

NEWS FROM THE CTC



12 Jun 2017

From FOB artillery to Field Artillery: Lessons Learned from the JRTC



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As printed in Redleg Update August 2015

Executive Summary

The authors discuss the effect of the occupation of forward operating bases (FOB) and combat outposts (COP) and the inactivation of all Division Artillery, created an unintended impact and long term consequences on the field artillery (FA) combat readiness. Which have drastically degraded the comprehension and implementation of field artillery core competencies. Officers and NCOs display the atrophy of skills in executing a wide array of tactical artillery missions and related operations at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) decisive action training exercise (DATE).

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CPT Jones and the 1SG scanned their battery defensive position with their PVS-14s after a 45-minute convoy and a battery deliberate occupation that took 30 minutes to complete. The wire obstacles were clearly across the road, blocking traffic just like they set up in Afghanistan during their last deployment. They had two crew-served weapons in an over watch position to engage any dismounts attempting to breach the obstacle. The Battery had not received engineer support, so they held off on fortifying most of the fighting positions until the engineers arrived. In their minds, they were ready for the expected attack that the S-2 predicted. Twenty minutes later, the opposing force (OPFOR) breached the battery's "wire", while suppressing the Battery's crew-served weapon systems with direct and indirect fires. The Battery command team was astounded at how quickly it all happened, left to wonder "what could we have done to prevent this?"

During the past 12 years, the field artillery has conducted predominantly static, or "fall-in", gun line combat operations. The occupation of Forward Operating Base's (FOB) and Combat Outposts (COP) drastically degraded the comprehension and implementation of field artillery core competencies. Moreover, the understanding of "directed and implied tasks," have reduced the ability and aptitude of the field artillery community to conduct operations in decisive action environments. This, combined with the expedited transformation of modular BCTs and the inactivation of all Division Artillery, created an unintended impact and long term consequence on combat readiness; COIN-centric operations, FOB related tasks, and force demand have marginalized the once powerful "King of Battle." Officers and NCOs display the atrophy of skills in executing a wide array of tactical artillery missions and related operations at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC).

The key to a successful Reconnaissance, Selection, and Occupation of a Position (RSOP) is a disciplined and team effort with a shared understanding, as outlined in ATP 3-09.50. Reconnaissance is the examination of the terrain to determine its suitability for use in accomplishing the mission. Field Artillery battalions are not training their subordinate units to conduct proper RSOP; instead, they are relying on what Soldiers are learning during professional military education (PME), functional courses, and other real world operations. Battery commanders do not have the required knowledge or experience to plan and execute RSOP. Commanders issue vague and inadequate guidance to conduct a thorough reconnaissance of the battery/platoon positions. Units fail to conduct RSOP operations at home station, therefore they continue to fail in the planning and execution here at JRTC.

<p>CALL Director's Note: This type of leader training can be done as part of a unit OPD program using a Terrain Walk or Tactical Exercise Without Troops (TEWT). Resource use is minimal and impact to mission readiness can be high.</p>

Without proper RSOP, the battery occupations are consistently disorganized throughout Combat Training Center (CTC) rotations in conjunction with failing to meet any required time standards. Vehicles and howitzers are consistently disorderly and remain static in one location for extended

periods of time. This severely impacts the battery's ability to be in position and ready to fire within the required time standards required by the ATP. Leaders fail to consider or implement criteria for the selection of a suitable and applicable Position Area for Artillery (PAA) and do not utilize proper howitzer formations as outlined in ATP 3-09.50

Common tendencies and repeat errors within our ranks continue to plague the artillery community. Units now face challenges during CTC rotations due to hasty decisions, inexperienced personnel, and lack of understanding of advance party (AP) duties and operations. Gunnery Sergeants supervise and execute platoon AP operations that should coincide with the battery commander's intent. Gunnery Sergeants are not consistently conducting PCC/PCIs to support the RSOP mission. Instead, they rely on the Section Chief and Soldiers to bring the correct equipment for effectively accomplishing the mission without executing the planning process to facilitate RSOP. In addition, battery command/Gunnery Sergeants fail to ensure that survey is properly integrated for the emplacement of common survey, orienting station (ORSTA), and end of the orienting line (EOL) to support independent checks. This would radically increase the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the occupation. At the section level, AP members do not have the required knowledge to conduct AP procedures. With the incorporation of AP procedures during section certification and enforcement of AP tasks, conditions, and standards, units would excel at JRTC. Poor Reconnaissance of the route from entry point to the gun position is the initial point of failure in meeting occupation time standards. Unit APs are inadequate at conducting or failing to execute mine detection operations, check for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) hazards, or detect other threats.

Most units and leaders are deficient in properly establishing a battery defense. The commander is responsible for general planning, coordination, and execution of his battery defense with the incorporation of enabling assets. However, Battery Commanders / 1SGs do not clearly establish the duties and responsibilities for the defense; it appears that 1SGs are lacking the expertise to help the commander with the planning, preparation and execution of the battery defense, or in rehearsing battle drills for diverse forms of threat. An SOP that describes priorities of work, rest cycles, and time standards, along with training at home station, rehearsals, and incorporating enablers, will help the battery to occupy and establish their defensive positions quickly, effectively, and to standard.

Units are challenged to provide 24 hour sustainability while providing firing capability and sustaining security for their own base defense. Senior leadership must understand all of their battery's weapon systems and their capabilities to conduct a base defense. Combined efforts and clear priorities of work will expedite the construction of triple strand concertina wire, building a platoon or battery defensive plan, building sustainable fighting positions from which to defend their position. Soldiers are not qualified on crew served weapons and are not proficient in the construction of sector range cards in turn leading to undue stress and workload placed upon those who can do the task.

The battery's defensive perimeter, fortified positions, and dug in positions are not integrated into the planning process which substantially degrades the battery defense, leaving units reacting instead of being proactive. Senior leaders are relying on the inexperienced junior officers and NCOs to fortify, harden, and improve position defense plans with limited clear and concise

guidance. Additionally, the Battery command teams are not actively involved in the early planning and coordination stages with their battalion for engineer assets that are accessible within the brigade to provide heavy construction support.

Throughout the Troop Leading Procedures (TLP) process, step eight, supervise, occurs continuously to produce optimal outcomes. Many units often fail to execute this critical step. Few units at the battery level issue a tentative plan or outline to subordinates for them to begin their PCC/PCIs. For TLPs to be effective; leaders must be knowledgeable and thoroughly trained to promote proficiency and execute the Battery's mission while incorporating the 1/3-2/3 rule. Leaders must give the subordinate leaders enough time to properly prepare for the mission, backwards planning is essential at this key juncture.

The 12 years of operating from a FOB or a COP has led to leaders who do not have experience with conducting Field Artillery operations in austere environments. The three areas where this is most evident is RSOP, battery defense and TLPs. At JRTC, Officers and NCOs display the deteriorating skills of field artillery competencies, consisting of a failure while executing a wide array of tactical artillery missions and related operations. The understanding of "directed and implied tasks" overall has reduced the ability and aptitude of the artillery community along with Artillery core competencies, senior leaders are not establishing sound priorities of work which substantially degrades the Battery's overall mission. Effective leaders must be knowledgeable and thoroughly trained to promote proficiency. They must give their subordinate leaders enough time to properly prepare, and execute the Battery's mission.