

Fleet Fire Support Officer

Marine representation within the maritime operations center

by Maj Kyle Lynch, USMCR

As the *Commandant's Planning Guidance* reorients the Marine Corps toward operations in support of fleet commanders, much attention is drawn toward recent bold force design decisions. Many Marines waited anxiously to find out what units or capability would be divested, and which new tools would become part of the Marine Corps inventory. Force design is not, however, limited to numbers and types of units, but also needs to have a corresponding effort by which the Marine Corps sources billets within naval staffs. If the Marine Corps introduces and deploys capabilities without champions for those capabilities in places where fleet commanders make employment decisions, then Naval Service integration will struggle to evolve past traditional amphibious operations. The Marine Corps can take steps now to start cultivating habits to achieve more holistic maritime integration by getting the right people, in the right place, and with the right authorities. As the Marine Corps of 2030 is shaped, one element that should not be overlooked is the critical role human interaction—at the action officer level—plays in facilitating success of the Marine Corps transformation back to an integrated Naval Service. An increased presence of Marines within certain key billets in a fleet maritime operations center (MOC) will help foster a true naval perspective and integration within the Service over a long-term period. This article's focus, more specifically, is how increased numbers of high-quality Marines on fleet staffs can help the maritime component with respect to the fires' warfighting function. Although many other related aspects of

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The strategic environment and Service chief guidance call for the more integrated application of Navy and Marine Corps capabilities, but there is insufficient Marine representation within the fleet/JFMCC staffs to do this effectively.

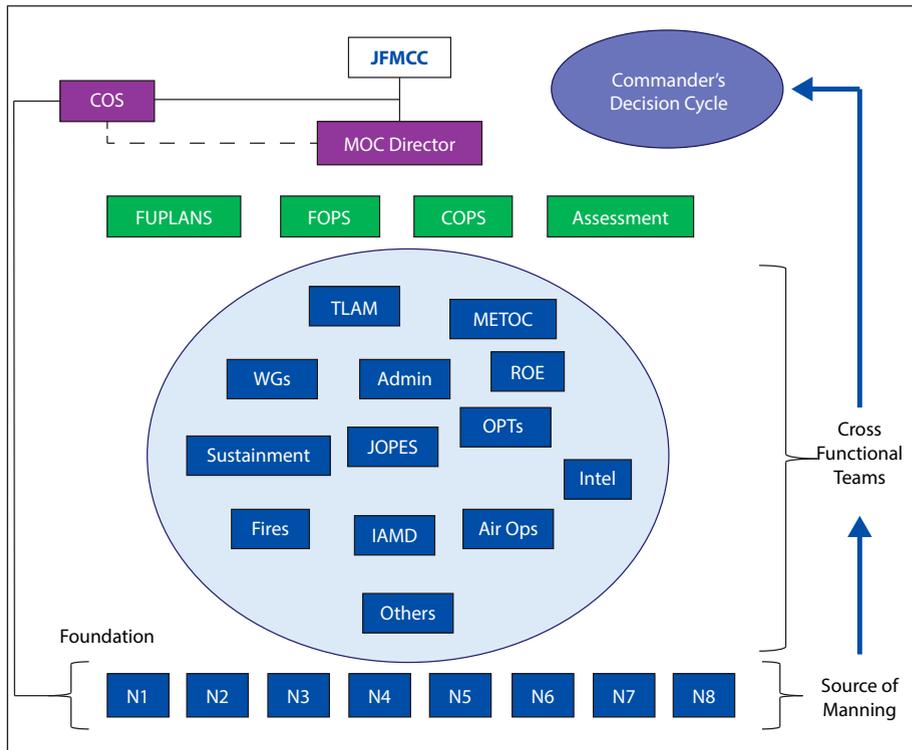
—Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment

effects integration such as operations in the information environment, sensor to shooter considerations, and commonality across command and control (C2)

systems are worthy of study and discussion, these topics are not the focus of this article.



HIMARS provides long-range surface fires. (Photo by Sgt Sarah Anderson.)



Organization of the MOC. (Original Image developed from NTPP 3-32.1)

The Maritime Operations Center

The MOC is the construct by which fleet commanders organize a maritime headquarters to facilitate decision making to exercise C2 of forces. Typically, key members of the fleet staff must fulfill two functions: fleet management and maritime operations. The MOC concept relies upon N-code staff personnel assigned to the fleet to also fill the preponderance of requirements within cross functional teams comprising the MOC. Augmentation is likely for a MOC to become fully functional in employing all fleet elements. Because members of the fleet staff fulfill dual roles, a shift from their steady state duties to operationally focused duties requires a transitional step during contingencies when the MOC needs increased manning. The fires cell within the MOC is one of the cross functional teams but is likely non-operational until exercises or the onset of contingency operations.

