

Scorpion 27 – Wolf Web Page August 2001

Issue: Planning and Tracking Engagement Area Preparations.

Discussion: Ineffective time management and the lack of defensive planning checklists hamper fire support preparations for defensive operations. The task forces do not identify the EFSTs needed to effectively integrate fires and maneuver. Integration and synchronization with key BOS representatives (S2, S3, and engineer) are not tracked on the task force timeline. Some specific examples of this are the use of digging assets to build survivability positions for FIST and mortar ammunition caches, target refinement to ensure planned versus actual obstacles are covered with indirect fires, emplacement of technical and tactical indirect fire triggers, and radar zones for critical units.

Recommendation: The task forces should develop a checklist or SOP which details what fire support tasks must be accomplished for defensive operations and determine which tasks are “critical” for success. Once the “critical” tasks are defined, they should be placed on the task force timeline to ensure visibility to the entire staff. The FSO should determine which tasks he will supervise and then delegate the remaining tasks to the FSNCO with a priority of work and effort. A sample checklist may look like the following.

* **Survivability Considerations:** If engineer blade time cannot be allocated to dig survivability positions for M981s, the task force may use SEEs to prepare dismounted OPs. SEEs can also be used to prepare pre-stock mortar ammunition points. If the mortar platoon is supporting counter recon security operations, use one of the FDC sections to accomplish the positioning of pre-stock and prepare the mortar firing position for later occupation.

* **RSOP of OPs and Tactical Occupation:** Company FSOs should tactically occupy their OPs and prepare the OP for operations. Conduct communication checks with the task force FSE and/or brigade FSE to ensure the position is suitable for communications. If engineer assets are not available, teams should individually prepare survivability positions. Sector sketches and observed fire diagrams need to be developed. Once the OP is prepared, the same format should be followed for alternate OPs to include rehearsals for time and routes for day and night occupations. Report times to the FSE and continue position area improvement.

* **Obstacle Planning / Integration of Indirect Fires:** The task force FSO needs to be a key player during the planning and development of defensive operations - obstacles, direct fires, and indirect fires. The FSO should determine which obstacles the commander deems decisive for indirect targeting, continuously coordinate with the engineer to track actual versus planned obstacles, and track any necessary target refinement. The primary observer responsible for firing a target should work with the company commander

responsible for sighting an obstacle, and that FSO should determine a PLGR grid to both ends of the obstacle and the target and provide that information to the FSE.

* **Trigger Emplacement:** Triggers should be established for all targets using the enemy rate of march and terrain analysis. If time or enemy situation does not permit the actual emplacement of a trigger marker, then informal triggers may be established by using the TSCD for azimuth and vertical angle, or similar technique. Also, incorporate observation of NAIs and TAIs to allow for tactical trigger considerations.

* **Mortar Positioning:** The task force FSO should determine one or two mortar targets or FPFs and focus the mortar platoon on these tasks. The mortar platoon should determine how, when, and what routes the platoon will use to displace and occupy their firing position once they move off the counter recon. The platoon should rehearse time displacement to alternate positions during both day and night, determine pre-stock positions, and report this information to the FSE. Time and situation permitting, adjustment/registration of FPFs and critical targets should be accomplished. Class V requirements should be determined, requested, and positioned. The task force S3 should allocate engineer blade time for survivability of the mortar platoon, and the platoon leader must determine a priority for his blade effort.

* **CAS:** If CAS is available, the task force FSO and ALO need to get the commander's guidance for CAS and how he wants to use it to support his defense. Planning should be accomplished even if the brigade does not allocate any sorties to the task force. The FSO and ALO should determine minimum safe distances for requested ordinances and include this information in the fire support annex to the OPORD. Consider also what separation technique to use, formal vs. informal ACAs, if and when CAS becomes available and is to be utilized.

* **Positioning of the task force FSO/ALO/ETAC:** Positioning of key personnel should afford the best observation of the entire battlefield, not just the major engagement area, to allow for adjustment to the enemy's actual movement. ETACs can be positioned forward with company FSOs or with task force scouts. The task force FSO must position himself to act as redundant eyes for as many targets as possible.

* **Radar Zone Planning:** The task force commander should determine force protection priorities and where he is willing to accept risk from enemy artillery fires. The FSO should coordinate with the S2 to determine the enemy's phases of fire and likely targets for each phase, then plan CFZs accordingly. All battle positions should be considered for CFZs, but they must be precise and prioritized to help in the brigade radar zone management plan. Sensor zones may be required for the mortars to help deconflict their position. Ensure FISTs are reporting grids to Company Battle Positions in order to facilitate zone planning and refinement.

* **Restrictive FSCM:** The task force FSO/FSE needs to be aware of all friendly elements within the task force sector and plan restrictive FSCMs accordingly. No Fire Areas (NFA) must be placed over all personnel forward of the battle position and the FSO must ensure this information is received at the brigade and DS FA battalion.

* **Special Munitions:** The task force FSO must coordinate with brigade to determine the plan for special munitions (FASCAM, smoke, illumination, CPH) and brief the task force accordingly. The task force may also be responsible for covering or targeting the FASCAM.

***Staff Supervision:** The FSO/FSNCO needs to determine and prioritize a schedule to check / supervise critical events (e.g., trigger emplacement, obstacle integration, target refinement, and rehearsals).