

Professionalizing Air Intelligence, Part V

In defense of the wing intelligence support company
by Capt Christopher A. Denzel

In September 2012, I checked into my first squadron as a freshly minted air intelligence officer (0207). Almost immediately, I surveyed my shop.

My chief was a lateral mover with three years of targeting intelligence experience, but there is not much targeting in an MV-22 Osprey squadron. My corporal had been with the squadron since its return from deployment; however, the previous chief was content to focus on security management, and the intelligence training this young Marine suffered. I lobbied MAG-26 to plus me up. They sent a lance corporal fresh from the schoolhouse. Yet, the entry-level Intelligence Specialist (0231) Course provides no meaningful instruction on air intelligence.

Then I used the course material from the Air Intelligence Officers Course to train my Marines. We learned to debrief and analyze surface-to-air engagements, guided intelligence studies of current missions, and studied threat manuals. When we deployed three months later, we had covered the fundamentals of air intelligence, but it took most of the deployment to master the *specific* skills required of a MV-22 intelligence shop.

Two years later, I repeated this exercise. I returned from the Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course (WTI) to a composite squadron beginning its pre-deployment training program (PTP) for a MEU. My chief checked in halfway through PTP having never led a Marine in his career. I replaced him fourteen days before we deployed. 2d MAW decided to pick a personnel fight with II MEF, so I did not get the corporal they promised me until less than 24 hours before the third and last

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at-sea PTP period began. My Harrier analyst developed medical issues and was replaced a week before our third at-sea period. The new analyst—organic to the squadron—lost a series of battles with hygiene and simple instructions. He was replaced after an at-sea PTP period by a new analyst from MAG-26. And my Huey/Cobra analyst was unable to join us right away because he was deployed with the sourcing squadron on a deployment for training. In the end, none of the Marines I deployed with were there at the start of PTP.

Both times, I had an ad hoc team thrown together a couple months before deploying. We never really trained together. In fact, we were barely trained. This might seem like especially bad luck, but I saw this situation repeat multiple times to varying degrees with other squadrons. I can only imagine it is not atypical.

Sad as it is to say, air intelligence is often a game of pick-up teams and amateurs (who should be commended for often making it work).

The root cause of these problems is the current force structure of Marine Corps air intelligence.

What Is the Wing Intelligence Support Company?

If fully implemented, Force 2025 will make significant changes to the



Instead of ad hoc teams thrown together to provide intel support, the WISC will provide better talent management of aviation intelligence manpower resources. (Photo by LCpl Koby Saunders.)

air intelligence force structure, creating WISCs and consolidating the majority of air intelligence Marines into these units:

The WISC is designed not only for the future force but to also address gaps and shortfalls documented in a deep body of after actions, articles, and formal studies from the Korean War through today. This capability took shape to both satisfy emerging Future Force requirements and to fix systemic issues outlined in the [2011] Rand Report “Alert and Ready” and the 2015 [DOTMLPF-P] Analysis conducted by the former MAWTS-1 [Instructor Pilot] & counter tactics/threat subject-matter expert.¹

WISCs will support deploying squadrons, groups, and wings with direct support teams (DSTs) that have been specifically trained in providing intelligence support to their supported airframe(s) at the specific echelon where they will serve. The trained, qualified, and certified DSTs are then attached to the supported unit prior to a PTP.

While there is a consensus that this is the right move, there remain a few hold-outs. Most of these individuals hold an incomplete understanding of the issues the air intelligence community faces or have not thought seriously about how to fix them.

I began as one of the WISC’s most vehement opponents. But over the last few years, I have been pulling the thread on the problems within Marine Corps air intelligence. Each seems possible to fix with the WISC and impossible to fix without it. I now find myself one of its most enthusiastic supporters.

This article outlines those issues and explains how the WISC structure will facilitate solutions to them. Ultimately, the change in force structure itself fixes very little. It does, however, set an essential condition for the necessary solutions to be implemented.

Why a WISC?

The WISC solves a force structure problem that has stood in the way of effectively addressing issues in air intelligence for decades. The community has not neglected these issues. It has created an intelligence WTI MOS, an



WISCs will support deploying squadrons, groups, and wings. (Photo by LCpl Jason Monty.)

MOS schoolhouse, the Squadron Intelligence Training and Certification Course (SITCC), the 0271 enlisted air intelligence specialist MOS, and the Air Intelligence Tactics Study Group.

