

CHAPTER 4

FIRE SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT

Applying the appropriate tactics, techniques, and procedures for employing fire support in combat operations is vital. Gaining an appreciation of how to apply fire support in offensive and defensive operations will help you develop your guidance for fire support. This chapter provides considerations for you to plan and execute offensive and defensive operations.

OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS

In offensive operations, fire support is characterized by decentralized execution with most of the firepower toward the main effort. Normally, one DS battalion is supporting each attacking maneuver brigade-sized force. Additional fires may be available from a reinforcing artillery battalion. Your control of the rate of movement is paramount for effective synchronization of fire support and maneuver.

Movement to Contact

A movement to contact is characterized by vague intelligence, limited reconnaissance, and the potential for rapidly changing situations. The following issues need to be addressed in the overall plan:

- Plan targets on the basis of the S2's IPB. Potential targets include known or suspected enemy locations, likely engagement areas (EAs) where you expect contact, and targets in support of future missions. In the absence of known, suspected, and likely enemy locations, targets are planned along the route of march. This keeps supporting artillery within range as the unit moves to contact.
- Ensure immediately responsive fires are provided initially to the lead element and then to the lead company as contact develops. This is done by assigning POF initially to the security force, then the advanced guard.
- Make your mortar platoon direct support to the advance guard company or team to provide immediately available fire support upon contact. This provides the advanced guard commander with responsive fire support when contact is made. Ammunition will be critical for the use of mortars in subsequent engagements.

- Ensure effective positioning of FOS and COLTs, if attached. Consider using the platoon FOs (mechanized and light forces only) to augment your scouts. Your scouts at times will have the best view of the enemy; therefore, ensure they have the ability to call for fire.
- Use your reserve company or team FISTs to augment flank security elements to get additional *eyes forward*. Care must be taken to leave the losing unit with some means of calling for fire.
- Ensure that artillery movements are synchronized with the OPTEMPO of the maneuver force and the FS requirements of the FS plan. In a mechanized environment, this might require a portion of the supporting artillery to move right behind the lead elements.
- Plan fires and smoke to support possible breaching operations. Incorporate these fires into battle drills and rehearsals for breaching operations. Remember fire support plays a key role in the *S* and *O* phases of SOSR (suppress, obscure, secure, reduce).
- Maximize the use of priority targets along the axis of advance. Ensure these targets are put into effect and canceled on the basis of the movement of the forward element. This is a key responsibility of the FSO and FSE. (For additional information on priority targets, see Appendix M.)
- Ensure the coordinated fire line (CFL) is kept forward of the lead element to protect the force but close enough to allow responsive engagement of targets. Phase lines work well for CFLs. The FSE, in concert with the maneuver battle staff, must assist you in this task.

Hasty Attack

A hasty attack, by its very nature, is constrained by the amount of time to prepare. To overcome this challenge, consider the following:

- A simple and rapidly produced FS plan is essential to effectively integrate all FS assets. This is done by using quick fire planning techniques and having a good SOP.
- You should position your artillery as far forward in the march column as the fire plan dictates. Treat the artillery as one of your maneuver elements, and articulate their task and purpose to support the attack.

- Once the maneuver force transitions to the hasty attack, the tactical mission of the mortars may change if they were in direct support to the advance guard during a movement to contact (MTC). As always, ammunition resupply is critical.
- The primary mission of fire support is suppressing direct fire systems affecting maneuver.

Deliberate Attack

In contrast to hasty attacks, deliberate attacks are fully synchronized operations that employ the effects of every available asset against the enemy defense. When your FSO plans fires to support a deliberate attack, consider the following:

- Synchronize the FS plan with the S2's R&S plan. It is imperative that targets are either confirmed or denied before execution. Failure to confirm target locations before line of departure (LD) could significantly reduce the effectiveness of the entire FS system.
- Weigh the benefits versus the drawbacks of shooting preparatory fires. Loss of surprise, ammunition expenditures, counterfire threat, and the number of significant targets are all factored into the decision to shoot a preparation. Strive for eyes on target to confirm the effects on target and provide adjustments if needed.

