Combined arms for JNCOs

This article discusses some tasks JNCOs may perform that will have direct impact on the success of combined arms activities.

To discuss combined arms, it is important to first define the term. Combined arms is not achieved when we group in the assembly area. The combined arms effect is achieved in the target area through the synchronisation of single arm effects generated by individual arms of the combined arms team; creating an environment where the enemy protecting itself from one arm of our combined arms team makes them vulnerable to one or more other arms of our combined arms team. This article will focus primarily on the relevance of combined arms for the junior non-commissioned officer (JNCO).

To provide context, I will highlight and expand on three key areas identified by the Combat Training Centre (CTC) that require a greater understand and further development to support combined arms. They are:

1) Communication/synchronisation

2) Support by fire/fire planning

3) Engagement area development.

Communication/synchronisation

Communication architecture

PACE plan[1]. This is the communication plan that will survive contact and the ongoing battle. It makes use of digital and analogue capabilities. When developing the PACE plan commanders at all levels are required to consider the mission, duration and capabilities of both enemies/friendly with the ultimate goal of reduced detection and disruption while maintaining consistent communication.

The use of the PACE plan will be entirely dependent on the situation. You may have an AN/PRC-152 on high power but it may not be the most effective form of communication. The AN/PRC-152 will typically be a part of any PACE plan, but its relevance within the plan may need to be scaled up or down within the tactical situation. An example of scaling a PACE plan down could occur during a section attack where the section will likely revert to less technological means: P = verbal shouting; A = UHF SPR; C = field signals; E = runner. An example of scaling the communications plan up may include a section that is static within an observation post that has less immediate time pressure and requires greater information fidelity. In this situation, a section may scale up to: P = HF data; A = SATCOM; C = VHF; E = face-to-face reporting. Of note, the PACE needs to be rehearsed just like any other SOP, with all equipment inspected.

The PACE plan is crucial in maintaining tempo and reporting when communications begin failing. It allows us the ability to shift to our alternate, contingency, and emergency means until the source of the issue can be resolved.

Data/voice. It is unlikely the data system will be placed down past the PHQ, however, there are situations in a specialist role, like reconnaissance patrols conducting an observation post, which will

[1] Primary, alternate, contingency and emergency.

require data. This provides the capability of sending imagery/reporting. The soldiers operating these systems need to be competent on all systems, as well as antenna theory, to get signal at greater distances.

The voice systems are essential in the tactical fight once contact has been made. However, best effort should be made to utilise voice as little as possible in an effort to reduce detection. If the enemy has the capability to detect and disrupt voice communications, strict procedures need to be adhered to in order to switch through the PACE. If the enemy does not possess these capabilities, it allows us freedom to communicate and eventually outmanoeuvre the enemy in a communication-free environment.

Understanding commander's intent. If you understand your commander's intent it will enable subordinate call signs to utilise mission command effectively. Once your commander has provided the 'what', you are enabled to conduct the 'how' in order to achieve the mission. It is important to utilise warning orders, back briefs, orders and confirmatory orders throughout the process to enable subordinates to have knowledge of commander's intent and allow mission command.

This process promotes flexibility, initiative, innovation, resourcefulness and the ability for anyone in your force to assume command and control of the mission.

Control measures. These are required to be in place to ensure the safe manoeuvre of forces. They will help control tactical actions, reduce the possibility of fratricide and limit the threat to your soldiers. To demonstrate you understand the commander's intent and to enable mission command, develop control measures that are understood by both your subordinates and commanders.

Support by fire/fire planning

The purpose of support by fire (SBF) is to increase the supported force's freedom of manoeuvre by engaging an enemy with direct fire. The fire planning is the coordination and control of the fire to achieve a layered effect.

Control measures. These are to be developed and communicated to ensure all soldiers are working within these restrictions. At a minimum, the following should be known:

1) Report and phase line
2) Boundaries
3) Axis of approach (and assault)
4) Form up point (and line of departure)
5) Coordination points
6) Routes.

Communication. Voice will allow for the coordination of fire to be switched or cut off as per your control measures. This should always have built in redundancy within its own PACE plan. The switch and cut off can also be achieved through timings and visual. Timings will need to correctly gauge the supported call signs' method of movement in advance to contact and from the line of departure to the enemy position (with the safety angles also applied). Visual will see the commander in the SBF

observing the forward line of own troops (FLOT) and switching or cutting off as necessary. This can also be support by a FLOT maker in the assaulting section being a marker panel, smoke, flares or IR strobe (in accordance with the PACE plan).

Switch fire drill. As the assaulting force moves to the objective, the SBF switches its direct fire to engage the depth targets, rather than having to lift its fires. This prevents fratricide while continuing to suppress the enemy as the attack continues. The coordination of this switch can be done by voice, timings and visual.

