As the Navy sorts out organizational and functional policies related to a theater JFMCC construct there may be significant value in looking to WW II history for lessons learned.

INTRODUCTION

Two different scenarios can readily be envisioned where theater level functional component commanders might be employed. The scenarios vary in complexity and while both will be described for clarity, only Scenario #1 will be addressed at this time. The role of theater JFMCC in Scenario #2 will be addressed in a future companion article.

Scenario #1:

This scenario involves an AOR-wide war against a near peer enemy. In such a situation, the Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) may assume the role of Joint Force Commander (JFC) and designate theater-level functional component commanders (maritime, land, air, etc.). Each theater functional component commander would command large-scale forces capable of operating across the entire AOR. Maritime forces would likely be organized as Task Forces (TFs) either regionally or functionally focused. In effect, this scenario posits a "standard" joint force structure employed in most operations today albeit on a much grander scale. The ultimate factor that might persuade a GCC acting as the JFC to establish theater level components would be the scope and scale of the fight in terms of time and space necessitating large maneuver forces operating over huge areas.

ADM Chester Nimitz essentially established a theater component commander construct in the Pacific theater of war during WWII. As Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Areas
(CINCPOA) Nimitz was, in today’s terms, the Pacific Ocean Areas GCC and the previously established Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC [Not to be confused with the acronym CINCPAC for the later unified command: Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, since changed to CDRUSPACOM] ), which Nimitz also commanded, was the theater JFACC. As theater JFACC Nimitz established TFs with geographic (North, Central, South) responsibilities or functional (unrestricted submarine warfare, logistics support) responsibilities.

Figure 1. C2 for Pacific Fleet Operations circa August 1944

**Scenario #2:**

Another scenario where theater level component commanders might be employed is more complicated than the first scenario in that it involves multiple related conflicts across an AOR involving several distinct enemies with either near-peer or highly capable asymmetric capabilities – or both. In this situation, particularly if the fighting is geographically separated, the GCC may decide to establish separate Joint Task Forces (JTFs) responsible for individual geographic areas. Given the scope, scale, and diversity of the situation the GCC may decide to employ a theater component commander construct to consolidate theater level command and control (C2). The designated theater JFMC would organize and coordinate domain related forces across the various JTFs while neither maintaining operational control (OPCON) nor being directly involved in the oversight of tactical operations. In effect, the theater JFMC would function as a “super Naval Component Commander” responsible for providing and meting out domain-related forces among the different JTFs.

This construct was employed in the European Theater in 1944 where, in effect, one JTF was established for the Italian Campaign and a separate JTF command structure was established for the Normandy landings. ADM Stark

While the U.S. Air Force’s implementation of theater JFACC precedes the U.S. Navy’s study of theater JFMCC, based on differences in tactical operations, organizational structure, and methodology, the existing theater JFACC construct is not a
good model for a theater JFMCC to use as a basis for organizing.

As Naval staffs grapple with establishing the organizational structure, doctrine, and procedures required to implement a theater JFMCC concept, they would be well served to look to history for ideas. In particular, ADM Nimitz, in his role as CINCPAC, functioned as what would be recognized as a theater JFMCC with several AOR-wide TFs and should be studied. A discussion of the much more complicated scenario involving a theater JFMCC providing forces to multiple JTFs will be saved for a later article.

To be able to apply the historical aspects of Nimitz (CINCPAC) as a theater component commander to today’s theater JFMCC concept there are a few basic assumptions that must be noted to provide a meaningful comparison:

1. The theater JFMCC concept applies to major wartime missions only! By definition (JP 1-02) a functional component command is established to perform particular operational missions. The theater JFMCC concept does not apply to a Phase 0 (shaping) campaign.
2. The theater JFMCC has command responsibilities over multiple, simultaneous TFs.
3. A scenario involving a theater JFMCC includes AOR-wide, near-peer (or highly capable asymmetric) maritime threats.
4. A scenario involving a theater JFMCC involves more than just air wing sortie generation, to include sustained multi-dimensional operations (surface, air, sub-surface, BMD, etc.).
BACKGROUND

