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GETTING PAST GUADALCANAL

The Joint Force Commander's Guidelines
for the
Control of Amphibious Forces

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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19 May 2000

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Abstract

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The Joint Force Commander's Guidelines for the Control of Amphibious Forces

The introduction of an amphibious task force into a Joint Operations Area will require the Joint Force Commander to decide how best to use the force and the proper command relations between the commanders of the amphibious task force (CATF) and landing force (CLF), and other key commanders in the Joint Task Force. Amphibious operations are fundamentally naval in nature and operate under unified command. These attributes give amphibious operations unique advantages over land defenses that must not be diluted by inadvertent or arbitrary decisions on command relations. "Support Command", as an alternative to "OPCON Command" is a viable command relationship between CATF and CLF as demonstrated by historical case study. Air support can be provided by commanders not under the direct command of CATF or CLF if clear and unambiguous direction is provided in an initiating directive or operations order. Fleet command and component command models are presented as methods of structuring a naval amphibious force.

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Preface

The United States Marine Corps and Navy began developing an amphibious doctrine with the amphibious landing exercises at Culebra in the 1930s. The first test of the doctrine under wartime conditions occurred in the Guadalcanal operation. Under the stress of combat over the next years it was quickly determined that the Navy and Marine Corps did not agree on key aspects of amphibious operations. Most important among those issues was the command relationship between the naval and landing force commanders and how naval support, and particularly air support, of the landing operation should be controlled.¹

The fundamental questions requiring resolution have not changed much since then:

- What is the command relationship between CATF and CLF?
- How will air support for the amphibious landing be controlled?

Joint doctrine suggests answers to the questions. Current amphibious doctrine provides a single command relationship between CATF and CLF, "OPCON Command", although a test publication has been released providing a second, "Support Command."² The current practice for air support is to place most, if not all, fixed wing air assets under a single Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC).

A review of history provides some insight into the correct answers to the above questions. Commanders have dealt with the same issues under combat conditions with varying degrees of success. Command relationships resembling OPCON Command and

¹ The term "naval" is often used to include both the Navy and Marine Corps, both being naval services. To ensure clarity for the purposes of this paper, unless specified otherwise, naval will refer to navy forces. In general, the term "landing force" will refer to the ground force, whether Army or Marine Corps. "Amphibious" will refer to both the naval and landing forces.

² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Test Doctrine for Amphibious Operations*. (Test Pub 3-02) (Washington, D. C., April 2000).

Support Command have been successfully used. Air support operating under the equivalent of a modern JFACC has had mixed results as has air support operating from aircraft carriers.

The supported-supporting argument is essentially over which commander is most responsible for the success of an operation. The issue of who is "most responsible" for the success of an amphibious operation is complicated by air forces. Air support rarely has been under the direct control of CATF or CLF. Where the commander had control over all the elements of the landing including the landing force, the naval force, and the air force, air support was not a problem for the amphibious operation.³

Given the challenges confronting modern amphibious operations, such as diesel submarines, mines, coastal anti-ship missiles, and small boat attack, the Joint Force Commander must ensure no decisions are made that lessen the opportunity for success. The real lessons learned of past amphibious operations must be understood and applied correctly in a concerted effort for "getting past Guadalcanal."

³ Donald S. Inbody "Much Ado About Nothing?: An Examination of Command Relations and Major Contentious Issues in Amphibious Operations," (Unpublished Research Paper, U. S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 2000), 6.

The Problem "The Guadalcanal Syndrome"

From the experience of the United States Marines at Guadalcanal, a mythology developed impacting current thinking on amphibious doctrine. As a result, there remains a fear that Marines dropped on a beach may be abandoned. There is a lack of confidence in close air support provided by anyone other than the Marine Corps. There is a near certainty that a Navy officer in command of Marines will not understand a Marine problem and will not provide the Marines ashore necessary support. All these perceptions stem from the Guadalcanal experience, and *all are wrong*. Additionally, and more dangerous to success, are doctrinally based decisions that may dilute the basic strengths of amphibious operations: unity of command and the fundamental, naval nature of such operations.

In 1942 Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet, and Chief of Naval Operations, issued the LONE WOLF Plan, and established the South Pacific Amphibious Force. One section concerning command relationships was to cause problems between the Navy and Marine Corps.

IX. Coordination of Command

- a. Under the Commander, South Pacific Force, the Commander of the South Pacific Amphibious Force will be in command of the naval, ground and air units assigned to the amphibious forces in the South Pacific area.⁴

Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner had just received orders to take command of the South Pacific Amphibious Force. Under the command relationship designated by

⁴ COMINCH, letter, FF1/A3-1/A16-3(5), Ser 00322 of 29 Apr. 1942, subj: LONE WOLF Plan. Quoted in George C. Dyer, *The Amphibians Came to Conquer: The Story of Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner*. Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972, 218.

Admiral King, Turner would command (Operational Control or OPCON under today's terminology) all the forces in the Amphibious Force including the landing force.

