Chapter 3. Airfield Operations at Forward Operating Bases

To provide timely aviation support, the ACE has the capability to operate from sea- or shore-based airfields. When conducting shore-based operations, the ACE should use existing facilities. If facilities are inadequate or nonexistent, construction forces of MWSS, engineer support battalion (ESBn) of the FSSG or NCF (Seabees) employ prefabricated material (expeditionary airfield matting) to complete FOBs.

FOBs increase responsiveness through basing flexibility and aircraft dispersal by decreasing distances to areas requiring support. The following methods of employing an FOB allow aircraft to operate ashore closer to the supported area:

1. Occupying HN airfields if available and tactically acceptable (used during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm).

2. Using abandoned or captured airfields that reduce construction and support equipment deployment requirements (employed during World War II and Operation Desert Storm).

3. Using roads, highways or parking lots if existing airfields are not available in sufficient quantity or are unsuitably located. (During Operation Desert Shield, the Al Ghar airfield’s parking lot was used as a landing area for rotary-wing aircraft to reduce crowding at Al Jubayl airfield).

4. Constructing an EAF (used during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm).

An EAF is a construction concept. A type of FOB, an EAF is constructed using prefabricated materials and engineer construction support. The construction of an EAF may meet the FOB employment concept as dictated by the mission to be accomplished. The versatile EAF concept and materials can be used to support other FOB concepts.
and expand an existing facility to meet MAGTF needs. Because of the extensive time, manpower, and equipment required to construct an EAF, it should be the last FOB employment method considered.

CLASSIFICATION

FOBs are classified in relation to their size, location, and characteristics in the form of airfield services, logistical supportability, and maintenance capability. Main air base, air facility, air site, and air point are the four FOB classifications from which the ACE will operate.

Main Air Base

A main air base is a secure airfield capable of supporting sustained operations ashore. The base handles aircraft up to and including C-5B and C-17. Task organization requirements determine support agencies and required facilities. At a minimum, the main air base includes an intermediate maintenance activity (IMA) support and full ground, logistic, and engineering functions required to support current and future needs.

Air Facility

An air facility is a secure airfield capable of supporting squadron-sized elements and associated organizational maintenance activities (OMAs). The facility sustains operations at a combat sortie rate and supports staging and replenishment of forward sites (e.g., FARPs). Normally, major maintenance functions are not performed at an air facility. An air facility stages aviation ordnance. Rough terrain-capable support equipment move and maintain aircraft and load ordnance. An air facility can be an airfield, road segment, matted runway (EAF) or clear, level ground.
Air Site

An air site is a secure location where aircraft preposition to reduce response time. The site is suitable for fully loaded and armed aircraft to land and await preplanned or immediate missions. Operations are normally limited to receiving and launching previously loaded aircraft. Fuel and ordnance can be staged at an air site, but the site does not receive routine logistic support and contains minimum personnel. Operational requirements determine air site capability. Upon completion of a mission, aircraft must return to either a main base or air facility for refueling, weapons loading, and maintenance.

Air Point

Air points are designed to support specific tactical missions at predetermined geographical locations. Air points are further broken down into FARPs or lager points.

Forward Arming and Refueling Point

FARPs are normally temporary, transitory facilities established for a specific mission and duration. Organized, equipped, and deployed by the ACE commander, a FARP is normally located closer to the tactical area of operation than the aviation unit’s AGS area. A FARP permits combat aircraft to rapidly and simultaneously refuel and rearm. The objective at the FARP is to minimize response time and decrease turnaround time in support of combat operations. To reduce flight time, the FARP is located as close to the objective area or the forward line of own troops (FLOT) as the tactical situation allows.

FARP personnel providing support to the ACE include—

- Fuelers.
- Ordnance personnel.
- Plane captains.
Site controllers.

Communicators.

Aviation maintenance is generally restricted to minor repairs and adjustments performed by aircraft plane captains and crew chiefs. Normal equipment directly supporting FARP operations may include—

- Tactical bulk fuel systems.
- Ordnance loaders.
- Communications.
- Lighting.
- ARFF.

**Lager Point**

Lager points are secure locations at which aircraft rendezvous, marshal or position between missions. These points are also used while awaiting completion or activation of an assigned mission. Lager points can be isolated and independent or adjacent to airfields, air facilities, air sites or FARPs. Communications should be the only support required.

**SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS**

FOB construction, maintenance, and repair support the effective employment of the ACE. Construction details include employment flexibility, responsiveness, and dispersal of aircraft assets to enhance survivability. The MAGTF uses a variety of engineer organizations to construct and maintain FOBs.
Engineer Operations Division, Marine Wing Support Squadron

The MWSS engineer operations division constructs and provides sustained support to FOBs, air points, and air sites. See chapter 2 for additional information regarding engineer services.

Engineer Support Battalion, Force Service Support Group

ESBn has a greater engineer capability than the MWSS. Specializing in expedient construction, the ESBn augments or reinforces the ACE’s efforts to construct FOBs. See MCWP 3-17 for more information.

Naval Construction Force

Under MAGTF operational control, the NCF reinforces and augments the MAGTF’s general engineering capabilities and provides civil engineering construction. The NCF constructs and maintains main air bases and air facilities, including RRR. NCF construction is preferred over ESBn construction of main air bases, air facilities, and EAFs. Tactical orientation, personnel, and equipment requirements make NCF support less feasible at air sites and air points. See MCWP 4-11.5, Seabee Operations in the MAGTF, for more information.