Rates of fire. The rates of fire are controlled by a normal and rapid rate of fire for all weapon systems. The SBF are likely to use a large amount of ammunition and must adhere to the fire planning to avoid failing to cover the assaulting force appropriately or running out of ammunition. Machine gun fire should use the method of ranging burst and killing bursts. A ranging burst is utilised to guide the weapon system onto target and consists of 10 rounds. A killing burst will consist of 20 rounds and can be counted by observing four tracer rounds.

Rifle fire. This will be inefficient, compared to machine gun fire, onto an enemy objective. The rifle is much better utilised providing security to the SBF with the marksman positions providing neutralisation of individual targets of opportunity. An ammunition load out that can provide greater advantage is the use of tracer rounds. The first two rounds in a 30-round magazine are tracer to provide target indication, the 15th round is tracer to indicate half way through the magazine and the 29 round is tracer to ensure you are aware an ammunition stoppage drill is imminent.

Weapon effects. These engagements should take into account:

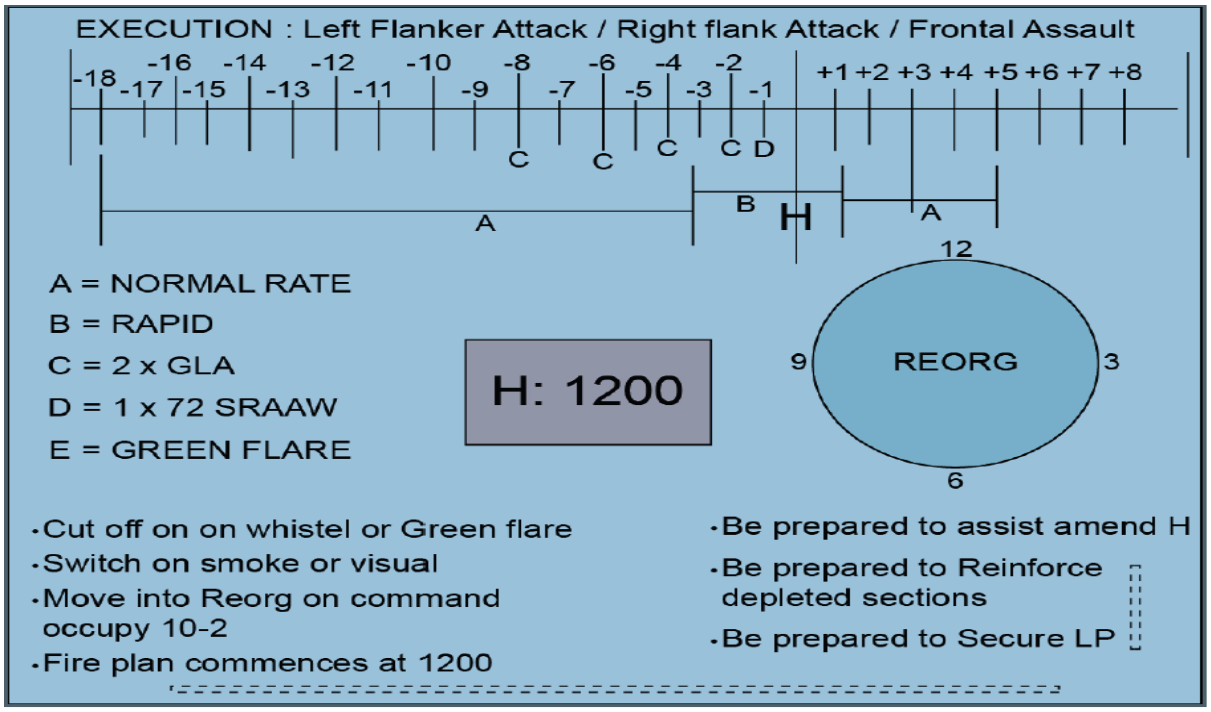
1) Reload times
2) Range to target
3) Back blast danger area (BBDA)
4) Arming distance
5) Vegetation and ground
6) Ricochet angles
7) Impact safety distance
8) Firers' ability
9) Smoke and dust expectation
10) Light conditions and capability of night fight equipment.

There should also be an understanding of the enemy dispersion and protection on an objective.

Grouping. These are to be tailored to weapon effects to provide optimal firepower according to the threat and environment. This may mean regrouping is to occur, provided there is always a C2 function present to ensure effectiveness.

Security. The SBF location will always need to provide its own integral security. This must be considered when allocating the security force. Routes to the SBF must provide cover or at least concealment from view of the enemy. If they are contacted en route, they must be able to deal with the threat in order to complete the task of SBF or the attack will incur greater friction.

