

# Maintain the Fire:

## *Enabling Transitions and Mitigating Seams for Fire Support in the BCT Construct*

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Under the current alignment of field artillery battalions in direct support of brigade combat teams (BCTs) and current doctrine, fire-support equipment is unable to maintain Army maintenance and equipment standards. This article discusses a fire support equipment transition that was conducted prior to the Department of the Army-dictated Defender 2020 exercise, which was the first expeditionary power projection of multiple BCTs converging on and through Europe to display combat credibility and assure NATO allies and partners in more than 30 years, and the lessons learned as a result of circumstances that followed.

Furthermore, rooted in personal experience, the lessons stand as recommendations to adjust Army materiel, equipment, and supply doctrine to set conditions and establish appropriate responsibilities for greater fire-support equipment readiness as the Field Artillery community continues to shift command/support relationships and equipment alignments in the future.

The digital fires sensor-to-shooter process relies on the equipment and supply policies and directed responsibilities at echelon. The foundation is rooted where equipment assigned to the fire support team (FiST) is analogous to the platform the FiST employs in operations. For example, within the higher system of the Global Combat Support System-Army (GCSS-A), communications equipment within the M7A2 Bradley Fire Support Vehicle (BFiST) platform must be assigned to that vehicle as a system of systems to ensure proper readiness reporting and maintenance priorities to validate digital fire support sensor-to-shooter capabilities. Albeit, this system of systems is lost in the transition of fire support equipment to the FiSTs' associated maneuver company, yet it underscores the importance on the transition of fire support equipment and the critical capability within the fires common operating picture of the BCT.

Prior to deployment operations in support of Defender 2020, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery (HHB), 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 3rd Infantry Division, made necessary plans to facilitate the attachment of fire support personnel and equipment to its associated maneuver units. Due to operational constraints, a temporary loan of equipment was dictated due to the short duration of the deployment, modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) considerations, nonexistent derivative unit inventory code architecture, and the necessity to begin divestiture of equipment upon redeployment to set conditions for modernization and fielding around 2nd Quarter of Fiscal Year 2021. Fire support personnel and their equipment attached across five separate battalion headquarters throughout the ABCT, highlighting the largest property movement across the brigade since its conversion to an ABCT just two years prior.

For those not previously exposed, a temporary loan agreement is a supply action that exercises the ability of one unit to lend equipment to another unit for a time period of more than 30 days, but not to exceed six months.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this, it remains on the owning unit's primary hand receipt (PHR) thus not counting against the gaining unit's authorized equipment totals, but it is moved to the gaining unit work center to enable routine maintenance/supply action, in contrast to a more traditional lateral transfer. Due to traditional maneuver units not being authorized fire support equipment under the BCT construct, the temporary loan agreement has potential to be an optimal solution to the assignment of the equipment consistent with maneuver battalion operational requirements.

In spite of this, only four of the five types of supply responsibility are bestowed upon the gaining unit: supervisory, direct, custodial, and personal; command responsibility cannot be delegated from the PHR holder.<sup>2</sup> These four



**Fire support Soldiers assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, employ a Lightweight Laser Designator Rangefinder utilizing a remote heads-up display for artillery observation spottings and corrections. (Photo courtesy of authors)**

types of responsibility hold the gaining unit responsible for the majority of actions concerning the equipment such as proper custody, routine/scheduled maintenance, security, disposition, and formal accounting requirements. It is imperative to note that authorization of a temporary loan agreement between PHR holders within a component is the property book officer (PBO), implying that the BCT PBO outlines all circumstances of the temporary loan agreement leaving as little to interpretation as possible.

This is worthy to note because information regarding loan agreements is scarcely available in circulated regulation and official publication. Army Regulation (AR) 735-5, *Property Accountability*; AR 710-2, *Supply Policy Below the National Level*; AR 700-131, *Loan, Lease, and Donation of Army Materiel*; and Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet (PAM) 720-2-1, *Using Unit Supply System*, only briefly mention temporary loan agreements of this nature.<sup>3</sup> This highlights a systemic deficiency of organizational knowledge in regard to the circumstances surrounding temporary loan agreements, which in turn has created steady educated guesswork at the user level.

In order to rectify the ambiguity that encompasses the temporary loan process, there needs to be clearly defined transitions of command-level responsibility and merges between Army doctrine in AR 735-5, AR 710-2, and AR 750-1. The Army supply, property accountability, and maintenance standards must merge in order to specify that command-level responsibility can be transitioned between the battery/company/troop headquarters in order to achieve requirements referenced in AR 735-5, section II, paragraph 2-8.<sup>4</sup> The HHB commander cannot achieve and maintain the property accountability and maintenance standards dictated by AR 735-5 and AR 710-2. Furthermore, due to the span across five separate headquarters and the volume of equipment the temporary loan encompasses, the ability to exercise acceptable command responsibility diminishes in an operational context. Once forward in Europe, the BCT disaggregated and began operating with separate and unique battalion mission sets, making the ability to exercise appropriate responsibility negligible. The equipment responsibility must doctrinally align to the associated maneuver echelon in order to maintain the digital fires sensor-to-shooter system of systems.

