

**Remodeling the Marine Air Traffic Control Officer Training
Progression**

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to

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The current Marine Air Traffic Control Officer (MATCO) training progression does not adequately prepare its officers to fill many Air Traffic Control (ATC) billets. Non-standardization and diversity in training creates officers of unequal skill and comprehension levels. Remodeling the ATC MOS¹ training progression will improve the safety of flight at Marine Corps air stations and deployed forward operating bases (FOBs) while tremendously enhancing ATC interface within the Marine Air Command and Control System (MACCS).

Marine ATC Officer responsibilities

The Training and Readiness (T&R) Manual for Marine ATC (MATC) paraphrases the distinctive responsibilities of MATC officers:

MATC training is unique amongst other MACCS MOS training because of the requirement to function in tactical and civilian ATC environments simultaneously, whether assigned to a MATCD [Marine Air Traffic Control Detachment] or MCAS [Marine Corps Air Station]. The MATCO provides Marine aviation the requisite interface required to conduct wartime operations and peacetime training exercises,

¹ (MOS) Military Occupational Specialty

integrating seamlessly into the U.S. National Airspace System (NAS) or a sovereign nation's airspace.²

ATC Officers (7220 MOS³) are responsible for the safe and efficient flow of air traffic at a CONUS⁴ air station or deployed FOB; they must also have a thorough understanding of airfield operations and airspace management. The required technical skills of the officer within the deployable detachment of the Marine Air Control Squadron (MACS) are unique from those of the station ATC facility officer. This leader must understand the employment of several radar systems attached to the detachment and liaison with members of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Additionally, the ATC officer will interface with the Theater Air-Ground System⁵ and the MACCS (requiring comprehension of combat airspace management and data link connectivity), while establishing ATC services at remote, degraded, or new air bases.

The ATCFO (responsible for ATC services at CONUS air stations) must understand Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Airspace (NAS) rules and regulations while interfacing with civil and private airfields and aircraft. The

² United States Marine Corps. NAVMC Directive 3500.98: Aviation Training and Readiness (T&R) Directive, Marine Air Traffic Control (Short Title: T&R Directive, MATC). Quantico, VA: TECOM, 3 Apr. 2006.

³ 7220- Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) designator for the Marine Air Traffic Control Officer (MATCO)

⁴ CONUS- Continental United States

⁵ The Theater Air-Ground System is the synchronization of the different services' aviation command and control systems.

amount of information to assimilate for junior officers is tremendous. LtCol Phillip Kenoyer, the Marine Corps' ATC Occupational Field Sponsor, states, "...the 7220 MOS is extraordinarily difficult. The 7220 must concentrate on two jobs, both tactical and civilian [ATC]. There is twice as much to learn and the officer must soon transition to the additional responsibilities of the 7202 MOS [upon promotion to major]." ⁶

Current ATC Officer training progression

Training begins in Pensacola, Florida, where officers complete a 16-week course on air traffic control and the fundamentals of the MACCS (figure 1⁷ depicts the current training progression). Upon graduation, they are transferred to a MACS and temporarily assigned⁸ to an air station ATC facility to earn two junior qualifications controlling aircraft (Radar Final Control [RFC] and Tower Ground Control [TGC]).

⁶ Kenoyer, Phillip. Personal interview. 21 Nov 2007.

⁷ United States Marine Corps. NAVMC Directive 3500.98: T&R Directive, MATC.

