



A-4 Skyhawk preparing for launch from USS Intrepid off Vietnam.
U.S. Navy (John G. Jacob)

The Single Manager

By WILLARD J. WEBB

Summary

In the months leading up to the Tet offensive and the siege of Khe Sanh, General William C. Westmoreland (the Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) came to the conclusion that existing arrangements no longer enabled him to effectively coordinate and direct the air teams of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force in the northern part of the country. The solution was to place fighter, bomber, and reconnaissance aircraft under one manager. The officer selected was the Commander, 7th Air Force, which brought remonstrance from Navy and Marine commanders. In the ensuing debate, Westmoreland held that his concept did not affect service doctrine, roles, or missions. The concept was adopted in the event despite continued squabbling among the Joint Chiefs and field commanders while the control of air assets in I Corps unarguably improved.

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In the early spring of 1968, General William C. Westmoreland, USA, the Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), introduced a single manager for tactical air in I Corps to make more effective use of available assets. He wanted to improve combat efficiency and streamline MACV organization, but what began as an intra-command reorganization turned quickly into a serious interservice quarrel.

A controversy began when Westmoreland named his own deputy for air, General William M. Momyer, USAF, as the single manager for air in I Corps, with operational control of all fixed-wing aircraft, Marine and Air Force. The Marines resisted placing their assets under a non-Marine commander and the Commandant brought the issue before the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) who, in turn, after failing to agree called on the Secretary of Defense to resolve the issue. But this did not end the dispute which dragged on throughout 1968. The issue of controlling air assets was not unique to the Vietnam conflict. It arose in the European and Pacific theaters during World War II and resurfaced in the Korean War. Two decades later, the single manager controversy was to prove to be one of the most acrimonious interservice disputes of the Vietnam era.

The Prelude

With the emergence of air power as a major element of combat power during

the single manager controversy was one of the most acrimonious interservice disputes of the Vietnam era



OV-10A Bronco VTOL firing Zuni rocket in Mekong Delta.

U.S. Navy (A.R. Hill)

President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill established an Allied air command for the entire Mediterranean area. The Commander in Chief, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, controlled all air in North Africa, Malta, and the Middle East. In Northwest Africa, Tedder was subordinate to Eisenhower. Under Tedder was Northwest Africa Air Force, which consisted of all the air forces in the campaign. This organization combined all air elements in the area into a single structure and allowed Eisenhower to concentrate his air resources as needed.¹

The North Africa experience demonstrated the type of command arrangements

for Air in Vietnam

World War II, the issue of control soon followed. In North Africa, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied commander, initially had no central direction of his air forces, with the U.S. Army Air Force acting independently of Britain's Royal Air Force. Then at the Casablanca conference in January 1943

needed for the invasion of Europe. In August 1943, the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided to combine Allied commands for both air and naval forces under an overall commander. Subsequently, they named Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory commander of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force (AEAF), the air component under Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the invasion. But what appeared good organization in theory did not work in practice. While all tactical air forces committed to the invasion came under Leigh-Mallory, the U.S.

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U.S. Navy (J.L. McDowell)

F-4B Phantom II from *USS Ranger* striking north in support of 3^d Marine Division.

Army Air Forces and the Royal Air Force refused to put their strategic forces under AEAFF. They feared a diversion of effort from the strategic bombing of Germany. Consequently, Leigh-Mallory planned all the air operations for the invasion and the first

months of the war on the Continent and commanded tactical aircraft while strategic aircraft remained under separate U.S. and British commands. Tedder, Deputy Supreme Commander in Europe, coordinated American and British strategic bombers with both ground and tactical air operations during the invasion and after forces were ashore. Subsequently, in October 1944, AEAFF was dissolved. Thereafter the U.S. Army Air Forces and Royal Air Force supported their respective ground forces in Europe. Coordination of operations and settlement of problems were handled by the Supreme Commander's headquarters.²

In the Pacific Theater the potential for trouble over control of air operations was greater. Army, Navy, and Marine air was assigned to two major commands, the Southwest Pacific Area under General Douglas MacArthur and the Pacific Ocean Area under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. But these forces all cooperated well, and centralized control never became an issue.

