Section IV. Fire Support and the Engagement Area

The battlespace is a continuum extending from the farthest range of the MAGTF's assets to the MAGTF's rear area. Applying the fundamentals of combined arms, the MAGTF confronts approaching armored forces with a variety of lethal combinations or packages of weapons systems. The MAGTF commander views the EA as a focal point at which enemy armor units are attacked and destroyed or disrupted. While an EA is ideally arrayed to utilize direct and indirect fire weapons systems in concert, EAs well forward of the FEBA may involve only aircraft or aircraft and long-range indirect fire weapons. EAs may be quickly established to account for fleeting opportunities. For example, an EA may be hastily established 100 to 200 kilometers forward of the FEBA in response to an immediately identified enemy armored column with aircraft and LAR as the only MAGTF assets utilized.

This chapter will address aircraft and indirect fire weapons systems in an antiarmor defense. The focus remains on the engagement of enemy armored columns and support units, *not* piecemealed armor assets supporting dismounted infantry operations.

4401. Definition

Fire support is the assistance to elements of the MAGTF engaged with the enemy rendered by other firing units, including (but not limited to) artillery, mortars, naval surface fire support, and offensive air support. (MCRP 5-12C). The mission of fire support is to delay, disrupt, or destroy enemy forces in support of the scheme of maneuver.

Fire support is selective and focused--it is always considered within the context of maneuver--either immediate or eventual maneuver. Conversely, maneuver is dependent on fire support. Maneuver and fire support are concurrent, not sequential preoccupations of the commander.

4402. Offensive Air Support

Offensive air support (OAS) is air operations conducted against enemy installations, facilities, and personnel to directly assist the attainment of MAGTF objectives by destruction of enemy resources or the isolation of his military force (MCWP 3-23, *Offensive Air Support*). Offensive air support is one of the six functions of Marine aviation. OAS is used to *destroy or neutralize or delay* the enemy.

a. Types of OAS. OAS may be subdivided by categorizing operations according to the degree of coordination required with the supported ground unit. These categories are are Close Air Support (CAS) and Deep Air Support (DAS).

(1) Close Air Support. Air action by fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft against hostile targets which are in close proximity to friendly forces and which require detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of those forces (Joint Pub 1-02).

Applying the fundamentals of combined arms, the MAGTF commander integrates CAS with other forms of fire support and the fire and movement of ground forces. At times, CAS is the best firepower delivery means available to rapidly mass a lethal capability, exploit tactical opportunities, or save friendly lives. CAS also gives the ground force commander flexibility in force employment by augmenting organic supporting fires. CAS missions can be flown in support of ground forces on either side of the FSCL. CAS is closely integrated with the fire and movement of all

MAGTF elements. To preserve this integration, the ground commander of the supported ground unit through his Forward Air Controller (FAC or FAC/A) requests and/or approves all CAS missions in his area of responsibility.

The three-dimensional mobility of aircraft provides commanders with the means to strike the enemy swiftly and unexpectedly. The speed, range, and maneuverability of aircraft allow the attack of targets that other supporting arms may not be able to effectively engage because of limiting factors, such as type of target, range, the terrain, or the friendly scheme of maneuver.

Although attack helicopters and fixed wing aircraft can both provide CAS, employment considerations differ. Fixed wing aircraft provide advantages of range, speed, and ordnance loads specifically designed to counter armored threats, whereas attack helicopters provide advantages of excellent responsiveness and the ability to operate in adverse weather conditions.

a. Attack Helicopters. Attack helicopters can operate from naval shipping, but normally operate from main operating bases that are fairly close to the battle area. Forward Arming Refueling Points (FARPs) are often located in the forward area for enhanced responsiveness of support. The attack helicopter occupies a niche between ground weapon system and fixed-wing CAS aircraft by allowing the MAGTF to cover gaps in the capabilities of assigned forces. In many situations such as poor weather, intense jamming, or during fast moving battles, the attack helicopter may be the only type of OAS available. However, the attack helicopter is generally more vulnerable to ground fire than fixed wing aircraft.

Attack helicopters may be used to attack specific targets at specific locations or they may be assigned missions similar to a maneuver element.

When given a mission of flank or forward security or as a reaction force, attack helicopter's primary importance rests with its mobility. In this instance, commanders should avoid overly restricting attack helicopters in fire support planning.

Attack helicopters may support a mechanized task force or LAR units that are conducting security operations forward or to the flanks of a defensive position. Attack helicopters are ideal for supporting spoiling or counterattacks. Attack helicopters may be used in a delay to engage the enemy once the ground element has disengaged.

b. Fixed Wing Aircraft. Fixed wing aircraft can be based on main operating bases on land and naval ships afloat, well behind the battle area. These locations offer the widest range of support, such as available ordnance, mission equipment, and logistics. Fixed wing aircraft can be deployed to forward operating bases, which decreases transit time and increases time on station but may limit flexibility of munitions available.