⁸ This temporary assignment is through the Fleet Assistance Program

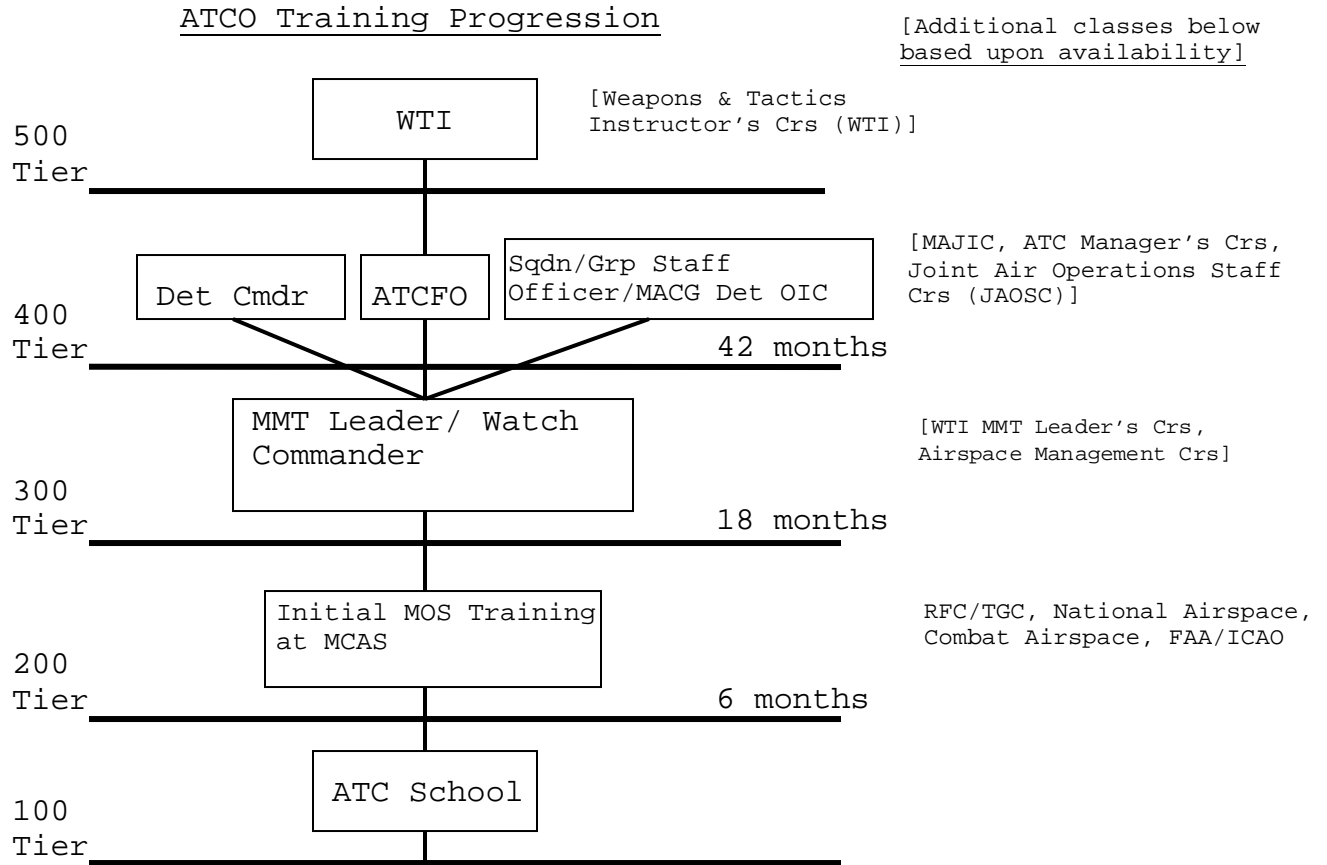


Figure 1

Once the officers complete the 200-tier training and receive the RFC and TGC qualifications, they return to the MACS; it is here where the training and opportunities for the ATCO officer begin to diverge. The ATC T&R Manual states, "The MATCO progression model...provides a clear, logical progression of qualifications within a unit. The emphasis of this model is on personnel qualifications in Core Skill Basic and Core Skill

Advanced stages; with this model, training officers have the guidance needed to produce viable training plans.⁹

Yet due to the availability of school seats, funding, deployment tempo, and/or collateral duty assignments, the professional development of these officers can differ substantially. Captain Dionisio Cooper, who is responsible for Marine enlisted and officer training at the U.S. Navy's primary ATC school, concurs: "It has been difficult over the past few years to have continuity in the training of 7220 Officers in order to meet T&R standards due to operational tempo, training needs of facilities, and available school seats for career progression schools between deployments."¹⁰ The career progression is unequal- many ATC officers do not have the opportunity to attend courses above the 200-tier level, leaving them unprepared to fill billets that require a diverse, working knowledge of air traffic control and joint air command and control systems.

Remodeling the current training progression

The present training model's tiers can be modified to ensure that ATC Officers attend several professional development courses which have been routinely unavailable or available only

⁹ United States Marine Corps. NAVMC Directive 3500.98: T&R Directive, MATC.

¹⁰ Cooper, Dionisio. No subject. E-mail to the author. 28 Nov 2007.

