

From the FA Commandant's desk

Q & A with the 53rd FA Commandant

Q: Was being the FA CMDT unexpected or was it something that's been on your radar?

A: Never for a second did I expect to become the FA Commandant. Having said that, I'm thrilled and humbled to serve our Army and Branch in this capacity.

Q: Now that you are the CMDT and chief of the branch; how do you feel about it?

A: Excited and energized! Like anyone else who has served this long, the Army has provided me a wealth of great Fire Support experiences through multiple deployments and training events, incredible mentorship from senior officers and NCOs, and opportunities to learn by working with talented Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, and Marines of all ranks and branches. What a fantastic opportunity to give back to our Army.

Q: Going forward, where would you like to take the school and the branch?

A: We need to keep on our current trajectory. Increased academic and physical rigor focused on fighting and winning against a peer threat in large scale combat operations. Our Nation has a tradition of fighting large scale wars with Fires...we will remain ready to do so when called upon.

Q: I know you want to focus on the school rather than the branch exclusively; why is that?

A: Our primary and most sacred duty here at the school house is producing competent, fit, and assertive Artillery warriors for the operational force, period. To do this, we must



routinely take a hard internal look to make sure our POIs are current, our instructors are fully qualified, and that we are applying appropriate academic and physical rigor. We will continue to inform and adjust our internal efforts through routine, two way, and transparent communication with Commanders in the operational force, our CTCs, and MCTP.

Q: What challenges does the FA face from your perspective?

A: Nothing insurmountable. Focus on the basics of communicate, shoot, and move under combat conditions.

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Q: How is the school house meeting those challenges?

A: We are getting to the field more often, we are ruthlessly removing any current academic requirement that is not singularly focused on our mission to destroy our enemies in defense of our Constitution, and we are increasing our rigor during PT by implementing ACFT principles.

Q: Are you planning on any changes to the FA curriculum?

A: Yes. We pulled out 80 hours of “common core” requirements in CCC and are replacing those with pure Fire Support and Artillery specific skills. We are conducting a similar effort in BOLC-B by modifying how we teach skills currently residing in our JFO POI. I anticipate greater changes to the BOLC-B curriculum over the next six months as we drastically increase rigor for our newest officers. For example, we are developing an echelonment of Fires for BOLC-B students where they will execute Danger Close Fires.

On the warrant officer side, we have already begun implementing reforms in FA Warrant Officer Basic Course that improve our generation of FA Technicians (MOS 131A) as system of targeting systems integrators – digitally and procedurally. We’ve begun to develop significant improvements in the FA Warrant Officer Advanced Course, to integrate additional fire support and joint targeting instruction. Finally, with much-appreciated emphasis from the Combined Arms Center CG, we’ve begun to develop a Warrant Officer Intermediate Level Education, Phase 3 course for our

senior warrant officers, focused on division/JTF level and above.

CSM Parsons has led the way in pursuing revolutionary changes to our Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development System (NCOPDS) with a rewrite of all programs of instruction (POI) for the FA Advanced and Senior Leader courses. Our intent is to develop FA NCOs to perform critical duties, train NCOs on the skills and knowledge required to certify their team/section/platoon, and prepare the NCO to lead the team/section/platoon by providing timely and accurate Fires in support of large-scale combat operations.

Q: Is there anything else I didn’t mention, that you would like to talk about?

A: Having served as an Artilleryman for 27 years, I can think of no more exciting time to be in the best branch in our Army! Our civilian and military senior leaders have made Fires modernization a top priority, Artillery force structure is growing, our maneuver commanders have more confidence and appreciation for our WfF than ever before, and we continue to demonstrate the awesome lethality of Joint surface to surface/air to surface Fires in combat and at our cornerstone training events during CTC rotations and WFXs.

Keep up the Fire! King of Battle!

BG Stephen G. Smith

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