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# Helicopterborne Operations

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**US Marine Corps**

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FOREWORD

Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-11.4, *Helicopterborne Operations*, describes how infantry and aviation units plan and conduct helicopterborne operations during subsequent operations ashore. MCWP 3-11.4 emphasizes the coordination necessary between ground, air, combat support, and combat service support organizations concerning the planning sequence and tactical employment of ground and aviation elements. It describes the versatility of helicopterborne operations and explains the tactical fundamentals of helicopterborne operations for ground-based operations once ashore.

MCWP 3-11.4 is intended for commanders, staff officers, and support units responsible for the planning and execution of helicopterborne operations. However, it should be read by any Marine involved in the execution of helicopterborne operations.

This publication does not contain information relative to amphibious operations. Helicopterborne operations in amphibious operations are discussed in MCWP 3-31.5, *Ship-to-Shore Movement*, Naval Warfare Publication (NWP) 3-22.5, *Tactical Manual* series, and Joint Publication (JP) 3-02.1, *Joint Doctrine for Landing Force Operations*.

This publication supersedes Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 6-21, *Tactical Fundamentals of Helicopterborne Operations*, dated June 1991.

Reviewed and approved this date.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Chapter 1. Overview

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Sequence of Operations .....           | 1-1 |
| Tactical Considerations .....          | 1-2 |
| Command and Control .....              | 1-3 |
| Helicopterborne Forces .....           | 1-4 |
| Organization .....                     | 1-4 |
| Task Organization Considerations ..... | 1-4 |
| Capabilities .....                     | 1-5 |
| Limitations .....                      | 1-5 |
| Vulnerabilities .....                  | 1-6 |

## Chapter 2. Preparation for Combat

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace ..... | 2-1 |
| Threat .....                                      | 2-1 |
| Task Organization .....                           | 2-2 |

## Chapter 3. Command and Control

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Planning .....                               | 3-1 |
| Effective Task Organization .....            | 3-1 |
| Precise Planning .....                       | 3-1 |
| Decentralized Execution .....                | 3-2 |
| Helicopterborne Radio Nets .....             | 3-2 |
| Airborne Command and Control .....           | 3-2 |
| Mission Commander .....                      | 3-2 |
| Air Mission Commander .....                  | 3-3 |
| Helicopterborne Unit Commander .....         | 3-3 |
| Assault Flight Leader .....                  | 3-3 |
| Escort Flight Leader .....                   | 3-4 |
| Assault Support Coordinator (Airborne) ..... | 3-4 |
| Tactical Air Coordinator (Airborne) .....    | 3-4 |
| Forward Air Controller (Airborne) .....      | 3-4 |
| Initial Terminal Guidance Teams .....        | 3-5 |
| Helicopter Support Team .....                | 3-5 |
| Pickup Zone Control Officer .....            | 3-6 |
| Subordinate Unit Commanders .....            | 3-6 |
| Command Post .....                           | 3-6 |
| Combat Operations Center .....               | 3-6 |
| Rear Area Operations .....                   | 3-6 |

