

ANGLICO's Potential Role Within Distributed Operations
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To
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Introduction

The global war on terrorism has produced an elusive, non-linear, and irregular threat on the battlefield. Countering this growing trend, the Marine Corps' maneuver warfare philosophy has evolved to include the concept of distributed operations (DO) which further takes advantage of the superior firepower, mobility, and command and control within the infantry battalion. The DO initiative, however, has largely stalled as a result of the intensive training required at the small unit level to attain the needed degree of proficiency in fire support and communication capabilities. The same capabilities DO attempts to add to a conventional battalion are resident within current air naval gunfire liaison companies (ANGLICO). The USMC should consider the use ANGLICO to support future battlefield distributed operations because of their current methods of employment, training, and robust communications and fire support capabilities.

Background

The concept of distributed operations seeks to provide an additive capability to the infantry battalion by placing increased authority and responsibility further down the chain of command at the small unit level. The Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) approved DO concept is defined as "an operating

approach that will create an advantage over an adversary through the deliberate use of separation, coordinated, interdependent, tactical actions enabled by increased access to functional support, as well as by enhanced combat capabilities at the small unit level.”¹ Because DO operates with increased spatial separation between DO units, it also involves more risk. Key to the success of DO, is the rapid access to fire support assets needed to engage targets and mitigate these force protection considerations. To accomplish this DO units must be fully trained (down to the squad level) to conduct and control attacks with U.S. and joint supporting arms to include ground and aviation attack platforms. Historically, these tasks have been the primary responsibility of much senior Marines within an infantry company fire support team (FiST).

Two significant problems arise with this downward shift in responsibility. First, squad leaders within DO units not only will have to control and “fight” their squads, but also have to maintain situational awareness on geometry of supporting arms fires, communication linkages to fire support agencies, and the requirement to “positively identify”, locate, or designate targets for engagement. The result is a squad leader who is

¹ U.S. Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps. “A Concept for Distributed Operations.” Washington D.C.: GPO, 2005, 1.

overloaded and task saturated with too many roles and responsibilities. This task saturation is counter productive and diverts attention away from the mission. Second, is the physical burden of the increased gear load resulting from the addition of specialized fire support equipment to locate enemy targets and the associated communications gear necessary to contact the supporting arms agencies and request fires. The added weight to an already heavy load further reduces speed and mobility if operating without vehicle support.²

In 2003, a resurrected 1st and 2nd Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Companies (ANGLICO) replaced the deactivated 1st and 2nd MEF Liaison Elements (MLE) in order to resume their role as the Marine Expeditionary Force Commander's fire support liaison units. With the reactivation came a newly revised mission statement for the company in which ANGLICO "provides MAGTF Commanders a liaison capability with foreign area expertise to plan, coordinate, employ, and conduct terminal control of fires in support of joint, allied and coalition forces."³ Since 2003, all ANGLICO units have deployed numerous times in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Their demand has continued to increase resulting in the establishment of a fifth company and

² Michael Little, "Task Organizing for Distributed Operations." *Marine Corps Gazette*, September 2007, 46.

³ U.S. Department of the Navy. United State Marine Corps, "Concepts and Programs 2007." Washington D.C.: GPO, 2007, 45.

an overall increase in the size of each unit by one additional brigade platoon or by approximately one third.

ANGLICO Employment

ANGLICO units operate in small five-man firepower control teams (FCT's) normally lead by a Marine Captain, that attach to infantry units and provide terminal attack control of fixed and rotary wing assets for close air support, as well as control of mortar, artillery, and naval gunfire. Each FCT carries a wide array of specialized fire support and communications equipment required for the sole purpose of employing supporting arms. ANGLICO teams conduct a wide array of training exercises and events to prepare them to support myriad different units ranging from joint forces, such as U.S. Army or Navy Special Warfare (NSW), to coalition partners like the Iraqi Army. With a well-rounded grasp of infantry tactics and a specialized knowledge of fire support and communications, ANGLICO teams are well suited to attached to almost any maneuver unit.

In the fall of 2005 during OIF 04-06.2, ten ANGLICO teams surged to attach to seven different units, supporting one specific operation. Operation STEEL CURTAIN in the Al Qaim region of Iraq saw all ten ANGLICO teams located within an approximate area of 30 square kilometers and within VHF range of each other. These teams greatly facilitated the coordination

and de-confliction of fire support assets between the various commands. Teams were able to pass updated intelligence, situational reports, or recommend specific geometries of fire rapidly from unit to unit. While this was not, nor was intended to be a D0 mission, Operation STEEL CURTAIN provided valuable insight into the possibility of ANGLICO teams supporting future D0 styles of maneuver warfare.

Training

The largest challenge facing D0 is the training requirement for small unit leaders to become tactically proficient at the new skill sets, especially within the realm of fire support. As the Commandant's concept for D0 point outs "small unit leaders will be trained in the employment of the full array of ground and aviation supporting arms, to include Joint fires...."⁴ While all infantrymen would benefit from such a comprehensive training program, the reality is, as Robert Dobson suggests, that "there does not appear to be sufficient time available for general-purpose infantry forces to develop and sustain advanced proficiency in distributed operations as well as maintain proficiency in all the other assigned mission essential tasks."⁵

⁴ U.S. Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps. "A Concept for Distributed Operations." Washington D.C.: GPO, 2005, 7.

⁵ Robert K Dobson Jr. "The Distributed Operations Hurdles." *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 2004, 33.

As the test bed and first trained DO unit, 1st Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines received, eight weeks of individual specialized training conducted by members of the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab (MCWL) at Fort Hunter Liggett and at Marine Base 29 Palms. Additionally, all fire team and squad leaders within the platoon benefited from simultaneously attending the Infantry Squad Leaders Course at Camp Pendleton.⁶ Such time consuming specialized training for the average infantry battalion to conduct all the way down to the squad level is currently not feasible.