Two days following the landing of the First Marine Division under Major General Vandegrift on 7 August 1942, Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, commander of the Expeditionary Force of which Turner's Amphibious Force was part, decided that the danger to the aircraft carriers from Japanese attack was so great he withdrew them from the vicinity of Guadalcanal. Without air cover, Turner's nearly defenseless force of transports was forced to depart as well. Vandegrift and his division were stranded without supply from the sea and without direct air support.

Over the next months, Vandegrift and Turner were to have numerous rows over the use of the Marines that were not already landed on Guadalcanal. Turner, reading his orders as giving him command, felt it was within his authority to make the decision. Vandegrift was certain Turner had no appreciation of the Guadalcanal situation. This issue was ultimately resolved in favor of the Marine Corps, but the legacy lives on.

The Navy, having learned its lesson, never again left a landing force on its own. The ultimate demonstration of this was during the Battle of Okinawa when the Navy kept the fleet under a constant threat of kamikaze attack. Three hundred sixty-eight ships were damaged with thirty-six sunk. 4,907 Sailors were killed, mostly by kamikazes.⁵ This was a great but necessary sacrifice made to support the Army and Marines ashore.

Often missed in this debate is the experience of the Navy with the Army during the amphibious operations in the European Theater of Operations (ETO). There were few

⁵ Dyer, *The Amphibians Came to Conquer*, 1104. The Navy death toll of 4,907 was some 600 fewer than the Army suffered, and some 2,000 more than the Marines. CINCPAC-CINCPOA, Monthly Operations Report, May 1945. Death figures are updated as of 5 November 1945.

command relation debates in that theater which saw landings in North Africa, Sicily, Salerno, Anzio, Normandy, and Southern France. That would suggest that a "support command" relationship is the preferred method. However, problems coordinating air support were a common thread through many of the operations.

CATF/CLF Command Relationship

The Navy and Army command relations in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) and European Theater of Operations (ETO) of World War II differed from those used in the central Pacific campaign. While the central Pacific campaign was conducted under a command relationship regime similar to current joint amphibious doctrine (OPCON Command), most of the Army-Navy operations were conducted under what is best described as "cooperation." While never stated as such, CATF and CLF were in an implicit "support command" relationship. The naval commander was the supported commander until the landing force commander was able to assume command ashore. At that point, CLF became the supported commander.

During most of the World War II Central Pacific campaign, once an operation began, CATF assumed OPCON of CLF for the duration. Marine General Holland M. Smith, CLF for the Central Pacific campaign, fought with the senior Navy commanders for changes and achieved many. By the landing on Okinawa, once CLF was established ashore, he reported directly to the theater commander.⁶ By the end of World War II, over three years after King's

⁶ This was the case for Lt. General Simon B. Buckner, Commanding General, Tenth Army. He was OPCON to VADM Turner (Commander, Joint Expeditionary Force) until established ashore. He then reported OPCON to ADM Spruance, Commander, Fifth Fleet, until amphibious operations were completed. General Buckner, as Commander, Ryuku Forces, then reported directly to Admiral Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Area.

LONE WOLF order of 29 April 1942, amphibious doctrine had undergone many changes, becoming essentially the current *Joint Pub 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations*.⁷

Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations (Joint Pub 3-02) provides for an "OPCON Command" relationship between CATF and CLF. The commanders are co-equal during the planning phase reporting to a common higher headquarters. Upon execution of the operation, normally with the embarkation of the landing force on the amphibious shipping, CATF will assume operational control (OPCON) of CLF and the landing force. (See Appendix A). Normally, once CLF has established command ashore, CLF will report OPCON to the higher headquarters or other designated commander.

With the advent of *Test Pub 3-02, Test Doctrine for Amphibious Operations*, an alternate relationship, "support command", is proposed. Under the new regime, CATF and CLF are co-equal throughout the entire operation. During various phases, one or the other will be designated as the "supported" commander with the other in a "supporting" role. (See Appendix B.)

Test Pub 3-02 provides no guidance as to how the decision ought to be made other than suggesting that it "should be based on recommendations from subordinate commanders and consider the scope of the mission, on station forces, command and control, logistics, opposing force and battlespace...."⁸ Some suggestions are provided as to when the supported command might shift. In all cases, the implication is clear that once the landing

⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations (Joint Pub 3-02)* (Washington, D. C.: October 8, 1992).

⁸ *Test Pub 3-02*, II-5.

force has been placed ashore, CLF will be the supported commander. (See Figure 1 below).

Examples of Shifts in the Support Relationship *	
<u>Mission</u>	<u>Supported Commander</u>
Assault	CATF, then CLF
Raid with coastal threat	CATF, then CLF, then CATF
Inland Raid with no coastal threat	CLF
Demonstration	CATF
Withdrawal	CLF, then CATF
Humanitarian Assistance	CATF or CLF

* Actual supported-supporting commanders will be designated by the establishing authority based on the specific mission requirements.

