

# Marine Corps Information Operations Center

Past, present, and future

by Col Francis K. Chawk, III

The Marine Corps Information Operations Center (MCIOC) was originally established under the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations with the release of *MARADMIN 266/09, Establishment of the MCIOC*, in April 2009.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, in February 2011, *MARADMIN 094/11* announced that MCIOC had reached full operational capability.<sup>2</sup> MCIOC has been described well in several previous articles: see then-Capt Emily Grant's *Gazette* April 2010 article<sup>3</sup> and Otto Kreisher's *Leatherneck Magazine* article from December 2010<sup>4</sup> for reference. With the establishment of the Deputy Commandant for Information (DC I) in 2017, MCIOC transitioned from Plans, Policies, and Operations to DC I along with what were then the Intelligence and the Command, Control, Communications, and Computers Departments. A colonel has led MCIOC since its creation. Originally a "director," the first board-slotted colonel assumed command of MCIOC in 2012.

The purpose of this article is to share with readers what MCIOC does now and what the future holds for the center. Well beyond the scope of this article, this is not a discussion or debate on information operations versus operations in the information environment. *Suffice it to say, the Corps has adopted operations in the information environment (OIE) as the construct for future employment, and the term "IO" will be phased out.* This could eventually lead to a name change

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Gen "Big Lew" Walt. (File photo.)

for MCIOC itself, but a name is not what matters for the Corps or deployed forces. What matters are the capabilities that deployed units and Marines need to operate successfully now and in the future.

The Marine Corps defines OIE as:

Actions taken to generate, preserve, or apply military information power in order to increase and protect competitive advantage or combat power potential within all domains of the operational environment.<sup>5</sup>

The term OIE is *not* simply a replacement for IO. OIE consists of seven functions and six capability areas (see Figure 1 on next page). It is critical that as the Corps transitions to OIE, Marines do not claim, "Yeah, I know ... It's all really just IO," because, quite simply, it's not. All MAGTF officers should learn and gain an appreciation for these functions and capability areas. Understanding these functions and capabilities will be increasingly important and will support what Marines do as fighting forces.

Located on the west side of I-95 in Walt Hall named in honor of Gen "Big Lew" Walt, the first four-star assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, MCIOC provides support to MARFORs, MEFs, MIGs, deploying MEUs, SPMAGTFs, and other organizations with subject matter experts, teams and detachments, and psychological opera-

<b>Seven Functions of OIE</b>	<b>Six Capability Areas of OIE</b>
<b>1. Assure enterprise C2 and critical systems.</b>	<b>1. Electromagnetic spectrum operations.</b>
<b>2. Provide info environment battlespace awareness.</b>	<b>2. Cyberspace operations.</b>
<b>3. Attack and exploit networks, systems, and info.</b>	<b>3. Space operations.</b>
<b>4. Inform domestic and international audiences.</b>	<b>4. Influence operations.</b>
<b>5. Influence foreign target audiences.</b>	<b>5. Deception operations.</b>
<b>6. Deceive foreign target audiences.</b>	<b>6. Inform operations.</b>
<b>7. Control OIE capabilities, resources, and activities.</b>	

*Figure 1. OIE functions and capability areas.*

tions (PSYOP) Marines. In addition, the center maintains relationships with several sister Service and Joint organizations. MCIOC coordinates with Training and Education Command on the current MOS producing courses used to designate Marines as 0510, 0550, and 0551.

MCIOC’s current strength is just slightly more than 200 personnel on hand. While active duty Marines make up the bulk of that number, the center has government civilians, a small Individual Mobilization Augmentee (IMA) detachment, and contract support as well. In addition to the headquarters element with the CO, chief of staff (civilian), XO (lieutenant colonel), and sergeant major, the center is broken down into two subordinate companies: headquarters (HQ Co) and PSYOP. While both are led by majors, the two companies are vastly different.

**HQ Co**

In HQ Co, MCIOC has the standard staff sections that one would expect to find in a Marine command: S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, and S-6. In addition, the center has an S-8 (which will be discussed below), security, procurement, budget, and several other key sections. Nearly all the sections are made up of a mix of active duty Marines, government civilians, and contract support, augmented at times by Marines from the IMA detachment.