During World War II ADM Nimitz simultaneously served as the commander-in-chief of two major commands responsible for over 65 million square miles of territory, two million men, and three Fleets comprising six thousand ships. On December 31, 1941 Nimitz relieved ADM Kimmel as CINCPAC responsible for all naval forces and naval operations in the Pacific Ocean – similar to today’s Commander, Pacific Fleet (CPF). Additionally, on 8 May, 1942 Nimitz assumed duties as the newly instituted CINCPOA responsible for all military operations in the vast Pacific Ocean Areas (North, Central, and South Pacific Areas) that included most of the Pacific Ocean and its islands but excluding China, Australia, New Guinea, and the Philippine Islands which were under the command of GEN MacArthur. CINCPOA was similar in nature to today’s CDRUSPACOM.

ADM Nimitz’ responsibility for two major commands (one naval and one joint) may convolute for some the lessons learned relative to the contemporary term “theater JFMCC.” In order to use ADM Nimitz’ experiences to guide organizational, doctrinal, and procedural development of the theater JFMCC concept, concentration must focus on Nimitz’ CINCPAC role only.
As CINCPAC, ADM Nimitz oversaw the maritime aspects of the entire Pacific theater. While initially focusing his forces in the South Pacific Area (Coral Sea and Guadalcanal), the Central Pacific Area eventually became his main effort with operations in the North and South Pacific Areas supporting or shaping the Central Pacific drive as economy of force areas. In studying Nimitz’ efforts as CINCPAC, it becomes clear that the majority of his energies were dedicated to command and control (C2), command relationships, and the connection (at the operational level of war) of C2 to intelligence, sustainment, movement and maneuver of forces, operational fires (theater level effects), and protection. A summary of how ADM Nimitz, as the first Pacific “theater JFMCC,” synchronized these operational functions offers practical lessons for those struggling with implementing the theater JFMCC construct today. Of note, with one famous exception, ADM Nimitz did not interfere with ongoing tactical operations.

OPERATIONAL COMMAND and CONTROL

ADM Nimitz’ perspective of C2 truly resided at the theater level, allowing subordinate commanders to have C2 freedom to execute operations. He instituted permanent subordinate naval commanders in the South Pacific Area (VADM’s Ghormley, Halsey, Newton, and Calhoun) and the North Pacific Area (RADMs Theobald and Kinkaid and VADM Fletcher) while he retained command in the Central Pacific Area. This was done in support of the concentration of effort in the Central Pacific drive. The South and North Pacific Areas had limited dedicated naval forces with additional forces allocated as necessary to accomplish the specific objectives of thwarting Japan’s ability to cut the sea lines of communication between the U.S. and Australia and protecting U.S. territory in Alaska, respectively.

However, the forces assigned or allocated to efforts in the South and North Pacific Areas were truly representative of economy of force measures. This allowed for massing of the preponderance of naval force for the drive across the Central Pacific Area to the heart of Japan. For this most critical objective, Nimitz retained overall command, delegating tactical control to his operating force commanders (ADMs Spruance and Halsey) for specific, approved major operations. With this C2 construct ADM Nimitz shifted forces to and from the three areas as required to accomplish the prioritized objectives that were established. In today’s parlance each of the Pacific Ocean Areas could be considered a separate geographic TF with the Central Pacific being CINCPOA and CINCPAC’s main effort and the North and South Pacific being supporting or shaping efforts.

One of the critical C2 concepts ADM Nimitz developed over time in the Pacific war involved alternating the commanders and planning staffs (Halsey as Third Fleet and Spruance as Fifth Fleet) of the naval forces operating forward. While Halsey was executing an operation Spruance was back in Hawaii planning the sequential operation. In addition to confusing the Japanese, this not only allowed Nimitz to oversee the planning of major operations but also facilitated a very quick tempo of operations that kept the Japanese off balance.

Additionally, ADM Nimitz retained control over theater-wide submarine operations which worked to cut Japan’s lifeline of resources from the Southern Resource Area (Southeast Asia) to Japan’s home islands. ADM Nimitz delegated command of day-to-day submarine operations to VADM Lockwood (Commander Submarines Pacific and Commander TF 17). However, his interest in this critical shaping effort ensured synchronization of submarine operations with on-going operations in the South, Central, and North Pacific Areas.

OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

As CINCPAC, ADM Nimitz was not involved in tactical level intelligence collection and analysis. Rather, the CINCPAC staff concentrated on fusing intelligence gathered across the three Pacific Ocean Areas (POAs). The intent of this theater-level intelligence work was to reduce risk and allow for bold naval actions that were coordinated across the three POAs by
CINCPAC staff. Probably the most famous intelligence success of WW II in the Pacific was Fleet Radio Unit Pacific’s (Station Hypo) use of a network of radio intercept stations, code breaking, and intelligence fusion to ascertain Japan’s planned attack on Midway Island in June, 1942. Nimitz oversaw the coordinated employment of operational planning (mission and commander’s intent), intelligence information, timely movement of forces, and high level assumption of risk to provide a tremendous tactical victory at Midway. Essentially, CINCPAC ensured that tactical level operations planned and executed by Admirals Fletcher and Spruance supported higher order operational objectives in the Pacific.

In another example, ADM Nimitz ensured that submarines not directly assigned to the Leyte Gulf operations in October, 1944 (Operation KING II) supported the success of the seizure of the island of Leyte. Several submarines, operating in the South China Sea to interdict Japanese shipping between Japan and the Southern Resource Area, were relocated just west of the Philippines to support Operation KING II. Their specific support mission was to locate Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) warships transiting from the west toward the amphibious objective area in Leyte Gulf. USS Darter (SS-227) and USS Dace (SS-247), stationed west of Palawan Island located ADM Kurita’s IJN forces, notified ADM Halsey of the position, and then attacked Kurita. CINCPAC’s involvement ended with the coordinated employment of forces: U.S. submarines assigned to a different mission were tasked to support Third Fleet (ADM Halsey) and Seventh Fleet (VADM Kinkaid) objectives.

To support operations throughout the POAs the Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas (JICPOA) was established adjacent to ADM Nimitz’ headquarters and employed over 1,000 analysts. JICPOA is considered “the United States’ first effective, all-source intelligence unit” and included communications, photography, document exploitation, and prisoner interrogations.1

OPERATIONAL SUSTAINMENT

Due to the vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean and the almost unfathomable number of forces assigned, success in prosecuting the war in the Pacific would not have been possible without a tremendous sustainment effort. CINCPAC was not involved with sustainment of individual units or formations. Operating at the theater level, the CINCPAC staff planned a theater-wide sustainment concept that directly supported the Central Pacific drive as the
main effort. Under Nimitz’ CINCPAC command authorities, his staff planned for and established forward operating bases and relocated them as required to keep pace with operations.

Late in 1943 ADM Nimitz created two Service Squadrons (SERVRONs) under Service Forces Pacific Fleet. These two squadrons would provide mobile service to the fleet as it moved across the Pacific — with one serving as a fleet base while the second remained in the rear. As the fleet moved forward the rear squadron would leapfrog to the front and create a new fleet base. This made it possible for Nimitz to create repair and supply facilities thousands of miles away from an established Navy base. Essentially SERVRONs brought a port to the Navy. The employment of SERVRONs enabled USN ships to operate in the western Pacific for a year or more without returning to a permanent port facility. Even battle damaged ships could be repaired forward in the SERVRON’s floating dry dock facilities. Based on its position east of the Philippines and the ability of its’ lagoon anchorage to hold 700 vessels, Ulithi followed Eniwetok as the Pacific Fleet’s major staging base. Operations in the Philippines and Okinawa were staged from Ulithi. ADM Nimitz referred to Service Squadrons 4 and 10 as his “secret weapons.”

Similarly, CINCPAC’s sustainment efforts enabled fleet submarines to endure much shorter transits to patrol areas and thus had more time on-station by establishing refuel and repair stations forward (e.g. Midway, Guam, and Subic Bay). Additionally, CINCPAC added recreation facilities to the sustainment areas for crew rest and relaxation.