But none have achieved their full potential because each has been retarded by a force structure that saps the impact of these improvements. 0207s often do not stay in or rarely return to the wing. They are often left to fend for themselves or have senior officers unfamiliar with the unique aspects of air intelligence. The WTI course has been treated as “Air Intelligence Officers Course 2.0,” not as a way to make intelligence instructors. SITCC is not followed up by sustainment training or managed on-the-job training for a Marine’s billet, and the Air Intelligence Tactics Study Group is a development and standardization forum that only has voluntary (and spotty) participation.

By altering the force structure, the WISC can achieve significant progress in at least four distinct areas: formalized (persistent, billet-based) training, tying intelligence training to unit readiness, talent management, and command opportunities.

Formalized Training

The current force structure excessively diffuses Marines in a way that inhibits sustainment training and man-

aged on-the-job-training for specific billets. In many squadrons, the organic intelligence complement is a single lance corporal as the intelligence clerk and a single sergeant or staff sergeant as intelligence chief (both 0231s). Most often, these Marines have no formal air intelligence training. The entry-level school for 0231s spends only a few hours on any air intelligence support considerations. By comparison, air intelligence officers (0207s) now receive five weeks of entry-level specialized air intelligence training with an additional ten weeks of MAGTF and basic intelligence training, and Air Force intelligence officers receive six and one-half months of basic intelligence training before they even begin formal training specific to their platforms (which can add an additional three months).

While the formalization of SITCC as an MOS-producing school (MOS 0271) does much to fix this, this only just occurred in 2018. Because it still only provides four weeks of entry-level air intelligence training, there is no sustainment or billet-based training once 0271s hit the fleet.

With few exceptions, there are no billets for 0207s at the squadron level. Most deploying squadrons only receive a 0207 a few months before deployment (and lose that officer shortly after returning). This limits an officer’s abil-

ity to train his Marines. Since we have historically provided specialized training to our air intelligence officers but not our enlisted Marines, the ability of 0231s to train junior Marines in these unique skills without the presence of an officer (as we might expect in other fields) is limited.

Officer force structure issues are compounded by a perceived lack of desirable intelligence officer billets in MAGs or MAWs above the rank of lieutenant. The perception is often that the MAGs and MAWs do not provide an opportunity to do meaningful air intelligence work. In many cases, being a lieutenant is the only way to deploy in an air intelligence role. Thus, many competent 0207s choose to leave the air wing rather than seek a follow-on assignment there at the rank of captain. This is as much cause as effect because many of the captains or majors at the MAG and MAW have no air intelligence background, leaving many lieutenants without knowledgeable or engaged senior officers, further compounding the perception that captain or major billets in the wing are undesirable.

To make matters worse, squadron intelligence tables of organization (T/O) have changed little since the 1980s when intelligence resources at a squadron were limited to maps and hard-copy country smart books and threat manuals. As a consequence, squadrons must be regularly augmented with additional 0231s to meet deployed intelligence support requirements, but these augments are equally untrained as those already at the squadron and rarely arrive before the officer (who must usually request them).

Thus, although we have been executing the WISC DST model for decades, we have done it poorly and all without the supporting training structure the WISC promises. Instead of deliberately identifying Marines to fill a training and exercise employment plan (TEEP) requirement and training them for their specific duties in support of an identified unit and mission, we have been substituting this preparatory training with whatever a 0207 can cram into the few months before deploying.

With the WISC, we will have an S-3 with TEEP obligations and an S-3T (training section) with an instructor cadre and tailored training syllabi. This allows deliberate preparation and training for planned deployments as well as improved training (and tracking) to address contingency requirements. The WISC, paired with training and readiness (T&R) events that correspond to specific billets (e.g., “VMM Intelligence Analyst”), facilitates a training regime that pairs billet-based training with the Marine TEEPed for that billet and contributes to a persistent learning environment over a Marine’s career progression. Additionally, intelligence WTIs (MOS 0277) are rarely, if ever, used as intelligence instructors, and T/Os everywhere have such low density of 0277s that no unit can afford to employ them in a primary training billet (as the MOS is used in aviation).

... how comprehensive can air intelligence training be ...

Tied to Readiness

It is an unfortunate truism that a “requirement” that is not reportable or inspectable is not a requirement, becomes effectively invisible to the Service, and the resource-constrained nature of reality steps in—all but ensuring that it is ignored.

Thus, if we want to have air intelligence training executed with any regularity or to any common standard, the training must be tied to something reportable or inspectable. Some have suggested that intelligence training be added to flying squadrons’ reporting in Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS). Despite the *doctrinal* importance we place on intelligence in executing effective maneuver warfare, it is hard to imagine a MAG commander accepting a lower rate of readiness in his squadrons because a few intelligence sections have not done their semi-annual intelligence preparation of the bat-

tle space (IPB) training. It is not hard to imagine a squadron operations officer, pressed to improve readiness, cajoling his intelligence officer (or the sergeant or staff sergeant), “Come on, you guys are *fine* on IPB,” and pencil-whipping the training in DRRS.

