Chapter 5

Command and Control in Amphibious Operations

An amphibious operation is a military operation launched from the sea by Navy and landing forces embarked in ships and craft with the purpose of introducing the landing force ashore to accomplish an assigned mission. Amphibious operations may include assaults, raids, demonstrations, and withdrawals. Refer to Joint Publication 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations, for more information.

Assault support provides the landing force with the ability to rapidly focus and project decisive combat power ashore and provides the MAGTF the speed, mobility, and flexibility necessary to accomplish the mission.

Assault support transport helicopters used in the ship-to-shore movement are subordinate landing force elements. The ACE executes the ship-to-shore movement according to the landing plan. The plan includes arrangements for shifting control of aviation operations to the commander, landing force (CLF) when the situation ashore permits.

Navy Tactical Air Control System

During the ship-to-shore movement, the commander, amphibious task force (CATF) coordinates and controls air operations through the Navy tactical air control center (TACC). Within the Navy TACC, the helicopter coordination section (HCS) coordinates helicopter operations. See figure 5-1.

The HCS decentralizes control of the helicopter ship-to-shore movement to the helicopter direction center (HDC). The HDC is aboard ships capable of handling helicopter operations. The HDC coordinates all assault support helicopter operations through the TACC. The HDC maintains continuous radar surveillance of aircraft operating in its assigned control area.

The plan for ship-to-shore movement is very detailed and jointly developed. It requires precise coordination and timing. MCWP 3-31.5, Ship to Shore Movement, covers this information in greater detail.

As soon as practical, the CLF establishes air control facilities ashore. This extends the amphibious force’s aviation control capabilities, increases surveillance, and accelerates response. Initially, air control agencies ashore operate in a standby status and monitor all air control circuits. The CATF and CLF decide when to transfer control from agencies afloat to agencies ashore. The transfer may be sequential as functions of the
MACCS become operational. Control agencies afloat continue to monitor communications circuits and are capable of resuming control, if required.

**Marine Air Command and Control System**

The Navy TACC controls all aviation assets, while afloat, in support of CLF. Once control is passed from CATF to CLF, the Marine tactical air command center (TACC) and its other subordinate agencies manage MAGTF aviation assets. The Marine TACC is the senior MACCS agency and provides centralized command and direction of subordinate activities. See figure 5-2. The Navy TACC then becomes a TADC and assumes a monitoring status. Other aviation control agencies follow.

**Tactical Air Operations Center**

The tactical air operations center (TAOC) is under the operational control of the Marine TACC. The sector antiair warfare coordinator (SAAWC) commands the TAOC. The TAOC is the primary antiair warfare (AAW) agency of the MACCS. It detects, identifies, and controls the intercept of hostile aircraft and missiles and provides airspace management and operational assistance. The TAOC can perform limited TACC functions.

**Direct Air Support Center**

The direct air support center (DASC) is the air control agency of the MACCS primarily responsible for the direction and procedural control of air operations directly supporting the MAGTF’s ground combat element (GCE). It processes and coordinates requests for immediate air support and coordinates air missions requiring integration with ground forces and other supporting arms. The DASC is usually the first principal MACCS agency ashore. It functions in a decentralized mode of operation, but is directly supervised by the TACC.

The DASC is established by the Marine air support squadron (MASS) and processes immediate requests for air support, coordinates aircraft employment with other supporting arms, manages terminal control assets such as forward air controller (airborne) (FAC[A]) and assault support coordinator (airborne) (ASC[A]) supporting ground forces, and provides procedural control of assigned aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and itinerant aircraft transiting through its assigned area. The DASC can employ a DASC (airborne) (DASC[A]) aboard a KC-130 and provide extended line of sight communications with low flying aircraft. The DASC will normally be co-located...
or electronically linked with the senior fire support coordination agency ashore.

In a MEF operation with multiple maneuver elements (divisions) within the GCE, the DASC may be located with the MAGTF force fires coordination center (FFCC). This location will centralize the management of close air support (CAS) and assault support aircraft between the GCE maneuver element and meet the commander’s intent for maneuver and fire support.

The DASC will usually deploy air support elements (ASEs) to each major maneuver element FSCC, to provide it with the necessary links to the MACCS, in order to request and coordinate direct air support. ASE size and composition will vary and can be expanded or reduced as the current situation requires (consistent with the assets available). The DASC only has the capability to provide “procedural control” for aircraft operating in its area. In amphibious operations, the DASC will normally land in the same scheduled or on-call wave as the senior fire support coordination agency phased ashore.

Several employment options are available for the DASC, including an airborne configuration in a KC-130. MASS assets are tailored to provide support based on the mission. A MEF could require a task organization that uses the assets of more than one MASS. At the MEU level, a MASS detachment is task-organized as an ASE, and its capability is reduced due to its size. The size and capability of the MEF DASC depend on the number of units that request air support and the number of aircraft that execute air support missions.

The DASC operates through several air control organizations. These organizations follow.

**Tactical Air Control Party.** A tactical air control party (TACP) is a subordinate operational component of a tactical air control system designed to provide air liaison to land forces and for the control of aircraft (Joint Pub 1-02). It is located within the GCE and provides ground commanders with the means to access direct air support. In the Marine Corps, tactical air control parties are organic to infantry divisions, regiments, battalions, and other combat arms units. TACPs establish and maintain facilities for liaison and communications between parent units and airspace control agencies, inform and advise the ground unit commander on the employment of supporting aircraft, and request and control air support. The TACP is a MACCS agency, but administratively it is not part of the MACG.

**Tactical Air Coordinator (Airborne).** A tactical air coordinator is an officer who coordinates, from an aircraft, the action of combat aircraft engaged in close support of ground or sea forces (Joint Pub 1-02). Within the MACCS, the tactical air coordinator (airborne) (TAC[A]) is a naval aviator or naval flight officer and the senior air coordinator having air authority over aircraft operating in the assigned area. The primary mission of the TAC(A) is to act as an airborne extension of the DASC, TACC, or FSCC, and to contribute to coordination among the tactical air control parties, airborne forward air controllers, and the fire direction of artillery and naval gunfire.

**Forward Air Controller (Airborne).** A forward air controller is a specifically trained and qualified aviation officer who exercises control from the air of aircraft engaged in close air support of ground troops. The forward air controller (airborne) is normally an airborne extension of the tactical air control party (Joint Pub 1-02). Within the Marine Corps, the FAC(A) is a naval aviator or flight officer who is specifically trained, qualified, and designated to perform air reconnaissance and surveillance, conduct terminal control of aircraft engaged in OAS operations, control artillery and naval surface fire support missions, act as a
radio relay, and control landing zone preparations.

**Assault Support Coordinator (Airborne).** An assault support coordinator (airborne) is an aviator who coordinates, from an aircraft, the movement of aviation assets during assault support operations (MCRP 5-12C). The ASC(A) is an experienced aviator with extensive knowledge of the MACCS who acts as an airborne extension of the DASC. The ASC(A) assists in providing situational awareness to the assault force, relays requests to the DASC, exercises launch authority for immediate and on-call missions, coordinates with the TAC(A), and provides routing recommendations to the air mission commander.

**Helicopter Support Team.** A helicopter support team is a task organization formed and equipped for employment in a landing zone to facilitate the landing and movement of helicopterborne troops, equipment and supplies, and to evacuate selected casualties and enemy prisoners of war (Joint Pub 1-02). Within the Marine Corps, helicopter support teams (HSTs) are accessed from the force service support group (FSSG), specifically, the landing support company of the support battalion.