

TRAINING AREA WANTED

The need for a dedicated training venue for a field artillery brigade

By Lt. Col. Anthony Bianchi

My team of observer coach / trainers (OC/Ts) from First Army and I spent three weeks observing and assisting a field artillery brigade (FAB) headquarters (HQs) and its subordinate battalions during Northern Strike 2018 at Camp Grayling, Mich., (CGMI) in August 2018. Training centers such as CGMI provide unique opportunities for brigade and division-level units to train as they would fight. At this time there is not an established venue which facilitates quality training to a field artillery brigade similar to those which exist for brigade combat teams (BCTs) at the combined training centers (CTCs); such as the National Training Center (NTC) or the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). NTC and JRTC do not have the necessary space in a field environment to accommodate a FAB along with a division-level HQs and a combat aviation brigade (CAB) HQs while maintaining a BCT with enablers. With four FABs in the active component and eight in the

National Guard, not having a dedicated training center capable of supporting FABs highlights a major training opportunity deficiency. Northern Strike 2018 opened my eyes to this issue and through this article I hope to highlight the main reasons why the U.S. Army needs a training center more capable of supporting a FAB.

With a paradigm shift in training focus from the counter-insurgency (COIN) fight to large-scale combat operations (LSCO) against a peer or near-peer competitor, the need for a location to train FABs in their traditional, doctrinal role is imperative now more than ever. This requirement is necessary for a few reasons. First, war against a near-peer competitor will be a division-led fight versus a BCT-led fight with the U.S. not having air superiority from the onset, thus prompting division-level field artillery Fires reinforced with FAB Fires as a key to victory. Next, the ability of FABs to execute mission command in its traditional role as a corps as-

set reinforcing a division waned over the past 15 years. Finally, a knowledge gap exists within the FAB HQs regarding the FAB's role in the targeting process within a LSCO fight. Let's take a look at these reasons with more context.

War against a peer or near-peer competitor will have U.S. forces fighting as divisions rather than BCTs like the past 16 years. Further, the U.S. will fight without the benefit of air superiority. There is no doubt that FABs, a corps asset, will reinforce divisions with their rocket and cannon Fires in this inevitable conflict. This emphasizes the need to have well-trained FABs ready to reinforce divisions with counter fire, suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD) and shaping/deep Fires. This will become paramount to the success of the U.S. military strategy. Currently, the formidable enemies of the U.S. can "out-gun" and "out-range" the U.S. in terms of indirect fire capability. Division commanders must rely heavily on the rocket and cannon artillery

capability residing in the FABs at the corps level to provide timely and accurate counter-fire against enemy long-range systems in the early phases of battle against a capable adversary. Dominating the indirect fire fight during these early phases of war would allow the BCTs freedom of maneuver within their sectors by mitigating effects on their formations from enemy indirect Fires.

Additionally, the U.S. would likely regain air superiority through the FAB's ability to provide effective SEAD Fires in order to integrate fixed and rotary wing assets back into the fight. Eliminating the air defense threat to U.S. assets brings air dominance back into the U.S.'s favor and increases the U.S.'s lethality and ability to mass Fires in the right time and space on the battlefield to overwhelm the enemy. In order to become experts once more at executing critical fire support tasks, FABs must have a viable venue to perform its mission which is to plan, prepare, execute and assess combined arms oper-

ations to provide close support and precision strike for the corps employing joint and organic Fires and capabilities to achieve distribution effects in support of commanders operational and tactical objectives.

Repeated deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the Global War on Terror significantly degraded the ability of FABs to integrate subordinate field artillery battalions and execute the function of mission command in its traditional role of supporting the corps commander's operational and tactical objectives which usually means reinforcing a division-level headquarters in support of the corps fight. For more than a decade FABs deployed piecemeal to execute non-standard missions and as a result lost their ability to do their core mission as a FAB HQs. Understanding the military decision-making process (MDMP) and its outputs at the FAB-level is the starting point for successful mission command operations and integration of subordinate battalions. Ideal-

ly, the FAB staff creates an Annex D for the corps operations order through the MDMP that focuses on achieving corps-directed Fire Support Tasks (FSTs) by assigning responsibility of those FSTs to subordinate battalions. Those battalions now have a task and purpose to drive the MDMP process at their level. Associated products of the Annex D that help guide both the FAB HQs and subordinate battalions are the Field Artillery Support Plan, High Payoff Target List, Attack Guidance Matrix, Target Selection Standards and Field Artillery Synchronization Matrix. These products should revolve around the FSTs and drive the planning and executing at the brigade and battalion level, thus supporting the FAB's ability to conduct mission command. This process brings together all the warfighting functions to provide collective support in the successful completion of each FST. Having a training center that can accommodate a FAB HQs placed in the role to reinforce a division HQs