Furthermore, such logic then extends to including metrics for every other staff function in DRRS. If everything becomes a mission essential task (MET), then nothing is a MET. The definitive answer to this question is provided by Marine Corps order, which requires METs “be focused outside of the command and support another command or directly affect the enemy” and “exclude common internally focused activities such as organic logistics support or command and control of internal organizations.”²

Including intelligence training in a flying unit’s DRRS is a non-starter.

Bringing back the old readiness inspection tab (functional area 250) for intelligence training might be a solution that will serve organic intelligence sections across the Marine Corps (and this is being considered). However, that does not solve the problem of a low-density force structure. For an organic intelligence section of two Marines, how comprehensive can air intelligence training be and how proficient can we expect those Marines to become? The MAGs could operate training programs. But many already attempt to do so now. Their success is hit or miss, reliant on the MAG being staffed with the right personnel (see the previous comment about undesirable captain and major billets).

Thus, it is not clear that we can institutionalize air intelligence training with the diffuse force structure we currently have. The fact that we are still attempting to solve this problem after decades of trying seems as empirical validation of this conclusion.

The readily apparent solution is a unit such as the WISC—where the unit’s own DRRS-reportable METs are fulfilled (in part) by the generation of DSTs filled by trained and qualified Marines. Such a consolidated unit has the critical mass required to establish a staff section specifically dedicated

to training (i.e., S-3T) with a selected cadre of instructors. The MAW's TEEP will identify the WISC's DST generation requirements (i.e., the number and type of deployments to support) and a re-written T&R manual will identify the training events each of those DSTs will need to complete to be fully trained to support their deployment. These DST training requirements will form the metric for the WISC MET: "Provide Task Organized Forces."

In this way, we can hold a (WISC) commander accountable for both intelligence training and deployed intelligence manpower requirements. This has the added benefit of mitigating the obvious concern that MAW G-2s would simply see the WISCs as free capacity and divert them from their primary training mission. If G-2s must answer to the CG for the readiness impact of such a diversion, the risk is minimized.

Talent Management

Currently, personnel supporting a deployment cannot be easily tailored. Marines filling an organic billet are generally stuck with that unit (or that unit with them). Whether they have a family situation that would be aggravated by deploying or they would be better suited to a less complex deployment, it is challenging to shuffle these Marines around. If a squadron must be augmented, it falls to the parent MAG to source augments from within the MAG S-2. Pulling Marines from another subordinate squadron, adjacent MAG, or the MAW normally requires disqualifying rationales for each of the Marines organic to the MAG S-2.

We require each echelon to successfully justify why they cannot make do with the forces they have before reaching up, down, or laterally. To state this plainly, with a random distribution of Marines as the baseline, we actually require units to be *mission incapable* to justify optimization.

These same factors leave highly-qualified Marines, eager to deploy, stranded at units not scheduled to do so. Instead, the WISC enables its commander to identify the best fit from a pool of intelligence Marines in the MAW. DSTs can be tailored based on the judgement of

the WISC commander, not the monitor's pen.

The WISC can also improve personnel management for external training, such as WTI. Intelligence airmen recruited to attend the Air Force's Weapons School (counterpart to WTI) travel to Nellis Air Force Base for a one-week screening program that rigorously evaluates their knowledge, briefing skills, and ability to rapidly digest and instruct new material. Only if they pass screening are the prospective students invited to attend the (six month) course. Upon graduation, Weapons School squadron commanders (its squadrons are organized by MOS) act as monitors, personally directing where those graduates serve. This screening process has measurably increased student performance and graduation rates since it was implemented several years ago. The monitor-like duties of the squadron commanders ensure optimal utilization of this high degree of training in the combat air forces.

It is not feasible for MAWTS-1 to screen prospective intelligence WTIs in the same manner. But it is relatively easy to implement an on-site screening process at the WISC, including a board that rigorously selects students for WTI, complex deployments, or demanding billets. Such boards are commonplace among aviators for important flight leadership positions—like aircraft commander—and among junior enlisted Marines everywhere for meritorious promotion boards. In a similar manner, training opportunities or follow-on assignments (within the WISC) can be prioritized and allocated within a large pool of intelligence Marines. Today, units are limited in their nominations for WTI by the Marines they have and are limited in employment opportunities for graduates based on the few deployments on the unit TEEP. Increasing this pool improves the process on both ends. Additionally, the size of the captive training audience at the WISC can serve to better justify and pay for external training, such as mobile training teams, better utilizing available training funds.