Each numbered fleet has a MOC, but historically each has operated differently. Additionally, some Marines may have MOC experience that differs from the doctrinal MOC described. The fact that MOCs operated so differently led to an

effort, in recent years, to standardize. *OPNAV M-3500.42A, Maritime Operations Center Standardization Manual*, published in 2018, requires fleet commanders to standardize the approach to manning, training, and assigning operational level tasks. Of note, within

OPNAV M-3500.42A and other current Navy doctrine, the only reference to the Marine Corps' contributions within the MOC is a brief acknowledgment that it may be beneficial to provide Marine Corps liaison officers. The fact that current MOC doctrine does not identify a need for Marine Corps representation should create concern within the Corps. If consideration to formally identify the role of Marines is lacking within MOC primary references, there will likely be growing pains as more Marines fall under joint maritime component commander (JFMCC) operational control.

MOC fires cell roles and responsibilities include deliberate and dynamic targeting and, according to doctrine, are similar to a Marine Corps fires and effects coordination center (FECC). The core manning required for the MOC fires cell include the following: one fires cell lead, two fires planners, and one tomahawk strike mission planning cell lead. Other personnel augment the fires cell to fulfill other roles such as the current fires watch officer during dynamic targeting operations. The required training curriculum involves attendance at Joint Fires Observer Course or Joint Targeting School, which are two to three week courses. However, the fleet's approach to staff the MOC, and specifically the fires cell, differs

Fleet Management	1.	Service Title 10 (Man, Train, Equip)
	2.	Force Provider (Force Management)
Maritime Operations	3.	Theater Security Cooperation (TSC)/ Phase 0 Mission for Assigned CDR(s)
	4.	Offensive/Defensive Operations Contingency* Missions
	5.	Non-Combat Crisis Response Contingency* Missions

* for the purpose of the MOC Standard: "contingency" refers to any advanced phase of operations (phase 1-5) and is not limited to short-duration missions.

<p>Take direct action against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major combat/pacing threat Terrorist threat Threats to the Homeland Threats to partners (Bi/multilateral defense agreements) Ballistic missile threat WMD threats CBRNE threats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyberspace threats (Internal/External to DODIN) Information threats Threats to space domain EM spectrum threats Threats to stability NEO (counter Hostile/Uncertain threat)
<p>Provide crisis action for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEO (in permissive environment) Support to Civil Authorities/HCA FHA/FCM/FDR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General crisis response Cyberspace crisis (Internal to DODIN) Epidemic response Migrant crisis

Fleet management and MOC Staff responsibilities. Figure 1-2, page 15 *OPNAV M-3500.42A, Maritime Operations Center Standardization Manual*, 12 Jan 2018. (Photo by author.)

substantially from the approach taken by the Marine Corps to staff FECCs. Although a MOC fires cell has a similar function to a MEF FECC, in reality the preponderance of MOCs have not conducted fire support planning as part of steady state operations or to clear strikes that are part of a dynamic targeting effort against hostile targets. In contrast to the MOC, the MEF FECC may include several field grade officers leading deliberate or dynamic targeting teams, and FECCs are complemented by permanently assigned naval gunfire liaison officers and information operations representatives.

In terms of employing fire support, a solid understanding of how a MOC is structured is important for Marines who will increasingly be placed under the operational control of fleet commanders. Current fleet and FMF organizational structures create potential obstacles that may limit integration of Marine fires in support of the JFMCC. After nearly two decades of working almost entirely independent of each other, the Navy and Marine Corps simply do not have a strong understanding of each other's capabilities, limitations, or warfighting constructs. Additionally, Navy and Marine Corps fires doctrine does not promote maximum naval integration in the current or future environment. As the FMF shifts to reside more firmly with the maritime component, these challenges will emerge and pose risks

ranging from poor advocacy to ineffective employment of Marine capabilities by the JFMCC Staff. Despite these potential obstacles, the Marine Corps' relative strength in fire support planning and coordination can bring immediate benefit to a JFMCC staff and can help develop a more holistic approach to maritime fires benefiting both services.