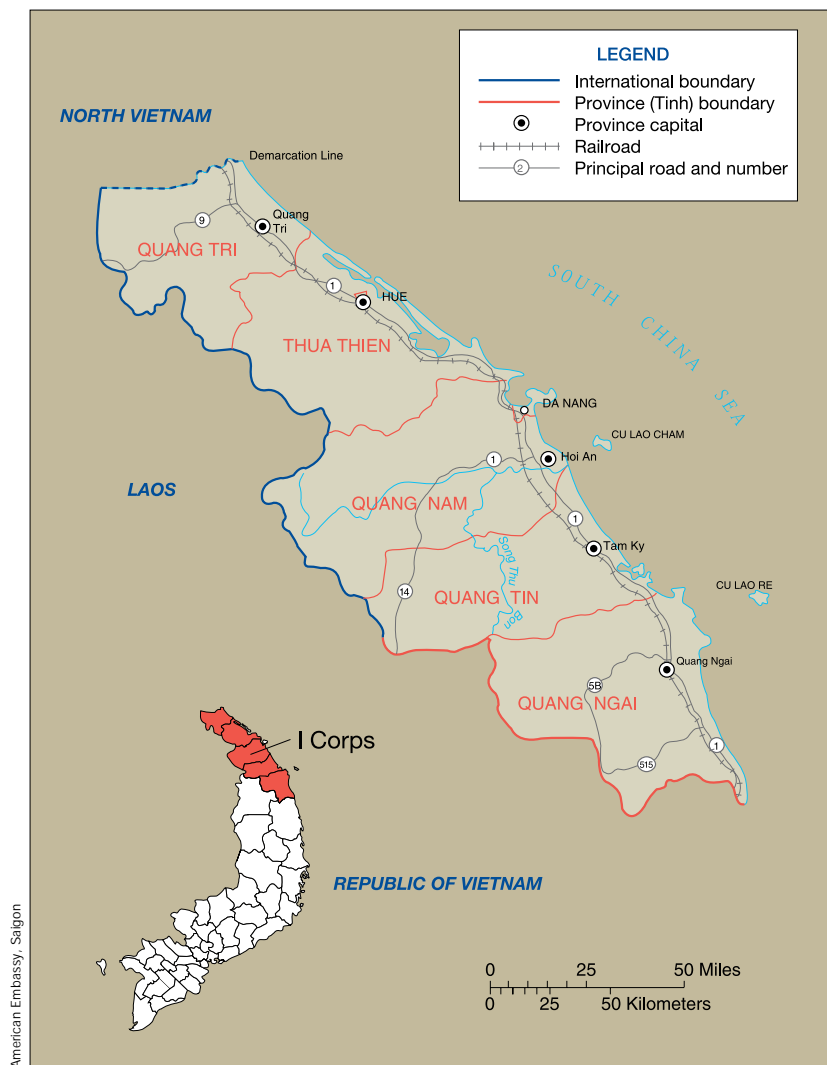
The question of control and responsibility for air operations arose immediately after World War II. During the interservice debates of 1946 over unification and roles and missions, control of land-based aircraft became an issue. The Navy wanted control of all air required for operations at sea, including those based on land. The Army argued that air operating from land bases should be under the Army Air Forces.³ The National Security Act of 1947 unified the Armed Forces under the National Military Establishment (soon to be renamed the Department of Defense) and created the Air Force as a separate service. It did not, however, resolve the question of service roles and missions. Among other things, the Navy feared the Army and Air Force were trying to restrict

the development of carrier air forces while the Air Force believed the Navy was attempting to assume part of the responsibility for strategic air operations. Secretary of Defense James Forrestal met with JCS in Key West during March 12–14, 1948, to settle the dispute. The result was a statement on "Functions of the Armed Forces and the Joint Chiefs of Staff," better known as the Key West Agreement, issued on April 21, 1948. The agreement called for integrating the Armed Forces into "an efficient team of land, naval, and air forces" and for the prevention of unnecessary duplication among the services. With regard to specific responsibilities, the agreement authorized the Navy "to conduct air operations as necessary for the accomplishment of objectives in a naval campaign." It assigned the Air Force primary responsibility for "strategic air warfare."⁴

The Key West Agreement did not prevent the issue of control of air operations from arising during the Korean War. There MacArthur was Commander in Chief, United Nations Command, and Commander in Chief, Far East, the U.S. unified commander. His air component, the Far East Air Force (FEAF), was responsible for control of all air operations in Korea. Initially, the Navy component, Naval Forces Far East (NAVFE), resisted placing its air forces under FEAF, but did eventually recognize FEAF as the controlling authority for air operations. The Marines participated in Korea as well, and the Commander, FEAF, asserted that Marine planes should come under his control, as exercised through 5th Air Force in Korea, in support of ground operations when and where needed. The Marines objected, wanting their assets used in direct support of their ground forces. In the end a compromise was reached. Marine aviation did come under the control of the 5th Air Force, but was used to support Marine forces whenever the tactical situation allowed.⁵

War in I Corps

Command arrangements governing Marines deployed in I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ) in early 1968 dated from 1966 when Westmoreland proposed and JCS approved that III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF) operate as a separate uni-service command directly subordinate to Westmoreland. III MAF was comprised of the 1st and 3^d Divisions



operating in the area, each with its own control system: 1st MAW supported III MAF and units organic to it; 7th Air Force supported U.S. Army divisions, ARVN forces, and Republic of Korea marines; and, on a much smaller scale, Navy carrier-based aircraft, which were outside of Westmoreland's jurisdiction, but responsive to him when requested.⁷

Early in 1968 Westmoreland became convinced that the coordination and direction of the diversified air assets supporting ground forces in I Corps were beyond the capability of existing command and control systems. The large number of aircraft committed and the close proximity of airfields, he believed, dictated a more centralized management of tactical air if he was to concentrate air fire power effectively, exploit tactical flexibility, and provide balanced air support. He also was concerned that the Marines, who provided most of the close air support from Da Nang northward, were not supplying adequate tactical air support for the Army forces. These developments, plus the fact that Marine fixed-wing assets now provided only a relatively small number of the total air support sorties in I Corps, led Westmoreland to consider assigning responsibility for managing all fighter, bomber, and reconnaissance planes in I Corps to one individual—his own deputy for air who also commanded 7th Air Force. This meant giving operational control of 1st MAW, which then resided with the Commanding General, III MAF, to an Air Force general.⁸