REMEMBER

The key to a preparation is to time the arrival of your maneuver forces just as the preparation is shifted or curtailed. Synchronizing your arrival with the end of the preparation allows you to take advantage of the shock effect and confusion created by the preparation.

- Pre-position ammunition in firing positions to reduce Class V resupply problems.
- Plan fires to support breaching operations. Consider making your mortars direct support to the support force during this operation.
- Ensure that a specific company, team, or observer is designated to control fires on the objective. One technique is to assign this responsibility to a unit in a support-by-fire position. They are not as actively engaged in staying alive as the company or team FSO in the assault force.

- Plan FM (voice) and visual (backup) signals for the lifting or shifting of indirect fires on the objective, and rehearse them in detail. The potential for fratricide is high if this is not accomplished.
- Enforce target refinement cutoff times. This allows time for computation of data, dissemination, and rehearsal of the plan. This does not restrict changes on the basis of reconnaissance. Failure to refine targets will result in a fire plan based on the situational template, not on actual terrain.
- Articulate the number of elements or size of elements you want engaged during each phase of the operation (engagement criteria). Specify the effects of attack (suppress, neutralize, or destroy) in terms of the enemy target types (attack criteria). This guidance is necessary for observers to discriminate targets for engagement and FDCs to determine firing data.
- When determining FSCMs, consider the minimum safe distance (danger close) for each weapon system. Ideally, you will shift fires from an objective at the last possible moment. This is particularly true when dealing with light forces and their diverse array of company and battalion mortars.
- Plan fires to augment your deception plan. Indirect fires are ideal for interrupting the enemy's time line and decision-making process. Although harassment and interdiction fires have been deleted from artillery terminology, the thought process behind them has not. An occasional HE round will make enemy engineers stop digging and seek cover. An illumination round along likely avenues for division or regimental reconnaissance will make them stop and seek concealment. The bottom line is to interrupt the enemy commander's decision-making process early and deep.

Exploitation and/or Pursuit

Use your indirect fires to sustain your momentum. It is critical that the possibilities for exploitation be addressed early in the planning process. The DS battalion movement plan should include exploitation and pursuit. Missions may have to be fired hip-shoot style. Never let your artillery fall behind. Use the artillery's OPTEMPO to gauge your rate of advance. Other considerations include the following:

- Use artillery to neutralize and fix bypassed pockets of resistance until follow-on friendly forces can deal with them. However, this may disrupt OPTEMPO by preventing the artillery from moving forward.

- Plan fires to support hasty attacks.
- Consider using CAS and attack helicopters, which are well suited for exploitation.
- Coordinate with your FSO to establish FSCM between exploiting and converging forces.

REMEMBER

A bypassed enemy platoon may not pose a real threat to an M1 or M2 platoon but is an artilleryman's nightmare.

- Keep the FSO advised of locations of lead elements to facilitate positive clearance of fires.
- Use FASCAM to delay or fix the enemy. Ensure that your FSO considers the loss of maneuver space.

DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS

In defensive operations, fire support is generally used against the enemy at maximum range to disrupt, delay, and attrit his forces before coming into range of your direct fire systems. Fire support assets extend the commander's battle space. Some primary uses of fire support are to limit the enemy's options, disrupt his coordination, and affect the closure times for follow-on elements. The maneuver commander must designate where his priorities are for obstacles, engagement areas, counterreconnaissance, and special munitions.

Mobile Defense

Commanders conducting a mobile defense take advantage of terrain and depth, obstacles, and mines while employing firepower and maneuver to wrest the initiative from the attacker. Fire support considerations include the following:

- If your brigade is designated as a striking force, consider retaining your habitual DS battalion. This does not put artillery in the reserve. The striking force is a committed force and may require its DS battalion. This simplifies command and control, ammunition management, and positioning.
- Ensure that FSCMs are planned for each phase of the defense. Particular attention should be given to FSCMs when a striking force, CAS, or Army aviation are employed.

