

# The Warfighter Support Center

Tactical support at the speed of the FMF

by Capt Adrian Felder

**W**hen it comes to tactical systems, the Marine Corps is a brand. Marines do not care if the equipment they operate was built by General Dynamics, Oshkosh, or Raytheon. The Marine Corps fielded the systems; therefore, it is the responsibility of the Marine Corps—namely Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC)—to assist them with any technical issues.

In industry, brands operate centralized support centers to provide a single point-of-contact organization that assists customers with issues operating their products. When Marines have problems configuring or operating an MCSC program of record (POR), they are directed to one of many organizations that may provide the support they need. This model is not sustainable as PORs continue to increase in complexity and interdependency with adjacent systems during the Information Age.

What if there was a single customer-oriented organization that a Marine could go to for assistance with any piece of tactical equipment—from a laser range finder or satellite terminal to a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle?

Drawing from lessons learned by MCTSSA, MCSC must establish a Warfighter Support Center to serve as the single point-of-contact support organization for all tactical PORs. Furthermore, program offices must integrate the organization into their life cycle sustainment plans.

## The Advantages of Centralization

A centralized Warfighter Support Center for all tactical PORs offers four primary advantages: simplification of the technical support structure, reduc-

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**Establish 24/7 service desks.** (Photo by author.)

tion in operations and support phase costs, improved organizational agility, and improved feedback mechanisms from the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) to the program offices.

Our current disparate support structure can require large time investments by units to identify which organizations support which systems. A single point-of-contact organization will greatly reduce the amount of time Marines spend troubleshooting. The Warfighter Support Center would offer a single service desk that Marines could reach out to 24/7 to receive technical support for all

tactical systems. This direct link will reduce bureaucracy from the fleet perspective and give Marines back valuable time to focus on their primary mission: warfighting.

Consolidating all tactical POR support through one service desk will also result in a cost savings. Instead of program offices sourcing low-level service desk support through vendors, DOD organizations, or their own resources, professional customer service experts at the Warfighter Support Center would provide this service using provided POR documentation.

For each program to provide comprehensive 24/7 support on their own, accounting for holidays, weekends, as well as training time and time off, would require at least six full time employees to provide round-the-clock service. Multiplying this number by the number of programs within MCSC results in a need for hundreds of personnel. However, by consolidating services for all programs to a single service desk, less than 30 personnel could accomplish these tasks. While the work would still require subject matter experts (SMEs), these experts would have less requests to field—reducing their demand signal—with the service desk triaging and resolving the low complexity requests. This structure has been successful in industry as well as at the Marine Corps Cyber Operation Group’s Enterprise Service Desk.

MCSC also gains agility by centralizing SME support within the Warfighter Support Center. Under the Warfighter Support Center construct, SMEs would not be assigned to specific PORs the way field service representatives are but instead would be aligned according to their technical expertise—which can span multiple systems. This concept enables MCSC to rapidly adapt to new programs through cross-training, rather than requiring new SMEs who may lack familiarity with the organization. The concept also facilitates increased knowledge of system interoperability, which the SMEs can pass onto the fleet.

As the one-stop shop for every MCSC program, the Warfighter Support Center would serve as the central feedback mechanism from the FMF to the program offices. Currently, there are few formal conduits for fleet Marines to provide timely and valuable feedback to programs on their successes or failures. In the proposed construct, experts responding to support requests would serve as MCSC’s eyes and ears, receiving, aggregating, synthesizing, and delivering technical feedback to the program offices in an effort to improve customer experience for the warfighter.

### **The MCTSSA Support Center Model**

MCTSSA’s WSD operates a single point-of-contact organization called the



**A SATCOM set up.** (Photo by author.)

MCTSSA Support Center, built to meet the unit’s task of providing support and deployed contact team capabilities for select command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) systems.

With more than 25 years in operation, the WSD has created a structure that effectively supports Marines around the globe while enabling the command’s institutional goals. The division is staffed by a dozen Marines and civil servants and augmented by more than 60 contractors.

In fiscal year 2019 (FY19), the organization supported more than 150 Marine units through the resolution of 5,439 requests and the delivery of 959 man-days of on-site support providing task organized global contact teams.<sup>1</sup>

Tactical support to the operating forces (TSOF) program and the associated tactical system support (TSS) contract facilitate the MCTSSA Support Center. The TSS contract is an indefinite delivery indefinite quantity services contract that enables MCTSSA to employ SMEs and customer service experts to provide technical support to the fleet.

The baseline funding—about fifteen percent of the program’s cost—is provided through the information program evaluation board. This funding is intended for program-agnostic functions

for the Support Center, including web development, a 24-hour service desk, and key contract support personnel.