Fixed wing aircraft provide the MAGTF commander with advantages in range, speed, and a heavy loadout of ordnance when attacking an armored threat. The greatest limitation of fixed wing aircraft is generally time on station. The variety of ordnance which can be delivered against armored vehicles includes: Precision Guided Munitions, General Purpose Bombs, Anti-personnel Rockets, and Cluster Bomb Units.

(3) Deep Air Support. Air action against enemy targets at such a distance from friendly forces that detailed integration of each mission with fire and movement of friendly forces is not required. DAS missions can be flown on either side of the FSCL; the lack of a requirement for close coordination with the fire and maneuver of friendly forces is the qualifying factor (MCRP 5-2C).

DAS differs from CAS because it does not require close integration with friendly forces. Air interdiction and armed reconnaissance are DAS tasks.

(a) Air Interdiction. Air operations conducted to destroy, neutralize, or delay the enemy's military potential before it can be brought to bear effectively against friendly forces, at such destiny from friendly forces that detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of friendly forces is not required. (Joint Pub 1-02)

(b) Armed Reconnaissance. A mission with the primary purpose of locating and attacking targets of opportunity; i.e., enemy materiel, personnel, and facilities, in assigned general areas along assigned ground communication routes, and not for the purpose of attacking specific briefed targets (Joint Pub 1-02). Aircraft conducting armed reconnaissance ordinarily operate at low altitudes making them easy targets for modern air defense weapons. Accordingly, armed reconnaissance missions require a low threat environment.

b. Types of Missions. CAS missions are executed as either preplanned air support or *immediate* air support, as determined by the degree of prearrangement. *Preplanned CAS* is air support in accordance with a program, planned in advance of operations (Joint Pub 1-02). *Immediate* CAS is air support to meet specific requests which arise during the course of a battle and which by their nature cannot be planned in advance (Joint Pub 1-02). Both preplanned and immediate air support are executed in response to specific requests.

Fixed-wing aircraft are most effective against armored columns not fully deployed for combat. When ground units are engaging enemy armor with direct fire weapons, fixed-wing aircraft are often diverted to attack second echelon or reinforcing units. Planning should allow for shifting air assets from one EA to another in a rapid manner.

c. Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD). SEAD consists of activity which neutralizes, destroys, or temporarily degrades surface-based enemy air defenses by destructive and/or disruptive means. SEAD fires should precede air strikes. The purpose of SEAD is to minimize the loss or damage to friendly aircraft during planned air strikes by neutralizing these weapons.

d. LAR and Aviation. Attack helicopter and fixed-wing assets provide increased flexibility and firepower for a unit defending against enemy armor. At the tactical and operational levels, a combination of LAR and ACE assets provide the supported commander with a unit capable of exceptional speed, range, and lethality. The concept of a MAGTF security force composed of LAR and ACE assets is discussed in MCWP 3-14, *Employment of LAR*. This force, operating well forward of the GCE, allows the MAGTF commander to see and shape the battlefield. LAR and ACE assets can engage enemy armor at the farthest possible point from friendly positions.

The introduction of LAR/ACE assets capable of deep operations provides the MAGTF commander with one more transitional capability to influence the action, but poses additional coordination problems. To ensure unity of effort among the diverse units operating in the MAGTF's area of influence, the MAGTF commander should assign the primary responsibility for the coordination of operations in this area to a subordinate.

While activities in the MAGTF area of influence are the responsibility of the MAGTF commander, the assignment of a *deep battle coordinator* allows timely decisions to be made based on the MAGTF commander's intent. The ACE commander is well suited for this task. The ACE commander possesses the requisite means for integrating the activities of both air and ground elements for exploiting opportunities in this area. Accordingly, it may be necessary

for the MAGTF commander to assign LAR assets to the ACE commander. I.ikewise, the ACE as commander may find it beneficial to designate the LAR unit commander as a mission commander and subordinate aviation assets to him.

4403. Indirect Fire Support

Fire support assets and priority of fires are allocated based on the most dangerous enemy avenues of approach (As are established here). They are normally suballocated to units on those approaches and shifted as the battle develops. Priority of fires is initially given to the forward security elements (e.g., LAR or mechanized units) and then shifted to the units on the FEBA when the security elements pass through the HOL. The allocation of fire support may be constantly shifted based on the factors of METT-T. It is no longer SOP that each infantry regiment will have an artillery battalion in DS. For example, an infantry regiment designated the main effort may have two or more artillery battalions providing support.

a. Uses of Indirect Fire Support. Indirect fires should be integrated with direct fire weapons to ensure the maximum benefit of combined arms. Indirect fire support includes but is not limited to the following uses:

· Disrupts, slows, and disorganizes the enemy and forces him to button-up at long range.

· Is employed against enemy overwatch or base of fire elements.

· Provides illumination for target acquisition at night.

· Covers disengagement, movements, and counterattacks.

· Destroys dismounted infantry with close-in barrage fire.

· Provides smoke for obscuration.

· Provides smoke at the rear of an assaulting unit to provide contrast for easier target acquisition.

· Delivers FASCAM on enemy armor avenues of approach .