Coordination of joint fires. These are an all arms call for fire (AACFF), armed helicopter support request, and emergency close air support (CAS). These requests can provide additional support for your SBF and fire planning. The key is to ensure synchronisation through layered effects to ensure the enemy position is receiving constant suppression. An example would include the addition of a 155mm fire mission, once troops enter the safe zone, before using 81mm mortars then 40mm grenade launcher projectiles. This reduces the blast danger area onto the objective, to coincide with the FLOT of the assaulting force, while maintaining constant fires onto the objective. All JNCOs should have the joint fire proforma in their battle book or battle boards to ensure they have the risk estimate distance for coordination.



Engagement area development

Task/utilised. All JNCOs must have an understanding of the process and principles associated with engagement area development.

These principles can be used to support section activities like the ambush, harbour, hasty defence and standing patrol. It should also be expected that the JNCO can back brief their platoon commander and officer commanding in high level formations to achieve mission command.

Effective engagement areas (EAs) are developed by ensuring an understanding and incorporating the following key principles:

1) Avenues of approach – Determine the likely avenue of approach through identifying key and decisive terrain, existing or natural obstacles, choke points, cover/concealment around the potential engagement area, size of the force and maintaining tempo.

2) Scheme of manoeuvre – Reconnaissance, formations, FSP, FUP, SBF, ABF, assault formation, axis, breach point, reserve, MLCOA/MDCOA.

3) Killing ground – Pre-determined target reference points are set to coordinate fires for maximum effect. Coordinating instruction will determine confirmed triggers for engagement (distance or asset).

4) Emplace weapon systems – Free fire lines, primary/alternate arcs, primary/alternate firing positions including high explosive (HE), safety zones, BBDA and illumination policy.

5) Integration of obstacles – Identify artificial and/or natural obstacles and determine whether they are covered by fire, observation, or both.

6) Joint fires − Establish priority defensive fire, final protection fires, fire support coordination measures, no fire areas and primary/alternate locations for observation of all anticipated targets.

7) Rehearsals – The key to any successful engagement is to rehearse fire commands, triggers for engagement/withdrawal, HE engagements, break contact and layering effects.

Supporting effects. This may be as simple as requesting an 84mm to be carried in the section or mortars being in direct support. The key takeaway is understanding the capability and how it can be utilised to best effect. If you have the ability to talk with a subject matter expert prior to task – it is always good practice to rely on their advice.

UAS integration. These systems (Black Hornet and WASP) are now seen down to platoon level and can be requested by section commanders. When using these assets, keep in mind launch and recovery sites as well as actions on for a downed asset. These systems can support EA development, the engagement itself and provide situational awareness about your position including what an enemy UAS would observe.

Tactics/admin. The role and responsibilities should be kept simple. Tactics are the responsibility of the section commander, and administration/governance is the responsibility of the section 2IC, who needs to be proficient in preparing the following, but not limited to:

1) Casualty collection points (CCP) – The siting of CCP primary and alternate with the correct amount of equipment in these locations. Considerations for the siting of Ambulance Exchange Points (AXP)/ Helicopter Landing Zone (HLZ) and optimal routes to the location.

2) Resupply – Whether this will occur on site or off site, and storage coordination.

3) Recovery – If you have vehicles, ensure you have trained all personnel in the section on recovery requirements and storage of these items. If using an external asset, the security requirements for the assets and time on site.

4) Captured persons – Siting of a CPERS location that does not negatively affect security of the position or mission. Of note, the Section 2IC should ensure that correct stores are carried within the section (sight control, hearing control and hand restraints) and considerations for

the back load of CPERS (on site or off site).

5) Equipment collection point/special equipment – Have an understanding of all equipment within the section, especially specialist equipment, as these items may be required for the above administrative requirements or the EA development. If equipment is damaged, they will coordinate the collection from friendly forces to be back loaded and replaced.

6) CBRN – Prior to any task the section 2IC should inspect all sizing and seals of personal protective equipment. In the event that the section is engaged with a CBRN threat, the section 2IC is responsible for maintaining timing control to coordinate a canister change to ensure the survivability of the section. Furthermore, the section 2IC advises the section commander on the section's ability to endure, within the CBRN threat environment, to achieve the task.

What does this all mean for the JNCO?

As you continue to mentor and train your soldiers, you all have a responsibility to also gain knowledge for yourself. The above focus areas will need to be developed in future within the close training areas, on exercises and on deployments to empower our JNCOs and enhance Army's lethality. I would also recommend you look to your respective peer groups, and your own mentors, to close any of these gaps and enhance our capability as a whole.

Be ready to step up – Know the big picture – Be confident and ready to execute in a mission command environment.

What effect does it have on the battlefield?

The continued pursuit of combat mastery and the lessons that can be learned now may be the difference between success and failure for our Army on operations or for any future potential conflict. If you ever want to see the standard of a company, battalion or brigade, the JNCO within it is always the best point of reference. The JNCO is the soldier that will typically achieve the tasks and mission set by commanders and ensure soldiers are appropriately trained to win the fight.

The following link provides some proformas around the joint fires/fire planning space, from the School of Infantry: https://objective/id:fBQ11268131.