoke rounds on a target. An HE fire mission, offset 500 meters from the target and 500 meters in the air, is also a possibility.

The platoon-based operations we employ in peace enforcement operations are critical but can be challenging. We put tremendous responsibility on the platoon leadership, who must execute all artillery tasks and often has responsibility for a radar collocated with the platoon. The platoon must establish its

own perimeter for defense and coordinate with the local population and nearby friendly maneuver forces. Just as the DS battalion operates as a "mini-division artillery," the platoons often operate as "mini-batteries."

Logistics for platoon-based operations are tough. We provide maintenance support to the platoon, part from the battalion and part by splitting the battery maintenance section. The platoon maintenance slice is part of the platoon's logistics package, which also includes food, water and fuel to live for four days without resupply.

The battalion's controlling the six or eight platoons is no problem. Our operations work well in a 3x8 battalion; a 3x6 organization would make it almost impossible to cover the platoons' critical areas and command, control and support the platoons.

Staying Focused. Each unit in Bosnia-Herzegovina has the challenge of keeping its warfighting skills razor sharp while executing the peace enforcement mission. We have to keep the leaders and soldiers focused on knowing how to execute precise, rapid fires while not firing a shot.

The artillery battalions have used the Bosnia deployment as a unique training opportunity. We occupy every conceivable position. Platoons have conducted urban occupations in deserted and destroyed villages (there are lots of these). They have occupied positions in thriving communities, wooded areas, open fields—even have conducted hipshoots on roads. Every imaginable type of ammunition is on the guns.