The remainder of TSOF is funded by specific program offices and units that pay for SME full-time equivalents to support their requirements. Currently, 32 PORs pay into the program.<sup>2</sup>

The foundation of the MCTSSA Support Center’s services is their self-help website, known as Tier 0, which provides a repository of technical resources for more than 70 C4I programs.

The purpose of this service is to provide Marines with tools to solve their own problems before reaching out to an external organization. The resources available include cut sheets, technical manuals, how-to videos, and interactive applications—many of which are developed by MCTSSA SMEs and validated by program offices for accuracy and relevance.

In a perfect world, the Tier 0 website would be the only service required for Marines to keep their C4I systems working. However, because of the constant evolution of tactical systems and imperfection of digital search tools, the center provides additional levels of service.

In FY19, MCTSSA established a Tier 1, 24/7 service desk aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, CA, which provides support for C4I systems



via phone, chat, web, and email. The driving factor behind this investment was to extend the quality of service that was previously available from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Pacific Standard Time to around-the-clock operations, serving Marines across the globe.

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MCTSSA SMEs focus not only on making tactical systems operate properly, but ensuring the Marines who own the gear can configure and operate the

resources and deploy as contact teams in support of Marine units—both in garrison and in the field. idly adjust to the technical needs of the FMF by cross-training SMEs. In FY19, 53 percent of onsite support requests revolved around the interoperability of two or more systems, highlighting the demand for such knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Inevitably, there are technical issues that Marines encounter that cannot be resolved by the Tier 1 service desk or Tier 2 SMEs. In these cases, requests are elevated out of the Support Center to various organizations around the Marine Corps and DOD, ranging from specific program offices to the Naval Information Warfare Center and commercial vendors. The Support Center continues to track the status of those requests through resolution. This ensures MCTSSA continues to build its knowledge database and Marines' issues are addressed.

**Scaling for the Enterprise**

Being part of a subordinate unit to MCSC, WSD and the TSOE program are natural places to start when creating an MCSC Warfighter Support Center.

While the MCTSSA Support Center's services are limited to select C4I programs, the concept of tiered support is scalable and could include all MCSC tactical programs, including those within the program executive offices.

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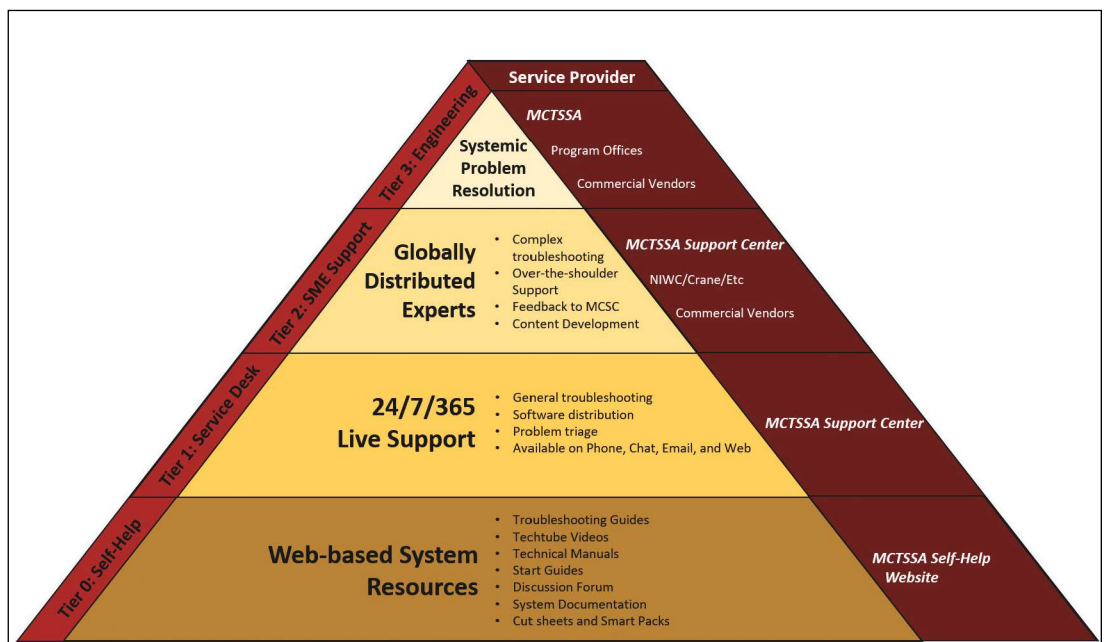
The service desk is designed to fulfill three functions. First, it triages support requests, identifying the impact and urgency of each request. Second, it leverages technical resources to help customers resolve common issues. Lastly, it connects customers with specific technical experts when necessary, either within the Support Center or other DOD organizations, to better address their issues.

