



Enhancing the 131A Field Artillery Technician Cohort:

A Path Toward Specialization and Expertise

By CW2 Ryan Saltzgaber

With collaboration from CW2 Michael Ruffin & CW2 Clifford Baxter

Editor's note: This article reflects the author's professional opinions and interpretations. It does not represent the official views, positions, or policies of the Field Artillery Commandant or Field Artillery School.

In the dynamic and critical world of field artillery, Warrant Officers in the 131A cohort play a central role in guiding targeting methodology, coordinating Joint Fires and providing specialized knowledge to commanders. However, despite their wide-ranging responsibilities, the current structure of the 131A community is characterized by a generalist approach that hampers the development of deep expertise in key areas such as counterfire, fire support and targeting operations. This article argues that the versatility expected of 131As, while valuable, ultimately undermines their ability to become true subject matter experts in their field. Drawing from personal experience in both the USAF and the 131A cohort, the article examines how

the breadth of the 131A role leads to a dilution of specialized knowledge and proposes a shift towards a more specialized system within the cohort. By examining the success of other Warrant Officer communities and offering potential solutions—such as the creation of sub-Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) or a structured training program similar to the Air Force's Career Field Education and Training Plan (CFETP)—this article aims to spark a critical conversation on how the 131A community can evolve to meet the growing demands of modern warfare.

Disclaimer about this article: It reflects my personal observations and opinions on an important topic within the

On 5 October 2022, during their culminating training event, 131As in Warrant Officer Basic Course, Class #004-22 facilitated a target decision board for Col. Victor Scharstein, the 428th Field Artillery Brigade Commander. Warrant Officer Basic Course (WOBC) is 30 weeks long ending with a two-week culminating training exercise where they will receive a brigade OPORD, conduct MDMP, FS planning and lead a target working group and target decision board chaired by brigade and battalion commanders. (U.S. Army photo by Judith Oman)

131A Field Artillery Technician cohort. My aim is not to criticize or ridicule anyone, but to stimulate conversation and drive innovation. I understand that my perspective may be limited by my relatively short time in the cohort, having joined in 2021 and graduated from the Warrant Officer Basic Course (WOBC) in 2022. Additionally, my previous military experience in the USAF as an enlisted Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) may offer a different viewpoint. That said, I want to raise a critical issue for discussion: how the 131A community can evolve to provide commanders with the most effective and specialized targeting technicians.

The Role of 131A Field Artillery Technicians

As outlined by the Warrant Officer Recruiting website, 131A Warrant Officers serve as subject matter experts on targeting methodology, the employment of target acquisition assets and coordinating Joint Fires. Depending on their rank, 131As fill various positions, including Targeting Officer, Counterfire Officer and Field Artillery Intelligence Officer (FAIO) across echelons from Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) to Corps.

However, the breadth of roles a 131A is expected to perform often leads to a lack of deep specialization. In addition to their core targeting functions, many 131As are assigned to roles such as Officer in Charge (OIC) of the S-2 shop or action officers in the S-3. While these assignments are valuable, they dilute the focus on developing deep expertise in Fires and targeting.

The Problem: Generalization Hurts Expertise

While the versatility of a 131A is valuable, the constant rotation between roles impedes the development of true subject-matter expertise. The complexity of targeting, counterfire and fire-support operations requires deep, specialized knowledge. However, when 131As are frequently rotated into different positions, they must rely on self-study and on-the-job training, which hinders their ability to provide expert advice with confidence.

The expectation to be a “Swiss Army knife” within the Fires warfighting function means that 131As cannot dedicate the necessary time and energy to become experts in specific areas. This approach may work for some positions, but when it comes to the critical tasks of targeting and Fires, there is little room for error.

A Comparison with Other Warrant Officer Communities

Other Warrant Officer communities, such as Air Defense, Cyber/Electronic Warfare (EW) and Intelligence offer multiple MOSs to ensure specialists can focus on specific areas of expertise. For example, the Intelligence field has eight distinct MOSs to ensure professionals become deeply knowledgeable in their respective areas. By contrast, the 131A community expects Warrant Officers to cover a broad range of tasks, which dilutes the focus on mastering any one area.

This approach contradicts the Army’s understanding that subject-matter expertise is critical for advising commanders effectively. Most other Warrant Officer MOSs are more specialized, allowing individuals to become indispensable

experts in their domains. This is a model that the Field Artillery community should consider emulating.

The Need for Change: Specializing the 131A Cohort

The “this is how we’ve always done it” approach has allowed us to fill gaps and serve as a flexible force, but it has also diminished our value as true experts in targeting and fire support. While the 131A community is known for being adaptable and reliable, this flexibility comes at the expense of developing the specialized knowledge needed for high-stakes decision-making in the targeting process.