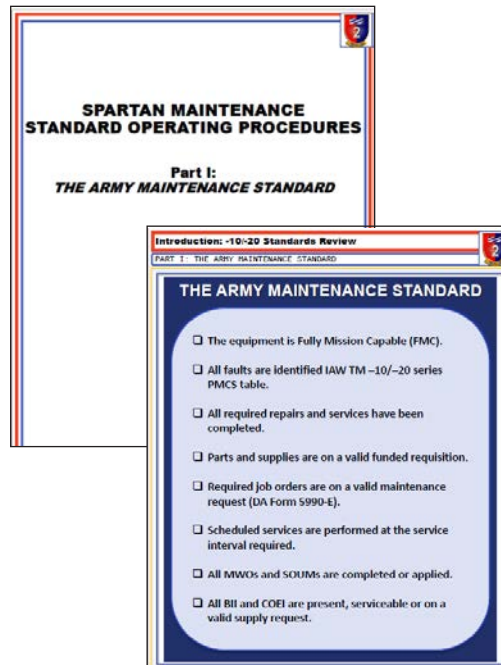
The lack of regulation and authority at the helm of the temporary loan agreement creates impacts to the field artillery community as it continues in what seems to be a perpetual keel in direct support of the BCT or the division artillery (DIVARTY) headquarters. By regulation, the PBO is the only authorization for loans between units in a like component and in all likelihood is the subject matter expert on the process at the organizational level. Unfortunately, there is a significant educational seam between units ranging from company-level supply clerks to battalion headquarters teams. The blind spots that were not specified in the temporary loan of equipment were what exacerbated the seams within the system of systems. Routine and scheduled services, dispositions, repairs, sustainment, oil analysis, modified work orders, and dispatches are all accompanying responsibilities that are inherent with a piece of equipment.

However, these were not always inferred. In order to rectify for future transitions, a doctrinal framework to specify transition of command responsibility between adjacent units will provide necessary oversight once the brigade's fires capability at the user level is transitioned to separate headquarters.

In addition to the doctrinal changes in supply and maintenance policies, there must be a deliberate education of maneuver commanders originating from the field artillery battalion headquarters executed by the respective battalion fire support officers (FSOs). Executed through the respective battalion FSOs, the gaining units will gain an appreciation and ownership of the system of systems inherent in digital fire support equipment. Ultimately, the maneuver commander maintains training responsibility authority and is responsible for the integration of fires within the area of operations (AO).<sup>5</sup> The credibility of the fires warfighting function begins long before the call for fire, the combined arms rehearsal, or even the fires rehearsal. Trust between maneuver and the fires community is built upon a foundation of credibility. Accepting absolute responsibility of these gains is in fact contrary to AR 710-2, but it is requisite to incorporate the fires warfighting function successfully.



**Fire support specialists utilize the M7 Bradley Fire Support Team (BFIST) vehicle and the Fire Support Sensor System (FS3) to identify targets and call for fire (CFF). (Photo by SPC Marcus Floyd)**



To synchronize fire support with their organic units, maneuver commanders must anticipate the needs of their FiSTs to properly employ their capabilities and plan with known assets as opposed to taking unscheduled requests in a dynamic situation.<sup>6</sup> To properly employ capabilities, maneuver commanders must be educated on the fire support platform's M7A2 capabilities to include the Fire Support Sensor System (FS3) and all ancillary equipment that becomes analogous with the fire support digital sensor-to-shooter system. Most important, the HHB commander must diminish the seam between maneuver units and fire support equipment capabilities by executing a deliberate transition of the GCSS-A system built having an M7A2 with ancillary equipment assigned to the corresponding platform. Furthermore, the system of systems must be transitioned giving that maneuver commander routine/scheduled maintenance plans, calendars for planned Army oil analysis program (AOAP) sampling with appointed FSO/fire support NCO representatives, and proper driver's training and licensing packets. Executing the transition of fire support equipment by handing off a system of systems and knitting the seam of command responsibility for that system between inherently similar units will prove advantageous to posture the fire support community for increased equipment readiness during periods of transition under the BCT or DIVARTY construct.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet (PAM) 720-2-1, *Using Unit Supply System*, 2016, 4-31.

<sup>2</sup> Army Regulation (AR) 735-5, *Property Accountability*, 2016, 2-8.

<sup>3</sup> DA PAM 720-2-1, 4-31, 5-4.

<sup>4</sup> AR 735-5, 2-8.

<sup>5</sup> Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-19, *Fires*, 2019, 2-6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 3-4.

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