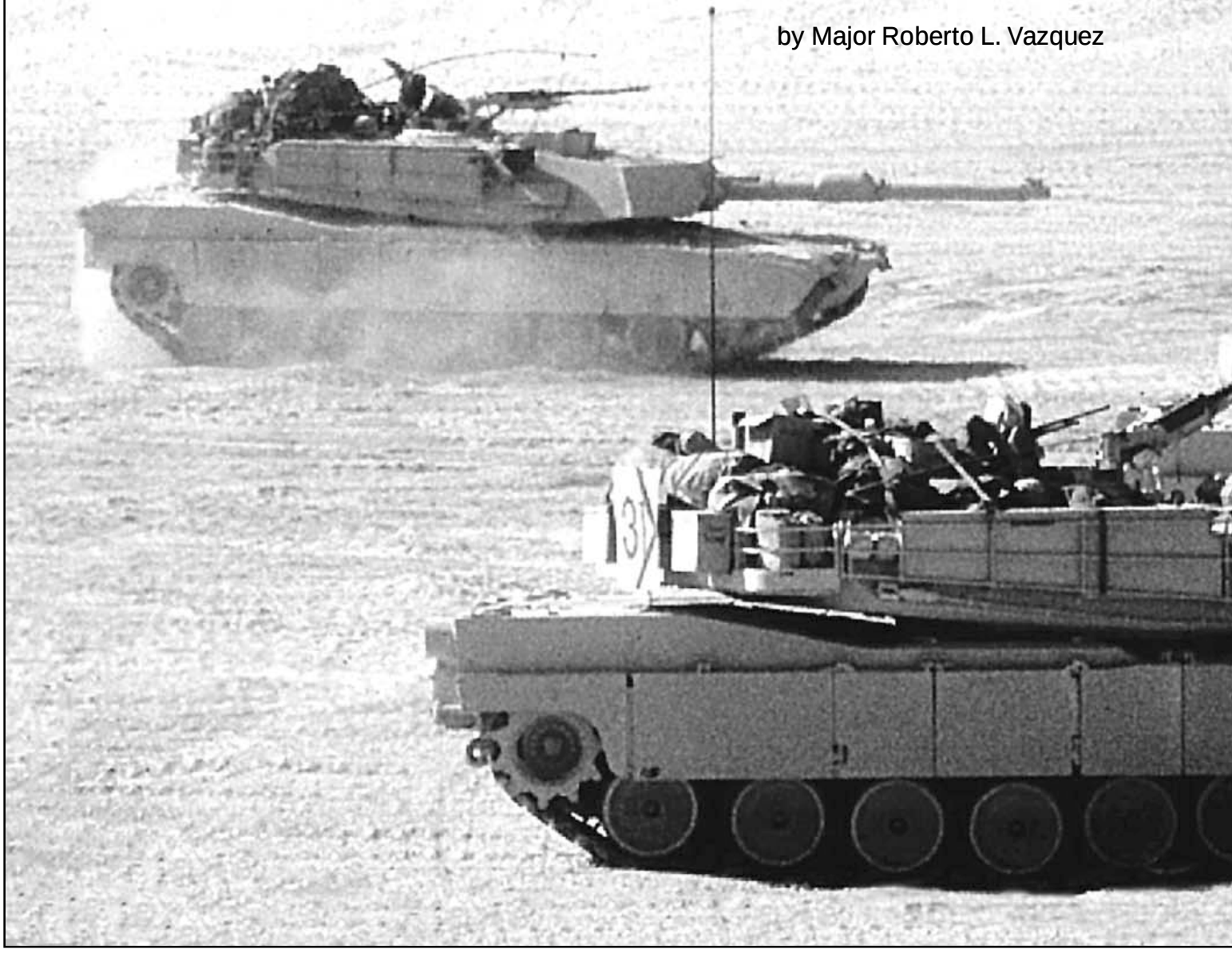
Fires in Support of Obstacles:

Matching the Fires Intent with the Obstacle Intent

by Major Roberto L. Vazquez



When properly employed, obstacles can be significant combat multipliers in defensive operations. But an obstacle not covered by direct or indirect fires is merely an inconvenience to the lead elements of the enemy formation. On the other hand, fires that aren't integrated with the obstacle plan may, in fact, be detrimental to the task and purpose of the obstacle.

