

# Enhancing the Artillery Fire Support Model, Part II

A professional fire support organization

by Capt Marcial J. Garcia

This is about warfighting. The core of our institutional spirit needs to be revived and reprioritized if we want to continue to dominate our enemies in every clime and place by leveraging “combined arms in all domains.”<sup>1</sup> The *Marine Corps Operating Concept* opens with a foreword written by Gen Robert B. Neller that states that “We need all Marines to read, discuss, and challenge the ideas in the *MOC*.”<sup>2</sup> Part One of this *Marine Corps Gazette* (see *MCG*, Mar18) series introduced some key shortfalls, a historical background, and a solution for enhancing the GCE’s artillery fire support model through reorganization and investments in professionalization of fire support leaders. The implementation of an FSB (fire support battery) at the artillery regimental level is a crucial part to the proposed solution, as is the generation of a BMOS (fire support professional) for Marine Corps careerists who desire to specialize in the military profession of combined arms and effects. Part Two aims to generate productive conversation between supported and supporting staffs throughout the Marine Corps by debating the relevance of what this article will refer to as the “pillars of fire support.”

The first and most important pillar of enhancing the artillery fire support model is to *reduce our inherent focus on artillery firepower* so that objective fire support solutions can be developed; from this point moving forward, this concept will be referred to as the “enhanced fire support model.” This is

**>Capt Garcia has served as a Forward Observer, Weapons Platoon Commander, and Fire Support Team Leader. He has been an Instructor, EWTG Pacific, served as a Battery Commander, and led a regimental FSCC.**

not intended to be a demeaning stab at the artillery community at all. The reality is that fire supporters generally grow from proud and technically rich artillery soil. But the destiny of the fire support professional is to grow into an intelligent planner and problem solver who leads a small team that aggressively

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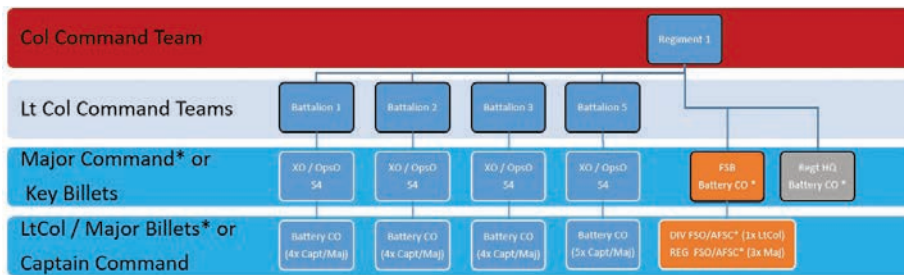
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and objectively overcomes complex fire support challenges. This enables the supported commander to “shatter the enemy’s cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions,” as *MCDP 1* demands of its leaders.<sup>3</sup> We exist to help our assigned supported unit plan for success and win, not to prioritize or emphasize community intentions because of invisible party lines. We must formally and diligently study all available attack systems, the cognitive effects associated with lethal and non-lethal fires, how to integrate into the planning

process, and the rapid coordination of assets; and we must train hard to earn the trust of the supported unit so that we may confidently employ our craft when it matters.

The second pillar of the enhanced fire support model is to *obtain reasonably stable, qualified management*. The implementation of the FSB creates a credible unit of outwardly focused teams with qualified leadership focused on the training and administration of the FiSTs (fire support teams). Without a stable command climate, fire supporters will never be able to interact with supported units in the capacity that they should nor will their administration, promotion, and retention be constructively impacted. The demand for fire support leaders to perform requirements that fall outside of their assigned primary or collateral responsibilities because of consistent manning instability has been a systemic problem for many years and should cease immediately. The FSB achieves greater stability by making leadership a “command opportunity” for an artillery major, which enhances that officer’s professional resume as he pursues future key billets and command opportunities. Command of an Air/Naval Gunfire Liaison Company or artillery battalion would be the next logical



**Figure 1. Visual aid depicting the more balanced task organization and distribution of key officer billets within the artillery regiment following the implementation of the FSB (regimental staff billets intentionally omitted). (Figure by author.)**

step for a fire support professional; and the professional growth associated with command of an organization, which expertly furnishes critical fire support expertise to the greater GCE prior to the lieutenant colonel promotion board or command slating, would only make an officer's record more competitive. (See Figure 1.)

The FSB command team should expect a twelve-month command opportunity, and fire support officers should be assigned to the FSB for no less than fourteen months to promote optimal stability, deployment readiness, and transition. Additionally, a commitment should be made to the GCE to prevent "gapped" leadership billets within the regimental or battalion FiSTs; "gutting" teams is a common practice that routinely generates poor command climate, increases disciplinary issues, and gaps planning and liaison capabilities provided to the supported unit, which builds an unprofessional perception of fire supporters within the supported unit. By consolidating the artillery regiment's fire support resources, a better distribution of resources can be assigned to the supported units to prevent teams from being void of leadership and infantry liaison resources.

The third pillar of the enhanced fire support model is to *prioritize the supported unit over all other organizational requirements*. MCDP 1 states that "commanders should establish habitual relationships between supported and supporting units to develop operational familiarity among those units."<sup>4</sup> It goes further to state that units

should train with the full complement of assigned, reinforcing, and supporting forces they require in combat ...