## Chapter 4. Planning

|  |      |
|--|------|
| <b>Section I. Estimation Process</b> .....                     | 4-1  |
| Analysis of METT-T .....                                       | 4-2  |
| Mission .....  | 4-2  |
| Enemy .....  | 4-2  |
| Terrain and Weather .....                                      | 4-2  |
| Troops and Support Available .....                             | 4-4  |
| Time Available .....   | 4-4  |
| Ground Commander's View of the Plan of Attack .....            | 4-4  |
| Scheme of Maneuver .....                                       | 4-4  |
| Plan for Supporting Fires .....                                | 4-4  |
| Loading Plan .....   | 4-5  |
| Air Movement Plan .....  | 4-5  |
| Landing Plan .....   | 4-5  |
| <b>Section II. Detailed Planning</b> .....                     | 4-5  |
| Ground Tactical Plan .....                                     | 4-5  |
| Mission .....  | 4-6  |
| Concept of Operations .....                                    | 4-6  |
| Landing Plan .....   | 4-6  |
| Selection of Landing Zones .....                               | 4-6  |
| Single Versus Multiple Landing Zones .....                     | 4-8  |
| Landing Formations .....                                       | 4-8  |
| Supporting Fires .....   | 4-8  |
| Emergency Extract .....  | 4-9  |
| Air Movement Plan .....  | 4-10 |
| Selection of Helicopter Approach and Retirement Routes .....   | 4-10 |
| Ground Considerations During Helicopter Movement .....         | 4-10 |
| Supporting Fires Along the Approach and Retirement Route ..... | 4-11 |
| Loading Plan .....   | 4-11 |
| Primary and Alternate Pickup Zones .....                       | 4-11 |
| Pickup Zone Criteria .....                                     | 4-11 |
| Pickup Zone Control .....                                      | 4-12 |
| Staging Plan .....   | 4-15 |
| <b>Section III. Mission Briefing and Debriefing</b> .....      | 4-15 |
| Mission Brief .....  | 4-15 |
| Helicopterborne Mission Briefing Guide .....                   | 4-15 |

## Chapter 5. Combat Operations

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Section I. Helicopterborne Operations in Offensive Operations</b> ..... | 5-1 |
| Attack .....   | 5-1 |
| Hasty Attack .....   | 5-2 |
| Deliberate Attack .....  | 5-2 |
| Exploitation .....   | 5-3 |
| Pursuit .....  | 5-3 |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Secure and Defend . . . . .  | 5-3        |
| Seizure and Retention . . . . .  | 5-3        |
| Control Measures . . . . .   | 5-4        |
| Assault Objectives . . . . .   | 5-4        |
| Reconnaissance in Force . . . . .  | 5-4        |
| Raid . . . . .   | 5-5        |
| <b>Section II. Helicopterborne Operations in Defensive Operations . . . . .</b>      | <b>5-5</b> |
| Defensive Operations Against an Armor-Heavy Threat . . . . .                         | 5-6        |
| Economy of Force . . . . .   | 5-6        |
| Delay . . . . .  | 5-7        |
| <b>Section III. Other Tactical Missions and Operational Considerations . . . . .</b> | <b>5-7</b> |
| Screening . . . . .  | 5-7        |
| Guard Force . . . . .  | 5-7        |
| Covering Force . . . . .   | 5-8        |
| Reinforcement of Committed Units . . . . .   | 5-8        |
| Linkup Operations . . . . .  | 5-8        |
| River Crossing Operations . . . . .  | 5-8        |
| Rear Area Operations . . . . .   | 5-9        |
| Night and Limited Visibility Operations . . . . .                                    | 5-9        |
| Operations in a Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Environment . . . . .              | 5-9        |

## **Chapter 6. Combat Support Within the Helicopterborne Force**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Section I. Fire Support . . . . .</b>                               | <b>6-1</b> |
| Fire Support Coordinator . . . . .                                     | 6-2        |
| Fire Support Delivery Means . . . . .                                  | 6-2        |
| <b>Section II. Fire Support Planning and Coordination . . . . .</b>    | <b>6-3</b> |
| Formal and Informal Planning . . . . .                                 | 6-3        |
| Displacement of Fire Support . . . . .                                 | 6-3        |
| Enemy Air Defense . . . . .  | 6-4        |
| Fire Support Coordination . . . . .                                    | 6-4        |
| <b>Section III. Artillery Helicopterborne Operations . . . . .</b>     | <b>6-5</b> |
| Planning Considerations . . . . .                                      | 6-5        |
| Range of Artillery and Other Support Systems . . . . .                 | 6-5        |
| Importance of the Target . . . . .                                     | 6-5        |
| Airlift Assets . . . . .   | 6-5        |
| Risk in Crossing Lines . . . . .                                       | 6-5        |
| Target Location . . . . .  | 6-5        |
| Pickup Zone and/or Landing Zone . . . . .                              | 6-5        |
| Ammunition . . . . .   | 6-5        |
| Communications . . . . .   | 6-6        |
| Security . . . . .   | 6-6        |
| Capabilities . . . . .   | 6-6        |
| <b>Section IV. Air Defense in Helicopterborne Operations . . . . .</b> | <b>6-6</b> |
| Capabilities . . . . .   | 6-6        |