Westmoreland first proposed the single manager concept on January 18, 1968. He and the Commander of 7th Air Force met with Lieutenant General Robert Cushman, Commanding General of III MAF, to discuss the possibility. Westmoreland stressed that only the fixed-wing assets of 1st MAW would be integrated into the overall tactical air picture while helicopters would stay under III MAF. Cushman objected, however, on grounds that the proposed system would be doctrinally and functionally unsuited to his requirements.⁹

From Saigon to Honolulu

The Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), Admiral U.S.G. Sharp, was also wary. He cautioned Westmoreland against changing a system that had worked well for

supported by 1st Marine Air Wing (MAW). The force came under Westmoreland's operational control while in the service chain it was under "the command, less operational control, of the Commanding General Fleet Marine Force, Pacific."⁶

This arrangement functioned well throughout 1966 and for the first half of 1967 when the Marines were the only American forces in I CTZ. But as the enemy began to concentrate major forces in I Corps, Westmoreland increased strength in the region, deploying the Americal Division in the fall of 1967 and then sending two additional Army divisions in January

1968. These forces, plus Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces, constituted a field army. With this buildup, three air teams were

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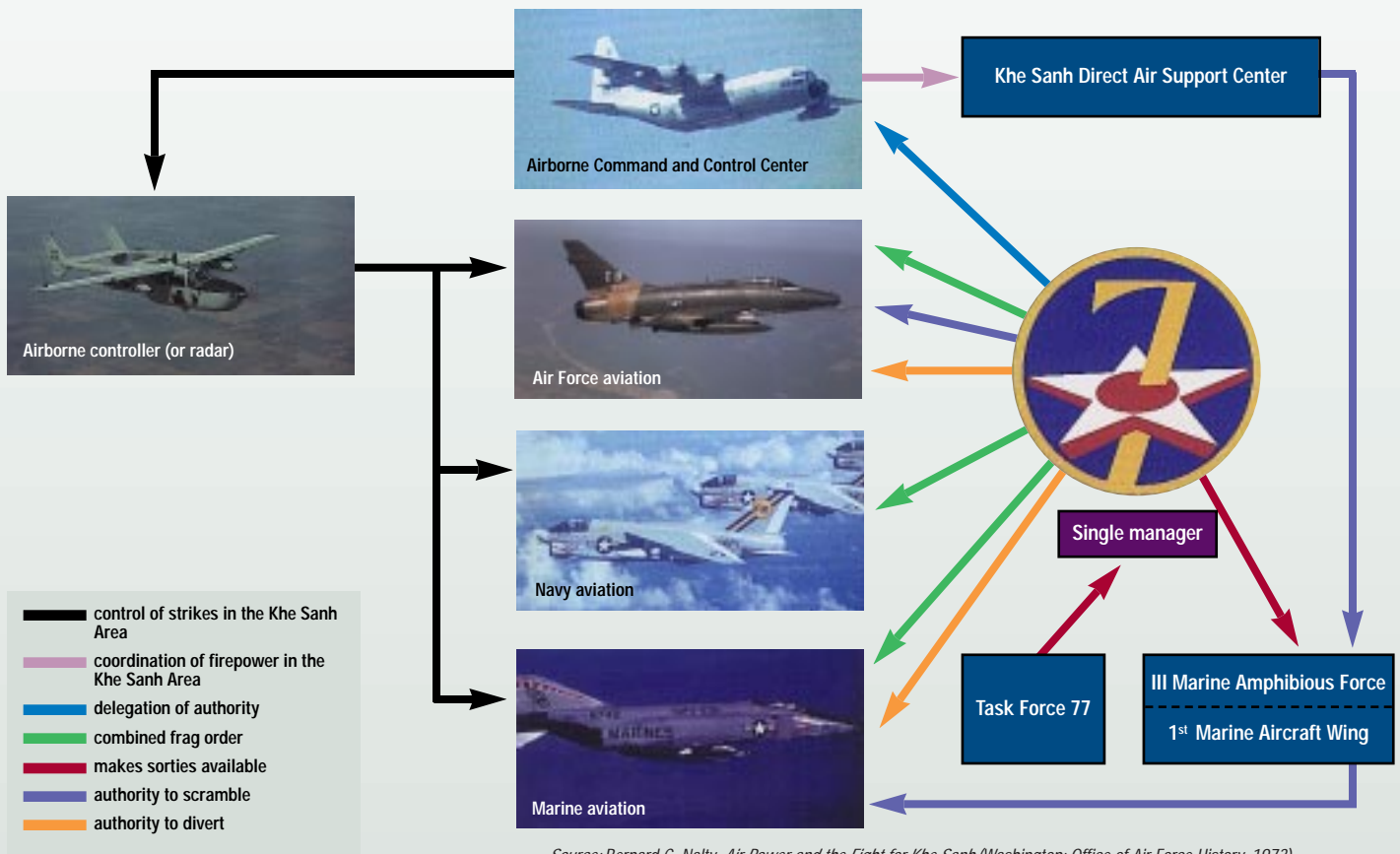
nearly three years. Any plan divesting III MAF of operational control of its air resources, he thought, required “full consideration of all aspects of the problem.” Subsequently, the single manager for air concept was tabled, only to be raised again one month later.¹⁰