Figure 1⁹

In the years following World War II, the Army argued that the Navy had too much influence in amphibious operations. The Army agreed if the purpose of the amphibious operation was to acquire an island base, then it was clearly a naval responsibility and should be commanded by a naval officer. However, if the landing was an "extension of a land campaign to seaward," it should be commanded by an Army officer.¹⁰

The Navy's position was that, regardless of the overall campaign priorities or goals, the amphibious portion of the operation should be under the command of a naval officer. This was principally because the Navy had the only mobile combat forces capable of dealing with the enemy during the critical phase of moving a landing force ashore.

Admiral William Blandy, commander of amphibious attack and support forces for several operations during World War II, was quite explicit in his recommendations:

If the amphibious assault does form part of an extensive land campaign, the overall command of the *entire invasion operation*, and all forces involved in it, should be assigned to an Army officer. But the *amphibious phase*...should

⁹ *Test Pub 3-02*, II-12.

¹⁰ William H. P. Blandy, "Command Relations in Amphibious Warfare," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 77, No. 6 (June 1951), 577-578.

be commanded by a naval officer, who, of course, is under the command of the Army invasion or theater commander.¹¹

Examination of the problems experienced by the commanders under the different command relationships shows that both regimes were successful. A recent study of thirty-one modern operations concluded that the command relationship between CATF and CLF made little difference as long as both commanders fully understood the mission. In every case studied, with one notable exception (Guadalcanal), the naval commander provided all the support the landing force commander required.¹²

The OPCON Command relationship is often misunderstood as giving CATF the authority to direct the movements and actions of individual units of the landing force. This has never been true. The misunderstanding stems from the Guadalcanal and the Central Pacific campaigns. The CATF, Admiral R. K. Turner, had operational control of the landing force for the duration of the operation. While Turner never interfered with the operations of the landing force once ashore, he did contend that the forces not already landed were part of the ATF reserve and, therefore, he commanded them and could direct their movements.

General Vandegrift and General H. M. Smith argued for change. Finally, in 1943, with Army support, it was resolved when Admiral Nimitz directed "the immediate superior combat commander" of the landing force would be the landing force Corps commander.¹³

The issue of whether the landing forces were under the command of CATF or CLF was never a problem in the ETO or SWPA. Admirals Hewitt and Barbey, ATF commanders

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Inbody "Much Ado About Nothing?", 8-9.

¹³ Henry Shaw and others, *Central Pacific Drive: History of the U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II, Vol. III*. Washington, D. C.: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1966, 34-35. In this case, OPERATION GALVANIC, the landings in the Gilbert Islands, the question had been whether Rear Admiral Turner or Major General H. M. Smith would be the immediate superior of the 27th Infantry Division. An earlier decision by Admiral Spruance, Commander Fifth Fleet, resolved that General Smith was the immediate superior of the reserve force that consisted of the 2nd and 8th Marine Defense Battalions and the 7th Army Defense Battalion.

in the ETO and SWPA respectively, were never concerned with controlling landing forces other than what was required for the ship to shore movement. Other amphibious commanders developed clear understanding of the relationship between CATF and CLF. Admiral Blandy is clear in his advice to naval commanders charged with landing forces ashore.

The joint amphibious force commander's orders to the respective attack force commanders (naval flag officers) should be worded, "land and support the landing force" rather than "seize, occupy and defend." Keeping these naval commanders out of the command chain for troop command is particularly important in order to allow the general commanding all the amphibious troops to function properly. If he has to wait until the troop commander of each attack force moves his headquarters ashore before taking that troop commander under his command, he is placed in an anomalous and unenviable position: that of taking tactical command of the landing force at an unpredictable time in an unpredictable situation.¹⁴

Amphibious doctrine now directs that "CATF is normally the only Navy commander that exercises authority over or assumes responsibility for the operation of LF units." However, CATF has never had authority to direct the movements of any subordinate unit of the landing force. Additionally, doctrine requires CATF to consult with CLF before issuing any directive that affects the landing force.¹⁵

Should Test Pub 3-02 be approved as doctrine, the Joint Force Commander (JFC) will have two choices in command relationships between CATF and CLF, OPCON Command and Support Command. History suggests that both command relationships work under combat conditions. Little evidence can be found to suggest one is preferable over the other.

¹⁴ Blandy, "Command Relations in Amphibious Warfare," 577-578.

¹⁵ *Joint Pub 3-02*, II-3.

Inherent Advantages of Amphibious Operations

Regardless of the assigned command relationship, the basic strength of amphibious operations must not be diluted. Amphibious operations have advantage over land defenders as they are inherently naval in nature and tend to be under unified leadership. The same cannot be said for the forces that have defended against amphibious attack. To arbitrarily or inadvertently give up that advantage would be to lessen the chance of success.

After exploring the question of why it has been apparently so difficult to defend against amphibious attack, Theodore Gatchel observed that he could find few occasions where the defender of an amphibious attack had unified command of all forces.¹⁶ While the defending general might have had unified command of all ground forces, there were nearly always separate commanders for the air and naval forces. In nearly all the cases studied, there was no common superior short of the national command authority.