CINCPAC was not involved with the daily sustainment of the forward forces. Rather, the CINCPAC sustainment effort was responsible for ensuring that capabilities were established throughout the theater to ensure timely sustainment of forces operating forward. This enabled Fleet commanders (ADMs Spruance and Halsey) to operate their forces forward and concentrate on defeating IJN forces knowing that fuel, food, munitions, replacement aircraft, and ship repair facilities would be there for them when needed.

**OPERATIONAL MOVEMENT and MANEUVER**

ADM Nimitz coordinated all operational level movement and maneuver of forces throughout the theater without involving himself or his staff in tactical maneuver. His role as CINCPAC entailed developing a campaign plan, selecting the commanders and forces to execute the upcoming operation, ensuring his commander’s intent was understood, and then letting the
subordinate commanders (ADMs Spruance and Halsey for the Central Pacific Area) execute the mission while he oversaw planning for the follow-on operations. Additionally, Nimitz had in place intelligence, sustainment, fires, and protection schemes to support the success of on-going operations.

While famously not involving himself in tactical maneuvering, ADM Nimitz was far from passive in planning major operations. He set the date for the assault on Kiska Island (August 1943) in the North Pacific Area, approved the plan, and then turned the operation over to VADM Kinkaid for execution. In another example, during planning for the Marshall Islands campaign (31 January 1944) ADM Nimitz asked for recommendations from VADM Spruance (overall commander), RADM Turner (Amphibious Force commander), and MajGen Smith (Amphibious Corps commander) on which island in the Marshalls to assault first. After the horrendous losses suffered during the assault on Tarawa a few months earlier (November 1943) many CINCPAC staffers as well as Spruance, Turner, and Smith thought it best to attack smaller outlying islands before assaulting the main atoll of Kwajalein. Nimitz felt that by applying lessons learned from Tarawa, the best option was a direct assault on the main island. He then overrode all of his subordinate commanders and ultimately decided Kwajalein would be assaulted first. However, Nimitz did not interfere with Spruance’s execution of the agreed upon plan.3

OPERATIONAL FIRES (Theater Level Effects)

ADM Nimitz did not get involved in tactical fires; he approved subordinate’s plans and allowed them to execute those plans. CINCPAC clearly viewed his role in operational fires as creating effects across the theater to shape the battle space to the benefit of his upcoming planned operations. For example, in early September 1944 ADM Halsey (Commander Third Fleet) conducted aircraft carrier raids in the Central Philippines. Based on the lack of aggressive response from the Japanese in the Philippines, Halsey recommended intermediate operations against the Taluads, Mindanao, the Palaus, and Yap be cancelled and Operation King II (Leyte) be advanced from its original December timeline. Based on Halsey’s recommendation and theater intelligence, ADM Nimitz agreed the Leyte operation
should be advanced but he still felt securing airfields in the Palaus was necessary to his overall Central Pacific drive. This was the recommendation he forwarded to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and it was ultimately approved. The Palau operations went as scheduled and the landings on Leyte were advanced by two months.

Additionally, about two weeks prior to the landings in Leyte Gulf, Halsey’s Third Fleet was tasked by ADM Nimitz to conduct a series of aircraft carrier raids on airfields in Formosa, Luzon, and the Ryukyu Islands with the objective of depleting regional Japanese airpower prior to the 20 October assault on Leyte. These raids were devastating to Japanese airpower and gave tremendous advantage to U.S. forces invading Leyte on 20 October 1944.

Another example of Nimitz’ shaping with theater level operational fires was his use of the Pacific Fleet submarine force. ADM Nimitz employed unrestricted submarine warfare from the outset of the war and built a submarine sustainment organization and infrastructure to sever Japan’s connection to natural resources in the Southern Resource Area. ADM Nimitz and ADM King (CNO) were convinced this, coupled with continuous air bombardment, would be enough to cause Japan to surrender. By war’s end U.S. submarines sank over 1,300 Japanese ships (approximately 5.3 million tons) accounting for 55% of Japan’s merchant ship losses, effectively annihilating the Japanese merchant marine service. Because of Japan’s reliance on imported resources, the Allied war against Japanese shipping is generally considered the single most decisive factor in the collapse of the Japanese economy.