The massive enemy Tet offensive, coupled with increased requirements for tactical air in the defense of Khe Sanh, reinforced Westmoreland’s desire for a single manager. “I have given long and detailed thought to this complex problem,” he told Sharp, “and have concluded that the situation dictates the creation of a single management arrangement . . . it is essential that I look to one man to coordinate this air effort and bring this fire power on the enemy in the most effective way in line with my day-to-day guidance.”¹¹ On February 19, 1968, Westmoreland directed that Momyer, in coordination with Cushman, prepare necessary

plans to implement the single manager concept. The plan, he specified, should give his air deputy control of all assets, less helicopters and transport aircraft, and at the same time provide for “Marine aircraft to continue direct support to their deployed ground elements.”¹²

The Marines opposed the single manager concept when it was first proposed. Now they objected at a higher level. On February 21, the Commandant, General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., informed the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, USA, of his “increasing concern” over recent proposals by Westmoreland for assigning control of aircraft of the 1st MAW to the MACV Deputy Commander for Air. Chapman said that if such a plan were implemented, it would be “a flagrant violation” of the Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF)¹³ and the February 1966 JCS decision fixing command relations in Vietnam. He found no deficiencies in air support under the existing

I CTZ: Unified Management of Tactical Strike Aircraft



Source: Bernard C. Nalty, *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sanh* (Washington: Office of Air Force History, 1973).

system or any evidence the change would enhance air support, and wanted to continue the existing arrangements for air support operations in I Corps without change.¹⁴

Westmoreland found it difficult to understand the Marine concern. On February 24, he explained the problem to Wheeler:

*The situation has changed in I Corps as compared to what it was three years ago or even two months ago. The enemy has concentrated a major portion of his regular forces in I Corps. I have had to counter this build-up with appropriate forces. I have the equivalent of a field army now deployed [there]. To support this magnitude of forces requires a major portion of the air assets of the 7th Air Force plus the air assets of the [Vietnamese Air Force] VNAF, carrier forces, and Thai-based forces. Marine air, therefore, has become a junior partner in the total air effort, but an important one. The problem is one of coordination and directing all of these diversified air elements so that the air support can be put where and when needed in the required quantity. I do not see how this can be accomplished without one airman fitting the B-52s, fighters, VNAF, carrier air, Thai-based air, and Marine air into schedules that do not conflict with one another. Thus, the old concept of a geographical area of responsibility breaks down by sheer magnitude of the forces going into I Corps.*¹⁵

Westmoreland added that his proposal would maintain the Marine air/ground team intact except when tactical situations dictated otherwise. Moreover, he said there would be no change in service doctrine or roles and missions.¹⁶

Meanwhile Momyer and his staff, after consulting Cushman, presented Westmoreland with a single manager plan. Throughout the planning sessions, the Marines repeatedly

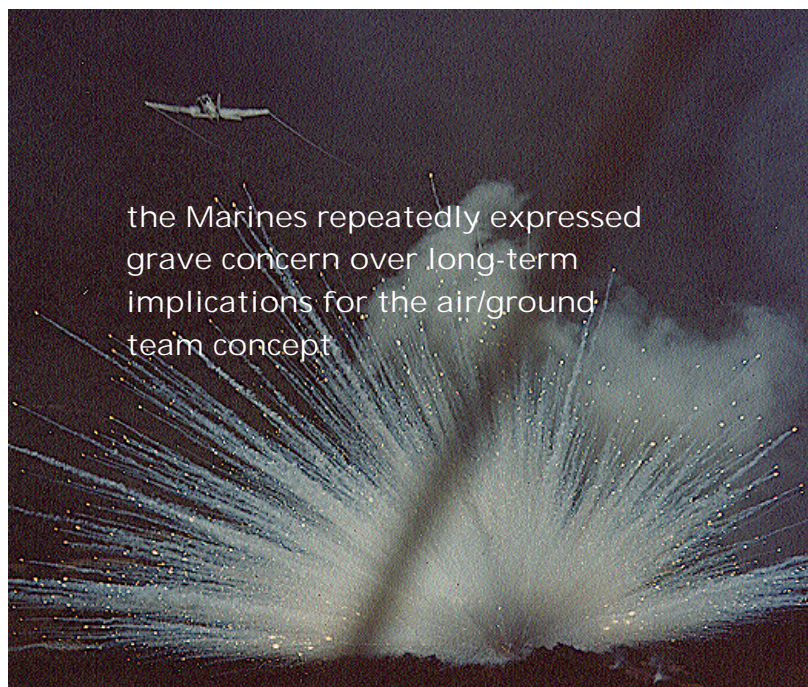
expressed grave concern over the proposal and its possible long-term implications for the air/ground team concept. Nevertheless, Westmoreland submitted the plan to Sharp who approved it with minor revisions on March 2, 1968. Westmoreland implemented the plan on March 8 which directed Cushman to make available to Momyer all strike and reconnaissance aircraft for mission direction and his tactical air control system as needed. Momyer would be responsible “for fragging [assignment of individual missions] and operational direction of these assets with all other available assets under his control to meet the daily requirements of forces in CTZ. Consistent with the tactical situation, Marine aircraft will be fragged . . . to support Marine ground units.” The first missions flown under the single manager system occurred on March 22, 1968.¹⁷

