



From the Desk of the FA CSM: 1SGs in LSCO

This year's Fires Conference theme was Fires in Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO). A great opportunity for Field Artillery leaders at multiple echelons from our Army, partnered and allied nations to engage in discussion to shape the future of the FA Force. Solid discussion throughout on various approaches and initiatives to get us where we need to be in the very near future. As I reflected on the discussions however, I realized with all we're doing there is a segment of our force for which we have not addressed gaps in tactical experience and training; our First Sergeants.

The critical role the First Sergeant plays in training and preparing his/her unit caused me to recall some of my own experiences as a First Sergeant. Using some of my observations as well as those shared from our senior Observer Controllers at the Combat Training Centers (CTCs), I'll lay out some of the tactical responsibilities required for success in large scale ground combat operations, along with some ways to get after it – because pointing out issues without solutions isn't what leaders do. The goal is an application of gathered experience for senior noncommissioned officers applicable to different problem sets they will encounter in their tactical role.

In the Decisive Action Environment (DAE), it's a safe bet you won't have much of what you've become accustomed to in the COIN environment. We must practice to be self-sufficient through planning, preparation and checks before SP. Start out by cutting the umbilical cord to the rear – if we know we can 'run back' for x or y because we failed to plan, we become reliant on that lifeline. Failing to plan and practicing to be self-sufficient (expeditionary) in home station training creates additional friction when we arrive to train at the CTCs - the result of that failure in combat operations is much more ominous. Home station training and validation is absolutely critical - far too many

times our units show up unprepared to fight the Combined Arms fight. Let's discuss some key areas the First Sergeant should be responsible for and directly involved to ensure their unit is trained and ready in the tactical environment. If we can't train our batteries to do these things routinely, and we're not personally involved, it doesn't matter how proficient our gunnery is – we won't keep the battery in the fight.

Beans, bullets, medics and maintenance

Not going to talk much about chow. This seems to be an area where First Sergeants aren't doing terrible, just don't forget your retrans, radar and in some cases FISTers like to eat hot chow occasionally, too. The rest of the conversation relating to logistics and support however, are key. Having the right stuff at the right place at the right time doesn't automatically happen. In DAE, you can't depend on the luxury of contracted support – we've got to be able to do it ourselves, with our internal systems. Getting senior NCOs (First Sergeant, CSM) routinely involved in planning and forecasting before we're in the tactical environment, or in contact, provides leaders at all levels with sets and reps, and allows senior leaders' experience to identify potential friction points before they become detrimental to the mission. First Sergeants' involvement in the planning and execution of logistics hand-offs for example, may identify potential hazards, more efficient loads, realistic timelines or potential gaps in planning.

A sure way for Soldiers to do routine things routinely and build muscle memory is to start training at home station with basic day-to-day activities that First Sergeants are already doing – reporting is a great start. Take a look at the systems and reporting

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you have in place while in garrison – some reports are also required in the tactical environment as well. For example, your Battery/Battalion requires submitting a daily PERSTAT; why not use the same format that's in the TACSOP in garrison? You might have to make a couple of minor adjustments, but doing so will allow everyone involved, from Section Chief to the S-1, to get extra reps and it becomes routine – doesn't matter if you're in garrison or the field we know what the report is, what info to provide, who gets it and when. Additionally, involving yourself in and incorporating LOGSTAT reporting in garrison gets the same result. Every unit struggles with accurate reporting at CTCs which is a fairly good indicator they will in a DAE; you have to let your higher HQ know what you have on hand and what you need in a timely manner. Consistently using the same reporting format regardless of environment builds muscle memory at all levels. Your involvement makes it important to your Soldiers.

Establishing accurate, routine reporting leads to keeping up with it all (accurate tracking), which provides the ability to forecast for upcoming battles. A prime example is Class V - ammunition. As a platoon sergeant, you may have experienced the friction of tracking what you had on hand and getting it to the right guns/launchers for upcoming missions. Remember the frustration of having to shuffle rounds around the position at the expense of Soldiers energy and risk to the mission because someone couldn't keep a good round count? Multiply that tenfold for battery and battalion ops and you see how important the proactive First Sergeant can be. As a First Sergeant, understanding the upcoming mission/battle, coupled with good knowledge of what's on hand and your experience as a leader gives you the ability to influence the forecasting of Class V to ensure the right quantities (rounds/rockets/missiles, charges, fuzes, primers), configurations (crated, pallets, pods), optimal delivery methods and locations to ensure mission success, or at the very least to see if the plan is executable in the time allotted. Too many wait around for battalion or the Forward Support Company (FSC) to come up with a distribution plan. The Battalion Ammunition Officer likely doesn't have the same level of experience or may not understand how to forecast for things such as FASCAM and SMK

or the difference in counting rockets versus pods. First Sergeants' involvement early on and throughout will eliminate much of the friction and saves significant time and energy, resources and reduces risk substantially.

