DIVISION FIRES: The Alignment of EAB Cannon Battalions under DIVARTY

By CPT Benjamin Harrell

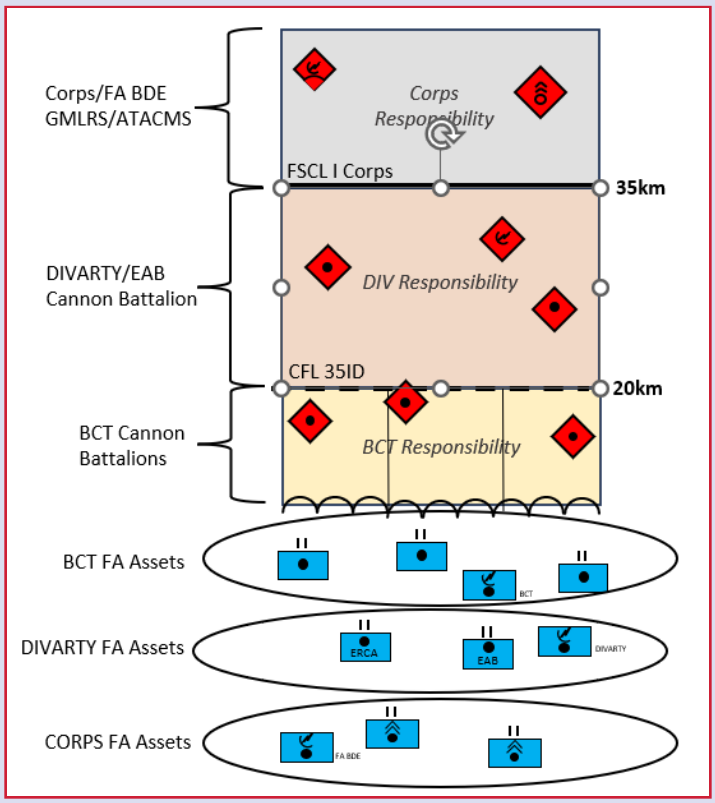
Currently, over a dozen echelon above brigade (EAB) cannon battalions exist in the Army National Guard (ARNG), commonly assigned under Field Artillery Brigades (FAB) and Maneuver Enhancement Brigades (MEB). They are a unique artillery formation that exists in both towed and self-propelled 155mm configurations with a significantly lighter footprint than its brigade combat team (BCT) sibling. These battalions are also a projected benefactor of the Army's pursuit of a longer-range howitzer with the self-propelled enhanced artillery requirement (SPEAR) with 2nd Battalion, 222nd Field Artillery Regiment, Utah ARNG and 2nd Battalion, 142nd Field Artillery Regiment, Arkansas ARNG already identified as the first two recipients[1]. They are designed to be allocated to a FAB or division artillery (DIVARTY) due to their lack of organic radar and observer assets.

Due to this limitation, they typically are not deployed independently but have been used to fill out and augment other Field Artillery battalions ahead of deployments. Within the FAB, these battalions are fielded alongside Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) and High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) battalions, which achieve more than double the range of their cannon counterparts. Typically, the EAB cannon battalions take a back seat to rockets in training scenarios because they do not meet the needs of the FAB and, in turn, the corps in large-scale ground combat. Historically, the Army has neglected and mismanaged these battalions by placing them in formations that either have no use for them or cannot effectively employ them.