When the commander conveys to the staff what he wants obstacles and fire support to accomplish and why in his intent and guidance, the staff develops a course of action (COA) to accomplish these tasks. The fire support officer (FSO) must be prepared to recommend essential tasks and purposes for fire support for the operation. The fire support tasks and purposes, whether approved by the commander or modified, become the basis for the essential fire support tasks (EFSTs) for the operation.

The commander's intent—in this case, his intent and guidance for obstacles to support his scheme of maneuver and his concept of fires—provides the FSO the *target of* the obstacle, the desired *obstacle effect* (or purpose) and the *relative location* of the obstacle in the scheme of maneuver. Meeting the commander's intent will be the result of fires covering obstacles in concert with the scheme of maneuver and the obstacle plan.

The targeting objective or desired effect of an attack on an enemy capability is "to disrupt, limit, delay or destroy" him (*FM 6-20-10 The Targeting Process*, Page 2-8). These targeting objectives can be "habitually associated" with certain types of obstacles—respectively, to disrupt, turn, fix or block the enemy (*FM 90-7 Combined Arms Obstacle Integration*). (See Figure 1.)

Commander's Desired Obstacle Effects	Commander's Obstacle Intent/Targeting Objective
Disrupt	Disrupt
Turn	Limit
Fix	Delay
Block	Destroy

Figure 1: Matching the Targeting Objective to the Commander's Intent for Obstacles

When planning fires for an obstacle, the FSO defines the EFST's task, purpose, method and effects (TPME)—he matches the intent of his fires with the commander's intent for the obstacle. (See Figure 2.)

1. Task: Tells what the EFST will do to the enemy; it has three parts: targeting objective, enemy formation and function.

2. Purpose: Describes how the task will contribute to the friendly force's mission and commander's intent.

3. Method: Provides the details of how to accomplish the task, including priorities, allocations and restrictions.

4. Effects: Is assessment-oriented and quantifies success.

Figure 2: Four Elements of the Essential Fire Support Task (EFST). Defining these TPME elements for each EFST helps ensure fires complement and are integrated into combined arms operations.

Disrupt Obstacle. If the purpose of an obstacle is to disrupt an enemy force or formation, one can expect fires to have the same targeting objective: disrupt the enemy formation by breaking it up, causing it to deploy early or slowing part of the force while allowing another part to advance unimpeded.

Figure 3 illustrates how fires might be integrated with a disrupt obstacle. As the enemy motorized infantry battalion (MIB) approaches the obstacle group, the Team A FSO fires target group A2D with dual-purpose improved conventional munitions (DPICM). The Bradley infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) engage the enemy with tube-launched optically tracked, wire-guided missiles (TOWs) between target reference points (TRPs) 08 and 09, forcing him to deploy into attack formation.

The combination of the obstacles and indirect fires slows the southern half of the enemy formation, allowing the northern half to proceed into Engagement Area (EA) Hot. Then Team A masses direct fires on the northern half of the enemy formation in EA Hot to destroy it before shifting fires to the remaining enemy force as it enters EA Hot. After disrupting the lead enemy MIB forward of the TF EA, Team A repositions to a subsequent BP to assist in the fight in the TF EA. An example of an EFST for this disrupting obstacle might read as follows:

Phase II: EA Hot

Task: Disrupt the ability of the lead MIB to mass its 3 MICs [motorized infantry companies] in EA Hot.

Purpose: To enable Team A to engage no more than 2 MICs at a time in EA Hot.

Method: Priority of FA fires to Team A, mortar priority to Team B. Team A: FA suppresses southern MIC at obstacle MD01 with target group A2D (DPICM, targets AD1005, AD1010). IEW [intelligence and electronic warfare] locates and jams MIB CMD [command] net.

Effect: FA destroys 3 BMPs and suppresses southern MIC direct fires until northern 2 MICs are destroyed in EA Hot. MIB CMD net jumps one or more times.

Turning Obstacle. A turning obstacle is typically supported with fires having an objective of limiting the enemy's ability to maneuver freely. Figure 4 is an example of how fires might be integrated with a turning obstacle.

