

MCWP 3-16

FIRE SUPPORT COORDINATION IN THE GROUND COMBAT ELEMENT



U.S. Marine Corps

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Unless otherwise stated, whenever the masculine gender is used, both men and women are included.

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FOREWORD

Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-16, *Fire Support Coordination in the Ground Combat Element*, is a framework for coordinating and employing supporting arms in consonance with maneuver elements. While this publication covers many aspects of fire support, it focuses on fire support coordination in the infantry division, regiment, and battalion. The doctrine applies across the full range of military operations—from humanitarian assistance to a major theater war.

Fire support doctrine is based on a common understanding of the nature of war and on our warfighting philosophy as described in Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting*. This doctrine provides for fast, flexible, and decisive action in a complex environment characterized by friction, uncertainty, fluidity, and rapid change.

This publication is a field reference guide for commanders, their staffs, and fire support coordination personnel. It forms the basis for specific fire support coordination tactics, techniques, and procedures.

This publication supersedes Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 6-18, *Techniques and Procedures for Fire Support Coordination*, dated 27 March 1992.

Reviewed and approved this date.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

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CHAPTER 1. FUNDAMENTALS

Fire support is fires that directly support land, maritime, amphibious, and special operations forces to engage enemy forces, combat formations, and facilities in pursuit of tactical and operational objectives (JP 1-02). Fire support coordination is the planning and executing of fires so that targets are adequately covered by a suitable weapon or group of weapons (JP 1-02).

The Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) is the Marine Corps' principal organization for all missions across the full spectrum of military operations. MAGTFs consist of a command element (CE), a ground combat element (GCE), an aviation combat element (ACE), and a combat service support element (CSSE). The MAGTF principally employs fire support provided by the GCE and the ACE, but may also receive external fire support from other joint, combined, and coalition forces.

MARINE CORPS WARFIGHTING PHILOSOPHY

The Marine Corps warfighting philosophy is based on rapid, flexible, and opportunistic maneuver capabilities. Maneuver warfare is a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a series of rapid, violent, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which he cannot cope (MCDP 1). Fire support in maneuver warfare produces combat power and is applied through combined arms.

The MAGTF and GCE are combined arms teams by the nature of their organization. The GCE's ability to deliver fire is most effectively employed when it creates a combined arms effect. Combined arms is the full integration of arms in such a way that in order to counteract one, the enemy must make himself more vulnerable to another. It pairs firepower with mobility to produce a desired effect upon the enemy (MCDP 1). In addition to the typical example of combined arms where indirect fire suppresses an enemy, enabling

either maneuver or attack by direct fire, multiple supporting arms can create a combined arms effect. Artillery raids in the Gulf War intentionally attracted enemy counterfire to enable air attack of enemy radar and artillery units. The enemy had to suffer the effects of indirect fire or risk losing its own artillery assets. The 3d Marine air wing used a similar technique when conducting attacks against the Iraqi integrated air defense system (IADS). Suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) packages accompanied Marine aircraft conducting strikes against Iraqi positions and equipment. When Iraqi fire control radars were activated, the aircraft from the SEAD package attacked the radars with high-speed antiradiation missiles (HARMs). Once again, the Iraqis were placed in a dilemma. To defend against the air attacks, they placed their fire control radars in jeopardy.

Combat power is the total means of destructive and/or disruptive force which a unit can apply against the enemy at a given time. Combat power consists of tangible factors such as the destructive effect of available firepower. But, just as importantly, it consists of intangible factors such as surprise, tempo, and morale.

FIRE SUPPORT TASKS

Fire support functions are performed in relation to—

- Supporting forces in contact.
- Supporting the commander's concept of operation.
- Integrating fire support with the scheme of maneuver.
- Sustaining fire support.

Regardless of the unit supported, these tasks give the commander and his fire support representatives a frame of reference to evaluate the overall effectiveness of fires. They serve as unifying factors for supporting arms. The four tasks do not change or replace traditional missions, roles, and operations. They provide a common point of departure for all supporting arms. For example, naval surface fire support

(NSFS) in general support of a regiment does not consciously plan to perform the four tasks. It accomplishes its mission by furnishing a continuous volume of naval gunfire that supports forces in contact and the commander's concept of operation. It integrates its support with the scheme of maneuver through liaison officers who plan fire support areas (FSAs) to support the scheme of maneuver.

Supporting Forces in Contact

Prerequisite to this task is the ability to immediately respond to and meet the fire support needs of forces engaged with the enemy. This task enhances the friendly force's survivability and increases their freedom of maneuver. Individual fire support assets support forces in contact in many ways; e.g., artillery supports forces in contact by performing its traditional roles of close support and counterfire.

Supporting the Commander's Concept of Operation

This task enables the force commander to influence the battle with firepower. It gives him the means to create effects on enemy forces or functions that contribute to his mission accomplishment. Fires can shape the battlespace by attacking the enemy's center of gravity (COG) through enemy critical vulnerabilities and creating decisive combat power with a combined arms effect.

Integrating Fire Support with the Scheme of Maneuver

Integrating fire support with the scheme of maneuver requires precise arrangement of coordinated activities in time, space, and purpose to produce the most effective fires. It provides the right attack means delivered on the right target at the right time, creating a combined arms effect. Integration must occur within the supporting arms and the other warfighting functions (maneuver, intelligence, command and control, logistics, and force protection).

Sustaining Fire Support

This task ensures fire support endurance and continuity in providing fires. It involves the actions to

achieve logistics sustainment and technical support for supporting arms available to the commander.

ROLE OF THE GROUND COMBAT ELEMENT

Each MAGTF element has specific roles in coordinating fire support. The CE implements the MAGTF commander's intent and normally focuses on deep operations to shape the battlespace for the major subordinate commands (MSCs). The ACE is a major provider of fire support through offensive air support (OAS), electronic warfare (EW), and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) support. The CSSE commander is normally assigned responsibility for the conduct of rear area operations. Since no formal supporting arms coordination agency exists within the CSSE's rear area operations center (RAOC), the CSSE may be augmented with fire support representatives. However, it is the GCE that receives the majority of fire support—its own—as well as fires provided by other MAGTF elements.

GCE fire support coordination centers (FSCCs) interact with the CE through the MAGTF force fires coordination center (FFCC). The FFCC coordinates those matters that cannot be coordinated by FSCCs within the GCE and those matters that affect the MAGTF as a whole. The MAGTF LF FFCC coordinates fires with higher, adjacent, and external commands. It is the element of the amphibious force (AF) that forms the supporting arms coordination center (SACC) with representatives from the amphibious task force (ATF). It maintains close coordination with the GCE for integrating fire support plans of the deep and close battle.

The GCE interfaces with the ACE through the Marine air command and control system (MACCS). Control and coordination of direct air support is achieved through tactical air control parties (TACPs) organic to GCE units, through the direct air support center (DASC), and through other MACCS agencies.