Enter the Chiefs

With implementation of the single manager concept, the focus of the controversy shifted to Washington. On March 4, Chapman voiced concern over the pending action telling Wheeler and other JCS members that Westmoreland’s plan violated the 1966 approval of III MAF as a separate command. He could not concur in an arrangement that would prevent Marine air assets from being directly responsible to Cushman. He wanted JCS to advise Sharp that only they could revise JCS-approved command arrangements and urged Wheeler to obtain Westmoreland’s plan for JCS review.¹⁸ The Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General John McConnell, disagreed. In a personal note of March 4, he told Wheeler, “Westy has now done something he should have done a long time ago. He should also, in my opinion, place Navy air into the same structure. Also, I consider that Westy *has* the authority to do what he has done.”¹⁹

Chapman’s recommendation went unheeded until, three weeks later, he raised it again. He did not concur with Westmoreland’s action, he told JCS on March 23, and recommended revoking the single manager plan. The Marines followed up with a briefing to JCS two days later. The new control procedure, the Marines said, would result in an “inevitable” increase in response time for both preplanned and immediate strikes because of the additional “layering” of agencies

A1E Skyraider hitting target in Vietnam with phosphorous bomb.



the Marines repeatedly expressed grave concern over long-term implications for the air/ground team concept

U.S. Air Force

in the chain. The Marines concluded that the overall system in effect prior to March 10 had worked well during nearly three years of combat, providing flexible and responsive support to both Army and Marine Corps ground units. Since the single manager plan would require more resources to accomplish similar results, but over a longer time, the Marines wanted to return to the old system.²⁰

In reviewing the air control issue JCS sought Westmoreland's views, including his reasons for changing the control arrangement. Westmoreland replied in detail, citing all the justifications previously presented to Sharp and Wheeler.²¹ Should JCS rule against his proposal, he requested the "courtesy" of appearing before them to explain the practical problems involved.²²

JCS considered the control of air assets in a series of meetings in early April but could not agree. As noted, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force supported Westmoreland, and Wheeler took a similar position. On the other hand, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Harold K. Johnson, and the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Thomas C. Moorer, sided with Chapman. Consequently, on April 21, JCS forwarded split views to the Secretary of Defense for resolution.²³

Out of the Tank

It was militarily unsound, Wheeler told the Secretary, to dictate to responsible commanders of the level of Westmoreland and Sharp how to organize and command their forces. He felt that, "Commanders of such rank, experience, and knowledge of the principles of war, who also have intimate knowledge of the specific situation facing them, are expected to utilize assigned forces and resources so as to maximize their combat effectiveness and minimize casualties sustained." He assured the Secretary that the single manager plan was an expedient to meet a tactical situation imposed by the enemy—the sizeable buildup around Khe Sanh and along and south of the DMZ. Wheeler did not regard the single manager system as a precedent for future assignment of Marine air units or as affecting the air/ground team concept. The Chairman argued against directing Sharp to modify the single manager system. Instead, the Secretary should direct JCS to note the revised arrangements for control of air assets in I Corps and advise Sharp that, as the tactical

situation changed, Westmoreland should revamp management and control of those assets "in light of the situation."²⁴

During the JCS consideration of the single manager question, a principal Marine complaint was the lack of responsiveness of the new system and the long lead time between requests for and authorization of preplanned sorties. Total elapsed time from battalion request to first strike, the Marines said, was "about fifty hours." Wheeler asked Westmoreland to ensure that such requests were handled in a timely manner. Westmoreland replied that the fifty-hour figure was misleading and said that the new system had actually improved response time. In any case, Westmoreland directed modification of the system to meet preplanned air support requirements. Wheeler told Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul H. Nitze of this pending modification and that it would provide the necessary responsiveness for preplanned missions.²⁵

On May 15, 1968, Nitze decided the single manager issue in Westmoreland's favor. The unified commander, he said, must be presumed the best judge of how to organize, command, and deploy his combat forces. He also concurred that the assignment of Marine air units under a single manager for air should neither set a precedent for centralized control of air operations under other combat conditions nor pose a threat to "the integrity of the Marine air/ground team." He wanted control of III MAF air assets to revert to "normal command arrangements" as the tactical situation permitted. He noted the Marine concern over the responsiveness of air support under the single manager, but accepted Wheeler's assurance that the system was being improved. Finally, Nitze wanted Wheeler to review the single manager system for necessary changes. Accordingly JCS instructed Westmoreland in conjunction with Cushman and Momyer to continue his review of the single manager system and submit monthly evaluation reports.²⁶

Nitze did not convince the Marines of the merit of a single manager. On May 18, Chapman told his JCS colleagues that the current procedure was "unwieldy, not yet producing the results it was designed to produce." Consequently, he proposed a