As the advanced guard main body (AGMB) approaches the turning obstacle between TRPs 06 and 09, the Team B FSO initiates target group A1C to be fired with high-explosive (HE) rounds and DPICM. The infantry in the northern part of BP 21 orients its fires on TRP 09 to prevent the enemy from by-passing the anchor point of the obstacle group, and Team B tanks engage the enemy oriented on TRPs 01 and 02. The terrain, the obstacles and the direct and indirect fires seal the enemy's by-passing to the east and force him to redirect to the southwest to continue the attack. As the enemy passes TRP 03, the Team B commander re-orients his fires between TRPs 02 and 04 with all platoons maintaining a high volume of fire to ensure the AGMB continues southwest into the TF's main EA Pom. This turning obstacle EFST might read like this:

Phase II: EA Spice

Task: Limit the AGMB's ability to maneuver and force it through EA Spice into EA Pom.

Purpose: To enable Team B to destroy 2 MICs in EA Spice while forcing the remainder of the AGMB into the EA Pom where the TF will destroy what remains of the AGMB.

Method: Priority of FA and mortar fires to Team B. Team B: FA neutralizes southern MIC at obstacle MT02 with target group A1C (DPICM and HE, targets AC2100, AC2105). Team B allocated one FA battery FPF [final protective fire]. Restrictions: No smoke in EAs without TF commander approval. IEW locates and jams AGMB CMD net, then ADA [air defense artillery] net when remnants of AGMB enter EA Pom.

Effect: FA destroys 3 BMPs and neutralizes AGMB while direct fires destroy 2 MICs in EA Spice. AGMB CMD net jumps 2 or more times.

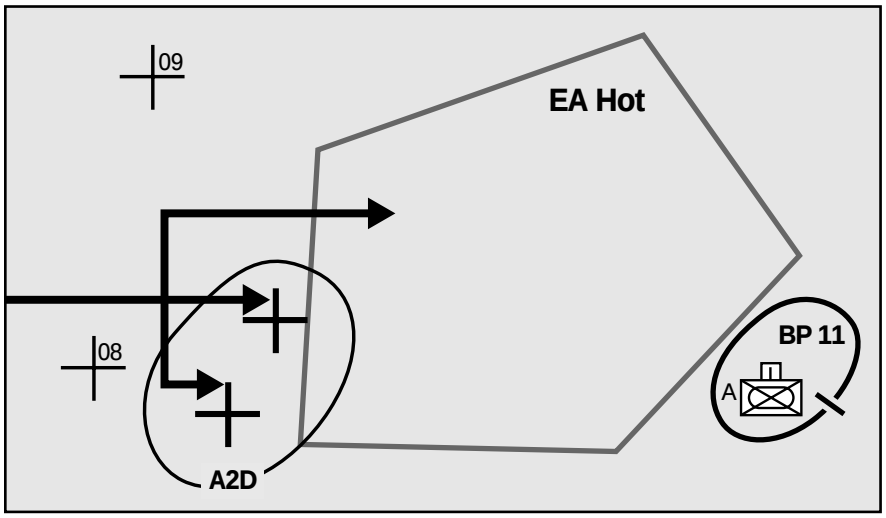


Figure 3: Disrupt Obstacle. Team A (balanced armor and mechanized infantry) must defend Battle Position (BP) 11 oriented on Engagement Area (EA) Hot between target reference points (TRPs) 08 and 09 to disrupt the lead enemy battalion, a motorized infantry battalion (MIB), forward of the task force (TF) EA. The TF fire support officer (FSO) has planned target group A2D to ensure Team A will engage no more than two enemy companies at a time with direct fire.