Current Challenges to Fires Integration

Few would argue the existence of a strong mutual understanding of the other Naval Service's capabilities among Navy and Marine officers. Most Marines do not understand maritime operations, and the Navy has limited understanding of Marine Corps operations during the past two decades. As a result, the Navy would understandably struggle to effectively employ Marines in support of maritime objectives. *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment* identifies several relevant military challenges faced by the Naval Service in pursuit of increased integration. Two specific challenges significantly impact the ability of Marines to effectively integrate fires in this setting: lack of representation on fleet staffs and different warfighting constructs.

The first problem is lack of Marine representatives in the MOC fires cell. This arrangement is unfortunate because Marine fires assets are less likely

to be employed effectively if deployed in support of the fleet without some Marine representation on the MOC floor. Other than providing strike assets to support the joint force air component commander (JFACC), the Navy was largely left out of the very land-centric targeting efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unlike the Corps, the Navy does not regularly train their units to employ close and continuous fires or conduct deliberate fire support planning. Without the experience inherent to dedicated career fire supporters in a MOC fires cell, clearing dynamic fires would challenge MOCs. One example illustrating this challenge would be a dynamic HIMARS rocket mission in close proximity to other maritime assets. This deconfliction effort demonstrates how surface and air clearance is not a regular MOC battle drill, and there is no existing career pipeline for Sailors to become proficient users of surface fire support C2 systems such as Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data Systems.

Deliberate targeting may also suffer under the current arrangement. Targeting support from the JFACC may be diminished if advocates within the MOC fires element are not sensitive to the needs of Marine ground units. It is easy to imagine a Navy officer who only attended a two- to three-week course and spent a career performing tasks other than fire support, struggling to articulate the criticality of targeting nominations for Marines engaged in land operations at a joint targeting and effects working group. As a result, Marine units may not receive the type of effective advocacy needed when they submit target nominations through the fleet for processing. In the future, Marines cannot assume they will always maintain the current level of control of organic aviation, and Marines may need to become more reliant on the JFACC's external targeting support.

A second military problem identified within *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment* is the differing warfighting constructs between the fleet and Marine Corps. Many Marines do not understand—or have not prescribed to—the Navy's composite warfare commander (CWC) construct. Under CWC differ-



Marine aviation assets can provide armed escort in defense of the fleet. (Photo by LCpl Dalton Swanbeck/Released.)

ent officers in tactical control may task assets from other task forces in support of their assigned tactical mission such as the anti-air warfare, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, and strike warfare to name a few. A review of *Marine Corps Gazette* articles from the 1980s and early 1990s shows the Navy and Marine Corps have struggled to grasp how the MAGTF fits into CWC for decades. The issue is still being explored without resolution. The inability of Marines to conceptualize CWC could be significant because a lack of understanding of, or a reluctance to accept, the Navy's warfighting command and control construct presents additional hurdles for employment of Marine fires assets. The Marine Corps' historic insistence on preserving MAGTF assets for operations ashore can be a source of frustration to naval staffs that embrace CWC. Marines can quickly gain reputations for not being team players, and naval staffs will be less likely to request support in the future. Second, there will be situations when Marine fires assets may better serve another warfare commander than the MAGTF itself. For example, if Marine fires asset are under tactical control of the strike warfare commander, or any other warfare commander, opportunities for future employment may increase during certain phases or types of operations.

Opportunities to Enhance Naval Integration

Despite the challenges described above, placing Marine fire supporters within the MOC and eventual updates to fire support doctrine can make fires a more integrated naval function.

Marine fire supporters should be permanently assigned within the fleet N-3 section. This would have the most immediate positive impact on MOC fires cell capabilities. In contrast to many Navy officers who may only have a brief exposure to fire support, many Marines practice and refine this discipline for their entire career. By the time a Marine artillery officer, air officer, or fire support chief reaches a point where they may be assigned to an operational-level staff, not only have they attended the same schools required of the MOC fires



Marines will develop new methods of employing Navy fire support assets. (Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Jonathan Sunderman.)

cell but they have also likely conducted fire support planning at the company, battalion, and either regimental or MEU level. Fire support planning is a large part of Marine Corps culture and incorporating the practical experiences of clearing fires and fire support planning over the past two decades would greatly enhance the MOC. Marine leadership within the MOC fires cell could also help the fleet put forward a confident operational level voice among other joint targeting entities on behalf of the maritime component to achieve targeting objectives.

As Marines with MOC fires cell staff experience return to Marine Corps supporting establishment billets, they can leverage their operational experience for the benefit of the Marine Corps helping guide updates and changes to doctrine and education.