Many currently in senior NCO positions at battery and battalion, spent their formative years in the COIN environment where we had the protection of the 'golden hour' MEDEVAC; the DAE will not be as forgiving. Again, you must plan and consistently train casualty care/evacuation to be as self-sufficient as possible. Rotations at the CTCs demonstrate this is clearly not a thought out process at the Battery level, as most units lose Soldiers from point of injury (POI) to Role 1 due to lack of rehearsals or a dedicated area for wounded to be collected. You have to have a plan with assigned responsibilities, everybody needs to know the plan and their responsibilities, and you must rehearse the plan every time you occupy new terrain. Establish roles and enforce execution during every FTX. Your medics must establish a Casualty Collection Point (use the DIME method) in each position, complete with signs and markings (have them make a kit and keep it stocked), once established they should inform everyone in the position where it is. Each section should walk the terrain from their position to the CCP at some time, both day and night to identify hazards and ensure they can get there. All Soldiers can perform first aid (remind your Soldiers of this) but you should have at least one CLS/TC3 trained Soldier in each section with a bag. Get a litter (SKEDCO or standard) for every section – the CLS bag and the litter should be in the same location in every like-type vehicle so everyone knows where they are. Identify and train litter teams in each section in advance (primary and alternates - don't make your CLS folks litter bearers!) Identify non-standard CASEVAC vehicles and be sure they have every piece of equipment they need to be used as a CASEVAC vehicle (troop straps, tie-downs, tarps), they need to be ready to load on a moment's notice (empty). Do Soldiers know how to load casualties (litter or ambulatory) in each type of vehicle? Rehearse it in the motor pool during Command

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Maintenance days, do it in the field during CASEVAC rehearsals; key word is do it, repeatedly. Establish a succession of responsibility for leading CASEVAC - for example First Sergeant; if not available 1st PSG; then 2nd PSG; then 1st Gunny; then 2nd Gunny. Important everyone knows who will be responsible, who takes charge when and just as important do they all know the plan? Where are the ambulance exchange points (AXP), Role 1 and Role 2? What other units are adjacent and where is their Role 1 located? Don't need to drive ten kilometers to your Role 1 if there's an adjacent unit Role 1 two kilometers away. Everyone in the succession of responsibility needs to know locations, so if they must lead the CASEVAC, they get there sooner. Just as sections should walk the terrain to the position CCP, these folks should conduct recons to the AXP, Role 1 and Role 2 if time permits, or at the very least a collective map recon. Who is collecting casualty data, who do they give it to and did it get sent/was it received (look back to accurate reporting). All this should be common practice every time an element of your battery goes to the field so it becomes 'the way we always do it.' Think you don't have the time? How much time would you like to spend explaining to a family why their Soldier died of wounds when we could have saved them?

Maintenance

We have to reestablish the culture of 'my gun, my responsibility.' Too often, NCOs aren't getting their hands dirty on maintenance and consistent upkeep of the equipment they are responsible for. They must understand they must do everything possible to keep their gun/launcher/equipment in the fight. This culture change starts with Command Maintenance. Just like everyone should be doing PT during PT hours, everyone (including the First Sergeant) should be in the motor pool all day during command maintenance - if you ain't there, who's enforcing everyone else is present? If good maintenance isn't being done in garrison, it won't get done in the field. We can't let leaders off the hook with 'I put it on the 5988E,' or let them go home when they have parts they can hang. Effective Field Artillery units have the same sense of urgency on maintenance as they do during fire missions - it's

THAT important. What are your subordinate leaders checking on? How many of your Soldiers are unable to troubleshoot basic issues? Lack of lubricant and -10s only compound the issue. Do your Soldiers have what they need to do basic maintenance/lube, not just in the motor pool but in the field, daily? Are they doing proper daily maintenance in the field? When breeches don't close... no boom, when comms fails because it is dirty, no boom... seems like such basic things but the First Sergeant's personal, consistent involvement can easily fix it. I learned as a Private to do those things I knew my Chief was going to check - if no one is checking, it probably isn't getting done. Lack of leaders checking, results in failure. We cannot afford to fail and keep ourselves out of the fight.

I'm sure every CSM who's been to a CTC LTP before their rotation has heard much of what I have discussed here. Yet I, and others, have still seen unit after unit struggle with these during the bloodless training rotations, mainly because leaders get overcome by events. I offer this article as a way for you to incorporate these techniques in your everyday training, so it becomes instinctive among your formations and it doesn't have to be something you need to work on, but something your unit does routinely. Repetition builds muscle memory and when the situation gets tough, Soldiers and the unit will perform as they've been trained because it's ingrained. They're not going to figure it out under duress at the training center, or under fire in combat, but if they've done it enough times in training, familiarity will kick in and they can adapt what they know to the varying conditions. Training should be bloodless, large scale combat operations will not be. Being in combat does not make the unit successful in a combat situation; the training you do before does... make it good and make it count.

King of Battle!

CSM Berk Parsons

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