

Bringing Back the MWSG

Aviation ground support

by LtCol Frank Rosa, USMC(Ret)

The Deputy Commandants for Installations & Logistics and Aviation recently teamed to support the reactivation of Marine Wing Support Group (MWSG) Headquarters-27 and -37 in fiscal year 2019. Despite recent force reductions and redesign efforts, the requirement to bring back the MWSG to plan, prioritize, and allocate aviation ground support (AGS) across the MAW has remained constant. This article will discuss the recent history and decision making concerning the command and control of AGS.

The MWSGs and subordinate Marine wing support squadrons (MWSSs) were formed in the 1970s by merging the Marine air base squadrons, wing engineer squadrons, wing transportation squadrons, wing engineer repair squadrons, and headquarters and headquarters squadrons to provide AGS to the MAW.

The Marine Corps was organized with four MWSGs: three in the Active Component and one in the Reserve Component. On the active side, an MWSG headquarters was assigned to each MAW, with an MWSS in support of each MAG, airfield, or forward operating base. The MWSGs' AGS tasks included fourteen functions essential to airfield operation services, maintenance and ordnance functions, and base commandant support and services.

Commanded by a colonel, the MWSG provided operational and logistical control of MWSS AGS. The MWSSs provided AGS to enable a MAG, or a composite MAG and supporting or attached elements of the Marine air control group, to conduct expeditionary operations.

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Marines prepare to refuel an incoming Huey. (Photo by Sgt David Bickel.)

In 2002 and 2003, MWSG-37 demonstrated its combat effectiveness during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM as it provided critical AGS that allowed the 3d MAW to maneuver in support of the I MEF GCE's rapid advance. MWSG-37 contributed to the establishment of over twenty forward arming and refueling points and forward operating bases throughout Iraq. Through these forward locations and hot reloading procedures, the MWSG contributed to dramatically reduced turnaround times in forward arming and refueling points, enabling rotary-winged assets to remain

in close proximity to supported ground units.

As a result of the 2010 Force Structure Review, the MWSG headquarters were deactivated as a means to meet decreased end strength requirements. Smaller aviation ground support departments (AGSDs) were established at each MAW headquarters to coordinate the AGS effort, and each MWSS was realigned under a supported MAG. Two MWSSs were reduced in size to better support their MAGs and were redesignated as Marine wing support detachments (MWSDs). The MAG

commander was now responsible for the AGS mission through the subordinate MWSS/MWSD, while the AGSD coordinated AGS across the MAW and combat service support requirements externally. This command relationship was effective but not as efficient as previously achieved through an MWSG commander and staff.

Many senior leaders were uncomfortable with the loss of command and control of AGS capabilities and saw this as an operational gap. They considered this a level of command issue and a MAGTF logistics balance issue. The placement of the MWSSs/MWSDs under the MAGs suboptimized the MAWs' logistics structure, which created an imbalance in MAGTF logistics. It was considered too focused on the tactical fight for a MAG and the MAW Commanding General. The MWSG headquarters is essential for generating the operational reach and tactical lethality and maneuverability needed from Marine aviation. Having a colonel lead MWSG headquarters, rather than the AGS departments, provides the CG, MAW, the means to apportion MWSS/MWSD resources in the most efficient and effective manner in a distributed fight.

In addition to colonel-level command advocacy for AGS, the MWSG



MWSGs establish forward arming and refueling points so that rotary-wing aircraft can maintain close contact with the ground units they are supporting. (Photo by Sgt David Bickel.)

commander also provides colonel-level career logistician leadership and mentorship to the MWSS/MWSD commanders and their communities.

Marine Corps Force 2025 was initiated in 2016 as a reorganization effort based on projected adversaries and capabilities requirements in the future operating environment. It was also an opportunity to address the AGS command and control gap and reinforce the critical role of the MWSG headquarters. As the dust settled in 2025 planning, the MWSG headquarters competed

with other high-priority capabilities but did not receive resourcing. Deputy Commandants for Installations & Logistics and Aviation were undaunted and deemed the MWSG-27 and -37 headquarters as must-haves and looked to source them "out of hide." MWSG-17 would not be reactivated, as it was the smallest group with two MWSSs, and the compensation could not be sourced. The Deputy Commandant for Combat Development & Integration led efforts to develop tables of organization and equipment; assess across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, and facilities spectrum; submit for the command selection program; and publish supporting Marine Corps Bulletin 5400s to reactivate MWSG-27 and -37 headquarters.

The MWSG headquarters are proven combat entities essential to gain economies for AGS functions and to sustain Marine aviation operations. The MWSG headquarters allows a single commander to plan and advocate for CSS and AGS resources within the MAW. Bringing back MWSG-27 and MWSG-37 is the right move for MAGTF logistics, and they will reactivate in fiscal year 2019.



Marines from MWSS-274 preparing to refuel a CH-53 during a training exercise. (Photo by Cpl Jason Jimenez.)