Gatchel points out that one must recognize "...that an amphibious operation is a naval operation." While it may seem a statement of the obvious, Gatchel's research shows that it "escaped most of the commanders who have attempted to defend against landings."¹⁷ General Senger und Etterlein, in his analysis of German defenses against amphibious landings in World War II, felt that the failure on the part of the Germans was due, "...in part, to the army's failure to understand the naval dimension of modern warfare."¹⁸ Gatchel offers a warning based on the above observations:

The danger for the U. S. military today is that it will lose sight of the essential naval character of amphibious operations. Emphasis is overwhelmingly focused on joint operations with the result that single-service capabilities are not always fully appreciated. In spite of this emphasis on "jointness," an

¹⁶ Theodore L. Gatchel, *At the Water's Edge: Defending against the Modern Amphibious Assault*. Annapolis: U. S. Naval Institute Press, 1996, 204.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 205.

amphibious operation remains primarily a naval operation, even when forces from the army and air force participate. Perhaps the distinction seems academic, but it is an important one.¹⁹

Amphibious operations, by their very nature, require the naval and landing force commanders to cooperate. A lack of cooperation will make success at least more difficult, if not lead to failure. The commanders therefore are driven to find an accommodation between the services.

There appears to be no such imperative for the commanders defending against an amphibious attack. During the twentieth century, there were no instances where a single operational level officer commanded all the land, naval and air forces defending against a landing. In all but one case, the defense of the landing beach was given to a single officer who commanded only the ground forces. The naval and air force commanders reported to separate superior headquarters. In the single exception, at Wake Island in 1941, the land and air forces defending against the Japanese invasion were commanded by a single officer. This defense was able to defeat the first Japanese attempt, although they were overwhelmed by a subsequent attempt.²⁰

With few exceptions, amphibious operations have been commanded by admirals and defended by generals. Most of the landings, regardless of the formal command relations in effect, involved the CATF exercising direction over the landing and fire support until CLF could assume command. Thus, unity of command for the attacking force was assured while operational unity of command for the defending force, to include naval and air forces as well as ground forces, was usually not achieved. This leads to a second warning:

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, 81-87. The American forces on Wake Island included 74 unarmed Navy and Army Air Corps personnel, 449 Marines, and 1200 civilian construction workers. Included in the force was VMF-211 with 12 F4F-3 Wildcat fighters. The force was under the command of Commander W. S. Cunningham, a naval aviator.

Commanders planning a landing have no influence over how a defending enemy force chooses to structure its command relationships. By the wrong choice of their own command relationships, however, amphibious planners could inadvertently give up one of their greatest operational advantages: unity of command under naval leadership.²¹

Control of Air Support

The control of air power in support of the amphibious task force and landing force is a touchy issue requiring the attention of the Joint Force Commander. The initiating directive or operations order must address air support explicitly. Several historical examples show how clarity or lack thereof, affected subsequent military operations.

Marine Corps doctrine requires that the commander of the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) maintain control of some aircraft, both fixed and rotary-wing. Similarly, Navy practice requires that the commander of an aircraft carrier force retain control of some aircraft to defend the fleet at sea as well as provide close support to any landing force. Current doctrine establishing a Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) may pose problems for the amphibious force commanders.

Historical study indicates that control of air support was the principle problem faced by amphibious commanders.²² In most circumstances, neither CATF nor CLF had direct control over air support for the landing operation. Small carriers were occasionally assigned directly to CATF, but in most instances, air support played a supporting role. At times the coordination worked well. At others, it did not. The difference was in the clarity and decisiveness of the direction provided to the air component commander.

²¹ Ibid., 207.

²² Inbody, "Much Ado About Nothing?", 9.

Air support was poorly coordinated for the Sicily landings (HUSKY) in July 1943. The ground and naval commanders had little capability to ask for close or direct air support. German bombers were able to attack the landing and naval force at the beaches with little or no opposition. The poor coordination also led to an unfortunate incident where naval and ground forces fired upon and caused serious casualties to an airborne lift that flew directly over the beachhead.

Air support was better organized for the Salerno landings (AVALANCHE) in September 1943. The theater commander, General Eisenhower, insisted upon better support for Lieutenant General Mark Clark's Fifth Army, the landing force for AVALANCHE. Land based air was organized under a single commander, a situation similar to the modern JFACC.

Despite the direction from the theater CinC and subsequent reorganization, land-based air support for AVALANCHE was complicated and did not ease the concerns of the naval and landing force commanders. Vice Admiral Kent Hewitt, CATF for the Salerno landing, and General Clark thought the arrangement was inadequate to provide the direct and close support required.²³ Hewitt was concerned enough to ask for Royal Navy aircraft carriers to be assigned in support of the operation.