U.S. Air Force

A-1E Skyraider
returning to base in
South Vietnam.

compromise. As “an interim measure to full reversion to normal command arrangements,” he wanted to restore control of Marine fighter-bomber and reconnaissance aircraft and control assets, as appropriate, to Cushman. Such Marine sorties as Westmoreland regarded as necessary to ensure a proper distribution of the total tactical air effort, however, would be provided to 7th Air Force daily. This modification, he believed, would not only increase responsiveness and reduce delay in providing air support, but would be “a logical transition step to the restoration of normal command arrangements.”²⁷

Semper Fatalis

Before JCS could consider this Marine proposal, Westmoreland announced modification of the single manager system. In essence, the change, to be effective on May 30, would divide strike sorties into two groups: 70 percent for allocation on a weekly basis through preplanned fragmentary operations orders or frags in accordance with MACV priorities and the remaining 30 percent to be assigned on a daily basis by Westmoreland to meet added requirements in response to enemy operations. Under this revised procedure, a specific and relatively constant number of strike sorties would be allocated weekly to major ground commands, including III MAF. Westmoreland believed the change would provide “greater

flexibility, responsiveness, and continuity in the management of preplanned air support to meet the day-by-day requirements of ground commanders.” Wheeler described the modification to Nitze as “a significant step in the reduction of delays caused by administrative procedure in handling requests for preplanned sorties.”²⁸

The modification did not satisfy the Marines. After two weeks of operation under revised procedures, Chapman told JCS on June 14 that the alterations “still will not meet the standards of responsiveness possible within the Marine support system.” Ground commanders, he said, were required to adjust tactical operations to accommodate advance scheduling of the air arm. Hence he could not accept the modification. Only by possessing operational control of its own air assets could III MAF ensure immediate availability of air support for the troops on the ground.

But Chapman did believe that the modification provided a framework for further revision. “An alternate interim solution,” he indicated, would be to return operational control of 70 percent of his available sorties to Cushman for direct support of Marine forces, with the remaining 30 percent retained by Westmoreland for daily allocation. Chapman added that assets returned to Cushman’s operational control could be diverted at any time to meet Westmoreland’s emergency requirements. He felt that this procedure would increase responsiveness, allowing Cushman to assign sorties to the next day’s tasks as required by Marine ground commander’s plans while Westmoreland would retain his prerogative to preempt Marine resources if needed for emergency situations.²⁹

JCS addressed the new Marine proposal on June 19, but deferred action pending a review by Sharp. Wheeler told Sharp that it was not necessary to do more than consider and comment on the proposal in his monthly evaluation of the single manager system. Wheeler noted that reports of apprehension from the field indicated the problem was getting “out of hand” in Washington. Such was not the case, he said, adding:

*I wish to evaluate the control system as now modified soberly, objectively, and without undue haste. In my judgment it is only by proceeding in an orderly fashion that we can ascertain the facts of the situation and correct deficiencies to the end of providing optimum close air support to our ground forces.*³⁰



1st MAW Crusader flying over enemy position in support of Heli-Marine landing.

U.S. Marine Corps (J. Morales)

On June 30, after the modified single manager procedures had been operating for over a month, Westmoreland filed his monthly evaluation. Based on inputs from Momyer and Cushman, he reported to Sharp that the system had improved “markedly” since implementation. The 70/30 split in the weekly/daily frag orders had proved “a giant step in the positive direction of providing maximum flexibility, responsiveness, and continuity within the mechanics of single management.” Moreover, Westmoreland said the 70/30 split provided executive control while delegating insofar as possible “planning, allocation, and a degree of control” of strike support to major ground units. As a result tactical air support in I CTZ, as well as in the other corps areas, had improved.

Westmoreland noted that Cushman still favored total management of his own assets while Momyer supported current procedures. Westmoreland opposed the proposal to return 70 percent of air sorties to Cushman’s control for direct support of Marine ground forces in I Corps on the grounds that it would be double management. Care must be taken not to vitiate the Marine structure and system for air/ground support. During the evaluation period from May 30 to June 26 Marine battalions had received an average of 6.65 tactical air support sorties per day while Army battalions received 3.03 sorties per day against a country-wide daily average of 2.14. Hence

there was no reason to believe the Marine air/ground capability had been impaired.³¹

In reviewing Westmoreland’s report, Sharp found insufficient information to support the statements regarding the effectiveness of the system and asked Westmoreland for further support of his statements, specifically data on the distribution of Air Force and Marine air efforts in South Vietnam during the evaluation period. The new COMUSMACV, General Creighton W. Abrams, furnished this data on July 13.³²

Two weeks later Abrams informed Wheeler that he had completed an appraisal of the single manager system. He cited improvements in the processing of air support requests and a reduction in the administrative workload. He believed the system could be improved further by “a relatively minor change”—arranging for III MAF to frag directly those Marine sorties within the 70 percent weekly frags “or whatever split COMUSMACV determines,” which were to be flown in I Corps. (This would seem to have achieved essentially the same result as Chapman’s June 14 proposal.) Such an arrangement, Sharp believed, would improve the evolutionary process further without detracting from the overall objective of single management.³³

Sharp had planned to implement this change immediately, but Wheeler asked him to wait. Wheeler did not agree that it was a relatively minor change. Sharp was retiring on July 31 and, as Wheeler planned to attend the ceremony, he suggested talking about the proposal at that time.³⁴ Sharp did retire on July 31, and Wheeler participated in the ceremony, but what they discussed or what decisions, if any, they reached on the single manager are not recorded. Nor did Sharp take further action on the matter before he retired.