First Army OC/T, Master Sgt. Oscar Martinez Canada, from 3-314th FA, discusses improvements on a fighting position with two Army National Guard Soldiers during Northern Strike 2018 at Camp Grayling, Mich. (Courtesy photo)



in the same field environment as the subordinate battalions would increase readiness in this endeavor and would also set the conditions to exercise a multi-echelon targeting process with a focus on FAB integration.

My opinion is most, if not all, FAB HQs lack the understanding of their role in the targeting process to support a division-level HQs in a LSCO conflict against a near-peer enemy. I saw this firsthand when my team and I provided OC/T support to a FAB from the Army National Guard (ARNG) during Northern Strike 2018. This particular FAB had a very talented staff and recently came back from a deployment to Iraq where they served primarily as a deliberate targeting cell for a corps HQs. Early during the exercise we realized the FAB staff did not understand their role in the targeting process for a LSCO exercise. They remained focused on nominating high payoff targets (HPTs) not aligned with the division directed FSTs for which they were supporting during this exercise versus refining division targets associated with those FSTs. The FAB S2 and Fires cell had a learning curve in understanding the importance of nominating named areas of interest (NAIs) that support their FSTs and requesting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support to identify HPTs in order to transform those NAIs to target areas of interest and changes / additions to permissive fire support coordination measures (FSCMs) to better execute traditional FAB missions such as counter fire, SEAD and shaping Fires. My assumption is this mindset exists with most personnel in all FAB HQs. The need exists for some sort of training venue where FAB staff personnel can understand the difference between targeting in a COIN environment and targeting within a LSCO environment.

Using the concept of Northern Strike at CGMI or another similar training center, can provide every FAB the optimal joint/

combined arms training environment necessary to hone the skills to fight a peer or near-peer enemy in a LSCO conflict. Incorporating a few lessons learned from Northern Strike 2018 would undoubtedly make this exercise the preferred method to train all FABs from the Active Component and the National Guard. At a minimum each exercise rotation would need to include a portion of a division HQs with Joint Air Ground Integration Cell capability to clear Fires, perform certain G2 functions and possess the ability to execute the targeting process with the Army in the lead and not the Air Force. The FAB would need to be placed in role of reinforcing a division area.

The exercise would also need the participation of a live CAB HQs to enable coordination between the FAB and CAB on massing Fires in the deep fight not attainable in a warfighter exercise environment. The exercise would also need a BCT to provide the necessary bottom-up, real-time feedback to the scenario and to the targeting process at division level. Having a live BCT and a CAB HQs would also significantly increase the training efficiency and shape everyone's understanding of their respective roles in the close and deep fights within a division battle space. Finally, the FAB would need to only bring its HQs to the exercise to get the training required which is coordinating with the division, CAB and BCT HQs. Over time the exercise can and should include the FAB's subordinate field artillery battalions for live coordination and associated effects.

The training mindset in the military changed with a focus of preparing to fight a peer enemy within a LSCO conflict where the U.S. will not have air superiority from the beginning. For the U.S. military to be successful, the U.S. Army Field Artillery, specifically the FABs, need to be more effective at supporting division level HQs as part of the corps commander's intent in this type

of war. To do this, the U.S. Army needs a venue dedicated to training FABs on these skills for the following reasons. First, war against a near-peer competitor will be a division-led fight versus a BCT-led fight with the U.S. not having air superiority from the onset, thus prompting the FAB as the center of gravity for success. Next, the ability of FABs to integrate subordinate field artillery battalions and execute the function of mission command in its traditional role supporting a division-level headquarters diminished over the past 16 years.

Finally, there exists a lack of understanding of the FAB's role in the targeting process within a LSCO conflict environment. Once the FABs are proficient at being the lethal arm of a corps ready to support divisions, the U.S. Army will have a sharpened tool essential in defeating a peer or near-peer threat. BCTs have at least three dedicated, highly resourced, quality training centers. Knowing that the next war will pit division against division and rely heavily on indirect fire to regain air superiority, isn't now the time to resource a quality training center for FABs?

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