Admiral Cunningham, the naval component commander in the Mediterranean, responded and assigned a group of escort carriers (Force "V") to Hewitt. The large carriers, organized as Force "H" under the command of Vice Admiral Willis, RN, were assigned in a supporting role to cover the landing. Cunningham was direct in assuring that Willis had no misunderstanding of his primary mission:

²³ Theodore Gatchel, "Eagles and Alligators: An examination of the command relationships that have existed between aircraft carrier and amphibious forces during amphibious operations." Research Memorandum 1-97. Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College, 1997, 43. Gatchel points out that "...at least five distinct air organizations provided support for Operation AVALANCHE."

The object of Force "H" is to cover the assault against interference by enemy forces. This cover is to include the provision of fighter cover over Force "V" while that force is present in the assault area.

Should the enemy battlefleet put to sea, Force "H" is not to be drawn off in pursuit to the prejudice of the object stated [above] without a definite direction from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.²⁴

Nimitz gave similar direction to Vice Admiral Mitscher after the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Central Pacific Force large carriers, Task Force 58, to provide support for General MacArthur's landings at Hollandia in April 1944. While Nimitz placed a high priority on engaging the Japanese Combined Fleet, his orders did provide clear guidance about the mission priorities. Mitscher's orders to his task force show that he had no confusion over the primary mission:

This force [Task Force 58] will destroy or contain enemy naval forces attempting to interfere with the seizure of Hollandia; will, without prejudice to the foregoing task, neutralize enemy airfields in the Hollandia-Wadke area by repeated air strikes by carrier air groups and by surface-ship bombardment if requested, and will provide air support requested by Commander Attack Force.²⁵

A year later, Nimitz directed Halsey to provide similar support for the Luzon landings. Halsey was to contact MacArthur and take the "necessary measures for detailed coordination of operations..." as well as "destroy enemy naval and air forces in or threatening the Philippines area..."²⁶

Compare Halsey's subsequent orders to his force with those given by Mitscher:

This fleet [Third Fleet] will conduct air strikes on Okinawa, Formosa, Luzon and Visayas in order to inflict maximum damage on enemy air and surface forces and ground installations in support of K-2 operations. If opportunity

²⁴ CinC Mediterranean Station, Operation "AVALANCHE" Naval Operations Orders (Short Title "AVON"), AVON THREE, Orders for the Covering Forces, 1, Naval War College, Microfilm file 346, Reel 19. Also quoted in Gatchel, "Eagles and Alligators", 45.

²⁵ CTF 58 OP Order 5-44. Quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. 8, New Guinea and the Marianas March 1944 - August 1944*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953, 36.

²⁶ CINCPAC-CINPOA OPLAN 8-44, 27 September 1944.

exists or can be created to destroy major portion enemy fleet this becomes primary task.²⁷

Halsey understood Nimitz's orders to place priority on engaging the Japanese aircraft carrier fleet. He told MacArthur in a message on 21 October 1944 that Third Fleet needed to depart the Leyte area in order to accomplish his strategic mission.²⁸ General MacArthur quickly responded that since the entire Leyte operation was "predicated upon full support by the Third Fleet," he considered it "essential and paramount" that Halsey remain in a covering position and not depart the area.²⁹ That Halsey did depart the area despite MacArthur's requirements, thus opening the amphibious task force to a nearly disastrous attack by a Japanese surface force, indicates that Nimitz's orders were at best unclear and at worst incorrect.

Ironically, it was negative reaction to what would turn out to be good judgment by Admiral Raymond Spruance the previous June that probably influenced Halsey to pursue the Japanese fleet. Spruance was in command of Fifth Fleet and had responsibility to capture the Marianas Islands. He commanded an amphibious task force, a landing force, and an aircraft carrier task force. During the course of the landings, a Japanese fleet sortie threatened the operation. Spruance ordered the carrier task force to position itself between the amphibious operating area and the enemy fleet. During the ensuing Battle of the Philippine Sea most of the remaining Japanese carrier-based aircraft were destroyed.

²⁷ COMTHIRDFLT OPLAN 21-44, 4 October 1944.

²⁸ "Reports of General MacArthur", quoted in Daniel E. Barbey, *MacArthur's Amphibious Navy: Seventh Fleet Amphibious Force Operations 1943-1945*. Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1969, 269. Halsey's message read as follows: MY PRESENT OPERATIONS IN STRATEGIC POSITION TO MEET THREAT OF ENEMY FORCES ARE SOMEWHAT RESTRICTED BY NECESSITY OF COVERING YOUR TRANSPORTS AND OTHER OVERSEAS MOVEMENTS X REQUEST EARLY ADVICE REGARDING WITHDRAWAL OF SUCH UNITS TO SAFE POSITION WHICH WILL PERMIT ME TO EXECUTE ORDERLY REARMING PROGRAM FOR MY GROUPS AND ALLOW FURTHER OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Following the battle, understanding that his primary mission was to cover the amphibious operations in the Marianas, Spruance restrained the carriers, refusing to permit them to attack the retiring Japanese fleet. He came under almost immediate attack for his decision. His subordinate, Admiral Mitscher, wrote in his after action report:

