



Effective Lethal Fires at Brigade

What Are They and How Do We Enable Them?

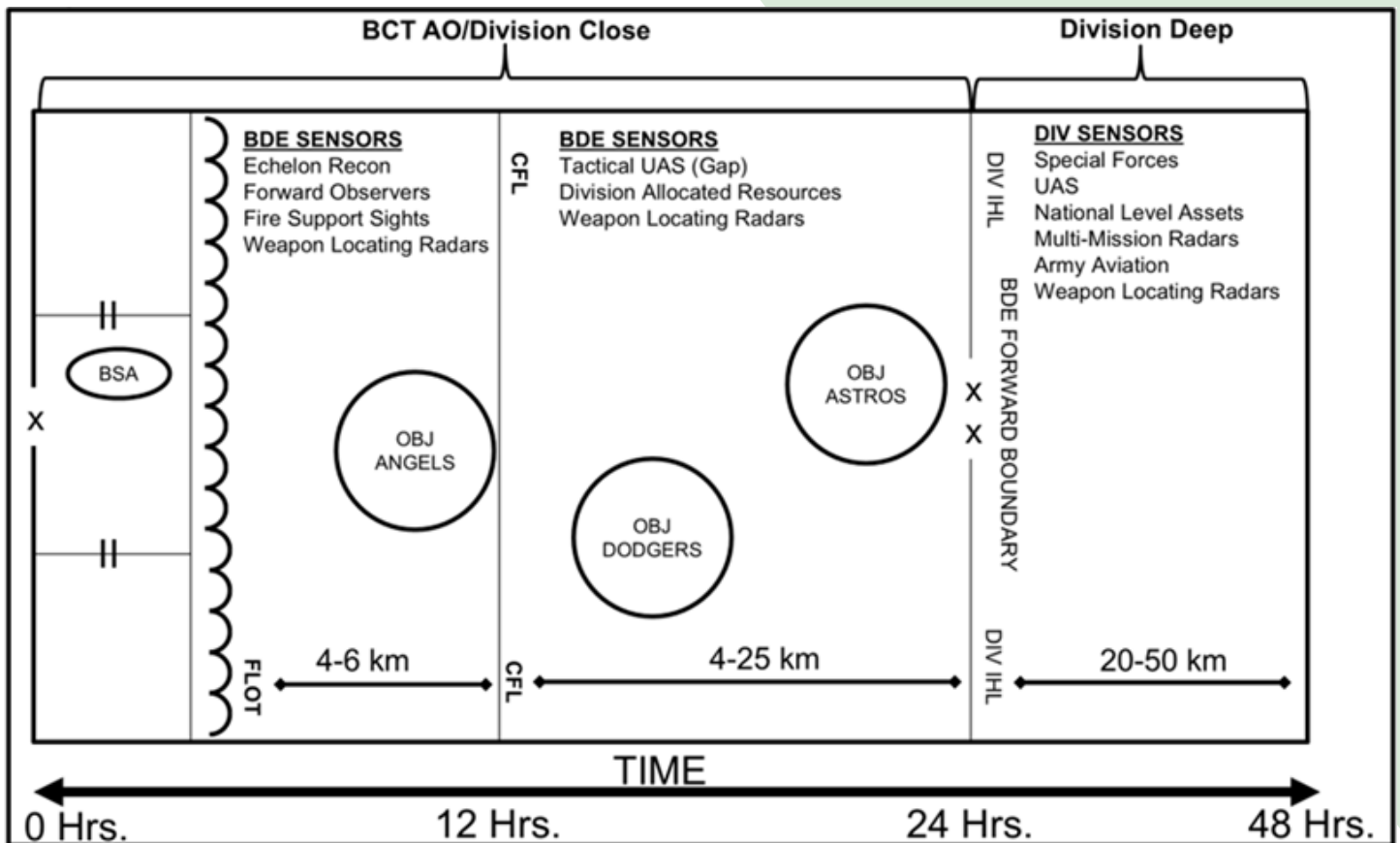
By COL Emiliano Tellado, Senior Fire Support Trainer,
& CW3 William Woods, Senior Targeting Trainer

Much discussion in our Army doctrinal circles has centered around the battlefield framework and responsibilities for battlespace and timeframes, especially within the brigade combat team (BCT). What is the lethal fires fight for a BCT? Where does it start? Where does it end? Is there a brigade deep fight? Along with many leaders and trainers assigned to the National Training Center (NTC), I have continually pondered the answers to these questions. As the senior fire support trainer and former practicing FA battalion commander, I didn't necessarily have all the right answers for these questions either. The reality is that I had to take time to study, observe and then seek information from leaders. Ultimately, after continued discussions, work with numerous rotational units and examination of our newest capstone doctrinal publications, we put together the following battlefield framework, depicted in **Figure 1**. It captures the doctrine laid out in Field Manual (FM) 3-0 and uses an operational framework with graphic control measures that clearly defines the lethal fires fight for a BCT. This article seeks to explain what effective lethal fires look like at the brigade level utilizing the provided framework and offering recommendations on how best to employ BCT organic resources to effectively use lethal fires.

