Professionalizing Air Intelligence

An MOS tactics, techniques, and procedures manual

by Capt Christopher A. Denzel

In the early 2000s, MAG-26 and MAG-29, operating forward as MAG-55, drafted a MAG SOP which standardized a baseline for mission planning, briefing, and execution. In time, this SOP evolved into the *Navy Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (NTTP) 3-22.5 Assault Support Tactical SOP* (short title: ASTACSOP). This publication identified best practices and useful reference information and provided the rotary-wing community with a common baseline from which to operate.

While unit flight SOPs existed prior to the ASTACSOP, its creation and dissemination reduced a large burden on the unit for mission planning, briefing, and execution. Instead of each squadron, MAG, or MAW creating its own standard or best practices, the rotary-wing community now shared a common baseline and had a standardized resource that allowed it to collect, vet, and improve best practices. (Despite its name, it is regularly used by all rotary-wing assets, not just assault support aircraft). Now it is common—if not ubiquitous—to see rotary-wing pilots deliver mission briefs from the flight brief outline in the ASTACSOP, brief coordination and deconfliction procedures and templates "per the ASTACSOP," and arrive at mission planning sessions with the resource close at hand for quick reference of capabilities, tactics, planning factors, and other critical information.

Every lieutenant who has passed through The Basic School since at least 2010 has received an analogous, if less thorough, resource in the form of the THULS manual (Tactical Handbook Unit Leader Small). And any Marine

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The Wing has to deliver training absent from the schoolhouse. *(Photo by LCpl Jonah Lovy.)*

who has used a smartpack, handbook, crib sheet, or some other sort of template or skeleton understands how useful such a resource can be. The Marine Corps air intelligence community has sore need for an "air intelligence version of the ASTACSOP," or an ACE Intelligence SOP (ACEINTSOP).

The Air Intelligence Problem

Perhaps one of the most profound requirements for such a standardized air intelligence reference arises from the fact that enlisted intelligence specialists (MOS 0231) do not receive the formal training so sorely needed to fully assess the air threat and to provide accurate, timely, and tailored intelligence support to air operations. These unique and technical skills must be individually taught to them by air intelligence officers (MOS 0207) who have all attended Air Intelligence Officers Course (AIOC) or 0231s who have attended the Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) course, the two formal schools

where this specialization is taught. These skills include understanding weather effects on the electromagnetic spectrum, advanced electro-optical and radar missile seekers, advanced enemy fighter tactics, missile guidance laws, and the full range of enemy air defenses ranging from AK-47s to multimillion dollar strategic surface-to-air missiles. Because many squadrons are only permanently manned—per the table of organization—with one or two 0231s and reinforced with additional 0231s and an 0207 for deployments, this system of teaching, retaining, and employing knowledge is not as effective as it could and should be, and much of this informal training is lost or atrophies with post-deployment manpower turnovers.

The air intelligence community has already taken some steps to rectify the lack of adequate formal training. 2d MAW has developed a Squadron Intelligence Training Course (SITC) that focuses on providing the air-specific training that 0231s need to function effectively in the air wing. It is based, in part, off of the WTI and AIOC programs of instruction and provides a wealth of information to air wing 0231s; however, while the SITC focuses on the basic knowledge required to provide intelligence analysis and support to aviation operations (knowledge that, in other areas, would be taught at an initial MOS schoolhouse), it still falls short in some critical areas. It teaches students to understand enemy capabilities within the context of an integrated air defense system and to decipher the terminology of the electromagnetic spectrum. But beyond exposure training, it does not teach them the operational procedures required to construct an air threat assessment, debrief pilots, write mission reports (MISREPs), or, most critically, the intelligence support required to support the vast array of mission essential tasks with which the ACE may be tasked.