After a year of operation, the 24/7 service desk proved to be a success, providing Marines a lifeline for C4I support available at any time and place. Within that year, 22.5 percent of requests received were fielded outside of normal business hours, and 30 percent of requests were resolved exclusively at the Tier 1 service desk level. As processes are refined, these metrics continue to rise.<sup>3</sup>

For support requests that exceed the expertise of Tier 1 service desk representatives, MCTSSA employs a diverse team of Tier 2 SMEs who are distributed around the globe. These SMEs are funded by specific program offices or units, and provide complex troubleshooting, develop content for knowledge

systems properly—a characteristic that sets these SMEs apart from field service representatives. MCTSSA SMEs not only address technical errors in systems but also knowledge gaps that may exist in the fleet.

MCTSSA SMEs are not selected solely on their extensive knowledge of a single system, but rather for their breadth of technical knowledge spanning multiple systems. This small, but important distinction means MCTSSA SMEs are experts in system interoperability as well as system operation. It also enables the support center to rap-



**WSD tiered support.** (Image provided by author.)

To accommodate such scaling, MCSC's table of organization and equipment must be adjusted, fiscal resources must be reallocated, guidance must be passed to program offices, and the FMF must be made aware.

The WSD mission has always been more focused on post-Milestone-C life-cycle actions, unlike the rest of MCTSSA which is more heavily involved in the engineering and manufacturing development phase of the acquisition lifecycle. With this in mind, removing the Support Center's structure from under MCTSSA and instead establishing it as a direct reporting command to MCSC would enable better communication with program offices and allow the organization to scale appropriately to support non-C4I programs.

The organization's table of organization and equipment should be augmented with line numbers for technical managers from all MCSC tactical portfolios, service desk management and quality assurance personnel, knowledge management and content development professionals, and liaison billets positioned across the FMF to keep the Support Center and greater MCSC aware of fleet issues with PORs.

The TSOF program should remain as the primary contract vehicle for the organization, providing subject matter and customer service experts via the TSS contract. By maintaining contractors as the primary service delivery personnel, the Warfighter Support Center will maintain the same agility the MCTSSA Support Center has developed.

Instead of providing baseline funding through the information program evaluation board, this funding should be provided directly from MCSC at a level that will facilitate the baseline functions of the Support Center for all tactical PORs, including Tier 0 content development and Tier 1 service desk support.

Funding for Tier 2 SMEs will be paid for by program offices, teams, or portfolios as those managers deem appropriate for their PORs. This will give program offices the ability to use other support organizations for SME functions if more appropriate.

FMF units should no longer be expected to pay into the contract for

specific POR SME capabilities because this role should be the responsibility of the fielding program office. MCSC or its subordinates should fund all tactical system support provided by the TSS contract.

Ensuring the Warfighter Support Center is used uniformly across the command will require top-down enforcement. As the purpose of the organization will be to both create a better experience for Marines within the operations and support phase and reduce costs associated with tactical system sustainment throughout the lifecycle, all tactical PORs should be directed to use the Support Center for Tier 0 and Tier 1 services. This can be done by directing the inclusion of the self-help and service desk structure in every POR's life cycle sustainment plans.

receives from the fleet, ultimately leading to more rapid and agile development of tactical PORs.

## Conclusion

As proven by the MCTSSA Support Center, a centralized support organization can be successful in improving the efficiency of the support structure within the operations and support phase as well as the quality of the products provided by MCSC to Marines.

Scaling the organization into the Warfighter Support Center concept will require actions at the command level and buy-in from individual program offices. However, this adjustment has the potential to create a more agile organization to support the rapid technological advancements of the information age.

MCSC should conduct a doctrine, organization, training, materiel, lead-

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Since MCSC will fund these functions, no additional costs should be charged to the program offices. Additionally, all PORs should consider using the Support Center for SME support whenever possible.

For the Warfighter Support Center to be successful, its existence must be socialized among fleet Marines. Marines' "can-do" attitude combined with complex support structures often lead Marines to "adapt and overcome" rather than use the tools designed to assist them. To ensure Marines are aware of the existence of this valuable resource, MCSC must ensure Support Center contact information is included on all tactical equipment and technical manuals, as well as in all system-related Training and Education Command periods of instruction that include MCSC PORs.

Better awareness of the Warfighter Support Center as a resource will not only increase the operational knowledge of Marines but also the feedback MCSC

ership and education, personnel and facilities assessment, and a cost-based analysis to determine the feasibility of establishing a centrally managed, single point-of-contact organization to support the MCSC brand.

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## Notes

1. MCTSSA, *Marine Corps Tactical System Support Center*, available at <https://www.mceits.usmc.mil>.
2. MCTSSA, *Solution Management and Reporting System*, available at <https://www.mceits.usmc.mil>.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