To start, we need to define what effective fires look like at the brigade level. Luckily for us, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-09.42, *Fire Support for the Brigade Combat Team*, gives us a definition when it states, "Effective fires are achieved at the brigade level when they are combined with maneuver to make destroying large forces feasible and enhance the protection of friendly forces."¹ Through this

1 Headquarters, Department of the Army, March 2016, p. 2

Figure 1: The Brigade Battlefield Framework



sentence, we can discern two constant points in doctrine and see them play out in every rotation.

First, fires combined with maneuver enables the destruction of a large force. “Maneuver intends to force enemy units into kill zones or concentrate formations where lethal fires can be leveraged to gain an overwhelming advantage.”² Operationally, we can define this as the decisive operation where “by massing forces rapidly along converging axes and synchronizing the effects of available supporting assets, attackers overwhelm forces at decisive points with concentrated combat power.”³ Within this decisive operation lies the main effort of the BCT that has priority and must be protected to enable success. At the brigade level, effective lethal fires enable victory at the decisive point. At NTC, units struggle with this when they fail to determine the decisive point and, therefore, lack the focus of efforts on setting the favorable correlation of forces and means to ensure victory.

Second is the role of fires to shape and counter enemy threats that enhances the survivability of forces and ultimately enables victory at the decisive point. Meaning that under this premise, we use lethal fires to shape future close operations, protect rear operations and provide counterbattery fires to disrupt and prevent the enemy’s ability from massing fires on friendly forces. To enable these actions, an operational framework that outlines responsibilities, creates permissive fires lines and synchronizes efforts is needed. Therefore, let’s take this opportunity to ground ourselves with a shared understanding of the terms associated with an operational framework. “An operational framework organizes an area of geographic and operations responsibility for the commander and provides a way to describe the employment of forces.”⁴ The three models traditionally used to build an operational framework are assigned areas; operations that delineate the deep, close and rear; and efforts that designate the main, supporting and reserved. I purposefully did not use the operational term “deep” as although it is doctrinally sound and traditionally used, it has become synonymous with operations at the echelons above brigade. Therefore, the term creates a false sense of time that is not present in operations for BCTs focused on the 24 hours ahead of them and work in an area of roughly no more than 25 kilometers, allowing any enemy force to close the gap in less than a few hours changing the correlations of forces and means. So, although we may describe the physical arrangement of forces using rear, close and deep, it’s imperative at the BCT level that we define the efforts that enable victory at the decisive point.

To be effective, a BCT must leverage its lethal fires to destroy enemy forces at the decisive point, neutralize enemy forces that can affect the main effort and suppress through counterbattery forces that limit their ability to move throughout the battlefield. The BCT must outline a well-defined operational framework supported by a battlefield framework that uses boundaries and coordination measures to define responsibility, ensuring that forces are adequately applied. In the battlefield framework of this article, we will focus on the implementation of a brigade forward boundary (BFB) aligned with a division intelligence handover line (IHL) with a BCT-established coordinated fire line (CFL) to enable a permissive lethal fires environment.

The BFB delineates the surface area for which the BCT is responsible for coordinating and deconflicting operations. It marks the formal transition between the division close, which BCTs fight, and that of the division deep, where the division is responsible for setting the favorable correlation of forces and means for supported commands to make contact with the enemy with the greatest ratio possible. The division deep is where the counterfire fight occurs, and multiple domains are incorporated. Further, delineating responsibility is the division IHL, which clearly defines who is responsible for collection in a defined surface area. At NTC, BCTs are assigned a BFB by the 52nd Infantry Division (ID) as they enter the area of operations that is periodically updated as they maneuver to their objectives. Further enabling BCTs to focus south of their BFB is the establishment of a 52nd ID Division Artillery (DIVARTY) that oversees the counterfire fight and actively shapes in support of the BCT forward of the BFB.