Current fires doctrine is proven but is almost exclusively focused on land warfare. Consequently, most Marine fire supporters are familiar with warfighting publications for fires in support of the GCE or MAGTF fires. The only combined Navy/Marine fires publication is exclusively dedicated to amphibious operations and is also primarily focused on land-based targeting. Marine Corps and Navy fires doctrine should be expanded

to include other maritime operations including development of a combined Marine and Navy MCWP/NTTP that considers fires in the maritime domain more holistically. An example that illustrates a current gap in fires doctrine are processes for clearance of long-range surface fires against a maritime target at sea, how to effectively employ aviation against small attack craft at sea, or how Marines could position other fires assets to best support ship movements. These are just a few examples to illustrate potential opportunities to enhance integration, but increased exposure of Marines to fleet tactics will likely unlock creativity among fire supporters and lead to more advancements in tactics, techniques, and procedures for employing combined maritime fire support. Training pipelines and education for Marine fire supporters are also very effective but do little to teach about fire support planning in the maritime domain beyond amphibious operations. As the Marine Corps becomes more integrated within the maritime component, consideration should be given to optimizing formal schools, and updating training and readiness standards in a way that will continue to develop fire supporters well suited for their likely means of employment.

Summary and Specific Recommendations

To address existing fire support coordination challenges at fleet staffs, the Navy should request—and the Marine Corps should assign—Marines to fulfill key billets within the MOC fires cell, to include the role of fires cell lead. This Marine detachment would be composed of one lieutenant colonel artillery officer or aviator (with fires experience) known as the fleet fire support officer, and the detachment would also include a senior fire-support chief and fire-support Marines to assist with fires support C2 systems. At least half or more of the MOC fires cell should remain comprised of Navy personnel. Initially, Marines should be assigned in these billets at 3D, 5TH, 6TH, and 7TH Fleets since these are the only fleets currently tasked with power projection operational level tasks within *OPNAV M-3500.42A*. Considering Marine Corps roles in land war in recent decades, these individuals should be screened to ensure they have relevant naval experience to contribute effectively in a MOC environment. Former MEU fire support, air, or targeting officers and chiefs or those who were instructors at Expeditionary Warfare Training Groups would be good initial candidates. Over time, screening may not be required, as familiarity with maritime operations increases across the FMF. Although individual augments may be required at first, eventually these individuals should be assigned to the MOC in order to develop habitual relationships across the MOC staff and for continuity, as opposed to only attaching a fires element from a MEF FECC,

for example, on a temporary basis. If required, tables of organizations at the MEF or Division staff may need adjustment to reflect this offset of personnel that are now permanently assigned to fleet billets. When needed, those Marine fires billets could be filled by internal augments or individual mobilization augmentees. This trade-off in staffing risks is justified because the MOC will become the most likely employment vehicle for Marines. Marine Corps and Navy fires doctrine should also be expanded to incorporate new publications related to fire support in the maritime domain, and Navy doctrine related to the MOC itself would also need to be updated to account for more permanent Marine representation.

Although the scope of this article is limited to the fires warfighting function and how an increase of Marine representation at the fleet staff would enhance the JFMCC’s warfighting capability, this concept clearly has application in other warfighting functions as well. Marines who can leverage expertise in command and control, and intelligence would all enhance the capability of the MOC. In time, these Marines would influence Navy counterparts to consider better ways to employ Marines and also bring back lessons learned from their Service with the Navy to enhance Marine Corps operations accordingly.

Notes

1. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: 2019).
2. Gen David H. Berger, *Force Design 2030*, (Washington, DC: March 2020).

3. Department of the Navy, *NTTP 3-32.1, Maritime Operations Center*, (Washington, DC: April 2013).
4. MOC Training Team, “MOC Effective Practices,” 3rd Edition, available at <https://intelshare.intelink.gov>.
5. Department of the Navy, *OPNAV M-3500.42A, Maritime Operations Center Standardization Manual*, (Washington, DC: January 2018).
6. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (Unclassified)*, (Washington, DC: July 2017).
7. Mitchell S. McCallister. “The Maritime Dynamic Targeting Gap—An Analysis of Current Joint Targeting Processes in the Maritime Domain,” (Research Paper, U. S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department, Newport, RI, 2002).
8. Terry Pierce, “MAGTF Warlords: A Naval Perspective,” *Marine Corps Gazette*. (Quantico, VA: July 1991).
9. Department of the Navy, *NTTP 3-02.2/MCWP 3-31.6, Supporting Arms Coordination in Amphibious Operations*, (Washington, DC: May 2004).
10. Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3-32, Joint Maritime Operations*, (Washington, DC: June 2018).