Coble- Remodeling the Marine Air Traffic Control Officer Training Progression on a limited basis (figure 2 depicts the proposed model). The greatest difference between the current model and the proposed model is that the officer must now complete several technical courses before accepting an ATC billet of increased responsibility, such as the detachment commander of facility officer roles. Making these classes mandatory is critical to the professional development of the officer. This model eliminates the diversity in ATC officer training; it produces a technically competent officer who is much more knowledgeable in the ATC MOS and familiar with the MACCS. Capt Robertson (MAWTS-1 ATC Division Head) concurs: "I think our junior ATC officers need a standardized class from day one regarding career progression for the ATC officer."¹¹ Additionally, Major Darry Grossnickle agrees that unbalanced training among ATCO's (especially in having the opportunity to attend WTI) can hinder their professional development: "I certainly feel the MMT leader's course and C3 WTI course taught by MAWTS-1 is [sic] the best tactical formal education currently available to teach the big picture. If an officer cannot get the above mentioned training, he is hindering his ability to perform in the future.

¹¹ Robertson, Sean F. "Re: ATC Officer Progression." E-mail to the author. 27 Nov 2007.

It is the only comprehensive place where C3 TTPs [Techniques, Tactics, and Procedures] are being taught."¹²

Proposed ATCO Training Progression ¹³

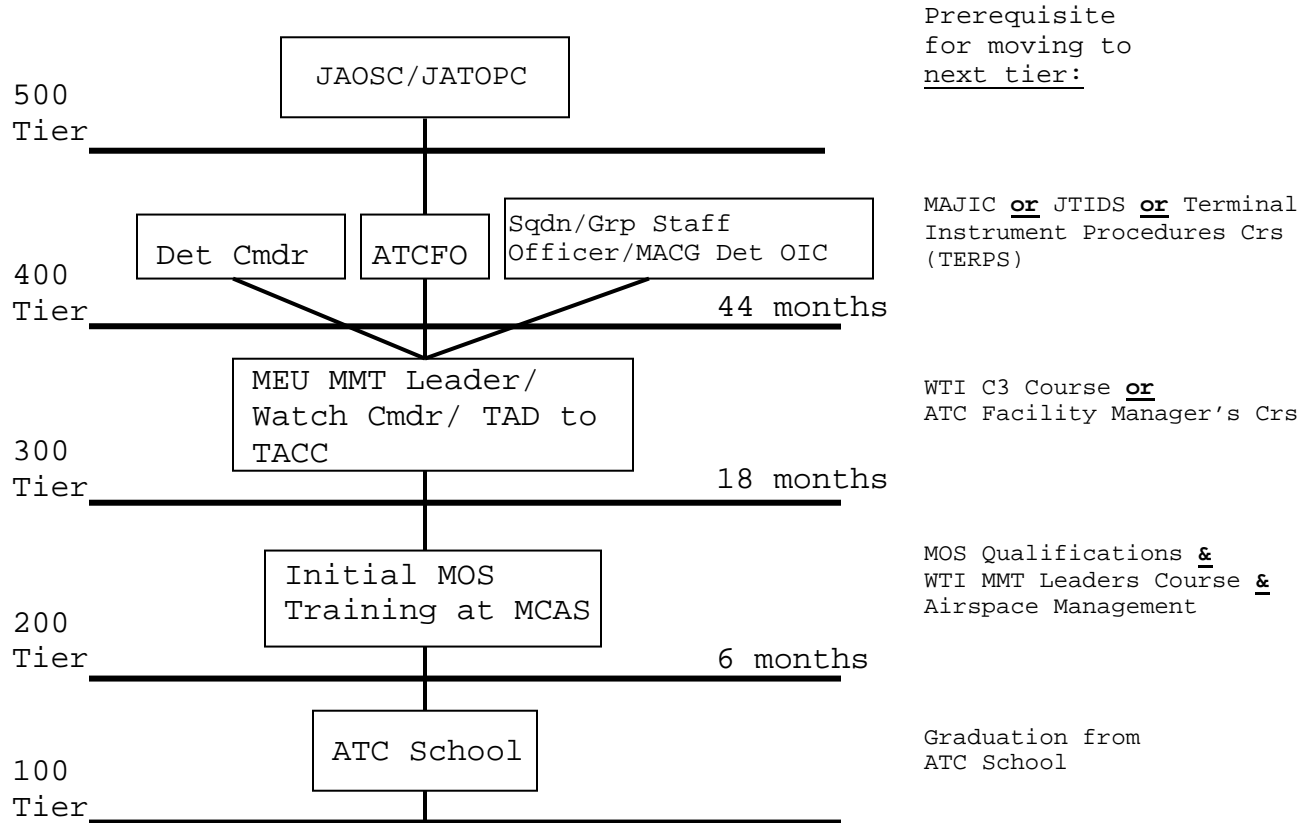


Figure 2

During the 300-tier training, the officer should be temporarily assigned to the Marine Tactical Air Command Squadron (MTACS) for experience working with the Tactical Air Command Center (TACC) if he or she is unable to fill a billet as a