2 Ibid

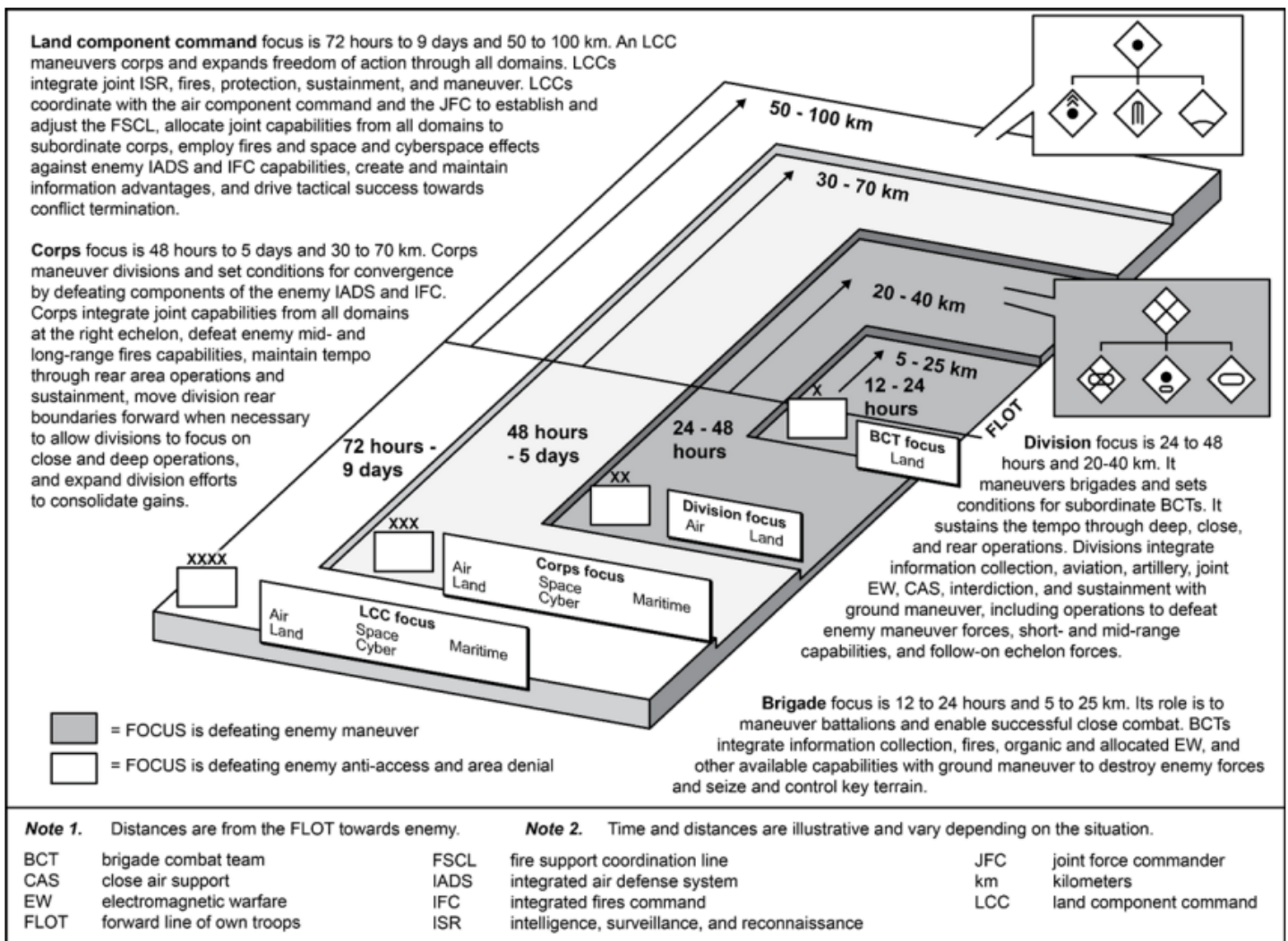
3 Headquarters, Department of the Army, August 2012, p. 2