Exercises should approximate the conditions of war as much as possible,<sup>5</sup> yet we do the exact opposite and expect glowing results. Scheduling conflicts and prioritization of support between maneuver unit and artillery training should almost exclusively favor the maneuver unit. Assigned fire supporters exist to support maneuver forces in combat; the supported unit and the FiSTs both lose out on critical training and trust-development opportunities when they operate independently. By the same token, integrated training between real

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maneuver units as supported commands should be the starting point for training across the MAGTF; plan and invest in fewer annual exercises that offer a build-up of training from subordinate collective tasks to superior collective tasks. Forming a habit of conducting training as a warfighting team will dramatically improve the understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of all elements of the MAGTF.

The fourth pillar of the enhanced fire support model is to *set expectations in accordance with the FGP (force generation process)*.<sup>6</sup> "The FGP institutes a systematic, service-wide approach to selecting, resourcing, and preparing units for deployment."<sup>7</sup> This great institutional guide to common fire support problems

is generally outweighed by other factors, causing many of the issues expressed in Part One of this series to rise to the surface. Battalion- through division-level fire support leadership representation and liaison with supported units should be consistent throughout all "blocks" of the FGP.<sup>8</sup> (See Figure 2 on following page.)

During Block 1A/B, FiSTs will reside in the FSB and will focus on formal school training and certifications, promotion requirements, and individual training events, which means that expectations of their use to support exercises should be significantly limited. During Block 2, FiSTs will continue to reside with the FSB and should train internally to the FSB as a battalion FiST and begin directly supporting their supported unit at the company level with focus on forming small teams and supporting maneuver requirements. Evaluations for Block 2 will be primarily conducted by the higher headquarters (artillery regiment via FSB leadership) but may include company-level evalu-

ations by the supported unit. Though not explicitly mentioned in the order, Block 3 signifies the formation of the deployable team which will be evaluated by the supported unit's higher headquarters and should be the point when the command support relationship for battalion and regimental FiSTs become attached TACOM<sup>9</sup> to the supported unit no less than 120 days prior to deployment. The transition to Block 4 is relatively insignificant to this fire support conversation because by this time, the institution should expect all attachments to be fully integrated into the supported unit. FiSTs should be familiar with their mission and team well before a mission rehearsal exercise evaluation if the earlier blocks of the

Block	Category	Description	Responsibility for Assessment	Remarks
Block 1 (A/B)	Individual Training	Formal schools, sustained core skills training, core plus skills training, and common skills sustainment training.	Unit conducting training.	TECOM supports training.
Block 2	Collective Training	Core capabilities and theater-specific training conducted by the unit. Company-level and below.	Unit conducting training.	Unit HHQ supports assessment. TECOM supports training.
Block 3	Advanced Collective Training	Core (plus) capabilities training conducted by the unit, by the unit's higher headquarters, and/or by other agencies. Battalion-level.	Unit HHQ.	Unit HHQ supports assessment. TECOM supports training.
Block 4	MRX	The graduation predeployment training exercise. Individually tailored to support and assess a unit's ability to perform tasks on its assigned mission METL(s).	TECOM approves unit assessment plan IOT provide service standardization.	Operating Forces support assessment. TECOM supports training. MRX supports unit deployment readiness certification.

**Figure 2. Excerpt from MCO 3502.6, Force Generation Process, provides an overview of the basic “building block” architecture of the FGP.<sup>10</sup> (Figure by author.)**

FGP were implemented correctly; waiting to attach personnel to the deploying supported unit during or immediately prior to Block 4 does the supported unit and the FiST a disservice and could potentially increase risk for an operational deployment. UDP (Unit Deployment Program) deployments are among the only gray-area circumstances for this approach to fire support attachments because UDP fire supporters are considered to be the manpower assigned to the 12th Marines fire support structure, vice the supported infantry unit. UDP is generally considered a training deployment, which is generally associated with a more flexible approach to fire support manning and qualification options amid personnel shortages.

**Why Now?**

The creation of the FSB, led by professionalized officers and enlisted leaders who emphasize the pillars of fire support, will invigorate the underprivileged fire support community with a professional mentor approach and with more consistent leadership manning, which will improve artillery regimental support to the MAGTF, occupational satisfaction, and the retention of crucial

skill sets that take years to cultivate. This transition to a fire support organization that is more lethal, practical, and professional may take months or years to fully implement because of current innovation challenges when it comes to organizational structure, so the time to act is now. The implementation of coherent priorities, as well as a logical approach to training plans and training support, will allow the limited amount of FSB practitioners to participate in value-added training and will best prepare units for employment in war. These improved organizational capabilities and combat readiness timelines are better achieved and managed by an FSB command team with a fire support professional at the helm. The enhanced fire support model will better enable the GCE and MAGTF to build productive relationships with supported units, logically and reasonably manage expectations during work-ups, and furnish the highest possible quality of personnel and expertise to deployable units that stand ready to fight and win our Nation's next conflicts.

**Notes**

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concept: How an Expeditionary Force Operates in the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: September 2016).
2. Ibid.
3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, (Washington, DC: 1997).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 3502.6, Marine Corps Force Generation Process*, (Washington, DC: 2010).
7. *MCO 3502.6*.
8. Ibid.
9. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCWP 3-40.8, Marine Corps Componenty*, (Washington, DC: 2009).
10. *MCO 3502.6*.

