Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC)

Outline

This document consists of a basic overview of the roles and responsibilities of the Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) in the context of supporting a section-level infantry element. It will cover what will be expected of people who step up for the position, some basic skills and procedures, and how the JTAC fits in to the organizational structure.

Responsibilities and Expectations

When air assets are present, a JTAC is given the responsibility for coordination and direction of those friendly air assets in an area of operations. The JTAC must remain attached to the commander, keeping them updated with aircraft movements when pertinent, directing fire missions at the commander's request, and facilitating troop transport via air by planning out LZs (including ingress and egress), acting as last on / last off, and coordinating directly with the pilot.

The role is all about communication; JTACs must be intimately familiar with Formal Radio Telecommunications (RATEL), and be confident juggling more radio channels than anyone else in an infantry element. The JTAC must equip themselves with a long range radio backpack, and a laser designator, but should otherwise take a standard rifleman's kit.

For JTACs with multiple monitors, the use of Athena - An Arma 2nd Screen Application is highly recommended to keep an eye on the locations of friendly aircraft and infantry elements.

Radios and Communication

A JTAC may take their own callsign when communicating with aircraft, or they may use the "Minor" designation of their section, e.g. "One Minor". A JTAC should have their radios configured as follows:

- Short Range
  - Primary: Team SR net, so they can talk with their CO and team mates;
  - Alternate: Section SR net, if applicable, so they can keep abroad of other teams' manoeuvres.

- Long Range
  - Primary: Aircraft LR net (typically 45 flat), so they can communicate with aircraft;
  - Alternate: Command LR net (typically 40 flat), so they can keep abroad of other sections' manoeuvres.

While juggling so many channels, it's important for a JTAC to be able to *smartly* prioritize streams of incoming information. Formal RATEL is incredibly important here; as long as you wave your conversation partner and sign off appropriately, focusing on your current conversation, and acknowledge waves directed at you, you should have no issue keeping up to speed. Don't be afraid to ask someone you're conversing with to "Wait out for priority traffic" and get back to them later.

Close Air Support

One of the JTAC's primary activities will be calling in close air support - visually confirming target information and relaying it to CAS pilots in an effective manner. Full 9-Line calls with walking-on can be superfluous and slow in the context of Arma 3, so JTACs are encouraged to use a simpler form of request that communicates just what a pilot will need to carry out a strike.

1. Target Position

The general location of the target. You can use references to nearby landmarks, or a grid coordinate, backed up by a map marker whenever possible.

2. Target Description

A description of what you want the aircraft to strafe.

3. Ingress / Egress and Offset

Which direction the pilot should come in from, and which direction they should head away after the attack run is complete. Offset may be specified as "left" or "right", and indicates that the pilot should only fire towards the offset side - usually because there are friendlies close opposite (ideally clearly marked by smoke).

4. Ordnance Requested

Which weaponry the pilot should use to engage the target, as well as any specifics (such as spacing when requesting multiple bombs, etc).

5. Nearest Friendly

The rough direction and distance, referenced from the target, of nearby friendly infantry.

Remarks

After providing this information for the pilot to copy, the JTAC may specify additional information, such as:

- Further specifics of the target, such as what to focus fire on;
- What colour smoke friendlies will deploy to mark their location;
- Whether there are known AA threats nearby to look out for;
- Any other hazards or terrain the pilot should be aware of.

Example: CAS Request

One Minor: "Scimitar, this is One Minor, CAS mission, over."

Scimitar: "One Minor, Scimitar, ready CAS mission, over."

One Minor: "Target grid 123,456, marked on map with yellow CAS box over the MSR. Target is infantry manning a sandbag bunker line. Ingress west, offset left, egress east and come around to re-engage as necessary. Request 30mm cannon. Nearest friendly 200 metres south. Remarks to follow, over."

Scimitar: "Copy, grid 123,456, yellow CAS box over MSR, sandbag bunker line. West-to-east, offset left with 30mm cannon fire. Friendlies 200 metres south. Ready remarks, over."

One Minor: "Good read back. Most of the targets are clustered by the largest bunker. Friendlies are marked with green smoke. Advise when you're starting your run, out."

Example: Quick CAS

One Minor: "Scimitar, this is One Minor, urgent CAS request, over."

Scimitar: "One Minor, send CAS request for Scimitar, over."

One Minor: "Need one times GBU dropped at 123,456, heading south to north. Friendlies southwest of target, under yellow smoke. Target is lased, over."