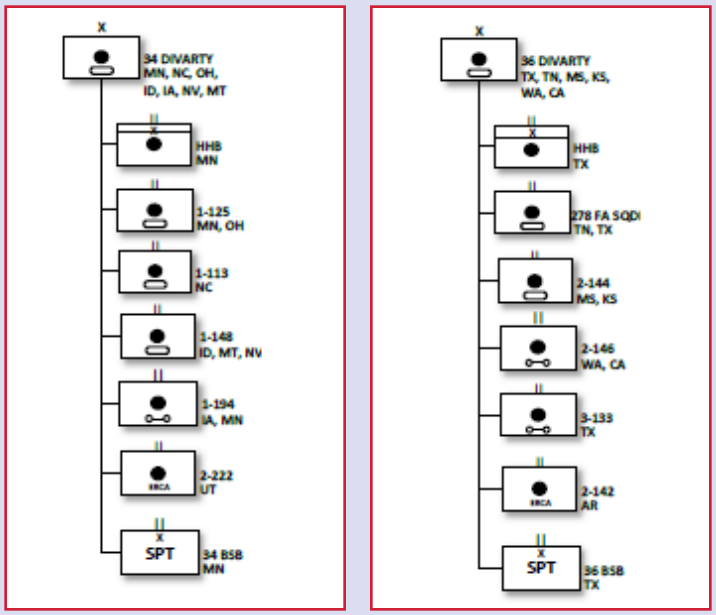
By task organizing these formations under the DIVARTY, they can be employed in the deep area, which is doctrinally meant to be beyond the BCT's boundaries, as well as be used to reinforce the BCT in the division decisive operation or be a dedicated counterfire shooter for the DIVARTY target processing section (TPS). This relationship better matches their range and configuration, given that they would likely be allocated to the division from corps in a GS role regardless. The key benefit in doing so is giving the DIVARTY commander greater flexibility with a fourth, dedicated firing battalion that can meet the basic needs of the DIVARTY, especially when no HIMARS/MLRS assets are allocated from the corps to the division.

SUPPORT TO DIVARTY FUNCTIONS

The first function of the DIVARTY outlined in Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-09.90 is the delivery of fires. By adding an additional battalion of cannons under direct control of the DIVARTY, the division tube strength is increased from 54 to 72 and enables the DIVARTY to deliver fires into the deep area without further encumbering the three downtrace battalions already committed to supporting each BCT. These three additional firing



1 ARNG Division Alignment ASEC 20211005



Projected structures for the 34th DIVARTY (Penetration) and 36th DIVARTY (Heavy)

batteries can be allocated in several combinations to support the division's tasks, including weighting the division main effort through reinforcing a BCT cannon battalion, suppressing enemy air defenses (SEAD) in support of the division's air assets and allocation of a battery to the DIVARTY counterfire cell.

Having an additional battery allocated in a reinforcing relationship creates greater freedom of maneuver for a BCT commander, particularly in high-risk tasks such as a wet gap crossing or a breach. The DIVARTY can re-allocate firing units from other battalions to support such an operation; however, it is at the detriment of those BCTs and their shaping operations. Instead, having the fourth (and potentially fifth as required) reinforcing battery in position and firing in support of the BCT enables more rapid displacement of the organic battalion to cross the objective and get set for follow on operations without disrupting fire support for the maneuver elements.

Through coordination with the division joint air-ground integration center (JAGIC), the EAB cannon battalion enables SEAD to be conducted with much closer control and responsive fires, shaping the deep area without impacting the resources of the BCT commander in the close area. Maintaining this tighter segregation on zones of responsibilities allows the BCT cannons to be controlled at the lowest level possible and enables the DIVARTY to support a division SEAD while reducing the unneeded impact on the subordinate units.

Counterfire can be expedited greatly by allocating a battery to the DIVARTY counterfire cell, particularly if the responsibility for reactive counterfire is left solely to the DIVARTY TPS, which is empowered to send targets directly to the platoons while the battalion maintains control of their positioning, ammunition and movement. Allocating those firing units precision and rocket-assisted munitions further enables rapid and responsive counterfire into the deep area. Setting aside firing units for rapid execution of counterfire allows the DIVARTY to shape future operations by attiring enemy indirect fire systems in the deep area.

In the proposed Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) Ready Division structure, the penetration and heavy division templates already have EAB cannon battalions aligned under the DIVARTY, in addition to each of the battalions allocated to the subordinate BCTs. This could easily be expanded to the light and joint forcible entry templates using 155mm towed battalions given the number of under-utilized battalions found in the National Guard.