- Position FS assets to support commitment of a striking force. This may require additional security to enhance firing unit survivability.

Area Defense

In an area defense, the bulk of forces are deployed to retain ground and are organized around a static framework provided by defensive positions with interlocking fires. The area defense is also characterized by a security area or covering force. Fire support considerations include the following:

- Consider HPTs for each phase of the defense. Targets during the counterreconnaissance phase will differ significantly from those in the MBA.
- Designate engagement criteria for each phase of the defense. The enemy formations, size and type, will differ between counterreconnaissance and the MBA.
- Plan fires to support the counterreconnaissance fight. Consider this as a separate phase for planning fires.
- Consider allocating engineer assets to dig in your DS battalion and mortars for survivability.
- Plan the coordinated fire line close to your forward elements to allow rapid engagement of enemy units.
- Consider no-fire areas (NFAs) around scout, COLT, and FO positions in forward areas.
- When emplacing FSCMs, consider the minimum safe distances (danger close) of each weapon system.
- Allocate assets to provide security for radars; they are normally an HPT for the enemy.

Security Zone. Some specific FS considerations include the following:

- Augment your security zone with additional observers. These additional observers may be COLTs, FISTs from reserve units, or platoon FOs.
- Ensure the FSO coordinates which communications nets he will use to receive fire missions. The FSE may be required to monitor a brigade or TF O&I net to fire for scout platoons. The FSO should consider using a quick fire or dedicated net.

- Plan fires to neutralize or destroy the enemy's reconnaissance effort. Copperhead is ideal for this situation; it surgically removes the enemy reconnaissance vehicles while limiting the exposure of your direct fire systems.
- Ensure that your FS assets are positioned to support the security zone fight.

Main Battle Area. Some specific FS considerations include the following:

- Keep in mind that ammunition on hand and weapons capability drive the number of targets you can expect to engage. Your DS battalion is limited in the amount of battalion mass missions it can provide.
- Designate where you want your artillery to mass their fires on the enemy. This should be specific. ("I want artillery to neutralize the enemy in EA RED, with Team D controlling fires.")
- Be specific in designating which key obstacles will be covered with indirect fire. A DS battalion cannot mass fires on every obstacle in a brigade sector.
- Ensure your FSO develops a fire plan, which as a minimum addresses the following:
 - Ensures your fire supporters are positioned where they can best execute the fire plan. This may require the TF or company FSO to be away from the commander.
 - Ensures all targets have redundant observers.
 - Ensures each target has a trigger point, and the trigger point can be observed by the primary and alternate observer.
 - Ensures the allocation of FPFs. (For additional information on FPFs, see Appendix M.)
 - Ensures your observers have a plan that supports operations during limited visibility.
 - Coordinates with the S2 to ensure collection assets are assigned observation responsibility for applicable NAIs and TAIs.

- The maneuver commander, not the FSO, is responsible for executing targets in the OPORD. Therefore, the commander is responsible to ensure the target is refined, observed, rehearsed, and executed according to the fire plan. You can ensure that your subordinate maneuver commanders understand this by including target responsibility in paragraph 3 of the OPORD (tasks to subordinate units).
- Remember, refinement of targets is critical. On the basis of the actual terrain, the company or team commanders and FSOs must ensure target locations satisfy the intended purpose of the targets.
- Ensure airspace coordination areas (ACAs) and air corridors do not overfly artillery or mortar positions.
- During rehearsals, have your commanders articulate their FS responsibilities. This will help synchronize fires with maneuver.
- Assist the engineer officer with evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of firing FASCAM during different phases of the operation. Firing FASCAM during the MBA fight will affect your ability to fire other, possibly more critical, missions.

RETROGRADE OPERATIONS

Fire support considerations for various types of retrograde operations are discussed below.

Delay

To trade space for time while inflicting maximum damage on the enemy, you must deliver fires on enemy forces at maximum ranges and as early as possible. Artillery and CAS are ideal for this mission.