Proposed Solution: Dividing the 131A into Specialized Sub-MOSs

To address this issue, I propose that we break down the 131A role into more specialized sub-MOSs, each focusing on a key aspect of the targeting and Fires process. These sub-MOSs would allow 131As to build deep expertise in one area, becoming the trusted advisors that commanders need. Below is a preliminary list of potential sub-MOSs:

- 1) **131A: FIRES Systems Integrator**
 - Responsible for all FA digital and voice systems
 - Build and maintain communications architecture linking targeting systems
 - Ensure functionality in automated, tech-driven operations
 - *Preferred Feeder MOS: 13J, but open to all 13-series MOSs*
- 2) **131B: FUOPs Planner and Deliberate Targeting Expert**
 - Specialize in planning future operations and deliberate targeting
 - Expert in Air-to-Ground and Surface-to-Surface delivery platforms
 - Mastery of the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP)
 - Senior targeting officer with direct influence on the Commander
 - *Feeder MOS: All 13-series MOSs*
- 3) **131C: Tactical Expert and CUOPs/Dynamic Targeting Officer**
 - Assistant Fire Support Officer specializing in Air-to-Ground and Surface-to-Surface targeting
 - Can be JTAC-qualified to fill gaps in coordination with the USAF
 - Lead Fire Support SME for immediate execution in the TOC
 - Lead Manager for JTAC and JFO programs in-house
 - *Feeder MOS: Preferred 13F, 11B, 11C, 19D, but open to all 13-series MOSs*
- 131D: Field Artillery Intelligence Officer (FAIO)
 - Serves as the link between Intelligence and Fires
 - In-depth knowledge of MDMP and intelligence gathering
 - Intimate understanding of the Target Development Process
 - Can validate targets for execution
 - *Feeder MOS: All 13-series MOSs*
- 4) **131R: Counterfire Expert**
 - Specializes in Counterfire operations, including radar systems

ENHANCING THE 131A FIELD ARTILLERY TECHNICIAN COHORT

- Builds cueing schedules and ensures radar maintenance
- Coordinates with 131B for planning and targeting
- Falls under FUOPs and CUOPs for integration into broader plans
- *Feeder MOS: preferred 13R, but open to all 13-series MOSs*
- Alternative Solution: A Career-Development Training Plan (CFETP)

If splitting 131A into multiple sub-MOSs is not feasible, I recommend developing a structured on-the-job training program akin to the Air Force's Career Field Education and Training Plan (CFETP). This plan would outline the skills and knowledge required at each rank and experience level, helping 131As develop the expertise necessary to become subject matter experts in their roles.

A CFETP-like system would:

- Track skills and knowledge progress from BN to Corps-level operations
- Set clear training milestones and timelines for completion

- Offer validation through a culminating "check ride," similar to the Combat Mission Ready (CMR) assessment in the Air Force
- Provide a visual representation of progress, allowing individuals to see where they stand in relation to peers

Conclusion: A Call for Change and Innovation

To ensure that 131A Warrant Officers continue to provide exceptional targeting and fire support, we must move toward a system that values deep specialization. Whether through the creation of sub-MOSs or the implementation of a structured training plan, it is crucial that we focus on developing expertise rather than relying on a generalist model.

I urge my peers in the 131A community to consider these proposals and engage in a discussion about how we can better serve our commanders and the Army as a whole. The end goal is to enhance the value of the 131A cohort and ensure that we remain the premier targeting professionals on the battlefield.

CW2 Ryan D. Saltzgaber is currently stationed at Schofield Barracks as the DIVARTY FAIO, his MOS is 131A Targeting Technician. He has 15 years of service. He was a USAF TACP and JTAC qualified and became a JTAC Instructor and Evaluator. He was in the Air Force for 11 years and then crossed over to the Army in 2021 after teaching at the JFO schoolhouse on Fort Sill. He has been in the Joint Fires Community his entire career.

CW2 Michael Ruffin has served as a 131A Targeting Technician since his commissioning as a Warrant Officer in August 2021 with a career spanning 16 years in the U.S. Army. In his current capacity, he is the Course Director for the Warrant Officer Intermediate Course (Distributed Learning) at Fort Rucker. Most of his career has been dedicated to the Joint Fires Community, where he cultivated extensive expertise. His key previous assignments include serving as a Joint Fires Observer Evaluator and holding positions within the 82nd Airborne Division, the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and the 3rd Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB). His primary objective is to contribute his expertise alongside CW2 Saltzgaber and CW2 Baxter to meaningfully enhance the work quality and combat effectiveness of the 131A MOS.

CW2 Clifford A. Baxter is a 131A Targeting Technician with 15 years of dedicated service. He is currently assigned to Fort Sill, Okla., where he serves as the Lethal Effects Targeting Officer for the 75th Field Artillery Brigade. He began his career as a 13F Forward Observer, spending his first eight years with the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). Following that assignment, he shared his expertise as a 13F Advanced Individual Training (AIT) instructor for four years. In 2022, CW2 Baxter was commissioned as a Warrant Officer.

Further information: Department of the Air Force. (2001). *Career Field Education and Training Plan: Tactical Air Command and Control Specialist AFSC 1C4X1*. Headquarters US Air Force. Washington, DC.