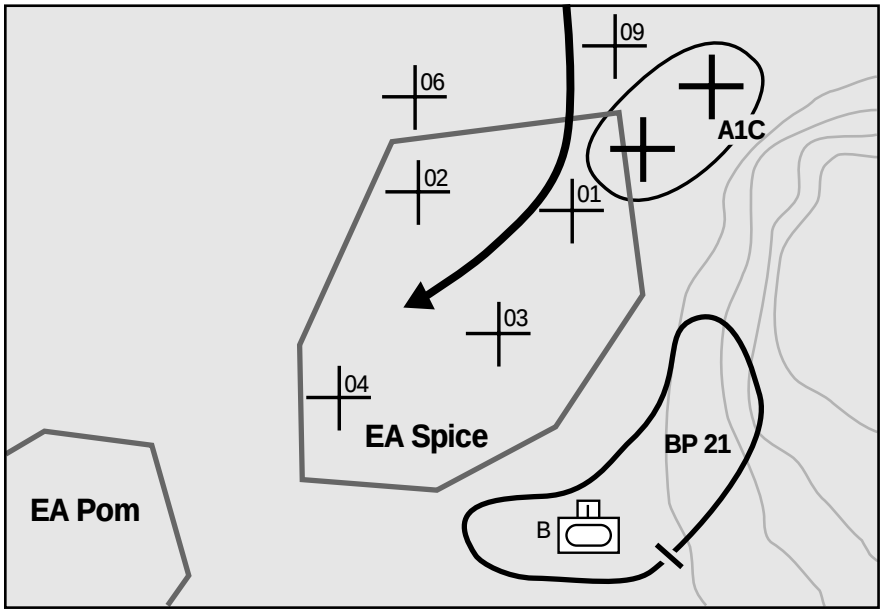


Figure 4: Turning Obstacle. Team B (armor heavy) in BP 21 oriented on EA Spice must destroy two of the enemy's motorized infantry companies (MICs) and turn the force into the TF's main EA Pom. The anchor of the turning obstacle is the restrictive terrain and the FSO's planned fires at A1C.

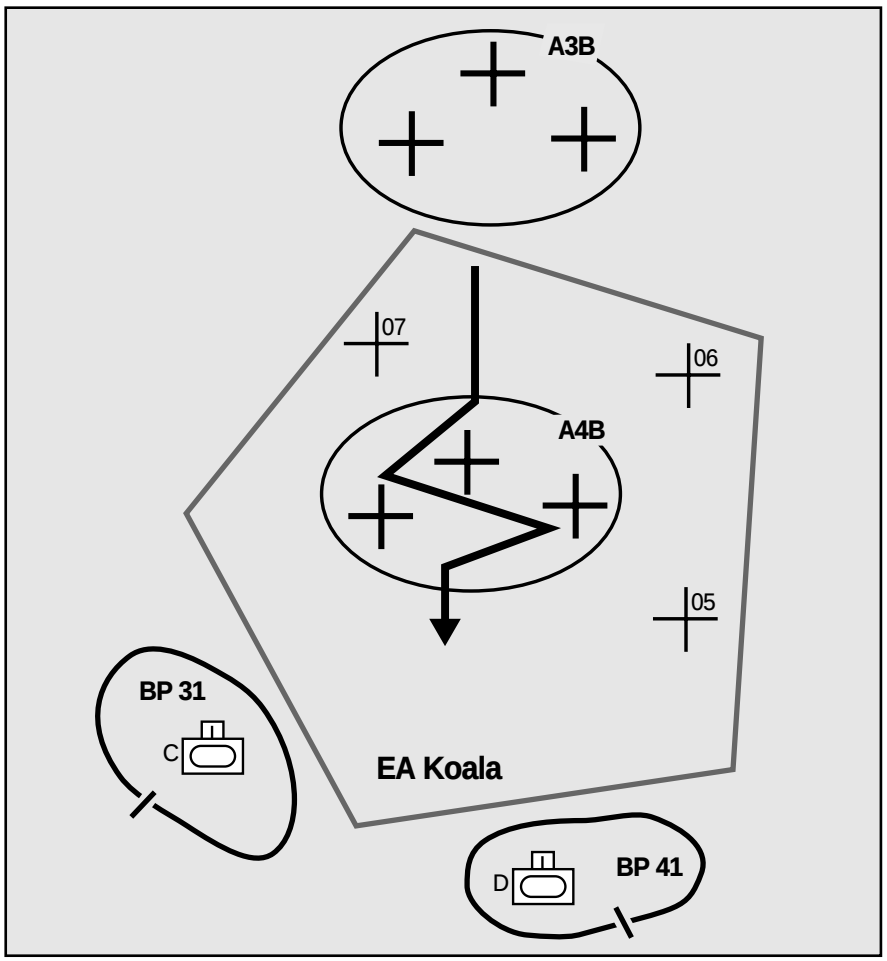


Figure 5: Fixing Obstacle. Teams C and D (both tank-heavy) in their respective BPs are to mass direct fires on and destroy two battalions of the enemy motorized infantry brigade (MIBR) in EA Koala. The TF FSO planned Phase I suppressive fires for A3B to disrupt the enemy formation and Phase II fires for A4B to delay the enemy's first echelon and allow the tanks and wire-guided missiles to destroy it in EA Koala.