¹² Grossnickle, Darryl W. "Re: Questions." E-mail to the author. 27 Nov 2007. Maj Grossnickle is an ATC currently serving as the detachment commander for the MACS-1 Tactical Air Operations Center (TAOC)

¹³ JATOPC (Joint Air Tasking Order Processes Course); JAOSC (Joint Air Operations Staff Course); JTIDS (Joint Tactical Information Distribution Systems Course), MAJIC (Multi-TADIL Joint Interoperability Course)

Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Marine ATC Mobile Team (MMT)

leader or as a Facility Watch Officer.¹⁴ MGySgt Franssen

(Enlisted 72xx MOS Monitor) highlights the diversity in training and deployment opportunities for MATCOs:

...it should not be 'luck' to be assigned to a MEU...or the Airspace Management Course. [There] should be a standard training progression for officers: school [primary], baby [junior] 'quals', MMT Leader's Course, MEU MMT Leader, MEU detachment OIC, WTI C3 Course, B-billet, facility officer/detachment commander.¹⁵

Tasking the Marine to fill time-intensive billets such as the squadron adjutant or training officer should be avoided. These duties are extremely important but detract from valuable training opportunities. Finally during the 300-tier, the Officer is exposed to the functions of the MACCS through formal instruction at the Weapons and Tactics Instructor's (WTI) Course or facility supervision at the ATC Facility Manager's Course. These technical courses are invaluable for the officer before taking command of a detachment or air station ATC facility.

Major Charles Smith¹⁶ agrees that non-standardized training after the ATCO's initial FAP tour varies significantly:

¹⁴ The Facility Watch Officer billet is junior to the ATC Facility Officer billet.

¹⁵ Franssen, Carrol. Personal interview. 30 Nov 2007.

¹⁶ Maj Smith is the Marine Corps liaison to the Navy for ATC and Expeditionary Airfield (EAF) operations

I think overall the follow-on schooling officers are afforded are a great resource and I always tried to send my officers to as many as possible but op [operational] tempo [p]lays a big part again. I do not think our younger officers are getting the additional schools as we once did in the past....in my observations the USAF schools attendance by Marines have dropped considerably. I wonder how many young officers have heard of the ATC manager's course offered at NATTC [Naval Air Technical Training Center][sic].¹⁷

Finally, 500-tier training¹⁸ has the ATCFO attending the U.S. Air Force's Joint Air Operations Staff Course or the Joint Air Tasking Order Processes Course, fully preparing the Marine for promotion to major and assuming the 7202 MOS.¹⁹ "[7202] Air Command and Control Officers plan for and coordinate the activities of Marine air defense and command and control units [all squadrons within the MACG]. They advise commanders on matters pertaining to integration and joint employment of such units. They command or assist in commanding such units."²⁰

¹⁷ Smith, Charles. No subject. E-mail to the author. 28 Nov 2007.

¹⁸ 400-tier training requires the officer to attend one of three prerequisite courses before enrolling in a 500-tier course (figure 2).

¹⁹ 7202 MOS- Air Command and Control Officer; this MOS becomes the primary MOS for all 72xx officers upon promotion to the rank of major.

²⁰ Powers, Rod. "United States Marine Corps Officer Job Descriptions: MOS 7202 Air Command and Control Officer." About.Com: U.S. Military. 9 Dec 2007. URL: <<http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milinfo/marineofficerjobs/bl7202.htm>>.

