

# Aviation and Ground Logistics

A cross-disciplinary perspective

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This article offers some unique perspectives on aviation and ground logistics from the viewpoints of two officers working at Headquarters Marine Corps—one an aviation maintenance officer assigned to the Installations and Logistics Department, Logistics Plans, Policies, and Strategic Mobility Division, Logistics Vision and Strategy Branch; and the other, a ground logistician assigned to the Aviation Department, Logistics Support Branch, Aviation Logistics Strategy and Plans Section. Having both served in these cross-disciplinary billets for more than one year, we'd like to pass along a few observations highlighting some of the significant institutional differences between Marine Corps aviation and ground logistics constructs. *Expedition-*

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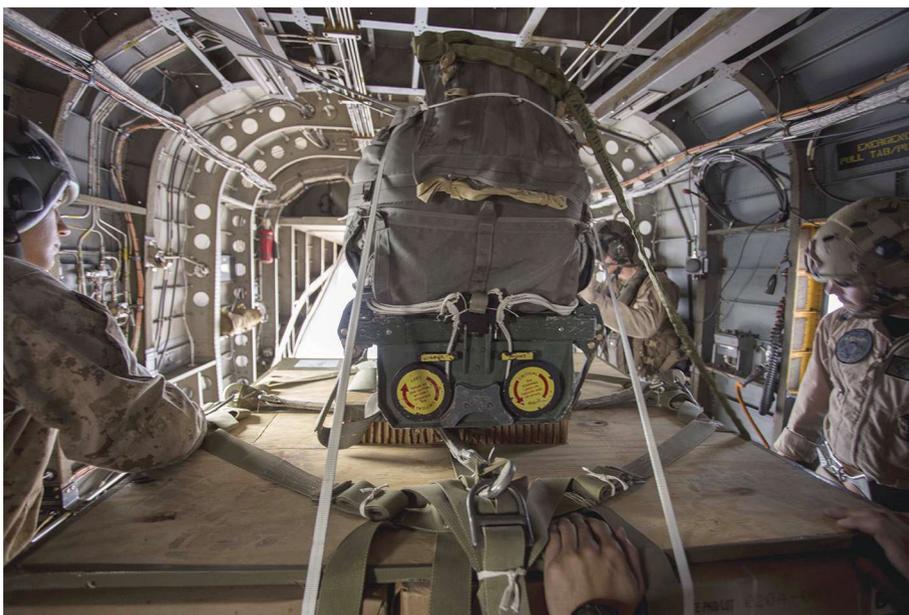
*ary Forces 21* states, "The characteristics of Marine Corps logistics under *Expeditionary Force 21* should evolve to be fully capable of being integrated with naval logistics while being interoperable

with joint, theater and applicable multinational logistics capabilities."

As we evaluate the merits of our respective disciplines in the paragraphs that follow, be mindful that our overarching intent is to stimulate conversation among all logisticians to consider ways to improve MAGTF logistics efficiencies in order to maximize readiness across the MAGTF. Only through this integration will Marine Corps logistics truly become inter-disciplinary, paving the way for further integration opportunities with naval and joint capabilities.

## Unity of Effort

Marine aviation logistics is fully integrated within naval aviation logistics, which is integral to the Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE). The NAE is a partnership of naval aviation leaders and organizations from across the Navy and the Marine Corps who are committed to working together collaboratively to advance and sustain naval aviation warfighting capabilities at an affordable cost.<sup>1</sup> The enterprise framework (see



Preparing to deploy a palletized load. (Photo by Cpl Reba James.)

Figure 1) brings these stakeholders together in order to foster better decision making for the benefit of naval aviation as a whole. Since its inception in 2004, the NAE has continually evolved and strengthened as an enterprise—its success is largely attributable to a common set of systems, processes, and metrics used to drive performance and behavior in optimizing support to the Fleet. The NAE promotes and rewards innovative thinking and actions spawned by a shared mission and guiding principles:<sup>2</sup>

- Consistently focus on improved readiness and increased efficiencies.
- Systemically apply cross-functional process thinking.
- Establish and maintain process discipline.
- Use consistent, integrated, and hierarchical metrics that allow fact-based analysis.
- Ensure full and consistent transparency of data, information, and activities.
- Establish and maintain accountability for actions and results.
- Understand single fleet-driven metric: naval aviation forces efficiently delivered for tasking.
- Commit to active participation in scheduled events and tasks as a priority.