4 Headquarters, Department of Army, October 2022, p. 2

The second graphic control measure is the CFL, which is “a line beyond which conventional surface-to-surface direct fire and indirect fire support means may fire at any time within the boundaries of the establishing headquarters and without additional coordination, but it does not eliminate the responsibility to coordinate the airspace required to conduct the mission.”⁵ The CFL is a permissive fire support control measure meant to expedite the delivery of fires.⁶ The placement of the CFL is intended to be as close to the forward line of troops as possible but not directly over, and unless consolidated by a higher headquarters, it can be set at the brigade level. The CFL typically marks the transition point in the employment of direct versus artillery indirect fires. To effectively leverage lethal indirect fires short of the CFL, the BCT must execute proper ground clearance procedures as they are at the point of contact. In addition, under the framework provided, it serves as a line where effective lethal indirect fires combine with direct fires to destroy enemy forces. The CFL also serves as the graphic control measure that enables the expedient delivery of fires to protect its forces through counterbattery effectively and the shaping of enemy forces to set the conditions for victory at the decisive point.

At NTC, the CFL is set initially by the division as they are the first tactical formation in theater providing the fires needed to set the conditions for the BCT to cross the line of departure. After the

Figure 2: Notional roles and responsibilities in terms of time, space and purpose at different echelons.⁷



5 Headquarters, Department of the Army, August 2024, p. 4

6 Ibid

7 Headquarters, Department of Army, October 2022, p. 6

BCT crosses the line of departure, the CFL shifts to the BFB until the BCT requests that it comes closer, thereby enabling a common permissive fire line that is shared by all headquarters. Through this coordination process, the BCT can establish a permissive fire line that enables it to expedite fires while simultaneously create an opportunity for division to still support in the close fight.

Within these two graphic control measures, we define the brigade battlespace where BCT directs its focus of fires and collection to enable maneuver to win at the decisive point. Furthermore, it aligns us with the planning horizons that FM 3-0, *Operations*, defines for each echelon as depicted in **Figure 2**. (previous page) I highlight this as one of the areas we see BCTs struggle with early on, defining their battlespace graphically and then aligning their assets against it. The BFB is established by the division and is meant to focus on efforts in the division close and deep so that they are complementary. The BFB is positioned based on the 0 to 24-hour planning and execution horizon that the BCT is responsible for and can execute with their organic capability. Having a BFB allows a BCT to focus its limited resources on winning at the decisive point and to communicate to the division the correlation of forces and means to ensure victory. Again, as we stated, if the intent of lethal fires at the BCT is to make destroying large forces feasible when combined with maneuver and to enhance the protection of friendly forces, we must understand our boundaries to drive our focus in the right area.

At the BCT level, the resources to effectively employ lethal fires are limited and meant to support not only the BCT commander but each echelon down to the platoon level. Therefore, it's important that prioritization and focus be provided by the BCT commander in their guidance. "Fighting in LSCGO requires more careful Fire Support planning because of the limited resources available to acquire, and attack targets at extended ranges, and requires detailed coordination and employment of target acquisition, attack, and assessment needs across all domains."⁸ Two specific assets that are often left without detailed guidance are the observer plan and the employment of weapon locating radars. These assets while employed either at the company level or controlled by a cell within the brigade command post are essential to enabling effective lethal fires.

"BCTs cannot effectively execute combined arms maneuver without an appropriately resourced observer plan. Fires without maneuver is indecisive; maneuver without fires is not lethal". – COL Jayson B. Morgan, Commander, 1st Armored Division DIVARTY

Although managed at the maneuver battalion, fire support teams are an essential capability in the employment of lethal fires. In BCT-level operations, they can be the single point that will enable success at the decisive point or lead to catastrophic failure. Whether it's the obscuration smoke at the breach or suppressive fires at the wet gap crossing, all these essential elements are vital to large operations and are enabled by observers. Even though observers are under the mission command blanket of the maneuver battalion commander, they become a BCT asset to which priority must be given in planning and support when assigned targets or focus areas by the BCT commander. When the BCT commander issues their commander's guidance for fires, the guidance must provide direction for an observer plan that allows the focus and targets to be developed to enable the overall BCT plan. It is then the responsibility of the BCT fire support officer under the direct supervision of the BCT fire support coordinator to develop, rehearse and execute the plan.