**OPERATIONAL PROTECTION**

CINCPAC’s view of protection generally was not concerned with force protection of individual units. ADM Nimitz took a theater view of protection, balancing it with assumption of risk at his level. He was mainly concerned with protecting his ability to achieve intermediate and ultimate objectives. For example, his application of economy of force in the South and North Pacific Areas assumed some risk in those areas while protecting his ability to prosecute the Central Pacific drive.

Another example involves Nimitz’ reaction after the apparent failure of pre-invasion bombardment against Japanese forces on Tarawa. Nimitz had a mock-up of Tarawa defenses built on Kahoolawe Island in Hawaii to test the effectiveness of various types of ammunition. Two lessons learned were: (1) fire control teams needed to be landed with the
first wave of troops to direct accurate fire and, (2) hydrographic reconnaissance in support of pre-invasion planning was needed to determine water depth, beach slope, and underwater obstacle locations. These were ideas used by planners in all follow-on operations that aided the successful drive to Japan.

Of note, ADM Nimitz also employed forces to protect individuals, akin to Personnel Recovery today. Over the course of the war, U.S. submarines were specifically positioned during major operations where naval aviators might have to ditch. U.S. submarines rescued over 500 airmen shot down in Pacific operations, including future President George H.W. Bush who was shot down on September 2, 1944 and rescued by USS Finback (SS-230).

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**LESSONS TO BE LEARNED**

ADM Nimitz and other senior WWII naval commanders became masters of operational art and were acutely aware that victory was predicated on the operational level of war setting the conditions for tactical success. ADM Nimitz was faced with a problem that spanned millions of square miles and would likely take years and massive amounts of resources to solve. Perhaps the most critical step Nimitz took to bring about the unconditional surrender of Japan was to establish and modify his C2 methodology. For the various reasons listed above, Nimitz decided to act as a “theater maritime component commander” and his vision ultimately resulted in victory.

Today, senior naval officers, many of whom are becoming re-acquainted with the operational level of war after years of success at the tactical level, are grappling with how to organize maritime forces to plan and execute across a wide expanse of ocean area, with the need to possibly deter or defeat a near-peer adversary – similar to ADM Nimitz’ challenge. The officers tasked with establishing a theater JFMCC construct today can derive practical lessons from ADM Nimitz’ experience as CINCPAC.

The below list of lessons focus on how Nimitz established a C2 structure that enabled him to oversee theater level maritime operations and to synchronize the other operational functions of intelligence, sustainment, movement and maneuver, protection, and fires for tactical forces dispersed across a massive theater facing a competent adversary.
1. **C2 is the decisive issue at the theater level.** A theater JFMCC must dedicate time and energy to establishing command relationships that focus on the main effort and modify them as necessary. ADM Nimitz’ C2 arrangement of forces operating in the three POAs and adaption of C2 relationships over time left no doubt about his theater level main effort.

2. **The synchronization of C2 with the other five operational functions at the operational level of war is what provides the foundation to success of the forces engaged in combat.** This methodology directly supports operations in a communications-degraded environment. ADM Nimitz synchronized and prioritized operational functions across three POAs – yet he allowed tactical level commanders to command their forces in execution.

3. **Stay out of the tactical weeds of any one subordinate TF and concentrate on coordinating the efforts of all maritime forces across the theater.** Nimitz had three questions posted on the wall: "(1) Is the proposed operation likely to succeed? (2) What might be the consequences of failure? (3) Is it in the realm of practicability of materials and supply?" ADM Nimitz would develop a plan, pick the right people to carry it through, let them know what he expected – then get out of the way to let them do the job.

4. **Centralized planning enables synchronization and decentralized execution enables increased tempo of operations.** Concentrating on planning and synchronizing operational functions across multiple TFs enables the success of decentralized execution. This is particularly valid in a communications degraded environment. Clearly ADM Nimitz built his C2 structure (alternating Third and Fifth Fleet staffs) to conduct centralized planning. Additionally, the CINCPAC staff ensured all supporting operational functions (intelligence, sustainment, movement & maneuver, fires, and protection) were synchronized to enable the planned operations to succeed.