A turning obstacle is typically supported with fires having an objective of limiting the enemy's ability to maneuver freely.

Fixing Obstacle. Fixing obstacles may be complemented with fires intended to delay an enemy formation. Figure 5 is an illustration of fires integrated with a fixing obstacle.

Team C in Figure 5 is oriented between TRPs 05 and 06; Team D is oriented between TRPs 06 and 07. The TF FSO planned FA fires in target group A3B (Phase I) to disrupt the enemy formation with suppressive fires and force the commander to deploy early. FA target group A4B in EA Koala is intended to delay the first-echelon MICs by neutralizing them in the EA with DPICM, enabling the tanks and TOWs to destroy them in the EA. Thus, the EFST for this fixing obstacle is:

Phase II: EA Koala

Task: Delay the first-echelon MIB forces movement through EA Koala.

Purpose: To allow Team C and Team D to mass direct fires on and destroy the first-echelon MICs in EA Koala.

Method: Priority of FA and mortar fires to Team C. Team C: FA neutralizes first-echelon MICs at obstacle MF03 with target group A4B (DPICM and HE, targets AB1620, AB1625, AB1630). Team C allocated one FA battery FPF. Team D: Alternate executor for A4B. Restrictions: No smoke or illumination in EA without TF commander approval. IEW locates and jams first-echelon MIB CMD nets, then MIBR [motorized infantry brigade] CMD net after first-echelon MIBs are destroyed.

Effect: FA destroys 3 tanks and 6 BMPs and neutralizes AGMB while direct fires destroy 4 MICs in EA Koala. MIB CMD net jumps one or more times. MIBR CMD net jumps one or more times.