Results of the action were extremely disappointing to all hands, in that important units of the enemy fleet, which came out in the open for the first time in over a year and made several air attacks on our superior force, were able to escape without our coming to grips with them. It is true that our troops on Saipan were well screened and protected against the enemy surface force, but it is considered unfortunate that our entire strength was deployed for this purpose and therefore not permitted an opportunity to take the offensive until too late to prevent the enemy's retirement.³⁰

The attacks on Spruance's judgment were heard clearly by Admiral Halsey. They probably influenced his decision to pursue the Japanese aircraft carriers a few months later at Leyte. With the advantage of hindsight, it appears that Spruance exercised exceptionally good judgment in covering the landing and protecting the amphibious forces. By avoiding direct fleet contact, he may have prevented loss of or damage to U. S. aircraft carriers.³¹

These cases suggest that with clear orders, adequate air support can be provided from either carrier or land-based sources. They also suggest that the commander of an aircraft carrier force may not be the best choice to be in overall command of an amphibious operation, most probably due to conflict of mission interest. Admiral Cunningham's provision requiring his subordinate to obtain permission prior to departing a supporting role

³⁰ CTF 58 Action Report, 62, quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II, vol. 8: New Guinea and the Marianas, March 1944 - August 1944*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1953, 314

³¹ Morison, *New Guinea and the Marianas*, 313-319. Morison offers an extensive review of Spruance's decision, citing several contemporary arguments. His conclusion, using Mahan as his guide, was that Spruance made his decision based on a clear sense of the larger mission, using the battle "as a means to the greater ends of victory."

is especially useful. Clear orders to land-based air or a Joint Force Air Component Commander will yield similar results.³²

³² Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The untold story of the Persian Gulf War*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993, 219-221. Data is limited, but there is some evidence that the guidance General Schwartzkopf gave Lieutenant General Horner, his Joint Force Air Component Commander for OPERATION DESERT STORM, was not as detailed as it might have been in providing air support to the ground force commanders. The ground commanders complained that targets important to them were not being attacked. Lieutenant General Boomer, Commander of the Marine Expeditionary Force, ultimately pulled all Marine Corps F/A-18 aircraft from the strategic mission and directed them to attack targets in front of the Marine Expeditionary Force. The Air Force replied that they were merely carrying out the CinC's {Schwartzkopf's} directions. It took a meeting with Schwartzkopf in early February 1991 to resolve the issue. "If any flights are not attacking the Iraqi land army, I want to know why."

Conclusion "Getting Past Guadalcanal"

The introduction of an amphibious task force into a Joint Operations Area requires the Joint Force Commander to make fundamental decisions. The JFC must decide how best to use the force and the proper command relations between the Commander, Amphibious Task Force, Commander, Landing Force, and other key commanders in the Joint Task Force. The initiating directive or operations order must contain clear and unambiguous direction.

As unified command and the inherently naval nature of amphibious operations are a significant advantage over land defenses, it is imperative for the Joint Force Commander to maximize that advantage. Current amphibious doctrine is the result of combat experience and is not to be discarded casually. "Support Command" as an alternative to "OPCON Command" for command relationships, is sound, based on combat experience, and does not endanger unity of command.

Potentially dangerous to success are doctrinally based decisions that may dilute the basic strengths of amphibious operations: unity of command and the fundamental, naval nature of such operations. Retaining some air support directly under the command of the amphibious commander will increase the advantage against an enemy.

Unity of command can be achieved in different ways. The JFC can either maintain direct control of all assets or assign control of the amphibious phase to a subordinate. This offers two command structures: the Fleet Command model and the Component Command model.

The simplest is to place all necessary forces under a single commander. If the scope of the operation makes it impracticable for the JFC to be the amphibious commander, a structure based on the Central Pacific campaign offers a solution. Assigning the amphibious

task force, landing force, and air forces to one commander was successful under extreme combat conditions. Gatchel describes this arrangement as the "Fleet Command Model".³³ (See Appendix C.) The command relationship between CATF and CLF can be either OPCON Command or Support Command.

A second method, described by Gatchel as the "component command model",³⁴ places CATF and CLF under the command of component commanders (ground and naval) and assign land and/or carrier-based air power in a supporting role. (See Appendix D). With this method, the JFC is the mutual higher headquarters of CATF, CLF, and the commander providing air support. The command relationship between CATF and CLF can be either OPCON or Support Command, although Support Command seems to be a more logical choice based on historical example. This method will require significant attention and meticulous direction from higher headquarters. Detailed orders to the supporting commanders, particularly the air support commander, as to their mission priorities will minimize problems.

Guadalcanal needs to be left to history. The Navy has and will support the requirements of the landing force. Air support from sources not directly under the control of the landing force or naval force can be applied successfully. Navy officers are able to understand clear guidance from higher headquarters as to priorities and support requirements.

The above is contingent on clear and focused direction. If the mission is clear and support requirements, especially air support, are unambiguously delineated in an initiating directive or operations order, the Joint Force Commander will have provided subordinates with the tools for success. The problems presented at Guadalcanal were partly the result of

³³ Gatchel, "Eagles and Alligators", 26-36.

