
Aviation Operations



U.S. Marine Corps

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Unless otherwise stated, whenever the masculine or feminine gender is used, both men and women are included.

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
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Washington, D.C. 20380-1775

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FOREWORD

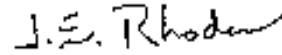
Aviation is an integral part of the naval expeditionary air-ground team—it extends the MAGTF's operational reach and flexibility and expands its warfighting power. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-2, *Aviation Operations*, applies the warfighting philosophy in Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting*, to Marine aviation operations. It is the link between higher order doctrine and the tactics, techniques, and procedures contained in other Marine aviation doctrinal publications. This publication establishes the doctrinal basis for the planning and execution of aviation operations and provides the philosophy for employment of Marine aviation in the prosecution of war and other operations in support of the Marine Corps' mission as the nation's expeditionary force in readiness.

This publication is intended primarily for commanders and staff officers who are responsible for the planning and execution of aviation operations. Nonetheless, it should be read by all Marines who are supported by or involved in the execution of aviation operations. It is also intended for other doctrine centers, joint and multinational staffs, professional military educational activities, and any other activity that requires an understanding of Marine aviation. It explains U.S. Marine Corps aviation capabilities and how the Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) exploits these capabilities, both operationally and tactically. It does not discuss the specifics of unit-level tactics and procedures; e.g., air-to-air combat tactics, how to conduct a helicopterborne operation, or how to attack any particular target. Rather, this publication applies maneuver warfare concepts to Marine aviation operations, especially in aviation's role as an integrated combat arm of the MAGTF.

As with all Marine Corps doctrinal publications, this publication is authoritative in nature but requires judgment in application. It supersedes Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 5-1, *Organization and Function of Marine Aviation*.

Reviewed and approved this date.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. E. Rhodes". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

J. E. RHODES
Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commanding General
Marine Corps Combat Development Command

DISTRIBUTION: 143 000019 00

Aviation Operations

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Chapter 1

The Role of Marine Aviation

*“Today [aviation] is the dominant factor in war. It may not win a war by itself alone, but without it no major war can be won.”*¹

—Adm Arthur Radford

Marine forces are general purpose forces and traditionally come “from the sea” with limited organic fire support and mobility assets. As such, Marine forces rely heavily on the fires, fire support, and mobility provided by Marine aviation. Marine aviation is an integral part of the Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF). It provides the MAGTF with a complete spectrum of operational capabilities and is a flexible instrument of the MAGTF’s combat power. The aviation combat element (ACE) is a powerful and versatile part of the MAGTF’s combined-arms team, complementing the MAGTF’s ground combat element (GCE) and combat service support element (CSSE), while functioning in consonance with the Marine Corps’ doctrinal philosophy of maneuver warfare.

Marine aviation provides the MAGTF with the operational flexibility it needs to accomplish its mission across the range of military operations. It extends the operational reach of the MAGTF and enables it to accomplish operational objectives designed to achieve strategic goals. The MAGTF uses the strategic and operational mobility afforded by the sea to employ its integrated air arm and to exert a powerful influence in most geographic areas of potential national concern. Since most ground- and ship-based fires have a limited range and ground-based mobility systems are limited by speed, range, and the terrain, the MAGTF’s ACE allows the MAGTF commander to conduct the deep fight. The ACE affords the MAGTF the ability to deliver fires, facilitate integrated command and control, enhance mobility and maneuver, provide force protection, sustain combat power, and collect intelligence.

Marine aviation’s expeditionary character sets it apart from all other aviation organizations. The ACE’s role is to project combat power, conduct air operations, and contribute to battlespace dominance in support of the MAGTF’s mission, and it organizes, trains, and equips for that role. Marine aviation can operate from amphibious platforms, forward operating bases (FOBs), forward expeditionary land bases, carriers (as an integral part of carrier air groups), or any combination thereof.

The MAGTF’s single-battle concept exploits the combined-arms nature of MAGTF operations. It allows the MAGTF commander to fight a single battle with an integrated, task-organized force of ground, aviation, and logistic forces. Based on this concept, operations performed by Marine aviation are rarely undertaken in isolation since its greatest value is in its integrated contribution to the MAGTF’s overall mission. It is designed to function most effectively as an integral part of the MAGTF and cannot be separated without a significant loss of capability. Marine aviation provides enhanced mobility and close fires for units in contact and augments ground and naval indirect fires. Marine aviation also gives a Marine expeditionary force (MEF), which would otherwise be a light infantry force, the operational reach of a corps-level force.

Marine aviation performs a variety of roles and tasks in support of national objectives. This can include fulfilling missions outside Marine aviation’s traditional MAGTF, naval expeditionary force, and joint force roles. Examples of Marine aviation being used in nontraditional roles include providing direct support to the President; providing aviation detachments for independent duty such as the Marines attached to the joint force air