On September 4, 1968, the new CINCPAC, Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., forwarded to Wheeler his evaluation of the single manager system. After reviewing all pertinent information as well as discussions with Abrams, Moorner, and Chapman, McCain concluded that the system had improved “considerably since its institution” and enabled Abrams to control the assets he required to carry out his mission. He noted

Cushman's proposal to allocate a block of sorties for fragging and Abrams's opposition to it. He believed that, though the single manager system still did not give Marines the responsiveness of their organic control system, it was "the best overall use of tactical air in COMUSMACV's assigned areas of responsibility." He thought the system would continue to improve as procedural modifications were smoothed out. He intended, therefore, to continue the current single manager system, but to monitor it carefully. Three days later, on September 7, McCain notified Abrams of his decision. With JCS concurrence McCain rescinded the requirement for monthly evaluations by Abrams, although both he and JCS wanted notification of any significant changes in the system.³⁵

Nitze Redux

Based on McCain's evaluation, Wheeler submitted a report on the single manager for air to Nitze on September 16, 1968. He told Nitze of the recent field evaluation, noting the careful and systematic consideration given the concerns of Chapman and Cushman. He described Abrams's improvements and refinements in the system as well as his care not to vitiate the Marine structure and system for air/ground support. Wheeler noted the Marine proposals for further revisions and of Abrams's opposition. Wheeler, like McCain, also acknowledged that the single manager did not give the Marines their accustomed responsiveness, but added that air support for Marine forces had been "equitable under the circumstances existing in I CTZ. . . ." He recommended continuing the single manager system for as long as Abrams deemed it necessary.³⁶

Chapman did not concur. While recognizing the improvements made in the single manager arrangement, he pointed out that, as Wheeler had stated, the system failed to provide the Marines with their accustomed responsiveness. On October 1, he requested a 30-day trial of a proposal by Cushman that would in effect return tactical air assets in I Corps to Marine control. He specifically proposed that, "following the MACV weekly allocation of air effort, Marine air, except that allocated by MACV outside of I CTZ, be

scheduled by III MAF on a daily basis to satisfy the dynamic air support requirements of all III MAF ground commanders, Army and Marines." He also recommended resuming normal command arrangements for III MAF as soon as possible.³⁷

After seeking the views of Abrams and McCain, and obtaining a review by the Joint Staff, Wheeler forwarded Chapman's recommendations to Nitze on November 22, 1968, stating that the field commanders continued to support the single manager as the best overall use of tactical air in I Corps. Therefore Wheeler again recommended against any further change.³⁸ Nitze also accepted Wheeler's advice again and the single manager system for tactical air in I Corps, as modified on May 21, 1968, operated without change during the remainder of 1968 and throughout 1969 and 1970. The issue eventually became academic. With Vietnamization of the war, the withdrawal of U.S. forces initiated in 1969, Marine air operations steadily declined. The operations fell by more than 50 percent in 1970 and ceased altogether as the last Marine combat units departed in June 1971.³⁹

The Last Word

Despite strenuous Marine Corps resistance to the control of its air assets by an Air Force commander, the single manager for air worked and provided improved coordination and direction of air elements in the combat zone. Westmoreland viewed the initiation of the system as part of his responsibility "to use all resources available to me in the most effective way possible." It was the one issue, he later said, where had JCS not supported him he would have considered resigning.⁴⁰

The Marines, too, eventually conceded that the system improved coordination and control of air resources. Lieutenant General Keith B. McCutcheon, who served as Deputy Commander of III MAF for Air during 1970, confirmed this assessment in 1971:

There is no doubt about whether single management was an overall improvement as far as MACV as a whole was concerned. It was. And there is no denying the fact that, when three Army divisions were assigned to I Corps and interspersed between the two Marine divisions, a higher order of coordination and cooperation was required than previously.⁴¹

field commanders continued to support the single manager as the best overall use of tactical air in I Corps

The single manager experience in Vietnam proved the value of central control of air assets in joint operations. When air forces of two or more services participate, the joint commander must look to a single manager to plan, allocate, and coordinate all air resources. While service needs must be accommodated, the overall joint mission remains the primary concern. The issue of joint control of air resources in the Gulf War reconfirmed this principle. JFQ

NOTES

¹ Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, editors, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. II, *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1941 to December 1943* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 161–64.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 733–56. Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, editors, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. III, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 620–22.

³ JCS 1478/9, “Missions of Land, Sea and Air Forces,” February 20, 1946, CCS file 370 (8–19–45) sec. 3.

⁴ “Functions of the Armed Forces and the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” April 21, 1948, in *The Department of Defense: Documents on Establishment and Organization, 1944–1978* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 276–85.

