
Operational Support Airlift



U.S. Marine Corps

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FOREWORD

Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-27, *Operational Support Airlift*, provides a framework for the understanding and effective employment of operational support assets during peacetime, crisis or war. This publication covers all aspects of operational support airlift (OSA), with emphasis on support for Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) operations.

OSA doctrine is based on a common understanding of Marine Corps warfighting philosophy as defined in our doctrinal publications and concepts. This doctrine applies across the full range of military operations—from humanitarian assistance to general war. It is meant for Marines at all levels of command in the operating forces and the supporting establishment as a guide to using OSA as an enhancement to their mission. This publication defines OSA, highlights capabilities and limitations of OSA, and discusses OSA employment and scheduling.

Reviewed and approved this date.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE
CORPS

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Chapter 1

Historical Perspective

The Beginning

The earliest use of Marine aircraft logistics support is traceable to the 1920s “Banana Wars.” In 1927, Atlantic Fokker tri-motors were used to transport troops and supplies by air in support of ground forces during the Nicaraguan campaign. The tri-motors could make the trip from Managua to Ocotol in 1 hour 40 minutes. The same trip by ox cart or mule train took 10 days to 3 weeks, depending upon the condition of the trails. By the 1930s Marine aircraft were used on a regular basis to move high priority cargo and personnel.

World War II

During World War II, as operations in the Pacific theater were expanding, the importance of rapid transport became even more apparent. Intratheater air movement of personnel, equipment, and cargo became commonplace. Marine air transports were used extensively to fly personnel and critical materials from the United States (US) to Fleet Marine Force units throughout the Pacific.