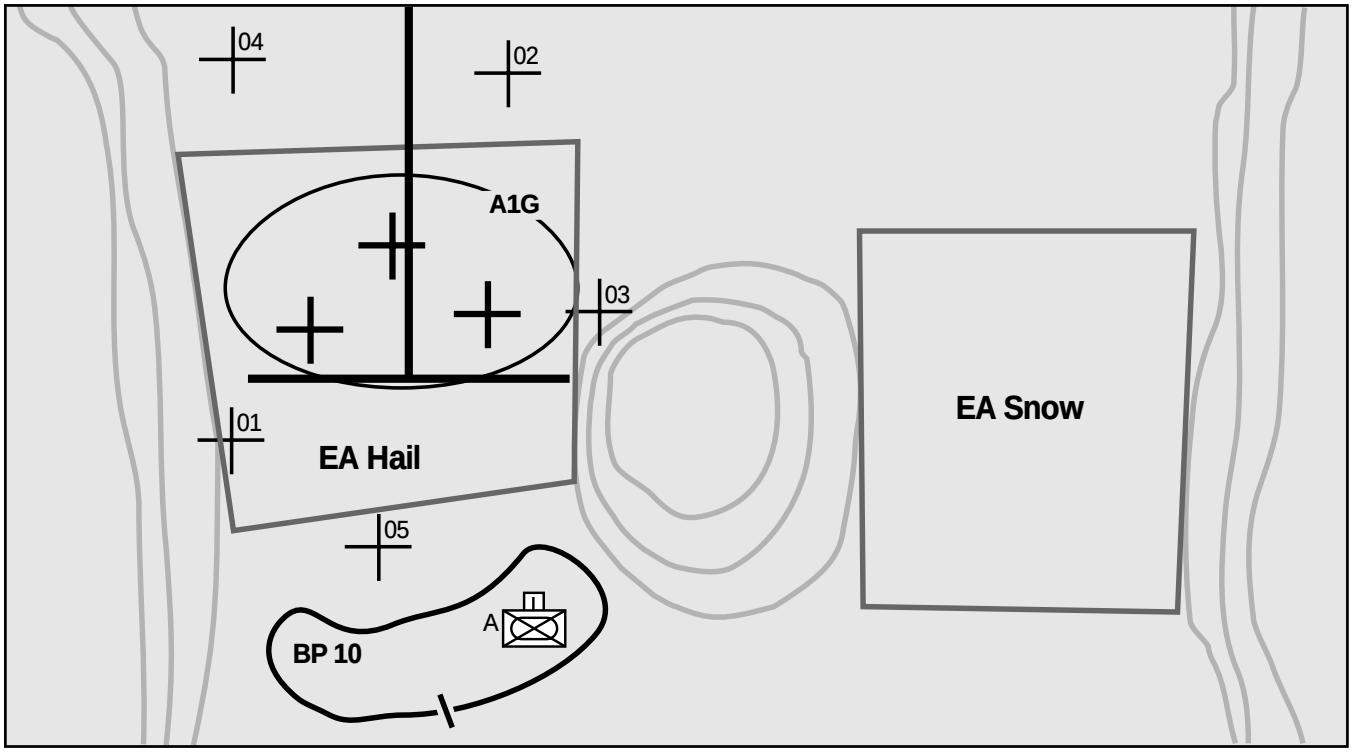


Figure 6: Blocking Obstacle. Team A (tank heavy) in BP 10 must prevent the enemy MIB from using the western pass as an avenue of approach, forcing the enemy brigade follow-on forces through the eastern pass so the TF can mass fires and destroy them. When the lead elements of the MIB pass TRP 04, the Team A FSO will fire target group A1G. To prevent the enemy from penetrating BP 10, the FSO has allocated one FA battery final protective fire (FPF) and one mortar platoon FPF.

Blocking Obstacle. Because blocking obstacles are used to either deny the enemy an avenue of approach (AA) or prevent him from passing through an EA, fires for a blocking obstacle often have a targeting objective of destroying an enemy element. Figure 6 is an example of the application of fires to a blocking obstacle. The object is to block an enemy MIB from using the western pass. The TF commander wants the follow-on forces of the enemy MIBR to advance through the eastern pass so he can mass his combat power to destroy the enemy in EA Snow.

Team A has its eastern platoon oriented between TRPs 01 and 02 and the western platoon oriented between TRPs 02 and 03. The mechanized platoon in the center is oriented between TRPs 02 and 04. When the lead elements of the MIB pass TRP 04, the Team A FSO will initiate group A1G to destroy elements beyond the blocking obstacle MB04.

Copperhead priority target AG1005 will be used to destroy engineer breaching vehicles. If the enemy succeeds in establishing a breaching lane, the TF commander will re-seed the obstacle with family of scatterable mines (FASCAM) (target AG9000). An example of a blocking obstacle EFST is:

Phase II: EA Hail

Task: Destroy elements of an MIB attempting to breach the blocking obstacle in EA Hail.

Purpose: To enable Team A to deny the enemy access to the western pass at EA Hail and force the MIBR into the pass at EA Snow for the TF to mass combat power against the MIBR.

Method: Priority of FA and mortar fires to Team A. Team A: FA destroys elements of an MIB in the western pass with target group A1G (DPICM and HE, targets AG1100, AG1105, AG1110) at obstacle MB04. Destroy enemy engineer breaching vehicles with Copperhead priority target AG1005. If the obstacle group is breached, re-seed with one FA-emplaced medium-density FASCAM minefield (AG9000). Team A allocated one FA battery FPF and a mortar platoon FPF. Once the follow-on elements of the enemy MIBR turn to the eastern pass, priority of FA fires is to Team D. IEW locates and jams MIBR CMD net, then ADA net when CAS reports IP [initial point].

Effect: FA destroys 2 tanks and 7 BMPs at the blocking obstacle. Copperhead destroys 3 engineer vehicles. Obstacle group is re-seeded with FASCAM if breach lane is established.

Clearly understanding the commander's intent for obstacles and fires enables the FSO to develop and recommend the most appropriate EFSTs to integrate fires and support the maneuver commander's plan.

Major Roberto L. Vazquez until recently was a Small Group Instructor for the Field Artillery Officer Advanced Course in the Fire Support and Combined Arms Operations Department (FSCAOD) at the Field Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Currently, he is a student at the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In previous assignments, he was Chief of and an Instructor in the Basic Fire Support Branch, also in FSCAOD; Commander of C Battery, 5th Battalion, 29th Field Artillery and Division Artillery Counterfire Officer, both in the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Carson, Colorado; and Platoon Leader, Fire Direction Officer and Armor Company Fire Support Officer in the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized) in Germany.