When planning fires to support the delay, ensure your FSO considers the following:

- May require the forward positioning of observers to facilitate deep fires. The FSO must have a plan for observer's security and withdrawal to prevent them from being cut off and destroyed.
- Use Copperhead to destroy command and control and engineer vehicles to disrupt and delay the enemy's movement.
- Position your mortars and artillery in depth, and ensure they are displaced by echelon or battery to ensure continuous fire support.

- Ensure your FSO has planned and rehearsed for fires to support possible counterattacks.
- Plan smoke to cover the movement of your maneuver forces.

Withdrawal

Although normally free from enemy pressure, the FSO must plan for a withdrawal under pressure first, then develop a plan for a withdrawal without pressure. Fire support considerations include the following:

- Mass fires to allow disengagement of friendly forces. This means that all available FS assets should be used to support the withdrawal. If necessary, request fires from adjacent units or higher HQ.
- Augment the withdrawing force with additional observers. This helps get eyes forward to assist in calling for fire.
- Leave the maximum feasible number of firing units forward. Establish disengagement criteria for them and rehearse this plan.
- Use CAS to counter enemy attempts to disrupt the withdrawal.
- Use smoke to support the withdrawal.

Passage of Lines

The FS planning required for a passage of lines is time consuming and emphasizes positive control of fires and continuous fire support during the passage. Fire support considerations include an exchange of information between the stationary and passing FSEs, such as—

- Unit SOPs to resolve differences in operating procedures. Primary examples are recognition signals and unit organic code words that apply to fire support.
- Existing target lists and fire plans.
- High-payoff target lists, attack guidance, and engagement criteria.
- Fire support coordinating measures.
- Position areas for supporting FS assets.

- A clear FS battle handover, or transfer of control, identified and approved by the maneuver commander. As a minimum, consider-
 - The event or time for the transfer of control. It may not coincide with the maneuver battle handover in order to provide continuous or uninterrupted fires for the stationary and moving forces.
 - The frequencies on which fire missions will be passed. Observers from the passing force monitor and transmit on the stationary force's frequencies.

Forward Passage of Lines. Fire support considerations should include the following:

- Smoke is used to obscure enemy positions or screen friendly movement. Inherent to this is identifying additional ammunition requirements for both artillery and mortars.
- The stationary force supports the close battle while the passing force's artillery moves through.
- The FSE of the passing force sends a liaison officer to the FSE of the stationary force.
- The CFL is positioned forward of the lead elements and continually updated. The FSOs must know the position of the lead elements.
- Fire support assets should be positioned near the passage point but not so they interfere with the stationary force. Priority of positioning should go to the passing force but must be coordinated by the liaison officer sent to the stationary force.
- Fire support requirements should be identified after completion of the passage of lines.

Rearward Passage of Lines. Fire support considerations include the following:

- Use smoke to conceal movement through passage points.
- Plan fires to disengage forces.
- Plan fires to support the deception plan.
- Ensure counterfire is planned and controlled by the stationary force.

- Position the stationary force's FS assets to provide continuous support until the passage is complete.
- Ensure positions are away from the passage points.
- Ensure the stationary force has positioning priority.
- Ensure the FSE of the stationary force sends a liaison officer to the FSE of the passing force.

OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR

The application of fire support in operations other than war frequently stresses protection of the force. It is characterized by using the minimum essential force to neutralize an aggressor while keeping collateral damage to a minimum. Fire support considerations include the following:

- The rules of engagement (ROE) must clearly specify when the use of fire support is appropriate and justified. For example, collateral damage caused by FS assets may warrant their use only on a case-by-case basis.
 - Clearance of fires is infinitely more complicated when operating in urban areas and foreign countries. Normal fire support coordinating measures (such as coordinated fire lines and fire support coordination lines [FSCLs]) may not apply during operations such as peace enforcement and peacekeeping operations.
 - Firefinder radars are key components to detecting and neutralizing belligerent indirect fire assets. Protection of these radars and associated equipment becomes paramount.
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