

**WHITE PAPER**

**The King and I:  
The Impending Crisis in Field Artillery's ability to provide Fire Support  
to Maneuver Commanders**

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As BCT commanders we have watched the deterioration of the Field Artillery branch with growing alarm. We are former maneuver commanders who recognize the importance of having reliable, fast, and accurate fire support and wish to provide our Army's leadership with a "customer's perspective" on this issue. All of us believe that the Army is on the right track with modular BCT's, but we believe that we have now accrued enough experience to recognize that some adjustments are necessary, the most pressing of which is addressed in this paper.

No branch of the Army has suffered a greater identity crisis than Field Artillery, as a result of transformation, COIN-centric operations and the non-standard manpower demands of OIF/OEF. The once-mighty "King of Battle" has been described by one of its own officers as a "dead branch walking." Now the Army is beginning to see real consequences in our ability to integrate fires with maneuver – an important capability for both COIN and High Intensity Operations (HIC). In fact, one could argue that speed and accuracy counts for as much, if not more, in COIN as in HIC. We believe that it's urgent that we take another look at the structure of this important combat arm.

TRADOC is now briefing fire support trends to pre-command course attendees. Some of their observations are worrisome. Here are the big "take-aways:"

#### CTC Observations:

- Fires Annex only produced in 20% of rotational units' OPORDs.
- No Fires net is maintained and if there is one, it isn't monitored.
- 90% of fire supporters are serving outside of their MOS
- 90% + of available fire supporters are uncertified
- Counterfire is seldom executed (except by mortars)
- Inability to fire plan prevents effective CAS application
- Most cannon platoons would have fired "out of safe" if not prevented by OC's
- Firing incidents during every rotation
- Crew drills are very slow and any type of friction halts operations
- Leaders no longer understand the need to calibrate or use MET data. The culture of relentlessly pursuing accurate fires is rapidly eroding.
- The brand new 2LT is usually the most competent fire direction officer
- Key leader shortages (2 of 9 13B40's and LTs per battalion is typical)
- The entire sensor to shooter chain is broken- Fires Battalions appear unable to fix the Forward Observer problems.

#### CTC Trend Analysis:

- We have already passed the point at which most artillery units will be able to re-train themselves without external support – with help, it will take the average unit 6-12 months to retrain, assuming the unit is protected exclusively for this purpose, which has not been our experience.
- OPTEMPO has prevented EXEVALs of most units since the late 90s

- Modularization places responsibility for fire support training on maneuver commanders who are neither trained nor resourced to perform these tasks
- There is no competent higher FA headquarters to coordinate resources and enforce standards. [There are no more Corps Arty or Div Arty HQs and the number of FA Brigades has been reduced - we have lost a total of 15 O-6 level FA headquarters in recent years.] This leaves battalion commanders to handle ammunition management, doctrinal review, New Equipment Training, TACP integration, JAAT training, MORTEP support, and FCX coordination, among other responsibilities. The Army fought hard for the Joint Fires Observer (JFO) capability after lessons learned in Operation Anaconda , but the BCT is not resourced for this training and certification. Division FSEs are not the answer. They do not support separate brigades, are led by non-green tabbers and are staffed by soldiers not qualified to certify subordinate units (nor are they empowered to do so).
- The only remaining source of expertise now is the FA School at Ft. Sill and the Combat Training Centers. Even the AC/RC Training Support Brigades are on the verge of losing core competencies. TSB Sill is training USAF units for ILO missions focusing on pre-deployment training and certification, Convoy Ops, CIED and MDMP. TSB Travis is running mobilization training at Fort Bliss and TSB Meade is running mobilization training at Fort Dix for units mobilizing to conduct in lieu of missions.
- Units are seriously challenged conducting Combined Arms Live Fire Exercises in support of maneuver due to poor level of FO training, fire direction, and gunnery skills.

As maneuver commanders, we are concerned by these developments. And to make matters worse, FA Branch is losing the very talent it will need to fix itself.

FA Captains are increasingly dissatisfied with their branch and are among the most likely to leave the Army. If not for stop move/stop loss, attrition for FA Captains would top 17%. The rationale that we heard most often in our discussions with our own departing officers is a lack of job satisfaction. In other words, they didn't sign up for motorized infantry, transition team membership, "in lieu of" transportation units, detainee camp guards, or any other of a number of hole-filler duty descriptions. They wanted to be artillery officers and ended up being anything but. This frustration was on top of the stresses and strains of repeated deployments that these officers share with the rest of the force. Also on their minds - if an artillery officer stays in the Army and is lucky enough to command an artillery firing battery, he is very likely to be unprepared because of a lieutenancy spent doing non-artillery tasks. What's more, many of their NCOs' skills, upon which commanders rely for success, will probably be degraded for similar reasons.

If a young artillery officer has a successful battery command and goes on to command at the battalion level, he may once again find himself unprepared. As an artillery battalion commander in a BCT, he is the Fire Support Coordinator and senior indirect fire trainer. But where are the senior mentors in the artillery community to guide the development of mid-grade officers? As mentioned earlier our experience bears out

that the best artillerymen are superb integrators of all the elements that comprise a BCT, and the very best are more than capable of commanding at the next level. Unfortunately, as we mentioned earlier, there are only six artillery brigade commands left in the whole Active Army. A branch with a built-in glass ceiling is not likely to retain or attract the best and brightest. If it hasn't already, FA accessions will begin to decline as well. Not long ago, artillery was one of the most sought-after branches for the top graduates of West Point. Today, it is one of the easiest branches to get into. As maneuver commanders, with only limited technical expertise in putting high explosive projectiles in the air over our heads, this is a source of concern to us.