The S-3 is the largest and most diverse section within HQ Co and is led by a

lieutenant colonel with a government civilian as the deputy. In addition to overseeing unit and individual annual training, readiness reporting, global force management requirements, lessons learned, and a variety of other tasks, the S-3 also oversees and directs three regional support teams (RSTs) that provide reach-back support for the MCIOC Marines who are forward deployed with MEUs, SPMAGTFs, and filling joint requirements. Led by government civilians, these three RSTs are roughly ten personnel each and have a mix of government civilians, officer and enlisted Marines, and contract support. RST 1 focuses on the Middle East, RST 2 has the Pacific and South America, and RST 3 focuses on Europe and Africa. MCIOC and the RSTs have recently begun to reach out to the supported units preparing for deployments to inform those units what reach-back support the RSTs can provide them while they are forward deployed and highlight the capabilities that the center provides in general. Within the S-3, and the RSTs in particular, MCIOC has several billets for officers completing their foreign area officer or regional affairs officer payback tours after completing their coursework at Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). Naturally, these RSTs have constant interaction with the MARFORs and MEFs/MIGs which share their areas of interest.

The S-3 section also oversees the publicly available information cell and

the Marine operations security team (MOST). The publicly available information cell supports operations through input to the RSTs and the MOST conducts operational security assessments of Marine units per Marine Corps Order 3070.2A.<sup>6</sup> MCIOC S3 is currently assessing the MOST’s role with DC I and ways to “operationalize” operational security assessments to review physical, technical, and administrative signatures.

In addition to unit and individual training, the S-3 section also has a small S-37 section which focuses on information related training that MCIOC provides to Marines, sister Services, and international partners. Previously known as the Combined Unit Exercise, MCIOC has run a two-week training evolution aboard MCB Quantico for several years. That exercise generally consisted of a week of staff training, followed by a week of practical application in a field environment—complete with a variety of scenarios, role players, leaflet drops, and limited use of information related gear and equipment. MCIOC is assessing how and where it conducts this training and the current plan is to evolve the name to the Information Warfighter Exercise with a continued focus on influence and deception operations, but with the ability to incorporate all functions and capability areas of OIE.

Perhaps somewhat unique to MCIOC, the center also has an S-8 section which works a diverse portfolio of new gear and equipment, input to doctrinal and concept employment, future requirements, MOS development, and other initiatives. In this capacity, the S-8 works on a regular basis with Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, Combat Development and Integration, Total Force Structure Division, and others. The S-8 also oversees the newly created signature management platoon. Like the S-3, the S-8 section is also led by a lieutenant colonel with a government civilian as its deputy. This section is typically where NPS graduates with the 8834 (Technical Information Operations Officer) and 8866 (Space Operations Officer) FMOS complete their NPS utilization tours.

## PSYOP Co

PSYOP Co is naturally where the majority of MCIOC's 0521 (PMOS) and 0522 (secondary MOS (SMOS)) PSYOP Marines reside. 0521 became a PMOS with the release of *MARADMIN 343/18* in June of 2018.<sup>7</sup> Currently, 0522 remains a secondary MOS for enlisted Marines who remain in their PMOS, but 0522 will be phased out as the Corps grows several hundred 0521s across the Corps over the next several years. For officers, 0520 is the secondary MOS for those who complete the PSYOP qualification course at Fort Bragg and additional courses at Virginia Beach, VA. In addition to *MARADMIN 343/18*, DC I recently released *MARADMIN 690/19* in December 2019 to continue to advertise the opportunities and requirements for Marines interested in careers in the PSYOP field.<sup>8</sup> Marines who are interested should discuss this with their career counsellor and consider making the move to this growing field.

PSYOP Co focuses on the training and subsequent employment of PSYOP Marines who deploy in support of operational requirements. As previously stated, these requirements are prioritized at Marine Forces Command through the global force management process. On a continuous basis, PSYOP Co has nearly 50 percent of its Marines either forward deployed, in some stage of training, temporary additional duty in preparation for deployment, or in dwell. Marines who return from deployments often serve in the RSTs or in the S-3 so that their recent operational experience can feed into the support that the operations section provides to the next rotations going forward. PSYOP Marines who are up for PCS orders are currently starting to rotate out to the Fleet Marine Forces for assignment within the newly created PSYOP sections within the MIGs. With a small handful of PSYOP Marines at each MIG, current focus of effort is to increase the MIGs' capacity over the next several years. MCIOC's PSYOP Co also has a small detachment of communication strategy Marines who assist in graphics on PSYOP production efforts.