Weapon-locating radars are the tool at the BCT level that enables counterbattery operations and feeds into the division counterfire fight. They are the most crucial asset in preserving the conditions for success. However, BCTs often fail to prioritize their placement, track their status on the battlefield and leverage the data they provide. In fire support, synchronization is the arrangement of military actions in time, space and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at a decisive place and time.⁹ There is no more significant demonstration of synchronization at the BCT level than its weapon-locating radars tied to a firing battery through a quick-fire net with permissive graphic

8 Headquarters, Department of the Army, August 2024, p. 6

9 Joint Staff, May 2022, p. 7

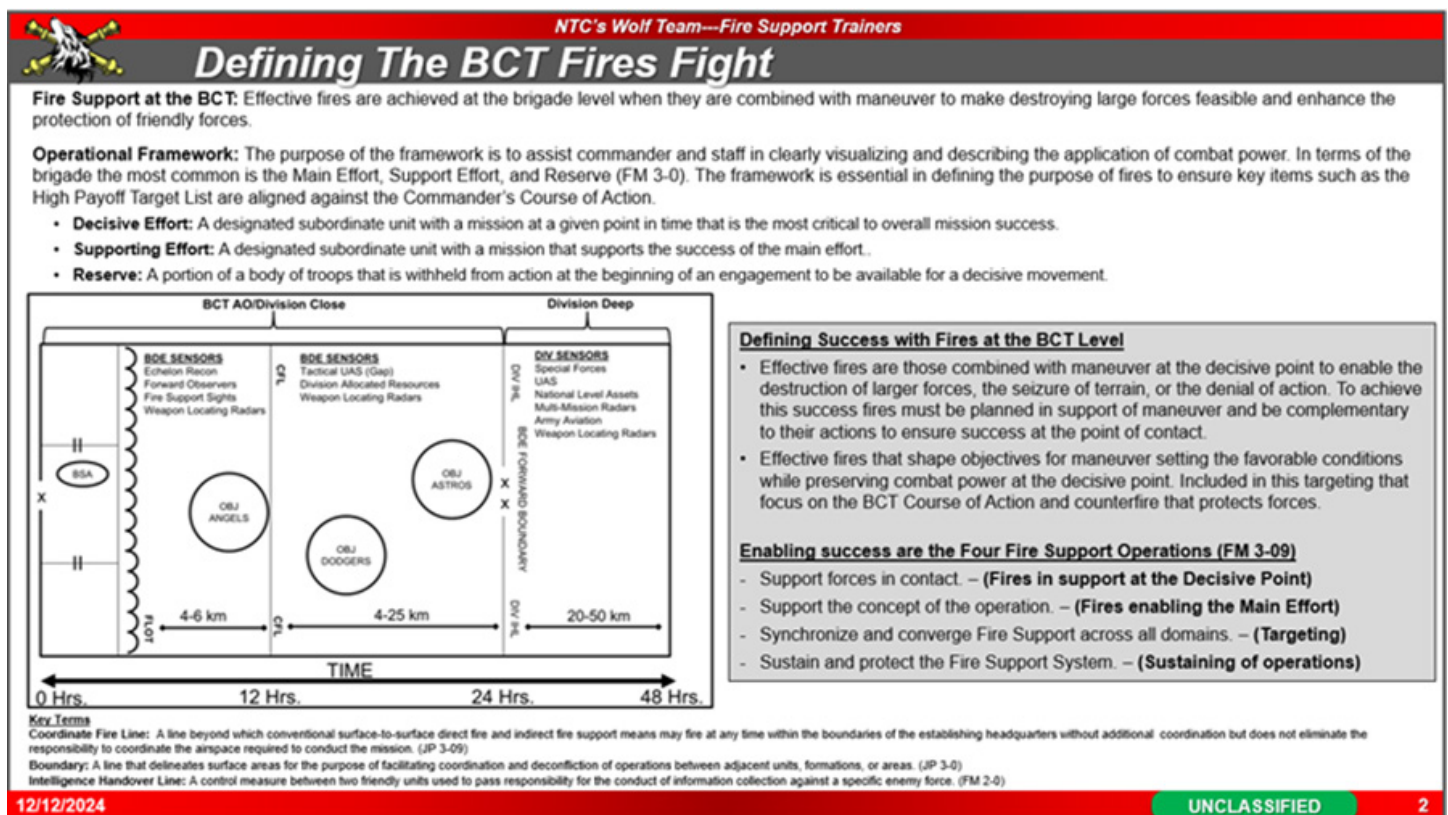
control measures in place to expedite the rapid delivery of fires at enemy artillery forces seeking to prevent them from gaining the advantage needed. The BCT commander must include in their guidance a focus and prioritization in the emplacement and protection of its weapon-locating radars. Like how the S-1 talks about points in a fight where casualty rates are expected to increase, the same can be said of enemy indirect fires. Therefore, planning must account for their employment and enable a process to monitor their status through the fight.

