Aviation Logistics Officers:
Combining Supply and Maintenance Responsibilities

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5 January, 2009

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED
05 JAN 2009		**00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Aviation Logistics Officers: Combining Supply and Maintenance Responsibilities	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University,2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Quantico,VA,22134-5068**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**12**	

Aviation maintenance officers (MOS 6002) and aviation supply officers (MOS 6602) must work closely together to provide aircraft readiness to Marine Corps aviation. These two fields are so interrelated that for either to truly be proficient, each must understand the roles and responsibilities of both specialties, starting from the beginning of an aviation logistics officer's career. In the aviation logistics community combining the fields of aviation maintenance and supply in order would allow for common training, create flexibility in officer assignments, and broaden the experience base for aviation logistics officers.

Aircraft Readiness: A Common Goal

Aviation maintenance and supply work toward a common goal of producing aircraft readiness. Maintenance officers produce readiness at both the operating level (o-level) and the intermediate level (i-level) by overseeing the processes dictated by the COMNAVAIRFORINST 4790.2A Naval Aviation Maintenance Program (NAMP). The NAMP provides the maintenance officers with the guidelines to oversee maintenance production. The purpose of the NAMP is to achieve and continually improve aviation material readiness and safety standards established by the CNO, with coordination from the CMC, with the optimum use of

manpower, material, facilities and funds[1]. Material readiness standards include repair of aeronautical equipment, protection of material from corrosion, and application of a systematic planned maintenance program. Aviation supply officers follow the regulations put forth in the Navy Supply Manual (NAVSUP) P-485 and Marine Corps Order (MCO) 4400.177E, Aviation Supply Desktop Procedures (ASDTP), to provide the required materials to the maintenance departments. While aviation supply provides repair parts and other equipment to both maintenance levels, the IMA uses supply issued parts to repair components and release them back to the supply department for issue to the operating squadrons. This relationship requires close coordination and an understanding of each process in order to optimize aircraft readiness.

Since the 1970's the Navy has a provided training to enhance teamwork between maintenance and supply officers to maximize readiness. This course is called Joint Aviation Supply and Maintenance Material Management (JASMMM) course. The purpose of this course is to develop technical supervisory and management skills in aviation support procedures and create a mutual awareness between maintenance and supply personnel for optimum weapon system support[2]. Training provided to enhance

[1] (Navy, COMNAVAIRFORINST 4790.2A 2008)
[2] (Navy Supply Corps School 2009)

knowledge of both maintenance and supply is seen as a requirement to make better supervisors and managers of assets and equipment. Training of maintenance and supply processes should happen together at the beginning of the aviation logistics officer's career, not after maintenance and supply officers have worked in fleet only understanding part of the process.

Opportunity for Common Training

During an eight week course in Pensacola, Florida, aviation maintenance officers are trained in NAMP procedures, aircraft weight and balance, and operational level (O-level) computer software called Naval Aviation Logistics Command Operating Maintenance Information System (NALCOMIS). The training is generic for all aviation and not specific to types of aircraft. This course briefly touches on supply procedures and IMA functions but does not go into detail about those areas that have a significant impact on the performance of the O-level and I-level maintenance activities. This training does not do enough to cover the complete aviation logistics process.

Aviation supply officers are trained at Navy Supply Corps School (NSCS) Athens, Georgia. During this three month course officers are trained on basic supply procedures, supply regulations, and the computer systems that help perform those

duties[3]. The computer systems include NALCOMIS and the Relational Supply Database (R-Supply). Basic instruction covers supply requisitioning, warehouse management, and supply accounting and inventory procedures. The school provides limited discussion concerning maintenance and supply interaction but it fails to cover the true interdependencies of these activities.

Both of these courses have a common goal: to produce officers who can manage material and maintenance procedures that produce maximum readiness. However, these separate courses only provide part of the picture to an entry level officer. A combined course would allow aviation logistics officers to understand how their role impacts readiness and the performance of the logistics system.

Greater Proficiency and Broader Experience

The experiences of a maintenance officer and a supply officer are very different. Maintenance officers can work at the O-level within a flying squadron to manage maintenance of aircraft or at the IMA within a Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron (MALS) to manage the intermediate maintenance of a specific type of equipment. Work at the O-level provides knowledge and experience about the airframe, maintenance

[3] (Navy Supply Corps School 2008)

practices, and challenges faced in trying to meet the daily flight schedule. Experience at the IMA comes from repairing components for reissue to the O-level, and the process of working with supply to manage the requisition of parts and the reissue of those repaired components. Both experiences require working with the supply system, either as a consumer of material or, in the case of the IMA, as a provider of components to be issued.

