Fire Support Reform for the US Army

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*"**You know who won the war, it was the Field Artillery" General George S. Patton, USA 1945.***

The United States military is arguably the most powerful war machine ever constructed. With a standing army that is more that 1 million persons strong, to include the reserves, the United States Army has the ability to project combat power in any region of the world. The 82nd Airborne Division alone is able to put a brigade of paratroopers on the ground with all of its equipment and three days of supplies anywhere within eighteen hours. This is to include the complete spectrum of combined arm assets: aviation, armor, infantry, and field artillery assets.

The field artillery has had the reputation of being the most casualty producing weapon system on the battlefield since the concept of combined arms came into existence. Now that our enemies have discovered a weakness and are choosing to engage United States forces in urban areas and thereby rendering armor and field artillery assets less effective. Consequently, the fire support community within the United States Army must develop new tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP's) of employing fire support assets in non-traditional battlefield environments.

PRESENT FIRE SUPPORT TTP's

The duty of a fire support officer is to control and employ all fire support assets assigned to a unit; this includes the full range of weapons' platforms. This also includes lethal and non-lethal fires as well as kinetic and non-kinetic weapons systems.1 The weapon platforms employed in the Iraqi theater of operations include systems from the United States Army and United States Air Force. Assets range from 60mm mortars to the AH-64D Apache Longbow system for the Army. Assets for the Air Force include the A-10 Thunderbolt to the AC-130 Specter and "Spooky" gunship2. The previously

described weapon systems depict a wide range of platforms for the fire supporter to employ but there are some fundamental employment problems with these system that do not facilitate the easy use of these systems on a conventional battlefield, much less a non-traditional battle space.

One employment problem is that the United States Army, unlike the United States Marine Corps, does not have the fixed wing fire support platform inherent within the service. All of the fixed wing assets that the U.S. Army employs in theater are provided by the United States Air Force. Another problem that accompanies this dual service relationship is that the Air Force and Army do not speak the same "operational language." The solution to the problem is overcome by extensive training by both services so easy communication is possible. Both the Army and Air Force provide liaison officers to provide knowledge and expertise to the other services to aid in the communication issue as issues arise.

Another inherent problem is that Air Force liaison teams are sometimes not provided for the Army below the brigade. The liaison team serves two purposes; they assist in the planning of fixed wing assets and also provide control of these assets on the combat zone. When liaison teams are coordinated and provided, they do greatly assist in the planning of support and providing knowledge. As a result of Doctrine established by the Air Force and Army, an Air Force Tactical Air Control Party or TACP, must be utilized to employ Air Force fixed wing assets. These teams sometimes are not provided and as a result, no Air Force fixed wing assets could be utilized. The lack of Air Force liaison teams is the result of a shortage of manpower by the Air Force or a lack of planning by either service.

One possible solution is to rewrite the Air Force and Army doctrine to employ a "universal observer." This service member of either the Air Force or the Army, could be from either service, could call for fire and employ assets from either service. This would include fixed wing assets, as well as rotary wing assets and surface fires like mortars or artillery. This would allow observers on the ground, from either service to employ the appropriate weapon system without conflict between services.

NON STANDARD MISSIONS FOR FIELD ARTILLERYMEN

Upon completion of normal combat operations, the coalition forces transitioned from a force of military power to a security force. The mission became a sustainment and security operation or SASO mission. This mission is considered a non-standard mission for the U.S. Army and provides a problem for employing fire support assets in areas where civilians live, specifically in terms of the target selection process and prosecuting of targets in the urban environments. As one soldier noted during the invasion of Iraq, "Force on force targeting methodology works for maneuver warfare but not necessarily for man hunting." This is an accurate statement when you consider the environment you are in and the complexities of prosecuting targets in urban environments. The targets processed in conventional combat environments are troops or equipment. These troops and equipment are identified by a number of different means but are nonetheless identified as enemy targets and destroyed with the appropriate weapon system. When the enemy is in an urban environment, you have to worry about collateral damage. This damage includes other buildings and the accidentally wounding of civilians. This automatically excludes using the normal targeting process because of the terrain the enemy has chosen to fight in.

OTHER PROBLEMS WITH THE URBAN ENVIORNMENT AND FIRE SUPPORT

One of the challenges that the Army must overcome in the non-standard mission environment is the ability to locate the enemy. This is no small feat when one considers that the enemy has the ability to observe and engage forces in a three dimensional battle field. The means of locating the enemy has not changed: get some type of "eyes on" him and call for fire. Assuming friendly forces can locate the enemy, engaging with an accurate weapon system that could kill the target without causing extensive collateral damage is difficult. One such fire support platform is the AC-130 Specter gun ship.

This converted C-130 has a 105mm howitzer in the belly that is computer controlled and extremely accurate. It also has two Vulcan cannons on it which are also computer guided. While this platform is extremely accurate, it will not fly during the day. However, after the battle of Tallulah, it was later discovered that the maximum range of the anti-air defense system in the area would not have been able to successfully engage the AC-130 if the gunship would have taken its highest orbit(3). The gunship had not been requested for daytime support since the Vietnam War, and an AC-130 had been shot down during its only daytime mission. The Air Force stated that the AC-130 would only fly at night, so the need for the Gunship during daylight had not been needed for over thirty years(3). Further examination of the procedure should be looked at and adjusted.

Sustainability and security operations demand a shift in artilleryman that most artilleryman are not accustomed. This shift is from providing fires for the infantry to performing non-traditional artillery missions. These missions are not normally

performed, or trained to be performed, by artilleryman so when the mission changed in Iraq, a great deal of artilleryman were not ready for the mission. A way to correct this shortcoming is to incorporate some type of training at the Combat Training Centers (CTC)(4). The Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana and the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California have instituted training in their curriculum for SASO and non-traditional missions.

CONCLUSION

The face of warfare has indeed changed, and it is going to continue to change. The branch of the field artillery must shift its thinking from along the lines of commanding and controlling "fires" to commanding and controlling "effects." The effects include traditional employment of weapon systems, but also the "effects" of psychological operations and information operations. The past few years have shaped the employment of these new weapon systems and the over the next five to ten years, the artillery community must adapt to the new battlefield to fully have the effects our nation wants.

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