As BCT commanders, we were fortunate to have FA battalion commanders who grew up under the old system and were tactically and technically superb. We had the best of both worlds – highly trained artillery that was fully integrated into our BCTs. Our FA battalion commanders and their staffs were highly trained subject matter experts, which meant that we didn't have to be. Given the complexity of the organization and the missions of our BCTs, that was a good thing. But current BCT commanders are now struggling with the consequences of an inadequately resourced FA branch. If we act soon, with the help of some of the remaining "old guard," we can salvage the King of Battle's old reputation for excellence. The longer we continue down our current path, the more difficult that will be.

With each passing month that we continue to let these perishable skills atrophy and lose our expert practitioners, we are mortgaging not only flexibility in today's fight, but our ability to fight the next war as well. This is similar to what happened to the Israeli Defense Forces. Israel's years of COIN-focused operations in the occupied territories cost them dearly in South Lebanon. When the IDF attempted to return to HIC operations, it found itself unable to effectively plan fires, conduct terminal control or de-conflict airspace. The IDF's ability to conduct combined arms integration had simply atrophied from neglect. We should consider ourselves fairly warned. We can't afford to lose sight of the critical role artillerymen play in our ability to plan, coordinate, integrate and synchronize our combined arms operation. This is not an artillery branch issue, this is an Army issue, as the Israelis learned ... the hard way.

So, what's the fix? It seems to us that we need to make several changes quickly before we lose so much expertise that we have to reconstitute the branch from the ground up.

First, consider more Fires Brigades. We had better bring them back soon, while we still have a cadre of qualified young O-6s, who came up under the old system. It seems that a ratio of one per division or UEx/UEy equivalent is about right with special attention to ensure separate BCT's are included in the alignment. A habitual relationship would engender better training, mentoring, and support. It would provide a Force Field Artillery HQ for each Division and for any/all BCTs deployed in proximity and would help all brigades with A2C2 and clearance of fires. In this regard, special consideration would need to be made for separate BCTs located in Alaska and Europe. Even if there is no nearby Division, a habitually associated fires brigade could still provide support.

Although a Fires Brigade at Ft. Lewis might be able to support units in Alaska, USAREUR may require its own fires brigade, just as it requires its own CAB. This headquarters could also help manage force modernization and development for associated FA units. It could also serve National Guard artillery units in their region until the Guard builds enough Fires Brigades of its own. Ten active duty, seasoned Brigade level commanders will be able to provide a leaner FA school at Ft. Sill with a much more seasoned and experienced sense of the needs of the force than 48 active duty battalion commanders. They can also provide more responsive and tailored support than Ft. Sill could as "the Divarty for the Army." Certainly Ft. Sill has an important role to play, but it can't be the sole solution to every fire support issue.

Each Fires Brigade should have one or two battalions of rockets or cannons for general support or reinforcing fires, target acquisition assets, and other supporting elements. The Headquarters Battery would be a ready source of external evaluators for Battalion EXEVALs. Finally, it provides career progression opportunities for FA officers and NCOs. We leave to separate discussions whether there should be some sort of command relationship between the Fires Brigade and the BCT Fires Battalions.

Second, we need to resource artillery training, both with ammunition and time. No matter what their expected mission while deployed, artillery units need to maintain their proficiency in core tasks. This enhances their flexibility on the battlefield and enables a more rapid return to full spectrum capability upon redeployment. It also helps to ensure the long term health of the force.

Third, we should re-examine the FCS artillery plan. Two man crews will make it very difficult for this small, 215 man unit to conduct continuous operations on a complex battlefield. With such a small crew, a single Soldier on a FOB support tasking, R&R, wounded, or just on sick call would make an important combat system combat ineffective. Maintaining a single hot gun would take the better part of a firing platoon.


Fourth, an artillery battalion headquarters should be made part of the Armored Cavalry Regiment MTOE. An ACR faces all of the same challenges as a BCT when it comes to artillery training and expertise, only worse, because it has three batteries embedded in its cavalry squadrons with no battalion commander or staff.

Fifth, ACRs and all separate BCTs, should also be formally and habitually aligned with one of the new Fires Brigades to ensure safety, standardization and proficiency.

How will we pay for this? Although the manpower for four new fires brigades would probably amount to something less than one of the planned new BCTs, that trade-off should not be necessary. Some of the bill could be offset by absorbing the newly created Division FSE's into the Fires Brigade HQs. The current Fires Brigade MTOE could also be trimmed to provide spaces for additional HQs. Most, if not all, of the rocket battalions and target acquisition batteries for these brigades already exist. Whatever the solution costs, though, it's a price worth paying. Our Army is in danger of becoming unbalanced

with too much maneuver and not enough fires and we must make the necessary trade-offs to ensure that our Soldiers continue to enjoy world class fire support.

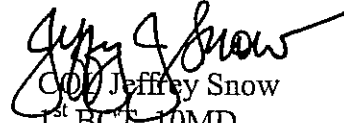
Respectfully submitted by the undersigned. We stand ready to discuss this in further depth with you or any appropriate office. Army Strong!



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