

ALSA

Increasing Warfighter Interoperability

By RAY A. ZUNIGA

The Air Land Sea Application (ALSA) Center produces multi-Service tactics, techniques, and procedures (MTTP) publications that help Servicemembers every day, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Established at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, in 1975 just after the Vietnam War, ALSA is a joint organization that meets the immediate needs of the warfighter. The Chiefs of Staff of both the Army and Air Force identified the need to stand up an organization to increase Army/Air Force coordination and to cut through the “red tape” of the multi-Service doctrine development process. The idea of forming a joint organization to focus on this area emerged as an effort to fix Service interoperability. Then-Chief of Staff of the Army General Creighton Abrams and then-Chief of Staff of the Air Force General George Brown came together and directed the Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and Air Force Tactical Air Command (TAC) to establish the Air Land Forces Application (ALFA) Agency to meet those requirements.

The decision to place ALFA at Langley where TAC (now Air Combat Command) was headquartered gave it close proximity to Fort Monroe, home of TRADOC headquarters, and allowed ALFA to coordinate between the two Services in the days before email.

Some of ALFA’s original initiatives dealt with topics such as airspace management, air defense suppression, and close air support. In July 1985, ALFA produced the first version of the *Multi-Service Procedures for the Joint Application of Firepower*, most

commonly known as “JFIRE,” which is a pocket-sized quick-reference guide for requesting fire support still used today in Afghanistan and Iraq. The JFIRE publication has been continuously updated for almost 25 years, and it continues to be ALSA’s most widely distributed publication.

In 1986, the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act reorganized the Armed Forces and mandated that all Services organize, train, and equip as a joint force. In a way, ALSA already had been “joint” for 10 years. The joint and coalition victory of Operation *Desert Storm* in 1991 convinced the other two Services of ALFA’s utility. The following year, the Marine Corps Combat Development Command and the Navy’s U.S. Atlantic Fleet assigned permanent billets to ALFA, and the organization was renamed the Air Land Sea Application Center to incorporate all Services. Today, ALSA consists of a small group of officers from the four Services, five Civil Service employees, and one noncommissioned officer. The ALSA Center director and deputy director are O-6 positions that alternate between the Army and Air Force.

In keeping with its original charter, ALSA provides multi-Service solutions, so commanders and troops in the field have the latest best procedures; in effect, ALSA publications are developed with advice from subject matter experts (SMEs) across the Services. These experts often range from E-3s to O-5s, are recently returned from combat, and may have experienced any publication deficiencies firsthand or realized gaps that may require a common-ground multi-Service solution. They come together in two joint working groups to revise or create a publication, a process that typically

only lasts a year and occurs every 3 years for revisions.

ALSA currently has a full workload of over 35 publications that are in various stages of development, assessment, and revision. ALSA gets its direction from the four Services’ doctrine chiefs (two generals, one admiral, and one member of the Senior Executive Service) and the J7 directors from U.S. Special Operations Command, U.S. Joint Forces Command, and Joint Staff, who together make up the Joint Action Steering Committee (JASC). The JASC meets three times a year to provide guidance on new topics and set priorities on projects. Current operations, Service transformation, new equipment acquisitions, new strategies for fighting our nation’s wars, and new technology integration into weapons systems provide ALSA with a fertile ground of interoperability challenges to address.

A great example of a technological evolution to assist in command and control is Internet relay chat (IRC, commonly called mIRC). Warfighters were using it to support operations downrange, but without a standard set of TTPs. Some even referred to mIRC as the “Wild West,” and the lack of TTP often caused confusion and delays. To meet the need, ALSA developed a new publication titled *Tactical Chat* (TC), which has since been adopted by U.S. Central Command for use throughout the theater. The TC manual is now the standard for using IRC to “chat” or pass data as it established firm business rules for online collaboration.

Some other new projects that ALSA recently published are MTTPs on *Advising Foreign Forces* and *Tactical Convoy Operations* (TCO). The *Advising Foreign Forces* publication is designed to help

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