By pairing this improved personnel management with persistent, billet-

based training, WISCs will be able to better ensure the right Marine is in the right billet with the right training. This improved talent management will amplify any other improvements to the field. It may even have positive impacts on retention and promotion of the most qualified Marines.

Command Opportunities

The WISC also offers air intelligence Marines a chance at command. While there will only ever be three WISC commander billets, these command opportunities bring along approximately eighteen subordinate key officer billets per WISC including: executive officer, operations officer, training officer, detachment commanders, and platoon commanders.

This officer ecosystem also includes corresponding key enlisted billets such as: operations chief, training chief, detachment chiefs, and platoon sergeants. Thus, leadership opportunities for O271s are similarly enhanced.

Today, an aspiring air intelligence lieutenant looking at a billet vacancy list for captain positions in the wing may see only a series of MAG S-2 positions, perhaps with a MAW G-2 assistant operations officer billet or two. Because of the negative perceptions of such billets, they are inclined to give up on their air intelligence passion and seek greener pastures elsewhere. With the WISCs, that same lieutenant can hope to move into a captain's billet at the WISC and have the flexibility to move up in these positions during their tour as they demonstrate their merit. (Not to mention cross-training in a deployable billet, such as Air Combat Intelligence section [ACI] targeting officer or flight line intelligence center officer-in-charge.)

What about the ACI?

One might reasonably assert that the garrison ACI should fill this role instead. This seems an eminently reasonable alternative. It makes do with the current force structure and avoids stripping flying units of organic intelligence Marines. Having never served in an ACI, I can only offer two observations that undercut the recommendation.



SITCC provides aviation Marines an opportunity to better understand weapons, their capabilities, and limitations. (Photo by Cpl Mackenzie Gibson.)

First, utilizing the ACI does not address the problems of the diffuse force structure. It does nothing to improve the capabilities of the intelligence Marines at the MAGs and squadrons, does not enhance leadership and mentorship at the MAGs, and does not provide any improved intelligence support to squadron training.

Second, the ACI has a history of focusing its support to the CG and inadequately training its Marines. I visited one ACI during a WISC research trip, explicitly to investigate the current state of air intelligence training. The senior SNCOs and officers openly admitted that they did not have, nor were attempting to develop, any training plan for their Marines. When Marines were attached to subordinate deploying units, they were not given any preparatory training and were provided “as-is.” The ACI also did not organize to support the intelligence requirements of subordinate or deployed units but instead focused on support of a weekly brief for the CG.

The result is that if you were to ask a deployed air intelligence Marine to list all the resources he could leverage for reachback support, most would omit the ACI entirely; the thought that it can or should support them would be a foreign idea.

The Real Questions about the WISC

For skeptics, the following questions are critical to evaluating whether the WISC is a step forward or back.

- What value does an S-2 provide to the squadron in garrison and can the WISC provide the same or better?
- What value does an S-2 provide to the deployed ACE and can the WISC provide the same or better?

Today, a squadron S-2 tends to provide little intelligence value in garrison. Beyond administrative (security management) functions, many S-2s merely provide weekly intelligence briefs. This need not be the case. There is ample opportunity to truly integrate into garrison squadron training. Failure to do so is often a product of the small organic structure at squadrons, usually comprised of Marines who do not have a grasp of what garrison intelligence support should look like or who only learn how to do it well right before they rotate out. MAGs and MAWs will largely be unaffected by this reduction in force structure as their residual organic intelligence is sufficient for these low-density, low-demand services.

Instead, the WISC can coordinate with squadron operations departments and build garrison intelligence support into their TEEP, sending out DSTs-in-training for individual training flights

and for DFTs or exercises. The WISC can also dispatch weekly intelligence briefers to provide briefs tailored for each unit’s future deployment (the briefers selected from those TEEPed for that unit in the future). Being managed by senior air intelligence Marines will ensure DSTs in-training take advantage of these support opportunities across the MAWs and also leverage them for their own training benefit.

Today’s *deployed* ACE S-2s are often an amalgam of organic and augmented intelligence Marines who have limited opportunities to train together, can be burdened by a suboptimal composition of Marines, have no billet-based training, and lack the critical mass to execute an enduring, robust training plan. This is little more than a DST model executed poorly. The WISC could hardly do worse. By giving this mission to an accountable unit, this ad hoc approach is improved with better, tailored training and with an improved mix of the most qualified Marines.

