



# How FA BOLC is Transforming in Contact

## Embracing the Fundamentals

By MAJ Jason K. Randolph

**T**ransformation in contact enables formations to adapt, innovate and remain lethal in contested environments. Within the Field Artillery Basic Officer Leader Course (FA BOLC), this transformation has not been driven by access to the Army's newest technologies but by deliberate emphasis on the fundamentals of gunnery, fire support and leadership. Constraints in time, funding and materiel have compelled the schoolhouse to prioritize what matters most: producing second lieutenants who understand doctrine, think under pressure and deliver timely and accurate fires regardless of technological conditions.

FA BOLC's renewed focus on foundational competencies reflects a recognition that intellectual rigor, physical endurance and adherence to fires principles remain constant across operational environments. While the course continues limited experimentation with emerging tools—such as short-form instructional videos and approved artificial intelligence (AI) platforms—these efforts remain subordinate to mastery of manual gunnery and doctrinal fire-support planning. Continuous feedback from the operational force and Combat Training Centers (CTCs) informs this approach, ensuring students understand current capabilities while retaining the ability to operate effectively when systems are degraded, denied or unavailable.

As the Army modernizes through initiatives such as Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and AI-enabled command and control, FA BOLC prioritizes the most enduring requirement for junior artillery officers: disciplined problem-solving rooted in doctrine. Emphasis on fundamentals enables lieutenants to deliberately slow decision making, validate inputs, and apply fires principles under stress, ensuring graduates arrive at their first units prepared to contribute immediately regardless of platform maturity or resourcing.

### Modernization in FA Gunnery

Recent changes to the Fire Direction Officer (FDO) evaluation within FA BOLC represent a shift toward increased individual technical accountability. The revised evaluation more accurately reflects operational realities within a Fire Direction Center (FDC), where junior officers are expected to understand and supervise all aspects of fire mission processing. Instructional methodologies, however, have not fully adapted to support this shift, creating challenges in efficiently developing individual competence.

FA BOLC provides progressive instruction from manual gunnery fundamentals to automated fire control systems. Historically, the manual gunnery safety examination served as the primary benchmark for technical proficiency. While this

*Field Artillery Basic Officer Leader Course students conduct a walk-through of the impact zone during a fire support coordination exercise (FSCX) Jan. 17, 2019, at Fort Sill, Okla. The walk-through was a new addition to the exercise. The FSCX was one of the training events conducted during Red Leg War, which is the culminating event for the FA BOLC students. (Photo Credit: Daniel Malta, Fort Sill Public Affairs)*

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requirement remains foundational, the revised FDO examination expands assessment criteria to encompass the full range of FDC responsibilities.

Under the new construct, a single lieutenant executes all core FDC tasks while processing both manual and automated fire missions. These tasks include executing the four FDO steps, extracting chart data, determining site, computing fire commands and processing missions using the Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS). This structure aligns evaluation with the operational expectation that junior officers possess comprehensive technical understanding and can make informed decisions under time constraints.

In parallel, the Gunnery Department has explored the use of AI as a doctrinal reinforcement tool. Experimentation with commercially available platforms revealed limitations related to security restrictions and doctrinal accuracy. While some platforms permitted access to approved sources, inconsistencies in doctrinal retrieval and access constraints limited instructional utility. These findings suggest AI holds promise as a supplemental learning aid but is not yet suitable as a primary instructional tool for institutional gunnery training.

Accordingly, FA BOLC has emphasized instructional design over technological solutions. Training events increasingly require individual execution of all FDC tasks throughout the course rather than concentrating proficiency at a single assessment point. Future efforts should focus on identifying or developing secure, doctrine-centric AI tools that support repetition and self-study while preserving instructor validation and oversight.

### Modernization in Fire Support

UAS integration within FA BOLC remains limited. Lieutenants receive a one-hour introductory block early in the Program of Instruction focused on the threat posed by small UAS, including adversary tactics, techniques and procedures. While this instruction establishes baseline awareness, it represents the extent of UAS exposure during the course.

FA BOLC does not maintain organic UAS platforms, preventing hands-on instruction despite UAS integration being codified in the POI. Field training events—including observed fires, live fires and Redleg War (RLW)—provide suitable opportunities for UAS employment without increasing training time; however, the absence of organic assets prevents consistent execution.

To mitigate this gap, instructors rely on external Fort Sill organizations for limited familiarization and support. While these organizations provide valuable expertise, personnel and cost constraints limit scalability. These challenges highlight the need for increased organic capability within FA BOLC.

One feasible approach is the development of instructor-level UAS flight operations proficiency through certification programs. Establishing licensed fire support instructors would reduce reliance on external organizations and enable consistent, POI-aligned UAS instruction. Expanded UAS integration would

enhance platoon leader, fire support officer and call-for-fire training while reinforcing modern reconnaissance, targeting and sensor-to-shooter concepts.

### Redleg War: Validating Transformation in Contact

Redleg War is FA BOLC's 96-hour, uninterrupted culminating training event designed to assess a lieutenant's ability to operate in a complex, rapidly changing operational environment. RLW emphasizes adaptive leadership, technical competence and tactical judgment under sustained physical and cognitive stress.

The event validates readiness to serve as company fire support officers, platoon and battery FDOs, and platoon leaders. Students plan, rehearse and execute fire support operations while performing physically demanding tasks intended to replicate combat conditions. Training includes walk-and-shoot operations; echelonment of fires; multiple iterations of Reconnaissance, Selection, and Occupation of Position (RSOP); and Rearm, Refuel, and Resupply Point (R3P) rotations.

RLW culminates with stress-based Artillery Skills Proficiency Tests across the gun line, FDC and fire support functions. Planned integration of external-joint enablers, including live-air support, will further enhance joint-fires planning realism and reinforce the requirement for artillery officers to integrate seamlessly with joint and combined arms partners.

### Conclusion

FA BOLC continues to adapt to the demands of modern warfare while operating within enduring institutional constraints. Rather than relying on the availability of emerging technologies, the course deliberately emphasizes foundational competencies—manual gunnery, doctrinal fire support planning and individual technical proficiency—as the bedrock of junior officer development.

Recent changes to gunnery evaluations, selective experimentation with AI, incremental UAS exposure and the demanding RLW training environment demonstrate that transformation in contact within the schoolhouse is driven by disciplined adherence to fundamentals, informed experimentation and continuous feedback from the operational force.

Looking ahead, FA BOLC must continue deliberate, incremental modernization aligned with doctrinal mastery. Priority efforts include adapting secure, doctrine-centric AI platforms within both gunnery and fire support programs of instruction to facilitate learning while preserving proficiency in foundational tasks. Expanding instructor certification in UAS flight operations would enable consistent integration of unmanned systems into BOLC training objectives. Incorporating 60mm mortar and close air support platforms into the Fire Support Coordination Exercise would further develop students' ability to integrate multiple fires systems into coherent, combined-arms fires planning. Collectively, these efforts will enhance training realism and ensure FA BOLC continues to produce technically competent, adaptable artillery officers for the operational force.

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