The enterprise approach is a proven way of doing business that enhances co-

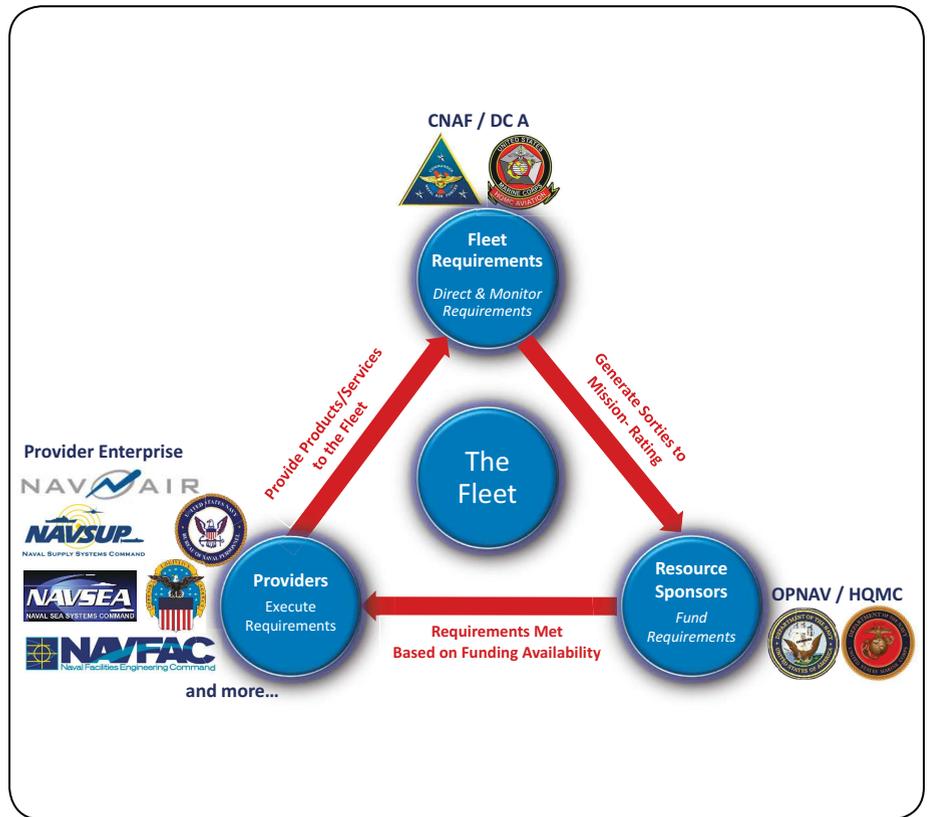


Figure 1. Naval aviation enterprise framework.

ordination and collaboration to achieve effectiveness, emphasizes efficient use of resources, and provides information to aid leaders in decision making. Marine aviation logisticians routinely receive enterprise-level support in the execu-

tion of their functional tasks. Moreover, when forward deployed, they can count on near-daily communications with the support infrastructure of the entire NAE to maintain readiness.

Although Marine Corps ground logistics hasn't fully embraced an enterprise construct, it is clearly moving in that direction—at least conceptually. The Marine Corps Installations and Logistics Roadmap (MCILR), published in 2013, acknowledges the value of developing an enterprise approach to optimizing MAGTF readiness. Specifically, as stated in the MCILR, "We will develop an integrated, enterprise approach to MAGTF readiness that encompasses the entire logistics chain."<sup>3</sup> Tangible progress in that direction, however, has been slow to develop. Opportunity, on the other hand, is limitless and initiatives such as Naval Logistics Integration and MAGTF Logistics Integration are actively seeking to integrate logistics processes among naval partners and within the MAGTF, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Ground logisticians have already adopted some naval processes



Loading out aviation support gear. (Photo by SSgt Justin Pack.)

that have been in use by Marine aviation for many years (e.g. cargo routing and retrograding repairables). The fact remains there is still much more opportunity for increased cooperation and alignment of logistics processes across the MAGTF. As MLI continues to work initiatives designed to integrate logistics across the MAGTF, continued ground logistics advocacy is necessary to move toward an enterprise approach.<sup>5</sup>

### Process Ownership

Supply and maintenance are two of the major logistics functions performed within both the aviation and ground logistics domains. Many of the processes for specific functional tasks, however, are very different. One of the more conspicuous examples is the Class IX [repair parts] allowancing process. When a Marine aviation logistics squadron (MALS) is tasked to develop an aviation consolidated allowance list for an ACE deployment, a standard allowancing process is employed under the control and supervision of Commander, Naval Air Forces (NAF) as the process owner. CNAF is the aviation type commander for each type/model/series (T/M/S) within all Navy and Marine Corps aviation units. Type commanders exercise administrative control of certain types of assets (e.g. ships, submarines, and aircraft) assigned to the Pacific and Atlantic Fleets. CNAF is responsible for the material readiness, administration, training, and inspection of aviation units and squadrons as well as for providing operationally ready air squadrons.<sup>6</sup> Naval Supply Systems Command—Weapons Systems Support (NAVSUP–WSS) is also a key player in the aviation allowancing process, providing analytical, modeling, and material support to Marine aviation. Others involved in the process include CNAF’s Aviation Outfitting Section (N414–Supply) and Aviation Readiness Section (N42–Maintenance). Marine squadrons and MALS maintenance and supply officers also participate in the process from end-to-end.<sup>7</sup> The level of effort afforded to the aviation allowancing process, aided by the process owners in an NAE framework, consistently provides superior results, with gross supply

effectiveness for the Marine aviation typically at or near 75 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Conversely, when a combat logistics battalion (CLB) is tasked to develop a consumable class IX block for ground equipment, the CLB supply and maintenance officers work with the supply management unit to develop a parts block that is typically ad hoc. There

aviation logistics maintains a constant focus on the readiness of the MAG. The MALS commander works directly for the MAG commanding officer, an aviator who drives the business decisions of the command through metrics that continually measure the health of the MAG. The MAG commander works for the MAW commanding