But while SITC does fill some of the gaps in training for 0231s, the pre-deployment manpower surges and post-deployment downsizing takes a toll on the execution of air intelligence training plans at many squadrons and does much to hinder the establishment of a thor-

oughly validated SOP to provide adequate intelligence support. Most fleet squadrons are not staffed with an 0207 per the table of organization. Of the seventy-eight 0207 billets in the Marine Corps, only 13 are at squadrons: seven at the active duty F/A-18 Hornet squadrons (VMFA) (although none are at the F/A-18D squadrons) and four at the EA-6B Prowler squadrons (VMAQ). Forty-six of the 0207 billets are concentrated at the MAG level. While, in practice, many of these 0207s are pushed down to squadrons, this means they are often rotated between squadrons for operational or training deployments. And with only some of the 0231s at squadrons able to attend the SITC (and only a rarified number able to attend WTI), this leaves a critical knowledge and capability gap at many squadrons where regular personnel turnover—of not just deployment augmentations but also the one or two 0231s allocated by the table of organization—also acts to counter much needed progress and professionalization.

> ## The publications and references currently available are limited.

Tools for Professionalization

The Marine Corps air intelligence community needs a standardized air intelligence doctrine supported by appropriate publications. This should take the form of doctrinal publications, instructional documents, and topical primers, but also an ACEINTSOP. Many squadron intelligence sections develop their own SOPs from a combination of practices taught at AIOC and WTI and various turnover binders, checklists, and informal gouge. The result is an ad hoc method of promulgating useful best practice SOPs for daily squadron intelligence operations while deployed. But the system could be improved by the community, reducing much of the "wheel reinventing" that goes on, reinvented all the more often due to

manpower turnovers. A standardized ACEINTSOP would serve not only as a reference for best practices, SOPs, and other frequently needed information, but also as a focus for future efforts to improve and refine those tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP).

This "ASTACSOP for air intelligence" would be a baseline SOP and reference document to bridge the gap between the knowledge taught at a program like SITC and the processes and procedures required for effective squadron intelligence support. It would serve as a common baseline across all fleet squadrons so that intelligence sections maintain a high level of common proficiency as they wax with manpower and experience for a deployment and then wane as that manpower and experience dissipates post-deployment. The list of problems such a publication can help solve is long.

The publications and references currently available are limited. The widespread U.S. Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT) "Mother of all MISREPs" (MOAM) uses an obsolete MISREP format not used by AFCENT for years. There are derivative copies of a 2003 MAW SOP in wide use which provides a valuable baseline for administration and security management but does not provide modern SOPs useful for daily intelligence functions while deployed. The Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One (MAWTS-1) Marine Aviation Intelligence Reference comes closest but currently focuses on unclassified threat reference material and is insufficient as a baseline SOP, and it is neither widely disseminated nor used. These references and others, moreover, have never been coalesced into a single source for ease of access.

The most glaring deficiency resulting from a validated TTP manual is the lack of resources for those units wishing to use a definition- and effect-based threat assessment. Despite effect-based air threat environments being defined in the *Aviation Training and Readiness Program Manual* (*Navy Marine Corps 3500.14C, Aviation Training and Readiness,* [HQMC, Washington, DC: August 2011]), these definitions are not

widely known or used. Despite multiple definitions existing for intent and capability and the mantra that "threat equals capability plus intent," this is not a formula widely applied in threat assessments. A definition- and effect-based threat assessment is critical for rapidly and accurately assessing a spectrum of threats in current and future operating environments.

The rapid response planning process (R2P2) cycle used by MEUs and some special purpose Marine Air Ground Task Forces (SPMAGTFs) requires an intelligence section equipped to support a six-hour timeline. An ACEINT-SOP that includes prespun intelligence requirements (IR) and products tailored to specific mission sets (e.g., tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel, raid, embassy reinforcement, etc.) greatly facilitates this process for any ACE. Neither the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) *Generic Intelligence Requirements Handbooks* (*GIRH*) nor the other available resources provide an adequate baseline for these IRs.

Within new normal disaggregated or hub-and-spoke operations, an individual Marine may find himself as the only intelligence Marine on a shift, requiring the tools to run the shop independently, to include an SOP which provides the "80 percent solution."

Finally, despite large amounts of threat information being unclassified, for official use only (U//FOUO), much of this information resides in classified documents (e.g., *AFTTP 3-1, Threat Guide* [Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, November 2001]), hindering hip-pocket professional military education (PME) or study. This PME is more accessible when it can be done by opening an U//FOUO handbook rather than entering a secure space to access classified documents for the same U//FOUO material.