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Planning Considerations . . . . .   | 6-7  |
| Using Helicopters to Support Air Defense Operations . . . . .                   | 6-8  |
| <br><b>Chapter 7. Combat Service Support</b>                                    |      |
| <b>Section I. Helicopter Support Team . . . . .</b>                             |      |
| Helicopter Support Team Organization . . . . .                                  | 7-1  |
| Advance Party . . . . .   | 7-2  |
| HST Headquarters . . . . .  | 7-2  |
| Other MAGTF Support . . . . .   | 7-2  |
| Landing Support Battalion . . . . .   | 7-3  |
| Equipment . . . . .   | 7-3  |
| Training . . . . .  | 7-3  |
| Employment . . . . .  | 7-3  |
| <b>Section II. Combat Service Support Planning . . . . .</b>                    |      |
| Considerations Prior to Planning . . . . .                                      | 7-4  |
| Key Points . . . . .  | 7-4  |
| Specific Points . . . . .   | 7-4  |
| Planning Considerations . . . . .   | 7-5  |
| Basic Load and Combat Service Support Buildup . . . . .                         | 7-5  |
| Basic Load . . . . .  | 7-5  |
| Combat Service Support Buildup . . . . .  | 7-6  |
| <b>Section III. Execution of Combat Service Support . . . . .</b>               |      |
| CSS Trains . . . . .  | 7-6  |
| Supply . . . . .  | 7-7  |
| Maintenance . . . . .   | 7-8  |
| Field and Personnel Support Services . . . . .                                  | 7-8  |
| Medical Support . . . . .   | 7-8  |
| Casualty Evacuation . . . . .   | 7-8  |
| Helicopter Casualty Evacuation Control<br>and Coordination Procedures . . . . . | 7-8  |
| <b>Section IV. External Load Operations . . . . .</b>                           |      |
| External Load Considerations . . . . .  | 7-9  |
| Elements of an External Lift Mission . . . . .                                  | 7-10 |
| <b>Section V. Aviation Support Considerations . . . . .</b>                     |      |
| Forward Arming and Refueling Points . . . . .                                   | 7-11 |
| Aircraft Maintenance . . . . .  | 7-11 |
| Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel . . . . .                           | 7-11 |
| <br><b>Chapter 8. Conduct of a Helicopterborne Operation</b>                    |      |
| Movement From the Assembly Area to the Landing Zone . . . . .                   | 8-1  |
| Procedures in the Pickup Zone . . . . .   | 8-1  |
| Organization of the Pickup Zone . . . . .                                       | 8-1  |
| Infantry Movement to the Pickup Zone . . . . .                                  | 8-2  |

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Helicopter Movement to the Pickup Zone . . . . .             | 8-2  |
| Lift-off From the Pickup Zone . . . . .                      | 8-2  |
| En route to the Landing Zone . . . . .                       | 8-2  |
| Security . . . . .   | 8-3  |
| Landing Operations . . . . .                                 | 8-3  |
| Command and Control Helicopter . . . . .                     | 8-3  |
| Landing Zone Preparatory Fires . . . . .                     | 8-3  |
| Landing Techniques . . . . .                                 | 8-4  |
| Completion of the Landing Zone Operation. . . . .            | 8-5  |
| Commanders' Responsibilities/Sequence of Actions. . . . .    | 8-5  |
| Helicopterborne Mission Commander or                         |      |
| Helicopterborne Unit Commander . . . . .                     | 8-5  |
| Air Mission Commander . . . . .                              | 8-5  |
| Helicopterborne Force Executive Officer. . . . .             | 8-6  |
| Helicopterborne Force S-1 . . . . .                          | 8-6  |
| Helicopterborne Force S-2 . . . . .                          | 8-7  |
| Helicopterborne Force GCE S-3. . . . .                       | 8-7  |
| Helicopterborne Force GCE Air Officer . . . . .              | 8-8  |
| Helicopterborne Force GCE S-4. . . . .                       | 8-9  |
| Helicopterborne Force GCE Fire Support Coordinator . . . . . | 8-9  |
| Subordinate Unit Commander . . . . .                         | 8-10 |
| Helicopterborne Force Commander . . . . .                    | 8-10 |
| Planning Sequence . . . . .                                  | 8-10 |
| Time Schedule . . . . .                                      | 8-10 |
| Ground Tactical Plan . . . . .                               | 8-11 |
| Landing Plan. . . . .  | 8-11 |
| Air Movement Plan . . . . .                                  | 8-12 |
| Loading Plan. . . . .  | 8-12 |
| Staging Plan . . . . .                                       | 8-12 |