⁵ Department of Air Force, *United States Air Force Operations in the Korean Conflict, June 25–November 1, 1950*, USAF Historical Study number 71 (Washington: Department of the Air Force, 1952), pp. 11–13, 19–30.

⁶ Message JCS 3964 to CNO and CINCPAC, February 14, 1966. All official documents cited in this article have been declassified.

⁷ *COMUSMACV Command History, 1968*, pp. 433–34. “Proposal of COMUSMACV on Operational Control, III MAF Aviation Assets,” appendix A to JCSM–237–68 to SecDef, April 19, 1968 (hereinafter cited as COMUSMACV Proposal on Operational Control).

⁸ William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 342–43. COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, *Report on the War in Vietnam (as of June 30, 1968)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), sec. II, p. 173. COMUSMACV Proposal on Operational Control.

⁹ *COMUSMACV Command History, 1968*, p. 436.

¹⁰ Message, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 182231Z January 1968.

¹¹ Message, COMUSMACV 02365 to CINCPAC, 191239Z February 1968.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ UNAAF was the general JCS guidance setting forth “principles, doctrines, and functions” governing the activities and performance of the Armed Forces.

¹⁴ Memo, CMC (ATA16–ras) to CJCS, February 21, 1968.

¹⁵ Memo, COMUSMACV to CJCS, “Single Management of Fighter/Bomber/ Reconnaissance Assets,” February 24, 1968.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Letter, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, “Single Management of Strike and Reconnaissance Assets,” February 26, 1968 (with draft directive to CG III MAF attached). Letter, CINCPAC Ser 00496 to COMUSMACV, same subject, March 2, 1978. Message, CINCPAC to CJCS and COMUSMACV, 030735Z March 1968. *COMUSMACV Command History, 1968*, pp. 433, 437.

¹⁸ Memo, CMC (ATA18–gwe) to CJCS, CSA, CSAF, and CNO, “Single Management of Fighter/Bomber/ Reconnaissance Assets,” March 4, 1968.

¹⁹ Memo (handwritten), CSAF to CJCS, March 4, 1968.

²⁰ CMC Memo number 21–68 to JCS, “Operational Control of III MAF Aviation Assets,” March 23, 1968. Marine Corps briefing for JCS, “Single Management of Strike and Reconnaissance Assets in Vietnam,” March 25, 1968.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–8.

²² Message, CJCS 3562 to COMUSMACV, March 31, 1968. Message COMUSMACV to CJCS, March 31, 1968.

²³ Note to Control Division, “JCS 1478/125–2, Operational Control of III MAF Aviation Assets,” April 5, 1968. Decision On, same subject, April 8, 1968. Decision On, same subject, April 12, 1968. JCSM–237–68 to SecDef, April 19, 1968.

²⁴ Appendix D to JCSM–237–68 to SecDef, April 19, 1968.

²⁵ Message, COMUSMACV 6342 to CJCS, May 15, 1968. CM–3312–68 to DepSecDef, May 15, 1968.

²⁶ Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, “Operational Control of III MAF Aviation Assets,” May 15, 1968. Message, JCS 9497 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, May 20, 1968.

²⁷ CMC Memo number 29–68 to JCS, “Operational Control of III MAF Aviation Assets,” May 18, 1968.

²⁸ Message, COMUSMACV 14578 to CDR 7th AF and CG III MAF, et al., May 21, 1968, JCS IN 28559. CM–3338–68 to DepSecDef, May 22, 1968.

²⁹ CMC Memo number 31–68 to JCS, “Operational Control of III MAF Aviation Assets,” June 14, 1968.

³⁰ Note to Control Division, JCS 1478/125–5, “Operational Control of III MAF Aviation Assets,” June 19, 1968. Message, CJCS 2866 to CINCPAC, June 19, 1968. Message, CJCS 6737 to CINCPAC, June 19, 1968.

³¹ Message, COMUSMACV 19472 to CINCPAC, July 6, 1968, JCS IN 24664. CM–3651–68 to DepSecDef, September 16, 1968.

³² Message, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV 102340Z July 1968, JCS IN 37550. Abrams succeeded Westmoreland as COMUSMACV on July 3, 1968.

³³ Message, CINCPAC to CJCS, 272134Z July 1968.

³⁴ Message, CJCS 8550 to CINCPAC, July 29, 1968.

³⁵ Message, CINCPAC to CJCS, 040118Z September 1968, JCS IN 47107. Message, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 070210Z September 1968. Message, CINCPAC to JCS, 142049Z September 1968 JCS IN 67981. Message, JCS 9587 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, September 16, 1968.

³⁶ CM–3651–68 to DepSecDef, September 16, 1968.

³⁷ Memorandum, CMC to CJCS, “Modification of Air Support System,” October 1, 1968.

³⁸ CM–3778 to DepSecDef, November 22, 1968.

³⁹ *COMUSMACV Command History, 1969*, pp. IV–20–IV–22. *COMUSMACV Command History, 1970*, p. VI–19. *COMUSMACV Command History, 1971*, p. VI–5.

⁴⁰ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 344.

⁴¹ Keith B. McCutcheon, “Marine Aviation in Vietnam, 1962–1970,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, vol. 97, no. 5 (May 1971), p. 137.