³⁴ Gatchel, "Eagles and Alligators", 40-47.

unclear guidance. With the challenges presented to the Joint Force Commander in the dangerous modern littoral environment, unclear guidance will result in failure.

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Appendix A

OPCON Command Relationship in Amphibious Operations

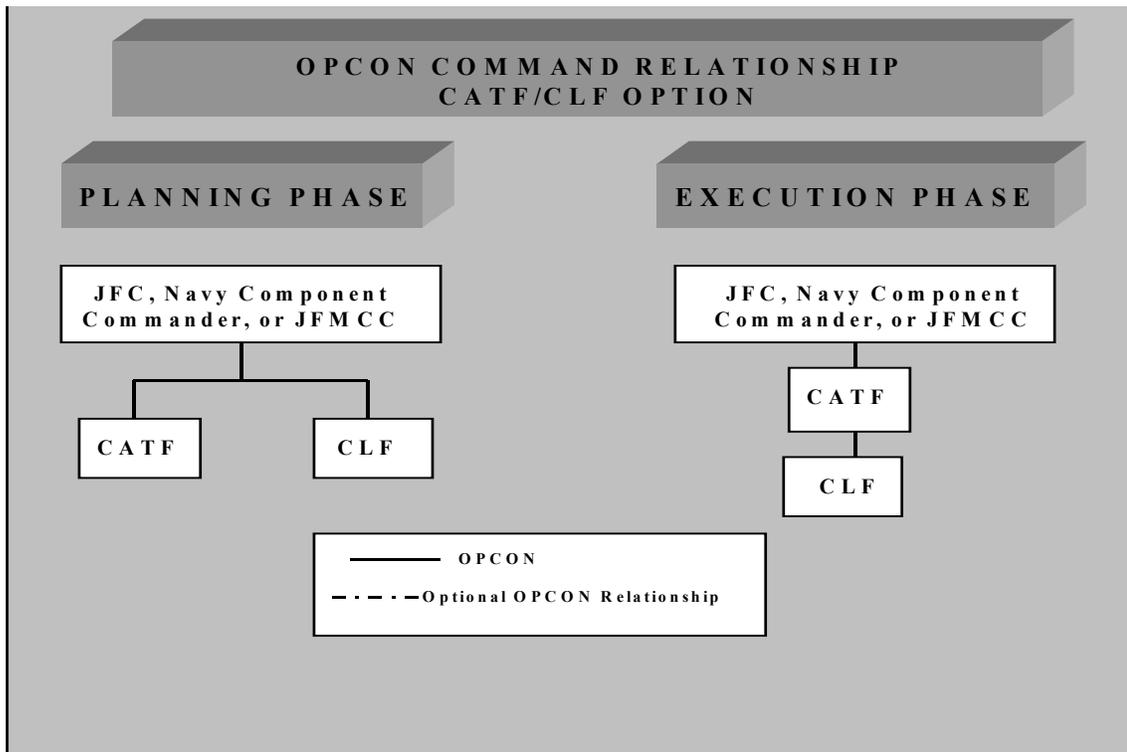


Figure 2³⁵

³⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Test Doctrine for Amphibious Operations* (Test Pub 3-02) (Washington, D. C., April 2000), p. II-6.

Appendix B

Support Command Relationship in Amphibious Operations

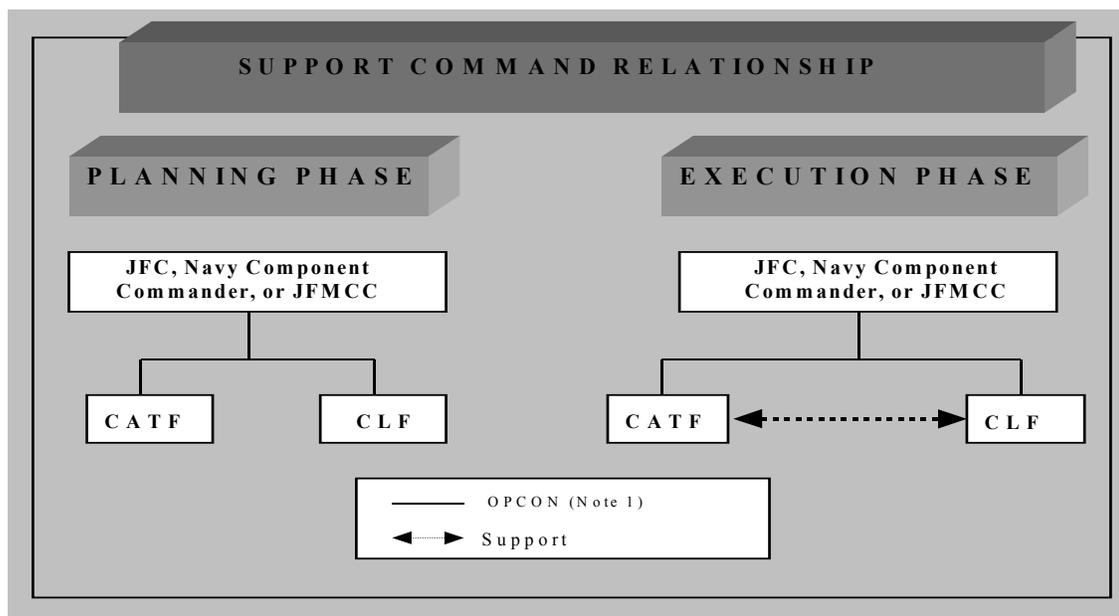


Figure 3³⁶

³⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Test Doctrine for Amphibious Operations* (Test Pub 3-02) (Washington, D. C., April 2000), II-13.

