



TERMINAL ATTACK CONTROL

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Flexible, real-time targeting guidance, collateral damage minimization and friendly fire avoidance are critical considerations when conducting [close air support](#) (CAS). To integrate air-ground operations safely and effectively, either a [joint terminal attack controller](#) (JTAC) or a [forward air controller \(airborne\)](#) (FAC[A]) provides [terminal attack control](#) (TAC) for CAS missions. TAC is defined as the authority to control the maneuver of and grant weapons release clearance to attacking aircraft. Current and qualified JTACs and FAC(A)s will be recognized across the Department of Defense as capable and authorized to perform TAC.

A JTAC is a qualified (certified) Service member who, from a forward position, directs the action of combat aircraft engaged in CAS and other offensive air operations. The JTAC provides recommendations on the integration of CAS with the ground commander's scheme of maneuver. A JTAC should be trained to:¹

- ✦ Know the enemy situation and location of friendly units and civilians.
- ✦ Know the supported commander's target priority, desired effects, and timing of [fires](#).
- ✦ Know the commanders intent and applicable [rules of engagement](#).
- ✦ Validate targets of opportunity.
- ✦ Advise the commander on proper employment of air assets.
- ✦ Submit immediate requests for CAS.
- ✦ Control CAS with supported commander's approval.
- ✦ Deconflict aircraft and fires from CAS sorties.
- ✦ Perform battle damage assessment (BDA).

¹ Terminal Attack Control roles and responsibilities are outlined in Table 32 of Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) 3-2.6, [Multi-Service TTP for Joint Application of Firepower](#).

The FAC(A) is a specifically trained and qualified aviation officer, normally an airborne extension of the [tactical air control party](#) (TACP) who exercises control from the air of aircraft engaged in CAS of ground troops. Only specially trained and certified aircrews are authorized to perform FAC(A) duties, as they require detailed knowledge of friendly and target locations, artillery operations, available aircraft weapons and fuel states, the ability to conduct all types of terminal attack control, and the flexibility to prioritize and adjust in a dynamic environment. At the request of the JTAC or TACP, a FAC(A) can assume the tasks of Brief, Stack, Mark, and Control. Each of these tasks has a specific responsibility associated with it, understanding that the absence or misidentification of the tasks and duties for the FAC(A) during planning and execution will likely result in delayed CAS operations. FAC(A)s should receive land maneuver commander clearance, normally through the TACP, before expending or authorizing other aircraft to expend ordnance. The FAC(A) may provide TAC, relay CAS briefings, provide immediate target and threat reconnaissance, and mark targets for attacking aircraft. Threats and weather permitting, the FAC (A) may see well beyond the visual range of ground-based JTACs. The FAC(A) can perform tactical battle management by cycling aircraft through the target area while prioritizing targets in coordination with a JTAC. In this role, the FAC(A) is operating as a [tactical air coordinator \(airborne\)](#) (TAC[A]). The FAC(A) may provide positive identification, collateral damage estimation, and immediate BDA.

The TAC(A) is an extension of the [theater air control system](#) (TACS) air support control agencies. In the absence of [Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System](#) or a FAC(A), a TAC(A) may provide communications relay between the TACP and attack aircraft. A two-ship FAC(A) flight, especially in higher threat environments, may divide responsibilities so one aircraft fills the normal FAC(A) role while the second becomes a TAC(A). The TAC(A) expedites CAS aircraft-to-JTAC handoff during “heavy traffic” CAS. TAC(A) tasks may include coordination of CAS briefs and attack times; CAS and FAC(A) hand-offs to terminal attack controllers; relay of threat updates and BDA to command and control (C2) agencies; coordination of aircraft and surface fire support; coordination of fixed and rotary-wing operations; visual reconnaissance; coordination of indirect fire support including naval surface fire support; and assisting strike coordination and reconnaissance missions.

[Joint Fires Observer \(JFO\)](#). A JFO can request, adjust, and control surface-to-surface fires, provide targeting information in support of CAS, and perform [terminal guidance operations](#) (TGO). TGO are those actions that provide electronic, mechanical, voice, or visual communications that provide approaching aircraft or weapons additional information regarding a specific target location. The JFO adds joint warfighting capability but cannot provide TAC during CAS operations. Unless qualified as a JTAC or FAC(A), **personnel conducting TGO do not have the authority to control the maneuver of or grant weapons release to attacking aircraft**. JFOs provide the capability to exploit those opportunities that exist in the operational environment where a trained observer could be used to efficiently support air-delivered fires, surface-to-surface fires, and facilitate targeting. The JFO is not an additional person provided to a

team, but rather an existing team member who has received the supplemental proper training and certification. **The intent of a JFO is to add joint warfighting capability, not circumvent the need for qualified JTACs.** JFOs expand the target set available to ground commanders by passing accurate targeting information to both the JTAC and aircrew.

Special Tactics Team (STT). Air Force STTs are composed primarily of special operations combat control and pararescue personnel. Combat control personnel support SOF ground elements by providing air-ground interface; fire support; target designation; C2 communications; and airfield, helicopter landing zone, and drop zone surveys. Some combat controllers are JTAC-qualified.