**Appendices**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| A. Small-Unit Leader's Guide to Pickup                         |     |
| Zone and Landing Zone Operations . . . . .                     | A-1 |
| B. Air Mission Commander's or Air Officer's Checklist. . . . . | B-1 |
| C. Helicopterborne Unit Commander's Checklist . . . . .        | C-1 |
| D. Landing Zone Brief . . . . .                                | D-1 |
| E. Example of an Annex to Battalion                            |     |
| SOPs for Helicopterborne Operations . . . . .                  | E-1 |
| F. Formats for the Five Basic Plans . . . . .                  | F-1 |
| G. Helicopterborne Training. . . . .                           | G-1 |
| H. Marine Corps Helicopter Characteristics. . . . .            | H-1 |
| I. Sample Helicopterborne Warning Order. . . . .               | I-1 |
| J. Glossary . . . . .  | J-1 |
| K. References . . . . .  | K-1 |

# CHAPTER 1

## OVERVIEW

Helicopterborne operations are tactical operations in which assault forces maneuver on the battlefield under the direction of an assigned commander in order to engage and destroy enemy forces or to seize key terrain. They are best employed in situations that provide the force a calculated advantage due to surprise, terrain, threat, or mobility. Helicopterborne operations allow the commander to maneuver rapidly to achieve tactical surprise and mass forces, regardless of obstacles and without dependency on ground lines of communication. These operations embody the combined-arms concept through coordination and planning between the air and ground commanders. Infantry and air units can be fully integrated with other members of the combined-arms team to form powerful and flexible helicopterborne task forces (HTFs). These forces can project combat power throughout the entire depth, width, and breadth of the modern battlefield with little regard for terrain barriers. The unique versatility and strength of an HTF is achieved by combining the capabilities of helicopters—speed, agility, and firepower—with those of the infantry and other combat arms to form tactically tailored HTFs that can be employed in low, medium, and high intensity environments.

Helicopterborne operations are not merely the movement of Marines, weapons, and material by helicopter units. They are deliberate, precisely planned, and aggressively executed combat operations that allow friendly forces to strike over terrain barriers in order to attack the enemy when and where he is most vulnerable.

### *Note*

*Helicopterborne operations are more than just air movement operations. Air movement operations require airlift assets outside of*

*the assets used for helicopterborne operations. These operations are used to move troops and equipment; to emplace artillery and other combat support assets; and to transport ammunition, fuel, and supplies.*

Helicopterborne operations span the spectrum of risk. They can be high-payoff operations that can, when properly planned and aggressively executed, drastically extend a commander's area of operations. This extension of a commander's area of operations enables the commander to execute operations in areas ranging beyond the capabilities of ground forces.

The speed and mobility of helicopters can provide freedom of rapid maneuver. Freedom of rapid maneuver can then fix the enemy and mass sufficient combat power to destroy him over distances that would otherwise be impossible to traverse as quickly. The helicopter's flexibility and versatility permit the ground commander to reduce time and distance limitations normally encountered in the ground movement of troops.

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### Sequence of Operations

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A helicopterborne operation generally takes place in the following sequence:

- Planning.
- Briefing.
- Loading.
- Air assault.
- Landing.
- Tactical ground operations.
- Sustainment.
- Ground linkup/air reposition.