Skeptics bemoan the loss of the organic S-2 who is perfectly attuned to the needs and progression of their aviators, well-versed in the rhythm of the squadron, and trained in all of the threats the squadron will face. But this S-2 is largely a myth. When and where it exists, it is short-lived and personality based. It relies on luck for the right high-performing personnel, that those personnel can find and leverage the right training materials (or build them themselves), and for the squadron to be TEEPed for a deployment during that time. The WISC can replicate these conditions more consistently than luck alone.

Thus, for both questions, the WISC will outperform the current force structure.

Pick-Up Teams and Amateurs

It is naive to imagine WISCs will operate as perfectly as the potential described above. As with any unit, the best laid plans will fall apart at the last minute. The star staff sergeant who just graduated WTI will be unexpectedly sent to recruiting duty. The exquisitely cross-trained “VMA, VMM, HMH, and HMLA analyst,” lined up for a

MEU fourteen months ago, will break her ankle and be replaced at the last minute with someone trained to be an “ACI Targeting Analyst.” Between the legal troubles, medical misfortunes, base personnel taxes, individual augmentee requirements, and everything else that eats up otherwise qualified Marines, there will somehow, at some time, be absolutely no sergeants available for a deployment.

Nor is it likely the WISC will achieve success immediately. New organizations and units take a long time to get their feet under them, find their identity, and integrate into existing structures and supported units (and for those structures and units to accommodate that integration). It is likely the WISCs will suffer years of mixed reviews (from within and without) before they truly come into their own. One need only

look at the half-century evolution of MAWTS-1 (from the Marine air weapons training units to the “black shirts” era to today) to see that even the most auspicious endeavors take time to get where they are going.

But perfect is not the point. The point is those problems are worse today. We have none of the mitigations the WISCs will offer. Right now, air intelligence is a game of pick-up teams and amateurs. The WISC offers the promise that at least the majority of intelligence Marines on the majority of aviation deployments will be specifically qualified and trained for their duties. In the future, when someone cries “the WISCs are broken,” at least they will have only 3 units to fix—not the nearly 80 squadrons, MAGs, and MAWs where today’s air intelligence Marines are diffused to.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, “Force 2025 Aviation Intelligence + Information Environment Operations Capability,” Information Paper (Washington, DC: December 2017).

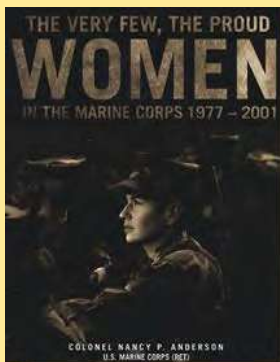
2. Commandant of the Marine Corps, *MCO 3500.110 Policy and Guidance for Mission Essential Task List (METL) Development, Review, Approval, Publication and Maintenance* (Washington, DC: July 2011).

>Editor’s Note: This article is a continuation of Capt Denzel’s articles on professionalizing air intelligence that ran in the January 2016, May 2017, March 2018, September 2018, and this issue of the Gazette.



For Further Reading

by BGen Thomas V. Draude, USMC(Ret)



THE VERY FEW, THE PROUD: Women in the Marine Corps, 1977-2001. By Col Nancy P. Anderson, USMC(Ret). Quantico, VA: History Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2018.

Col Nancy Anderson has written a superb history of women in the Marine Corps from 1977-2001. She has captured the frustrations, tensions, and perspectives of women who were attempting to serve as well as those who were attempting to restrict that opportunity.

It is a history that reviews past limitations that now seem unreal, such as rules of no touching any weapon as well as classes on posture and makeup. Others were based on preconceived notions of female physiology; one Marine aviator general shared with me that women could not fly high performance aircraft—because “the G Forces will pull their uterus right out!”

Col Anderson takes the reader through the stages of this journey, including training, accession, and assignment policies; Title 10, U.S. Code; and combat, aviation, physical fitness, uniforms, sexual harassment, and discrimination. It is extremely well-researched with many interviews to clarify issues. (Full disclosure: I served on the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, am married to a Marine who was discharged for pregnancy, and father of a female Navy carrier pilot.) The appendices are appropriate and useful covering such areas as strengths, traditions, trailblazers, and personal experiences “in our own words.”

Marines pride themselves on knowing our history. But not many know of this particular history of our Marines—we should. This void is captured in this statement by Col Anderson: “When breaking gender barriers, women often have had to work twice as hard as their male colleagues to be considered half as good.” This history is a giant step in filling that void!

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