## The Future

As mentioned, all three MIGs will eventually have their own, organic PSYOP sections. Originally envisioned as two companies (one on the east coast and one on the west), the current structure (based on Future Force 2025 growth) will be less than 35 PSYOP Marines at each MIG. As the structure comes on-line for those billets and as the Corps lateral moves, trains, and PCS Marines into the MIGs, those MIG Marines will take on the tactical-level requirements that MCIOC Marines have filled for more than a decade. This will drastically improve work relationships and ease deployment requirements that MCIOC has filled. Currently, if a MCIOC Marine is going to support a deploying unit out of Okinawa, California, or North Carolina, that Marine and his or her team could join the unit



**Marine Corps Information Operations Center logo.** (Logo provided by author.)

several months before the deployment for work-ups, followed by the actual deployment itself, and then any follow-on requirements that may arise at the tail end of the mission. This could easily turn a six-month deployment into nearly a year away from home station (Quantico). While this may seem like a standard "price of providing support," it can be very costly in terms of temporary additional duty and time away from families when that support comes from Quantico. Conversely, there are times when a MCIOC Marine does not join the deploying unit until days or weeks before deployment because of unavoidable circumstances. That situa-

tion nearly always equates to a less than ideal construct because of the lack of integration with the deploying unit. In the future, when the support comes organically from Okinawa, Pendleton, and Lejeune, with the gear and equipment they need to operate, support relationships to those tactical-level units will undoubtedly improve.

However, one caveat from the writer's perspective is that the Marine PSYOP sections within the MIGs will most likely not be enough to meet all the requirements for each MEF. MCIOC has seen that with MOS training timelines, school throughput, slight yet unavoidable attrition at schools, PME requirements to keep Marines competitive for promotion, and other factors, it often takes "three to make one." With the recurring missions of MEUs, SPMAGTFs, and other requirements, I argue the MIGs will need to continue to grow their PSYOP sections, particularly if the demand for 0521s continues to increase over time. If the MIGs are capped with the Marine PSYOP sections, they will see a continuous deployment-to-dwell cycle of 0521s, which could lead to exhaustion and burn out. The MIGs, MCIOC, and Manpower Management Enlisted Assignments will need to be aware of the operational tempo and monitor its effects on PSYOP Marines. Without a doubt, Marines who laterally move to PSYOP will have multiple opportunities to deploy in support of operational requirements.

In theory, once the MIGs have reached full operational capability and are able to sustain the tactical-level requirements, MCIOC's focus will shift more to the operational level. Already working at this level as well, MCIOC currently supports MARFORs and several joint task forces with planning expertise, subject matter expert exchanges, operation plan development, and other tasks. That will continue and expand as MCIOC pulls out of the tactical level over the next three to five years. MCIOC will continue to serve as the Service's center for expertise with an initial focus on influence and deception operations while continuing to build relationships with

those units and commands who focus on electro-magnetic spectrum, cyber, space, and inform operations. By doing so, MCIOC will continue to evolve from a command that was focused on influence and, to a lesser extent, deception to a command that will be involved in all seven functions and six capability areas for OIE.

Working with all capability areas for OIE, MCIOC's role in training and preparing units for deployments will also likely increase. Already working with Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group at Twentynine Palms, Marine Corps Cyberspace Warfare Group, MAGTF Staff Training Program, and Training and Education Command, the center is assessing how and where its cadre of expertise could help continue to drive OIE into all training in which Marine units participate. MCIOC has supported and will continue to support Weapons Tactics Instructor, TBS, EWS, Command and Staff, the School of Advanced Warfighting, and others with presentations and subject matter expert support. Because MEFs will want their MIGs to be tested and evaluated during training, perhaps experts from MCIOC will be able to expand the training role that currently exists to develop that capability further. MCIOC will also serve as the center for lessons learned so that experience gained by one MIG can be shared with the others to increase the learning cycle and advance concepts faster.

Throughout this evolution, MCIOC will continue to provide input on doctrinal development, conceptual employment of OIE, design of future gear and equipment, and other Service-level requirements that will require input from MCIOC's experienced staff. Ideally, Marines who have completed tactical-level information related tours with MEFs, MarDivs, MAWs, MLGs, and the MIGs will at some point serve on the MCIOC staff where their experience will inform and shape doctrine, policy, and future concepts. Of course, the Marines who are not 0521s will have to ensure that they maintain proficiency in their PMOSs. Back-to-back information related tours could potentially be detrimental to a Marine's career, unless

the Corps were to consider an information occupational field.

