

Joint Terminal Attack Controller, A Primary MOS For The Future.

EWS Contemporary Issue Paper

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to

Major P.M. Bragg, CG 4

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## Scenario

"Wild Eagle Base (FSCC), this is Wild Eagle 25... troops in contact, Coordinated attack with small arms and grenades... request immediate CAS over."

Watch officer: "Attention in the TOC, Charlies's observation post (OP) is engaged with small arms fire from multiple positions. Two of Spartans Op's are under attack. We have a coordinated attack at OP Hotel..."

S-3: "FSC (ANGLICO) what aircraft are up? Where are your controllers?"

FSC: "Sir, your joint fires observer (JFO) is co-located with Charlie, He is talking to Attack 13, a section of AH-64's. Wild Eagle 25 is with Spartan, He is talking to a section of F/A 18's. Brigade just sent us Spud 11, a section of F-16's with ten minutes on station... We have UAV's stacked from 2-5K..."

"Wild Eagle Base, this is Profane 61... 25 is requesting LMAV on building 13 in sector P-10, wants you to clear maneuver..."

FSC: "Sir we can get the GMLRS on building 13. We will keep a UAV on the building... will get Profane to the Hotel to track the insurgents..."

FSC: "airspace clear, GMLRS shot, time of flight two minutes twenty seconds..."

"Wild Eagle Base, Profane has five individuals heading north..."

"Wild Eagle Base, Spud checking off BINGO at this time."

## Introduction

Over the past couple of years, the joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) has become a pivotal military occupational specialty (MOS). From distributed operations (DO) in Afghanistan to Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO) supporting Iraqi Army, U.S. Army, Naval Special Warfare, and Marine Reconnaissance units, JTAC's synchronize, apply, and link the aviation combat element (ACE) and the ground combat element (GCE). Combined arms, all fire support assets to include aviation delivered ordnance in perfect balance with maneuver, is an essential part of maneuver warfare. JTAC's, particularly with ANGLICO, have become the face of combined arms in both planning, integration of joint assets, and execution providing other services the expertise that only the Marine air ground task force (MAGTF) can provide. However, JTAC billets have been difficult to fill, and a new approach is needed. Because of increasing demand with the MOS, lengthy initial training, and rapid turnover, the JTAC MOS must become a primary MOS to sustain requirements in the operating forces.

## Demand

Marine Corps Order P3500, *Aviation Training and Readiness (T&R) Manual*, *Tactical Air Control Party (TACP)* highlights the importance of the JTAC:

The JTAC program (MOS 8002) was developed to increase Marine Corps capability to provide terminal attack control to more units by using JTACs in the form of seasoned ground officers and SNCOs. JTACs are an addition to, not a replacement for, FACs or AOs... JTACs will focus on the skill-sets required for terminal attack control.<sup>1</sup>

As the Marine Corps continues to grow the force, the ever increasing demand of capable JTACs to fill billets grows as well. With the addition of two ANGLICO brigade platoons for FY08, the requirement for JTACs increased to twenty-six.<sup>2</sup> The expansion of Marine Reconnaissance, Marine Special Operation Companies, and Ninth Marines will increase numbers and continue to widen the gap.

### Training

The T&R has been revised to ensure a streamlined approach to training and evaluations for the JTAC.<sup>3</sup> This new standardized approach ensures all Marines attending TACP receive the same training regardless of their level of experience with

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<sup>1</sup> Marine Corps Order P3500, *Aviation Training and Readiness Manual, Tactical Air Control Party (TACP)*, 01 Oct 07: p 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Gunnery Sergeant Daniel E. Jackson Jr. USMC. Personal interview, Plans, Policies and Operations JTAC MOS specialist, Washington, DC 18 December 2007. Currently the total JTACs for a platoon consist of two supporting arms liaison team leaders, two supporting arms liaison team chiefs, three air officers, and four fire power control team leaders. The number used for this example is a current revision and includes the platoon commander and platoon sergeant as JTACs. This number would increase by five with the addition of a third supporting arms liaison team.

