



FORWARD AIR CONTROLLING

1. One of the most effective applications of airpower in our counter-insurgency effort in Vietnam is the mission performed by the Forward Air Controller (FAC) in his O-1 Bird Dog. The FAC has been able to limit, and in some areas, deny freedom of movement to the enemy during the daylight hours. Our FAC visual reconnaissance program covers all of South Vietnam in an effort to ferret out the enemy and keep him off balance. As in any other military action, we have found ways of improving our effectiveness by establishing basic rules and concepts of employment. This bulletin will present some FAC techniques which have been employed successfully in Vietnam. This report is not intended to be either restrictive or all-inclusive. No one account can' cover. all facets of this diversified mission.
2. In order to work effectively as a FAC, you must thoroughly understand the capabilities and limitations of the strike aircraft you direct and the troops you support. You are not a trained infantry officer but you can develop a good comprehension of ground force. procedures by forming close associations with the people you are supporting and studying Army publications. The FAC is the pivotal member of the strike team consisting of himself and the strike aircraft flight leader. He possesses a target within defined limits and, with the cooperation of the flight leader, he must employ the fighters to achieve maximum

effectiveness. The employment of the fighters is the responsibility of both the FAC and the flight leader. If a dangerous situation develops during the attack, the strike can be withdrawn by either the flight leader or the FAC.

3, At this point, without going into target acquisition, let us the FAC assume that the FAC has a target and a flight of strike aircraft. The FAC has a responsibility to the flight leader to describe the target situation and surrounding area, and provide current intelligence as it affects the strike. He must describe the target, point out the positions of the friendly troops and coordinate with artillery and other air operations in the area. The FAC stores up a tremendous knowledge of his area by his daily flights over it and by personal contact with ground troops. The FAC must digest the target and then, using his full imagination, communicate each aspect of the target to the strike pilots so that the fighter crews see the target in the same context as the FAC. The FAC must reduce his sight picture of the target to those items readily visible to the fighters at their higher altitude and airspeed.

4. The actual marking of the target is, to some degree, a misnomer. The FAC may provide adequate target identification by verbal description. A smoke rocket or grenade may be used as a common point of reference; however, often a good landmark is available from which the target can be described. In this case a mark is not necessary. The mark gives away the intended target and the element of surprise is lost. Normally 3 or 4 minutes elapse between target marking and the first attack. The enemy uses this time to disperse and take advantage of passive defenses. However, in the case of specific enemy locations such as gun emplacements or bunkers, or when friendly troops are in close proximity to the target, there is no substitute for an accurate mark.

5. In order for the FAC to act as a controller and as the eyes of the strike crews, he must position himself to meet two basic requirements.

a. The FAC should be able to see the fighter aircraft at all times, If weather or smoke preclude visual reference, it is imperative that the FAC see the fighter on final approach to the target. Since the FAC shares the responsibility for avoiding a mid-air collision, visual reference is of paramount importance. Also the FAC must be sure that the fighter is lined up on the correct target. High on the list of items that can ruin a good day is for a FAC to allow one of his fighters to drop ordnance off-target in a friendly position.

b. The FAC must be able to see his target at all times. He must see the target to detect any enemy movement or ground fire and to insure that the fighters are on the proper axis of attack.

6. There are several methods for the FAC to position himself to meet the above requirements.

a. The simplest method is to establish an ordinary racetrack pattern with the axis parallel to the axis of the fighters' final approach heading. Taking into consideration wind, timing of the fighter passes and compliance with the two basic requirements of positioning, the FAC actually chooses a holding space to occupy. If the fighters change their attack heading, the FAC must change his holding airspace so as to avoid interference. Holding altitude varies with the situation but is normally between 1,000 feet AGL (above ground level) and 3,000 feet AGL.

When evaluating the risk against the results, there is little to be gained by flying lower. As much as possible, close surveillance should be accomplished prior to the airstrike. Flying at a lower altitude will only increase exposure to battle damage.

b. The second basic method of orbiting the target applies to low altitude ordnance delivery. (Napalm, CBU low angle strafe.) This is a small circular pattern directly over the target. This is a dangerous technique if moderate or heavy automatic weapons fire is encountered. However, if the FAC has done his homework with his respective intelligence officer, he will be aware of potential enemy action in the target area. For this pattern a minimum of 2,000 feet AGL is recommended. This will permit the strike aircraft to vary attack headings and still be able to locate the FAC quickly on final.

7. Following the initial pass by the flight leader, the FAC must direct subsequent attacks to insure adequate target destruction. One of the best methods is to provide adjustments in reference to the last ordnance on the target. Corrections should be given in meters from the last hit in relation to a distinguishable landmark, with directions in compass headings. This will reduce the possibility of confusion when fighters vary attack headings. Some easily distinguishable landmarks are canals, houses, trails, tree lines, tree groups, contrasting coloration and cloud shadows. The FAC must always start his description from a readily identifiable object and move the fighter pilot's eyes from there to the

desired impact area. For example. "From the last hit go southeast across the light green rice paddy, a house with a tin roof." With these tools, the FAC can give the strike pilots a specific adjustment prior to the time that the fighter rolls in on final attack. The information must be given quickly and curtly so the inbound pilot will have time for a question if he does not immediately pick out the target. The FAC must provide a specific target for each pass, properly matching the target to the ordnance whenever possible. In other words, the FAC must plan the efficient distribution of ordnance.

8. The last strike responsibility of the FAC is the bomb damage assessment (BDA). The BDA is simply what it implies, a word picture of the damage inflicted on the target. "Five houses destroyed; seven houses damaged; two large sampans sunk; one large secondary explosion from a sampan due to strafe; encountered automatic weapons fire, position destroyed--bomb; 40% target coverage. Remarks: Excellent Bombing accuracy." With the exception of the percent of target coverage, it is self-explanatory. The percent of coverage is a combination of actual target coverage, total destruction of the target, and a grade on the ability of the fighters. For example, the actual percent of target coverage would be inaccurate if all of the ordnance fell within the target limits but completely off the specific intended targets. The FAC must ask himself, "Did the fighter place the ordnance where I directed?" The fighter strike can be no better than the direction received. First, the percent of target coverage must reflect the actual target coverage; second, it must be weighed in respect to the percent of effective ordnance; and third, the results must be evaluated against the type of ordnance delivered. Fifty percent coverage with strafing is nowhere near as destructive as fifty percent coverage with GP bombs. The classical method for the FAC to get the BDA is to reenter the target area following the strike and examine the damage. This is dangerous, and BDA is not worth taking a hit. If the FAC has done his work correctly, he will have nearly completed the BDA simultaneously with the completion of the strike. There may be occasions such as friendly forces under attack, which will require accurate and precise BDA. In this case it may be necessary to take a close look at the target to be sure of results. These instances are rare and this technique should be avoided except when absolutely necessary.

9. Some of the above comments have been extracted from a report submitted by Captain Thomas F. Seebode, who recently completed a FAC tour with the 22 TASS operating in the IV Corps area of the Mekong Delta. Our thanks to Captain Seebode for his observations and comments.

Documenting this experience is a valuable contribution to the theatre indoctrination program in SEA.

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