### Information Occupational Field (Occfield)?

It is worth noting that every additional or free MOS for officers doing a tour in the information field (0510 intermediate MAGTF IO practitioner, 0520 PSYOP, 0530 Civil Affairs, 0540 Space, 0550 Advanced MAGTF IO planner, 8834, 8866, etc.), all remain secondary MOSs. This poses multiple challenges. First, there is an obvious training timeline and pipeline that officers must go through in order to have a basic understanding of the billets in which they will serve. Training and education can range from courses lasting two weeks (0510) to two years at NPS (8834, 8866). Additionally, it means that the vast majority of the officers serving in information related billets could be doing their job for the first time. MCIOC currently has officers whose PMOSs include 02XX, 0302, 0402, 0802, 1302, 3002, 6002, 6602, 7204, 7208, 7315, and 7565. While this is tremendous for the broad skillset it brings to the officer cadre on the MCIOC team, it means that officers come to MCIOC with a varying degree of familiarity and experience in the information field. The final challenge is that all officers will PCS from MCIOC (or any other information related billet in the fleet) and go back to their PMOS for their next assignment. While many may desire to continue to work in the information field, the current Marine Corps system requires Marines to maintain proficiency in their PMOS. Otherwise, their chances of continued promotion, and therefore continued service, could be limited. This applies to all enlisted Marines as well, except for those who lateral move to 0521.

With the creation of information as a joint function,<sup>9</sup> and the Marine Corps' subsequent adoption of information as a warfighting function,<sup>10</sup> perhaps the Corps should consider what it would take to create an information occfield. As previously noted, all officer additional MOSs and free MOSs in the information field remain *secondary* MOSs. If the Corps—Manpower

Management Officer Assignments in particular—were to assess 0510, 0520, 0530, 0540, 0550, 8834, 8866, and other MOSs, there may be enough structure to create an information field. That occupational field, along with intelligence (02XX/26XX), communications (06XX), and cyber (17XX), would all remain core elements within the DC I hierarchy. With a three-star lieutenant general DC I advocating for those fields, the potential to integrate and advance all seven functions and six capability areas within OIE would have tremendous opportunity for growth and improved support to deploying Marine units.

While heretical to some and even frightening to others, the author also believes that the Communications Strategy and Operations (CommStrat) field (45XX) should be considered for that occupational field as well. While seemingly sacrilegious to consider PSYOP and CommStrat Marines working side-by-side in the same field, that is exactly what the information field needs to create a force capable of operating in the environment envisioned by the *Commandant's Planning Guidance*.

### Conclusion

The MCIOC has served the Corps well for the past decade and will continue to evolve, particularly as the requirements to operate in the IE continue to increase. Developing technologies, operational concepts, and capable pacing threats will demand that all Marines, not just those working in the information field, consider and debate how Marine units are structured and resourced for the future challenges they will face. If the Corps truly embraces that information is the seventh warfighting function, perhaps the Corps should consider careers in that field and how those opportunities could expand and improve the support that MCIOC provides to the Service.

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### Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MARADMIN 266/09, Establishment of the Marine Information Operations Center*, (Washington, DC: 2009).

2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MARADMIN 094/11, MCIOC Full Operations Capability*, (Washington, DC: 2011), available at: <https://www.marines.mil>.

3. Emily Grant, "The Marine Corps Information Operations Center," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: April 2010).

4. Otto Kreisher, "Information Operations: Developing a Marine Corps Capability," *Leatherneck Magazine*, (Quantico, VA: December 2010).

5. Deputy Commandant, Combat Development and Integration and Deputy Commandant, Information, Joint Memorandum, "Definition for Information Related Terms," (Washington, DC: January 2020).

6. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 3070.2A, The Marine Corps Operational Security (OPSEC) Program*, (Washington, DC: July 2013).

7. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MARADMIN 343/18, Announcement of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) 0521 Primary Military Occupational Specialty and instructions for Lateral Move*, (Washington, DC: June 2018).

8. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MARADMIN 690/19, Solicitation of Qualified Marines for Lateral Move into the Psychological Operations Primary MOS 0521 and Release of FY20 Schedule for Psychological Operations Screening and Assessments*, (Washington, DC: December 2019).

9. *Joint Publication 1* Extract with CH-1 states, "The information function encompasses the management and application of information and its deliberate integration with other joint functions to influence relevant actor perceptions, behavior, action or inaction, and human and automated decision making. The information function helps commanders and staffs understand and leverage the pervasive nature of information, its military uses, and its application during all military operations. This

function provides JFCs the ability to integrate the generation and preservation of friendly information while leveraging the inherent informational aspects of all military activities to achieve the commander's objectives and attain the end state." (Washington, DC: July 2017).

10. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Bulletin 5400 (MCBUL 54), Establishment of Information as the Seventh Marine Corps Warfighting Function*, (Washington, DC: January 2019), available at <https://www.marines.mil>.



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