· Kills armor with DPICM (against light armor) and Copperhead (any armor).

· Delivers counterbattery fire.

· Provides SEAD.

b. Fire Support Means. A basic understanding of the employment of each indirect fire support weapons system is imperative for the proper use of combined arms.

(1) **Artillery.** Artillery is positioned to provide close, deep, and counterfire support in coordination with maneuver forces. The intent is to disrupt and weaken the enemy's offensive action and to provide windows of opportunity for

friendly offensive action. Control of fire support assets is more centralized for defensive operations against an enemy armored force. Artillery and other indirect fire support means must be massed against armor to be effective.

(2) Naval Surface Fire Support. NSFS ships can deliver a large volume of high velocity projectiles within a short period. NSFS can deliver suppression (there is no immediate suppression mission for NSFS), neutralization, and destruction fires. NSFS direct accuracy, high muzzle velocity, and flat trajectory provide effective penetration and destruction of targets which present an appreciable vertical surface.

(3) Mortars. Mortars at the battalion and company level are normally deployed to support secondary avenues of approach. They can provide responsive fires to support the maneuver of company teams and platoons between battle positions. During night operations, mortars assume a greater role when there may be a requirement for illumination and the threat of a dismounted infantry attack is usually greater.

4404. Fire Support Planning

The fire support plan defines the way artillery, mortars, NSFS, and CAS aircraft will be used to complement the scheme of maneuver, and it provides instructions for executing those fires. It may include air defense assets. It ranks targets in priority order, matches them with the available fire support systems, eliminates duplication of targets, and allows fires to be executed quickly without specific direction from the commander once the battle starts.

A fire support plan is developed before any operation and continues throughout the operation based on enemy contact and continuous intelligence gathering efforts. There is continuous interaction between the commander, staff, and his fire support agencies. The plan is constantly refined as the operation continues.

a. Time-Distance Factors. Fire support planning against armor is similar to other operations EXCEPT the movement, tempo, and distances covered are greater than those encountered against enemy dismounted infantry. Additionally, the target effects for a given type munition is less on enemy armor than on dismounted troops. These differences must be considered at the outset of the planning process. Figure 4-27 provides some basic speed/time considerations for fire support planning.

This table provides the time required to travel 1 kilometer or 1 mile while using specified march speeds. The travel times are calculated based on rates of march (miles/kilometers in one hour) and include time for scheduled short halts and time lost due to road and traffic conditions.

b. Targeting Considerations. Targets and targeting are discussed in detail in MCWP 3-16, *Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures of Fire Support Coordination.* Multiple armor targets call for special considerations. When fires are desired on several targets, groups and series of targets may be established.

(1) Groups. A group of targets consists of two or more targets on which simultaneous fires are desired. In the defense, a group of targets can be used to destroy enemies stopped at minefields or to destroy vehicles waiting to cross rivers or bridges. Individual targets in the group can be selected based on how the commander thinks the enemy would form at these activities (See fig. 4-28).

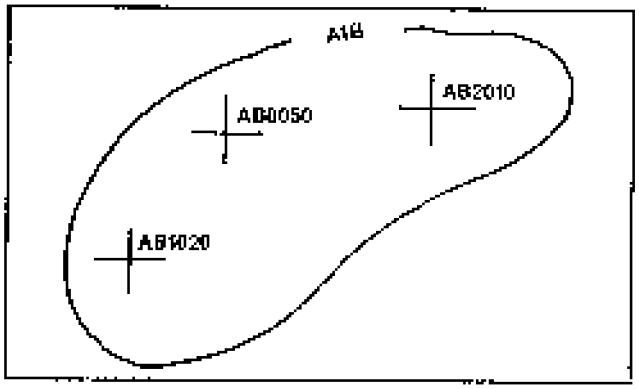

Figure 4-28. Target Group.

(2) Series. A series of targets is a number of targets or groups of targets planned to be fired on in a predetermined sequence. In the defense, the series allows for fires which are tied to speed; but, in this case, it is the speed at which the enemy will attack. A series of linear targets may be planned to destroy the enemy attack echelons. Attack of linear targets 1,000 meters apart (3 minutes at 20 kilometers per hour) may keep fire continuously falling on the enemy (See fig. 4-29). Additionally, series work well in the defense with CAS TOTs to facilitate integration of indirect fires in concert with aviation delivered fires.

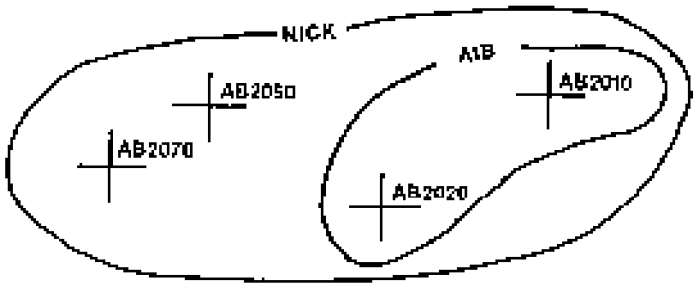

Figure 4-29. Target Series.