Supply officers, on the other hand, rarely leave the confines of the MALS, despite providing support to both the IMA and the O-level maintenance activities. Supply deals directly with both levels of maintenance. It acts as a provider of goods to both levels and as a distributor of goods repaired by the IMA. These interactions require knowledge of maintenance practices and requirements. Unfortunately, supply officers sometimes have very limited knowledge about the airframe they are being asked to support, or the maintenance practices being used to support it. This knowledge could enhance the supply officer’s ability to predict requirements and meet the demand of the airframe.

However, an officer who serves in a flying squadron supporting day-to-day operations gains experience in the maintenance requirements and practices for a specific airframe, which can translate into a better understanding of how to

support that airframe from an IMA and the supply warehouse. Enhanced airframe knowledge enables an aviation logistics officer to better support aviation readiness.

Aviation Logistician Career Progression

Maintenance officers currently serve in O-level squadrons as the Maintenance Material Control Officer (MMCO) or the Assistant Aviation Maintenance Officer (AAMO). At the MALS maintenance officers serve as division heads for airframe repair, engine repair, etc. or the AAMO. They can also serve as the operations officer (OPSO), executive officer (XO), or the commanding officer (CO). However, unrestricted maintenance officers are never the department head for a maintenance activity at the O-level or at the I-level. The O-level maintenance department head is a pilot, and the I-level department head is a limited duty officer, meaning a maintenance officer is never able to be a maintenance department head during his career.

Supply officers in a MALS can serve as the officer in charge (OIC) of the various supply divisions within the supply department. They can also serve as the assistant aviation supply officer (AASO), the supply department head known as the aviation supply officer (ASO), OPSO, XO, or CO. The main difference between a supply and maintenance officers career path

is that the supply officer has the opportunity to lead a department within the MALS. Combining maintenance and supply specialties into one logistics specialty provides assignment flexibility within the MALS and flying squadrons.

Creating the opportunity for a logistics officer to serve in a flying squadron will provide experience with daily activities and challenges associated with meeting a demanding flight schedule. In addition, the training that they received in supply processes will enhance the officers' performance while assigned at the flying squadron. This experience would carry over when the officers are assigned a position in the MALS. The experience gained at a flying squadron would also help the aviation logistics officers understand what type of support is needed to help the flying squadrons make their mission.

Also the flexibility gained from combining the aviation supply and maintenance specialties would reduce the number permanent change of station (PCS) orders by increasing the opportunities for permanent change of assignment (PCA) orders. The monitor would have the capability to transfer aviation logistics officers between co-located flying squadrons and logistics squadrons of the same type model series (TMS) aircraft. This allows the aviation logistics officers to expand their expertise with a specific TMS over a longer period of time. PCA orders also have the added benefit of saving the

Marine Corps money by eliminating the expenses associated with relocating an officer.[4]

The aviation logistics officers will gain broader experience through their varied assignments and they will provide the Marine Corps with more flexibility for duty assignments.

Counterarguments

Do we lose specialization?

It can be argued that by combining these two fields, the officers lose specialization in complex jobs, or that officers will become “jacks of all trades but masters of none”. Combining the specialties would not take away any of the training that aviation logistics requires; it would actually increase understanding of the logistics system. Understanding the interdependencies of the aviation logistics system is crucial to the Navy and DOD initiatives for continuous process improvement (CPI). CPI requires an understanding of not only one’s own processes and systems but also those processes and systems of others that relate to them.

Integration of training and a common experience base for aviation logistics officers would allow them to view the entire logistics system and understand their impact on it. An officer

[4] (Department of Defense 2009, U5B2-1)

trained in the processes of both supply and maintenance would produce amore experienced, more effective officer than one who is trained in only one area.

Is That Enough?

Combining aviation maintenance and supply could be part of change that is happening within the Marine Corps logistics community as a whole. In a July 2008 Marine Corps Gazette article, “Aviation and Ground Logistics” by Capt Shawn Miller, the author addresses the need to integrate ground logistics systems and personnel with aviation systems and personnel. He states that this should be the first step taken to truly integrate Marine aviation and ground logistics; however, as long as the aviation and ground computer systems are different, integrating the personnel of those systems would be difficult.

Aviation supply and maintenance, on the other hand, can be integrated now to provide better prepared officers who can leverage training and a broader experience base to provide improved aircraft readiness.

Conclusion

The creation of aviation logistics officers from aviation supply and maintenance officers produces opportunities for Marine Corps aviation. Consolidated training creates a common

knowledge base for logistics support of aviation. A combined specialty provides the opportunity for more broadly experienced officers from working at O-level maintenance to being a division head at MALS Supply, experience which is invaluable for those officers tasked with creating readiness for the flying squadrons. Combining these two related fields also provides flexibility for assignments of aviation logistics officers within a Marine Aircraft Group (MAG). By taking two interrelated specialties and combining their training, tasks, and assignments, the Marine Corps can create better prepared officers to create the aviation readiness the Marine Corps requires.

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