<sup>3</sup> Major Michael Grice, "Marine Corps Joint Terminal Attack Controllers: a view from the back of the bus," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2006.

fire support or aviation. They follow a reasonable and manageable training continuum during initial training. Nevertheless the entire process to receive full qualification is quite lengthy through follow-on training once the individual graduates from TACP.

A fully qualified JTAC is "A Marine with the 7502 or 8002 MOS who is JTAC certified and has successfully completed the core skill introduction phase of the USMC T&R."<sup>4</sup> The core skill introduction phase is nothing more than JTAC primer, which is now a distance learning program and a prerequisite for all TACP attendees. The core skill phase concludes with graduation from TACP.

Continuing with the building block approach, ground combat arms Marine complete the core skill advanced and are labeled as Marine terminal attack controllers (MTAC), which the T&R defines as "a qualified JTAC who has successfully completed the TACP T&R core skill basic and advanced phases of training and is capable of integrating all six functions of Marine aviation into the ground scheme of maneuver during major exercises and operations."<sup>5</sup> At the completion of the advanced phase, pilots/naval flight officers (NFO) receive their designation as

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<sup>4</sup> TACP T&R, 1-7.

<sup>5</sup> TACP T&R, 1-7.

a forward air controller (FAC) or an air officer (AO) depending on which training pipeline was taken.

Further, to maximize training while utilizing available resources, the T&R has allowed simulation training. One week has been added to TACP to conduct simulation close air support (SIMCAS). Simulator training reinforces key concepts within the six functions of Marine aviation and fire support methodology which ultimately is utilized in all phases of the TACP training continuum. With the limited number of sorties available for JTAC/MTAC/FAC during re-certification, simulation training gives the commander the flexibility to develop unit training to support re-certifications. Although, it should be evident that SIMCAS should be avoided to the greatest extent possible. While streamlined, the entire training period encompasses numerous weeks, an investment from which the Marine Corps expects a return.

#### Turnover

The rapid turnover of certified, experienced, and combat proven controllers due to career progression and to fulfill non JTAC billets add to the increasing demand. Currently the number of ground combat arms Marine JTACs stands around one hundred,

with only half fulfilling JTAC billets.<sup>6</sup> The one-year (on average) billets, which pilots/NFOs fill during their non-flying tours as a FAC or AO contribute to the increasing demand as well. This revolving door of experienced personnel lead to the demand of the JTAC in the operating forces.

To reduce the demand for JTACs the Expeditionary Warfare Training Groups (EWTG) needs to institute a qualified observer course.<sup>7</sup> Standardizing the training for combat arms Marines will not only assist the Marine Corps as a whole, but lessen the impact of unit level training when time and resources are minimal. These qualified observers aid the JTAC in performing terminal control of aircraft and will facilitate combined arms training down to the lower levels.

#### Primary JTAC MOS

Historically distributed operations and the idea of a qualified observer or JFO can be traced back to the Vietnam Conflict. These small patrols, teams dubbed "Stingray," could consist of five to eighteen members, depending on the mission. In the article *Dispersed Operations, Strike Teams, and Future*

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel E. Jackson Jr.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel E. Jackson Jr. A current COA from EWTGPAC is to stand up a JFO program which will teach 100 students a year. This will allow trained Marines to facilitate type II and III CAS with a JTAC while also including terminal guidance operations. This COA would be a standardized POI taught by certified instructors in an accredited schoolhouse.

War, Major G.R. Martin states, "Many Stingray patrols were inserted by helicopter, then moved by foot to an OP, and stayed put for days at a time. In the dense vegetation of Vietnam, the teams called in artillery, naval gunfire, and air support, usually without ever being detected."<sup>8</sup> These small patrols were led by non-commissioned officers who utilized all fire support assets available in the conduct of their operations. In 1996 the Marine Corps conducted an eighteen-month experiment called Hunter Warrior during which infantry squads conducted distributed operations. One lesson learned was the need for a qualified observer. "This would be a single individual, who is trained in controlling all available supporting arms."<sup>9</sup>

Currently only officers and staff non-commissioned officers can receive the secondary MOS designation of an 8002. To reduce the deficit of JTACs and set the path for the future, the table of organization (TO) and MOS manual should reflect the JTAC MOS as a primary MOS, within the 0861 community ranks of sergeant through master gunnery sergeant.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Major G.R. Martin, "Dispersed Operations, Strike Teams, and Future War," *Marine Corps Command and Staff College research paper 2003*.

