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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-505](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Members of the Subcommittees on Total Force and Readiness, House Committee on Armed Services

Why GAO Did This Study

Recent operations in Afghanistan demonstrated the dangers of providing air support close to troops on the ground. Such close air support requires timely, well-practiced procedures and communication between ground and air elements. While most close air support operations in Afghanistan were successful, "friendly fire" incidents have resulted from mistakes made while conducting the mission.

At the request of the Ranking Minority Members of the Subcommittees on Total Force and Readiness, House Committee on Armed Services, GAO reviewed Department of Defense (DOD) efforts to provide adequate close air support training, as well as efforts to enhance the equipment used to support this mission.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending several initiatives to provide the leadership and accountability needed to resolve the lingering close air support training shortfalls. GAO is also recommending actions to achieve greater equipment interoperability among the services.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with the report's recommendations and is in the process of establishing specific completion dates for initiatives that will address the lingering training and equipment interoperability shortfalls.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-505.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal Curtin at (757) 552-8100 or curtinn@gao.gov.

MILITARY READINESS

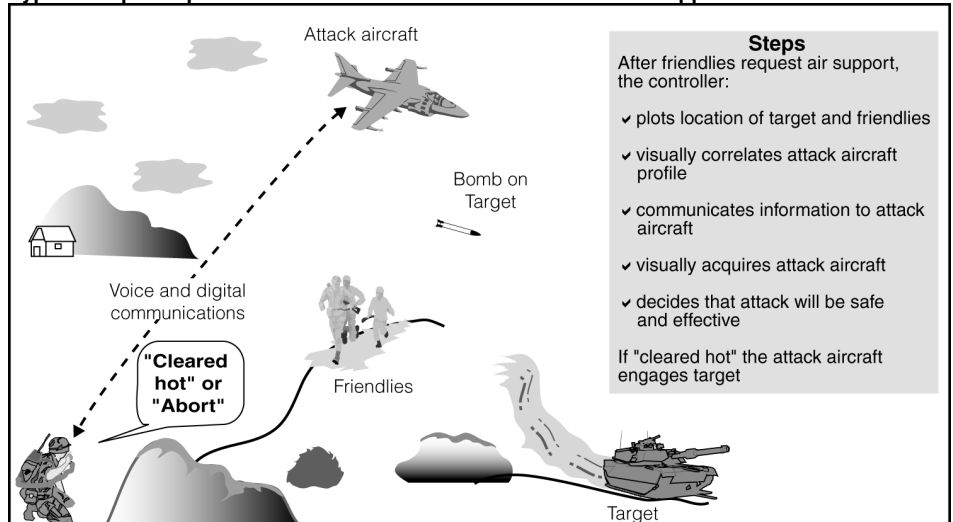
Lingering Training and Equipment Issues Hamper Air Support of Ground Forces

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense has had limited success in overcoming the barriers that prevent troops from receiving the realistic, standardized close air support training necessary to prepare them for joint operations. This is the result of four interrelated factors: (1) ground and air forces have limited opportunities to train together in a joint environment; (2) home station training is often restricted and thus does not always provide realistic training to prepare troops to perform the mission; (3) the services use different training standards and certification requirements for personnel responsible for coordinating close air support; and (4) within the individual services, joint close air support training is often a lower priority than other missions. While the department recognizes the need to improve the training for the mission, progress has been slow on many of the issues because the services have been unable to agree on joint solutions. In the interim, U.S. troops engaged in joint close air support missions are forced to conduct last-minute training or create ad hoc procedures on the battlefield.

Efforts to enhance the capabilities of the equipment used to perform the joint close air support mission have not kept pace with precision weapons capabilities and as a result do not achieve DOD's goals for interoperability and cost-effectiveness. Advanced systems improve the accuracy of battlefield information and can speed the transmission of information from the troops on the ground to attacking aircraft. However, the services have acquired equipment that is not able to communicate across the services, a key requirement in joint operations. Moreover, the services are procuring equipment independently to meet individual service needs, thereby missing opportunities to achieve cost benefits from joint service purchases.

Typical Steps Required in the Final Coordination of a Close Air Support Mission



Source: GAO.