To achieve effective lethal fires at the BCT level, they must be combined with a maneuver to enable the decisive operation to defeat the enemy, protect the main effort and support it through effective counterbattery and shaping fires. In order to be effective with lethal fires, they must support the maneuver and enable them to win at the point of contact. Lethal fires must be synchronized with maneuver and tied to the concept of the operation. They must shape objectives for maneuver setting the favorable conditions while preserving combat power at the decisive point. A final point doctrine provides that assists in planning are the four functions of fire support that drive the conditions for effective fires:

- **Support forces in contact.**
- **Support the concept of the operation.**
- **Synchronize and converge fire support across all domains.**
- **Sustain and protect the fire support system.**

The four fire support functions are requirements that create the conditions needed to enable success when coupled with an understanding of what effective lethal fires are at the BCT level and the necessary battlefield framework to achieve them. **Figure 3** is a depiction that encapsulates the article’s points and is meant to enhance the understanding of doctrine and its application. Finally, **Figure 4** (next page) shows a tool that we have developed at NTC to aid BCT commanders in the development of their guidance for fires that encompasses the doctrine from FM 3-09, *Fire Support and Field Artillery Operation*, ATP 3-09.42, *Fire Support for the Brigade Combat Team* and ATP 5-0, *Planning and Orders Production*. The overall intent of **Figure 3** and **Figure 4** is to provide a BCT commander tools

Figure 3: Effective Fires at the BCT Level





BCT CDR's Guidance for Lethal Fires – “A Way”

The BCT CDR's Guidance for lethal fires must provide what conditions to enable actions need to occur to win at the decisive point.

- **Commander's Intent**
 - Mission
 - Expanded Purpose
 - Key Tasks
 - End State
 - **Concept of the Operation**
 - Define the operational environment designating the operations: What is your Shaping, Sustain, and Decisive Operation
 - Identify the Decisive Point and what you need protected to enable it
 - Identify the critical points where convergence and synchronization are vital to ensure success
 - Provide initial guidance for an observation plan and where you see mortars taking the lead versus artillery
 - **Purpose of lethal fires**
 - Provide direction on what enemy forces and capabilities in time you see lethal fires effecting
 - Identify when and where you see yourself as the supported commander for control of observers to enable critical points in the battle
 - Identify the critical points where you see the execution of fires being the key enabling task for maneuver and the operation
 - Identify what conditions by phase you need lethal fires to set
 - **Priority of lethal fires**
 - Link your operational assignment of forces to the priority of fires by phase: Who is your Main and Supporting Effort
 - Leverage Priority Targets as means to not only align priorities but synchronization for critical points
 - **Effects of fires**
 - Describe the Effects you are seeking from lethal fires: Disrupt, Delay, Limit, Damage, Degrade, Deny, Deceive, Exploit, Influence Protect, Disrupt, Restore, Respond, or Destroy
 - **Considerations for Special Munitions and the establishment of Fire Support Coordination Measures.**
- Use a guide to identify what you see as the High Value Targets and High Payoff Targets that you want to see targeting focused.
- Identify the conditions you need set to enable the mission and what role does fires play in it.
- Identify the potential munition restrictions and restricted/no-strike targets that you want to consider with regards to civilian end state.

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Figure 4: BCT Commander's Guidance for Fires

that combine already written doctrine from across multiples sources into two documents. I could say that I instantly understood the ideas in that figure when I assumed my position at NTC. However, it grew out of a desire to best understand the doctrine and coach success for the fire support enterprise at NTC. So, as with any article, they are meant to drive the reader to seek out more information and develop their understanding rooted in doctrine.

COL Emiliano Tellado is the current Senior Fire Support Observer, Coach/Trainer (OC/T) at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA. COL Tellado has served in the Field Artillery since 2003, and his previous assignments include Fire Direction Officer, Firing Platoon Leader, Infantry Company Commander, Congressional Fellow and Field Artillery Brigade S3 & XO. He most recently served as the Battalion Commander for 1st Battalion, 14th Field Artillery Regiment out of Fort Sill, OK.

CW3 William Woods is the current Senior Targeting Observer, Coach/Trainer (OC/T) at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA. CW3 Woods has served in the Army as a Field Artillerymen since 2004, and his previous assignments include Battalion Targeting and Senior Radar Observer, Coach/Trainer (OC/T), Regimental Targeting Officer and Field Artillery Intelligence Officer in the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (2CR), Counterfire Officer and Target Acquisition Platoon Leader in the 17th Field Artillery Brigade.

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