Standardized training would assist ATC officers when they assume the 7202 MOS and better prepares them for future responsibilities. When queried about whether ATCO's are prepared to be 7202s, Major Smith states, "...I do not think we are unprepared but when compared to our 7210 [Air Defense Officer] counterparts [sic] we are behind. If an officer has not had the right timing to attend WTI C3, deploy on a MEU, attend some of the specialty schools, etc., then he/she will be unprepared."²¹

A final option may be to utilize the U.S. Air Force's primary school for ATC and/or its extensive airfield operations course:

[Air Force officers]...complete a 15-week course at Keesler AFB, Miss., learning the fundamentals of air traffic control. At Altus AFB, students begin the 40-week Airfield Operations Officer Training Program. The program curriculum exposes new...officers to many facets of the broad career field which include gaining air traffic control certifications in the control tower and radar approach control facilities; orientation to airfield management; Federal Aviation Administration air traffic and flight check orientations; exposure to deployed air traffic

²¹ Smith, Charles. No subject. E-mail to the author. 28 Nov 2007.

control and landing systems, and various management topics.²²

The airfield operations course could provide the MATCO technical instruction not available at a formal Marine Corps school.

Counterargument for remodeling the current training progression

Several senior ATC officers feel that current training, although it can always be improved, is adequate. Major Grossnickle comments, "...ATC officers seem to be more flexible, readily adapt, and are able to learn more quickly than our peers. Even though our peer communities (DASC²³, TAOC, etc) seem to have more tactical training during initial schools. [sic] ATC personnel seem to be very quick to learn the tactical fundamentals of airspace, and are able [to] comprehend the big picture."²⁴ He continues, "We cannot prepare an officer for everything, but our systematic approach, our flexibility, our ability to rely on our quality SNCO's, and a willingness to learn are better in ATC than in the other communities."²⁵

Remodeling the current training progression also requires additional time for initial training and more funds provided by the Training and Education Command (TECOM). Many schools, such

²² Alfred, Allen. "Airfield Operations Officer Training Program Moves to the Air National Guard." Altus Air Force Base Website. 18 Oct 2007. 9 Dec 2007. URL: <<http://www.altus.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123072464>>.

²³ DASC- Direct Air Support Center

²⁴ Grossnickle, Darry W. "Re: Questions." E-mail to the author. 27 Nov 2007.

²⁵ Grossnickle, Darry W. "Re: Questions." E-mail to the author. 27 Nov 2007.

Coble- Remodeling the Marine Air Traffic Control Officer Training Progression as WTI, only occur biannually and attendance is limited. To alleviate this, the officer's Time-On-Station should be extended from three years to four for their initial MACS tour. This provides additional time for the Marine to attend the required classes and gain invaluable operational experience before assuming their first B-billet. Billets of greater responsibility, such as the MATCD commander and facility officer roles, should only be allotted to competent mid-grade to senior captains who have completed the prerequisite courses according to the proposed training model.

Despite the sustained deployment tempo and the unique knowledge requirement of ATC officers, Capt Robertson states, "...there is room for some [training] improvement but I believe the T&R and majority of the career progression model adequately capture the meat of what ATC Officers should train to and when...The issue is following the T&R, tracking it, and pushing it from the officers of the community."²⁶ Capt Robertson adds that mentoring of our junior officers is the easiest way to improve the ATC training progression: "The challenge is for ATC officers to take charge of their own careers and make the right moves, not the easy moves."²⁷

²⁶ Robertson, Sean F. "Re: ATC Officer Progression." E-mail to the author. 27 Nov 2007.

²⁷ Robertson, Sean F. "Re: ATC Officer Progression." E-mail to the author. 27 Nov 2007.

Concerning MATCO training progression, LtCol Wayne Herbert²⁸ states, "...no one will take you by the hand, you have to get out there and get proficient as an ATC Officer AND you need to look for key opportunities to cross-train as you progress."²⁹ Echoing this thought, LtCol Kenoyer concludes- the 7220, "...must read on his own and concentrate on basic leadership."³⁰

Conclusion

The complexity of the 7220 MOS requires ATC officers to be more aggressive in self-education, but this alone will not enhance their training progression. Courses already exist within the Department of Defense to provide critical knowledge to the MATCO- three months of primary school and two junior ATC qualifications are not enough training. Only by standardizing the training tiers and offering more formal technical instruction will the ATC officer be aligned with the tactical knowledge of his 72xx peers and have the technical knowledge for success.

Word Count

1,982

²⁸ LtCol Herbert is responsible for ATC facility operations for Marine Corps Installations East)

²⁹ Herbert, Wayne M. "Re: ATC Officer Progression." E-mail to the author. 28 Nov 2007.

³⁰ Kenoyer, Phillip. Personal interview. 21 Nov 2007.