Appendix C

Fleet Command Model

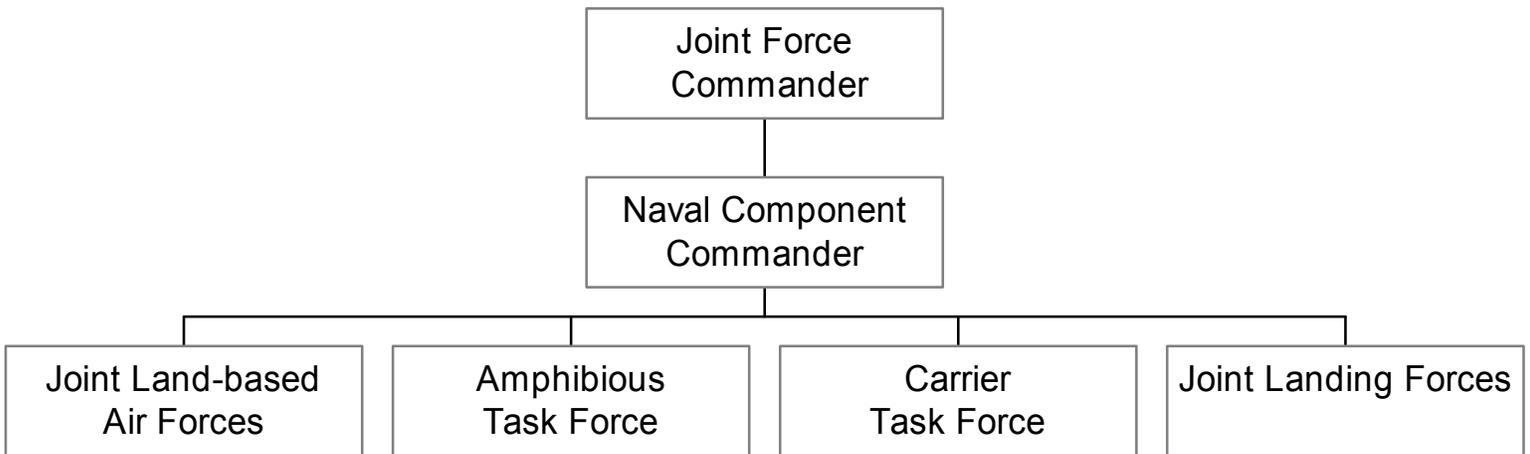


Figure 4³⁷

³⁷ Gatchel, "Eagles and Alligators", 26-36. The above diagram is based on Gatchel's model shown on page 55.

Appendix D

Component Model

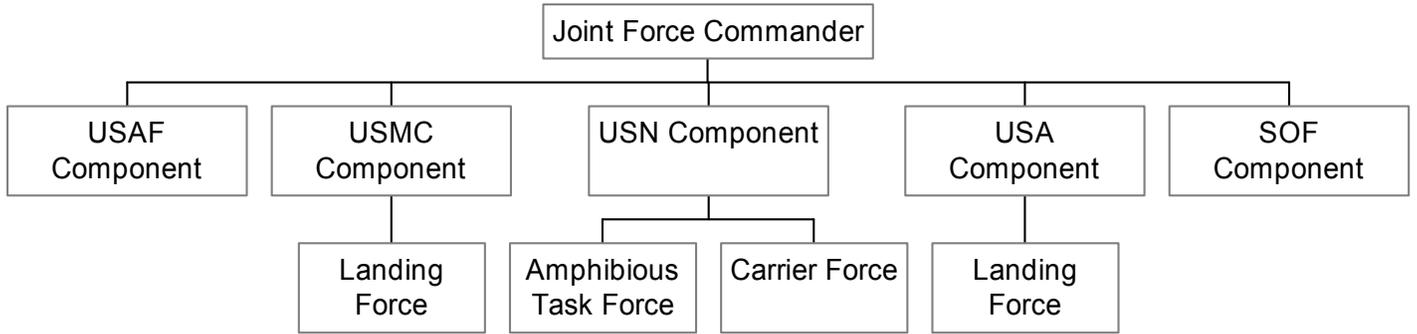


Figure 5³⁸

³⁸ Gatchel, "Eagles and Alligators", 40-47. The above diagram is based on Gatchel's model shown on page 56.