Scimitar: "Sighted, circling around for GBU drop. Hold that lase, wait out."

Fire Support (Artillery)

Though not strictly an air asset, when artillery support is available, it often falls to the JTAC to direct fire missions as they can be very similar to CAS missions. There are some important

differences, though - artillery operators can't see and don't care which smoke you mark friendlies with, don't need a heading to strafe, and don't care what the target looks like.

Fire support may be provided by a player-run fire support element, but is more often provided through the Command callsign over Command's LR net.

1. Target Position

Mark the target's position on the map with a clear, simple name. Reference the marker by grid coordinates and the given name.

2. Round Count & Type

Artillery generally has several different rounds available, most commonly smoke (WP) and fragmentation. Specify which you require, and how many.

3. Dispersion

How far apart you want the rounds to be spread when they hit. This can indicate a general area, for example, "30 metre spacing around the marker". Alternately, you might specify a line by giving a spacing and a heading, such as "30 metre spacing in a line, north to south".

Example: Fire Mission Request

One Minor: "Fire Support, this is One Minor. Fire mission, over."

Fire Support: "One Minor, this is Fire Support, send fire mission, over."

One Minor: "At grid 123,456, marked 'SCREEN'. Requesting five times smoke rounds. Spaced every 25 metres in a line from west to east, centred on the marker, how copy, over."

Fire Support: "Copy, grid 123,456 marked 'SCREEN', five smoke rounds, every 25 metres in a line west to east. Ready to fire, over."

One Minor: "Good copy Fire Support, send it, over."

Fire Support: "Rounds out, ETA thirty seconds to splash, wait out."

Troop Transportation

When the section needs to be relocated by air transport, the JTAC is the one-stop go-to for making it happen. Regardless of where the section is, and where the section is going, the JTAC plans and coordinates the trip.

Organise a Transport Pilot

First step a JTAC should take is to assess whether a transport aircraft is available for tasking or whether one should be reassigned. It's important to check this early, as reassigning a pilot from a different role back to troop transport can be a long process depending on where the air base is located in relation to ongoing infantry operations. If necessary, advise a pilot to prepare a transport craft appropriate for the size of the infantry force being transported. If the pilot's already available, and there are safe skies nearby for them to hold a pattern, advise them to wait there while you finalise the planning and secure the LZ.

Plan the Trip

Assign a Pickup LZ

The JTAC should work with their commander to determine where the transport aircraft can set down to pick up the infantry. This should be flat ground that the infantry force can adequately secure and provide ongoing security as the craft is landing. Ensure that the commander has a boarding plan so that section elements are boarding in an orderly fashion and external security isn't broken down until the last moment.

Assign Destination LZs

Assess the terrain around the next objective and work with the commander to determine 1-3 possible LZs for the pilot to set down the infantry. The JTAC should take into account as much information from their map as they can - elevations, immediate surroundings (especially buildings and tree cover), distance from objective, and nearby terrain features that may impede or protect the aircraft as it touches down. Rappelling should only be considered for a very short distance, and only if the rappelling infantry can be coordinated carefully - it's not a silver bullet when there's nowhere good for the pilot to land.

Determine Route

Assess terrain adjacent to LZs, as well as nearby threats, and pick a route and flight altitude that suits. A given insert might require the pilot fly below nearby hilltops, for example, or follow a valley in towards the drop-off point. Ideally this route should be versatile enough for the pilot to make the decision which LZ they're comfortable taking.

Execution

1. Order the pilot to make their way to the pickup LZ and make sure the commander has set security around the area with a clear point for the pilot to set down.
2. As the pilot is approaching, signal with coloured smoke and advise the pilot what to look for. In LZs with tight landings, ensure you're positioned adequately to direct the pilot into place.
3. Wait for the entire infantry force to board, then board last, advising the pilot that they're

clear to take off.
4. Let the pilot do their job. The pilot will attempt to prioritize the best LZ but may veto any and all LZs suggested at their sole discretion.
5. Stay on the aircraft until the entire infantry force is debarked, then debark last, advising the pilot that they're clear to take off.

Re-approaching Objectives

When a transport pilot decides that none of the LZs marked by the JTAC are appropriate, they may wave off entirely and return to safe skies to hold for further orders. When this happens, the JTAC should determine the problem (was the LZ too hot? Were there no available landing points?), solicit observations and information from the pilot, and coordinate with the commander to produce alternate LZs.

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