<sup>9</sup> G.R. Martin, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel E. Jackson Jr. Structure loss versus gain is a consideration within the operating forces. Example: an infantry battalion would lose it's three 0341 mortar FO's but gain three 0861 certified JTACs.

Inherent in this recommendation is the need for an assignment policy which requires a three-year mandatory assignment as a JTAC in the operating forces to limit the monitor's ability to pull experienced, certified JTACs to fulfill non-JTAC billets. The current USMC total requirement for JTACs/FAC/AO stands at 485. As the USMC continues to grow the requirements will climb to 530. With the current assignment policies and the total number of JTACs the EWTG can produce at the school house, it will take over five years to accomplish the goal.<sup>11</sup>

EWTG must increase the rate at which they train and certify JTACs allowing potential JTAC candidates, particularly ANGLICO and Marine Special Operation Company (MSOC), to attend joint schools such as Special Operations Tactical Air Controllers Course (SOTACC), or other accredited sister service schools would help in this regard.<sup>12</sup> Fire support experts would be allowed to prepare for advance unit level training in

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel E. Jackson Jr. Structure loss versus gain is a consideration within the operating forces. Example: an infantry battalion would lose its three 0341 mortar FO's but gain three 0861 certified JTACs.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel E. Jackson Jr. Based on a current JTAC production and school seat ratio of ground combat officers and aviation officers from both schools. New COA which has school seat ratio change combined with a TO change in the operating forces will reduce the time to about three years.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel E. Jackson Jr. A current COA will reduce seats from the aviation community replacing seats for ground combat Marines in the resident schools for initial training. T/O changes within the operating forces will justify this need.

preparation for deployment within their unit's capabilities. This would free up a small number of school seats within the EWTG for other ground combat arms Marines to receive initial training.

### Counterarguments

Opponents believe pilots/NFOs filling a JTAC billet for a short duration before returning to their primary duty is acceptable. With the initial training, advanced training, and ultimately a minimum of three years of experience in the billet, a 0861 sergeant or staff non-commissioned officer would provide continuity within the unit and provide the combat experience for this skill intensive MOS.

Opponents express concern about ground combat arms Marines providing terminal control of aircraft. Prior to attending initial training at EWTG the average 0861 JTAC candidate is well versed at conducting detailed integration of combined arms. Ground combat experience with the infantry and his fire support skills make him uniquely qualified to become the resident expert in the application of combined arms.

Opponents argue pilots have existed within infantry units since the beginning of Marine aviation.<sup>13</sup> "By the end of World

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<sup>13</sup> Captain J. T. Martin USMC, "Being True to the MAGTF; Keep Aviators in the Infantry", *Marine Corps Expeditionary Warfare School research paper* 2003.

War II, the accepted method for coupling aviation with the GCEs was through the FAC. CAS effectiveness improved dramatically when the men at both ends of the radios were aviators."<sup>14</sup> Ground combat arms Marines controlling aircraft and naval gunfire can trace their roots back to World War II and the Assault Signal Companies (ASCO). In 1947 ASCO was disbanded and in 1949, the Marine Corps formed ANGLICO. From Korea to Iraq, ground combat arms Marines continue to provide terminal control and detailed integration necessary to execute combined arms.<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

The demand for capable JTACs to fill billets in the operating forces will continue as the Marine Corps grows the force. There is a never ending rotation of personnel and strain on the Marine Corps resident schools to train and certify personnel for this skill intensive MOS. A three-year assignment in the operating forces after certification would maximize capabilities and cohesion while ensuring combat experience is retained. The JTAC MOS must become a primary MOS to sustain requirements in the operating forces. When applying combined

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<sup>14</sup> Major Edmund F. Flores, "Marine Forward Air Controllers The Vital Link", *Marine Corps Command and Staff College research paper* 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Major Brian K. McCrary, "ANGLICO: Birth, Life, Death and Resurrection," *Marine Corps Command and Staff College research paper* 2001.

arms an experienced JTAC particularly from the 0861 community is the company commander's most important asset.

1997 words

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