The attachment of ANGLICO FCTs to DO units eliminates problems associated with training the small unit leaders in fire support. The FCTs would provide a certified and qualified joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) who has attended one of the DoD recognized course of instruction (lasting approximately four weeks) and who has maintained the required currency while achieving advanced terminal attack controls of Close Air Support (CAS) aircraft.⁷ In addition to the JTAC, the FCT would provide two fire support men experienced in controlling mortars,

⁶ MCCLL. "Distributed Operations in Afghanistan, First Battalion, Third Marines." 14 Nov 2006, 6.

⁷ USMC JTAC Certification Process. Prior to commencing JTAC training, a JTAC trainee requires a minimum of one year in a position with operational exposure to the integration of direct, indirect, and aviation fires in consonance with ground maneuver; or, be a pilot/NFO with at least 2 years of operational flying experience. Individuals shall complete required distance learning and receive authorized training at organizations with accredited courses. To be certified as a JTAC, the individual must conduct a minimum of 14 controls. Six (6) of these must be fixed wing Type I or Type II controls and 2 must be rotary wing controls. Four of these controls must expend live or training ordnance. One of the 14 controls must be conducted at night. Marines receiving the 7502 or 8002 MOS shall be certified by an EWTG.

artillery, and naval gunfire, and two radio-telephone operators (RTO's) skilled in and knowledgeable about all fire support communication nets. When not attached to the D0 unit, FCTs would continue to train with their parent ANGLICO command, maintaining a high level of proficiency on USMC and joint fire support platforms.

Communication and Fire Support Equipment

D0 units operating beyond the normal range of conventional forces, require additional assets compared with conventional infantry forces. More radios will be needed to relay intelligence, coordinate actions between forces, and request supporting arms. Specialized fires support optics and equipment will be necessary to locate and engage targets accurately. Each one of these pieces of equipment will have their own battery demands. As Captain Little points out, D0 units will have unique challenges to maintain tactical mobility and maneuver with the increased loads, such as the D0 platoon from 1/3 operated with in Afghanistan.⁸ Without freedom of mobility, distributed operation units would fail to exploit the spatial and temporal advantage D0 seeks to attain.⁹

⁸ Michael Little. "Task Organizing for Distributed Operations." *Marine Corps Gazette*, September 2007, 46-47.

⁹ U.S. Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps. "A Concept for Distributed Operations." Washington D.C.: GPO, 2005, 1.

Implementation of ANGLICO teams in support of DO units would eliminate the need for the small unit leaders to maintain a communication nets to supporting arms agencies, freeing up Marines from carrying additional radios and allowing them to focus on the mission's tactical task. ANGLICO FCT's would come with organic VHF, UHF, HF (voice & data) and SATCOM (voice and data) capabilities, extending the tactical range of the supported unit. Along with radios, the attached teams would possess fire support optics and targeting devices such as the Ground Laser Target Designator II (GLTD II), Vector 21B Common Laser Range Finder (CLRF), and thermal imagers or laser spot trackers (LST's), which would shift the physical and mental weight of employment responsibility away from the small unit leader.

Counterarguments

While ANGLICO could support DO, many will likely argue that doing so is not within the realm of ANGLICO's current mission statement; ANGLICO is a MEF asset to be assigned by the MAGTF commander to support joint, allied, or coalition forces operating within the MAGTF area of operations. Marine units normally receive the lowest priority for ANGLICO support. While this may very well be the case within OIF due to the large

number of U.S. Army and Iraqi infantry forces operating within the MAGTF's battlespace, it may not be the case with a MAGTF deployed solely by itself. In fact, the MAGTF could integrate ANGLICO teams within USMC battalions in future conflicts to take full advantage of DO through their robust communications and fire support knowledge. Doing so would relieve the small unit leader and his Marines from such a burden. Some such as the former 2nd ANGLICO Commanding Officer, LtCol Campbell, pose the question of employment options for a post OIF conflict by saying "what does the Marine Corps want us [ANGLICO] to be able to do? Are we going to have a role in distributed operations or are we going to maintain a more traditional ANGLICO mission of joint coalition support, liaison and fire support?"¹⁰

Others will argue that too few ANGLICO teams are currently available to support all USMC infantry battalions' distributed operations. In this case a more selective approach for support will be required. As Colonel Dobson has suggested, a possible option would be to stand up a DO battalion within the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF).¹¹ If the MEF decided to limit DO to one selective battalion, ANGLICO units would have more than sufficient teams to integrate and provide fire support

¹⁰ MCCLL. "Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company Operations: Lessons and Observations from OIF 05-07." 5 Feb 2007.

¹¹ Robert K Dobson Jr. "The Distributed Operations Hurdles." *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 2004, 33.

coordination and execution to the maneuver forces. An infantry battalion with attached ANGLICO teams could undergo a qualification and testing phase prior to deployment in order to be considered DO-capable.

Conclusion

The distributed operation concept expands and builds upon the Marine Corps' philosophy of maneuver warfare by attempting to add more capabilities to small unit leaders in the form of training and equipment. The need to provide numerous spatially separated units with increase mobility, rapid decision making and command and control, is the impetus. While the concept is solid, challenges exist. Training limitations and the task saturation that occurs when complex fire support attacks must be executed impair and divert the attention of the small unit leader from the tactical task. With the integration of ANGLICO teams into DO units to control all aspects of fire support with their existing methods of employment, training, and equipment, the full potential of distributed operations can be achieved.

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