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exists neither a standard process nor a process owner within the ground logistics construct for allowancing. Class IX support concepts and allowancing procedures vary between MEFs and subordinate commands within each MEF. Secondary item (repairables) allowancing receives a good degree of oversight from deploying units’ higher headquarters and from Marine Corps Logistics Command due to the high cost and limited availability of these items, but there is no single process owner for allowancing in support of consumable ground equipment maintenance.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps indicative of the level of effort and oversight afforded this functional task within the ground logistics community, fill rates for class IX consumable blocks are typically at or below 15 percent for most MEU deployments, whereas fill rates for secondary repairable blocks are typically above 80 percent.

### Command Relationships

Marine aviation logistics and the NAE share a common goal and are motivated by a single fleet-driven metric, the foundation of which is best expressed in Dr. Eliyahu M. Goldratt’s book, *The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement*. There are countless things going on within an enterprise, but being able to find and focus on the critical few is most important to optimize resources.<sup>10</sup> The elements within the enterprise must align the way they operate and work interdependently to achieve sustainable success. Marine

general who is also an integral participant in the NAE. The Commander, Naval Air Forces and the Deputy Commandant for Aviation direct and monitor fleet requirements; OPNAV and HQMC as the resource sponsors, fund requirements; and the systems commands (NAVAIR, NAVSUP, and NAVSEA) as the providers, execute requirements.

A fundamental difference between aviation logistics units and any ground logistics unit lies within the scope of their mission, and subsequent command relationships. While a MALS provides direct support to a MAG, a CLB or combat logistics regiment (CLR) provides nonaviation peculiar support functions that are not organic to, or beyond the capability of, the GCE and ACE units. Ground logistics units often maintain a support relationship with the GCE when deploying as part of a MAGTF, but they operate under the command and control of the MAGTF commander. Once deployed and depending on its size and task organization, the MAGTF LCE is at times cut-off from its parent unit and thus any expectation of reach back support. While this is a progressive step toward building self-sufficiency within MAGTFs, it may be premature without an enterprise construct firmly in place to help orchestrate the many logistics enablers that are required to sustain MAGTF readiness. Institutionally, common metrics do not exist among ground logisticians, thus they are forced to seek guidance and sup-

port rather than obtaining anticipatory support from an enterprise that is structured with a focus on sustaining readiness.

### Conclusion

Although there are similarities between aviation and ground logistics, some of the institutional differences between the two disciplines are borne out of necessity, while others are not. We have witnessed many innovations in our aviation and ground logistics processes over the past decade, and while independently successful, we are not standardized where standardization makes sense nor are we integrated as much as we should be. Operating concepts such as disaggregated MAGTF operations and seabasing, along with current fiscal constraints, underscore the need to further modernize and integrate MAGTF logistics. Efforts such as MLI are critical to operational success and the efficient stewardship of resources, but we must continue to advocate creative thinking toward MAGTF logistics. If we as a Corps seriously endeavor to develop an integrated, enterprise approach to MAGTF readiness that encompasses the entire logistics chain, we must improve the integration of our air and ground logistics processes.

### Notes

1. Department of the Navy, Commander Naval Air Forces, "The Naval Aviation Enterprise: Our History," accessed 23 June 2014 at <http://www.public.navy.mil>.
2. Ibid.
3. Department of the Navy, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Installations and Logistics Roadmap 2013* (Washington, DC, June 2013), 13.
4. Deputy Commandant, Aviation, and Deputy Commandant, Installations and Logistics, *MAGTF Logistics Integration Group (MLIG) Charter* (Washington, DC, 12 September 2014).
5. Department of the Navy, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *USMC Installations and Logistics Advocacy Process*, MARADMIN 370/13, (Washington DC, 24 July 2013), accessed 23 June 2014 at <http://www.marines.mil>.

6. Department of the Navy, Commander Naval Air Forces, San Diego, CA, accessed 23 June 2014 at: <http://www.public.navy.mil>.

7. Maj Paul Reyes representing the Commander Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, "Aviation Allowancing Processing" brief delivered to MAGTF Logistics Integrated Project Team, 1 May 2013.

8. Department of the Navy, *COMNAVAIRFOR Instruction 4440.2B, Supply Operations Manual*, (Washington, DC: 22 May 2012), 9–24.

9. Col Kevin J. Stewart and Maj Daniel M. Bartos, (HQMC LPC), to MajGen John M. Broadmeadow, CG, MARCORLOGCOM, "Coordinated Consumable Management—Road to War," on 16 April 2014.

10. Eliyahu M. Goldratt, and Jeff Cox, *The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement* (Great Barrington, MA: Great North River Press, 2004).



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