The ACEINTSOP

The Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 365 (Reinforced) (VMM-365[REIN]) Intelligence Section created a 24th MEU ACEINTSOP that is intended to meet these requirements in six sections. It has been validated

Squadrons are running their own air intel courses out of necessity. (Photo by Cpl Michelle Reif.)

through seven 24th MEU workup exercises, 2d MEB's Bold Alligator exercise, and our deployment to the Mediterranean and U.S. Central Command. At 226 pages and 66,000 words, it is comprehensive.

It is broken up into six sections: unit specific SOPs, battle rhythms, and administrative information; an analysis and assessment SOP and standardized methods for threat analysis and assessment; a *GIRH* tailored to MEU ACE mission sets; debriefing information, MISREP checklists, and guidance for MISREP drafting; a quick reference section for unclassified mission planning and air threat knowledge for use, studying, and PME; and periodic reference information of general use to intelligence Marines.

The ACEINTSOP is one example of a comprehensive baseline SOP for air intelligence. It was generated in collaboration with weapons and tactics instructors, former MAWTS-1 instructor pilots, and intelligence Marines with experience at a number of operational squadrons, making it widely applicable within the community.

VMM-365(REIN)'s pilots have also found regular use for portions of the ACEINTSOP, requesting their own abridged versions including the threat quick reference and general reference sections. This has served as a ready re-

source for the more junior and senior pilots alike.

Standardization, Not Proscription

The ACEINTSOP, if adopted by the community, may help standardize many SOPs and TTP, but collecting and validating SOPs and best practices should neither be considered limiting nor serve to codify those procedures as a standard from which we may not deviate. As with SOPs in any capacity, these represent *standing* operating procedures, not the *only* operating procedures. By providing air intelligence Marines with a vetted collection of best practices, the air intelligence learning curve is dramatically shortened, and the squadron intelligence section then simply needs to develop its own unit- or mission-specific tailored approach.

The ACEINTSOP, in its current form, is also admittedly squadron- and MEU ACE-centric. Further input from MAGs, MAWs, and SPMAGTF ACEs can expand its utility to air intelligence sections at units of different size and composition. And, like the MEU ACE, the ACEINTSOP is weighted more heavily toward rotary-wing needs and concerns. 0231s and 0207s with extensive fixed-wing experience have significant contributions to make, especially in the realm of targeting support.

Conclusion

A standardized ACEINTSOP would be an invaluable asset for the Marine Corps air intelligence community. As the MAG-55 SOP was adopted and is now maintained by MAWTS-1, the ACEINTSOP will need to be adopted by a responsible agency that can provide institutional support and has the expertise to solicit changes, collect new best practices, sustain the document, and disseminate it. This may be AIOC as subject matter experts for Marine Corps air intelligence, or it may be MAWTS-1 as the unit responsible for much of the standardization throughout Marine aviation.

Once such a baseline SOP is adopted and disseminated, it will be critical to hold periodic air intelligence working groups to continue to refine and develop best practices, advancing the community state of the art. In this, the MAW G-2s (intelligence officers) would serve as regional advocates and facilitators for air intelligence by organizing and hosting such working groups. The MAW G-2 would have the resources, authority, and institutional weight to allocate necessary resources and manpower to this

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Marine Corps air intelligence must continue to professionalize ...

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continued professionalization and community improvement. These working groups would serve as a clearinghouse for developing TTP, helping to refine them and solicit input from across the MAW and then provide collated, vetted feedback to the agency responsible for the community publication.

In its limited and informal dissemination to this point, the 24th MEU ACEINTSOP has already been favorably received by a number of other MEU and SPMAGTF ACEs as well as a handful of squadrons and MAGs. The 0231s and 0207s who have had the opportunity to employ it have had largely positive experiences, with some lamenting that it has taken this long for such a product to be made available. If nothing else, this would appear to demonstrate that there is a genuine need in the air intelligence community for such a publication. Marine Corps air intelligence must continue to professionalize in a number of areas to include its training pipelines for 0231s and in the creation of a doctrine. But one area in which a practical and tactical need has already been clearly demonstrated and an initial tool has already been created to begin to fill that need is a baseline SOP and TTP manual in the form of the ACEINTSOP.

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