5. **Ensure subordinates understand the theater JFMCC’s concern for risk during any given operation and understand the level of risk delegated to them.** In conducting centralized planning ADM Nimitz ensured his subordinates understood his view of risk for any given operation and also understood why risk limits were in place. For example, at Midway Admirals Fletcher and Spruance were instructed in an adjunct letter to CINCPAC Operation Plan No. 29-42: “You will be governed by the principle of calculated risk, which you shall interpret to mean the avoidance of exposure of your force to attack by superior enemy forces without good prospect of inflicting... greater damage on the enemy.” ADM Nimitz knew that Midway had great potential to alter the course of the war due to his synchronization of C2, intelligence, maneuver, and protection but he also was cognizant the forces employed at Midway were the only remaining major naval forces in the Pacific at the time.

6. **A theater JFMCC should conduct external planning coordination with other components and be responsible for any external “fight” for required resources.** Doing this will ensure theater level coordination with other theater components while properly allocating resources to each TF. At the same time this frees subordinate TF commanders to concentrate on conducting operations. ADM Nimitz conducted theater level coordination with GEN MacArthur and routinely met with ADM King (CNO) to present Pacific maritime resource requirements for future operations.

7. **Conduct maritime campaign assessment to ensure the theater JFMCC is on track to accomplish the ultimate objective.** Tactical assessment is best left to subordinates. ADM Nimitz always kept his ultimate objective in mind as he prosecuted the drive across the Central Pacific. With his Central Pacific planning methodology, ADM Nimitz could readily assess accomplishment of his intermediate objectives. His intermediate objective (Formosa) only changed after a meeting with President Roosevelt and GEN MacArthur in July, 1944 that adjusted objectives among CINCPOA and SWPA resulting in the decision to go to the Philippines in October, 1944.

8. **At the theater JFMCC level, focus planning to ensure synchronization of ends, ways, means, and risk throughout the maritime theater.** As theater JFMCC, ADM Nimitz always maintained the “big picture” view of the maritime theater and adjusted intermediate objectives, reassigned forces, and assumed risk as necessary to stay focused on the ultimate objective in his theater.
9. **Purposefully delegate OPCON/TACON and understand they can vary in different parts of the theater as well as in time.** By establishing his command relationships relative to the three POAs and maintaining command in the main effort Central Pacific, ADM Nimitz delegated command in time and space as he determined it would best fit the situation. Additionally, ADM Nimitz adjusted command relationships in the three POAs as the war progressed, relieving under-performing commanders (VADM Ghormley in South Pacific and RADM Theobald in the North Pacific) as necessary.

The challenge of regional conflict at sea will come from the difficulties associated with C2 to synchronize large numbers of tactical forces in time and space throughout an AOR. This is where the theater JFMCC concept will have its greatest value. The most difficult concern for a theater JFMCC will be theater-wide C2 of maritime forces, particularly when communications become degraded. As CINCPAC, Admiral Nimitz had similar challenges and adapted his C2 construct over the duration of WW II in the Pacific. Today’s Navy would be wise to look to Admiral Nimitz for theater JFMCC lessons to be learned.

10. **Keep the theater JFMCC main effort in mind always and understand with clarity why it is the main effort.** Everything else must be addressed as supporting or shaping of the main effort. ADM Nimitz had clarity in his prioritization of the Central Pacific Area as his main effort and he did not waver from that throughout the war.

**CONCLUSION**

Having enjoyed several decades of unmatched sea power, the U.S. Navy today is seeing challenges at sea from aspiring regional hegemons. As these potential adversaries develop symmetric and asymmetric capabilities to spread maritime conflict across an AOR the U.S. Navy must be prepared to respond. Our tactical level forces are prepared today for conflict with any adversary’s tactical forces. The challenge of regional conflict at sea will come from the difficulties associated with C2 to synchronize large numbers of tactical forces in time and space throughout an AOR. This is where the theater JFMCC concept will have its greatest value. The most difficult concern for a theater JFMCC will be theater-wide C2 of maritime forces, particularly when communications become degraded. As CINCPAC, Admiral Nimitz had similar challenges and adapted his C2 construct over the duration of WW II in the Pacific. Today’s Navy would be wise to look to Admiral Nimitz for theater JFMCC lessons to be learned.

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