LIMITATIONS

In its current configuration, the EAB cannon battalion has several shortcomings that hinder its role in the deep fight, whether under a DIVARTY or FAB. The most glaring of these is the limited range fan. It stands to reason that an EAB battalion with identical range to its BCT counterparts will not be effective in engagements in the deep area. In the short term, this creates a heavy dependence on rocket-assisted projectiles, while in the long term, fielding SPEAR, or other extended range systems such as BAE's M109-52 SPH resolves this shortfall. Similarly, in M777A2 equipped battalions, a long-term solution will need to be met as the Army continues to explore wheeled options for the light and Stryker formations.

Currently, the EAB formation only exists in the Army National Guard and, as a result, is not available on the same training cycle as the Regular Army (RA) DIVARTYs. This means that in the short term, the live and collective training opportunities for an RA-to-ARNG pairing would be limited to

the annual training period of the EAB battalion. Though, combat training center (CTC) rotations and larger exercises can be coordinated with enough deliberate planning and coordination. A similar issue can arise for ARNG-to-ARNG pairings if they are not in the same state but again can be remedied with deliberate planning and coordination at the state level.

Further, simply aligning an additional battalion under the DIVARTY will not always be sufficient to meet the division's needs. The need to mass more fires will still necessitate the DIVARTY adding missions to the BCT battalions' queues. The addition of the fourth battalion should be seen as an enabler and an additional resource rather than a solution.

In virtually all cases, HIMARS/MLRS exceedingly outperform the capabilities of cannons and is the preferable option for the deep fight. However, there is no guarantee that the division will be assigned rocket artillery from corps. As a result, having the EAB cannon battalion serves as a default to meet the requirements without HIMARS/MLRS and allows for better prioritization of those rocket assets when they are made available to the division.

Finally, deliberate coordination and allocation of ammunition is critical to supporting the EAB battalion without taking away from the requirements of the existing battalions. Careful considerations of the missions of each BCT, as well as the DIVARTY, will dictate to whom special munitions are allocated while range fans should dictate the concentration of rocket-assisted and guided munitions between the battalions.

CONCLUSION

Aligning EAB cannon battalions under DIVARTYs represents a move to better equip the division for MDO while making the best use of existing force structure. By integrating these formations directly into DIVARTY, their operational capabilities are maximized while streamlining command and control and reducing strain on the existing firing units within the division. This realignment addresses longstanding challenges in properly utilizing EAB cannon battalions. Historically, they have been underutilized or misallocated within existing force structures, limiting their impact. Placing these artillery assets under DIVARTY command ensures that they are aligned in a manner that fully leverages their capabilities as the DIVARTYs continue to come online.

In virtually all cases, HIMARS/MLRS exceedingly outperform the capabilities of cannons and is the preferable option for the deep fight

The key advantage of this realignment is the increased flexibility it offers DIVARTY commanders. With these cannon battalions under their direct control, commanders can deploy them to support various divisional tasks from weighting the division's decisive operation to providing dedicated counterfire capability. Moreover, aligning EAB cannon battalions under DIVARTY has broader implications for the division's readiness for Large-Scale Combat Operations. As emerging cannon technologies are adopted and fielded, the utility of the EAB cannon battalion will only grow and further allow the division to create overmatch in the deep area.

CPT Benjamin Harrell serves concurrently at the KSARNG G3 as a CUOPS Officer and at the 130th FAB as the Brigade Fire Control Officer. He previously served as the AGR Training Officer and AS3 of the 1-161st Field Artillery. He has also served as a Platoon Leader and FDO in a Paladin Battery, as well as a Brigade S1 OIC. Prior to commissioning, he served as a Fire Direction Section Chief in the 2-130th Field Artillery (HIMARS), including a deployment to Syria in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in 2017-18.