

2D RECONNAISSANCE BATTALION: PROVIDING AN EDGE FOR THE DIVISION

The vast majority of we SMDA members, if questioned, would answer that Division Recon exists, conducts beach reconnaissance missions, and—depending on when we served—is located on either Onslow Beach, French Creek or at Court House Bay. We would be correct in answering each basic question. Beyond the basics, this feature will spotlight the smallest battalion of our Division which by its very nature keeps a low profile yet provides a most vital service for commanders, planners and assaulting forces. Follow Me will trace the battalion's combat roots; examine the manning, training and equipping of the battalion and the 2d Force Reconnaissance Company, over which it has administrative control; and examine the battalion's way forward to regain their edge in operations in the littoral regions of the globe.

AFTER WW II:

The 2d Marine Division returned to Lejeune in 1946 with only one reconnaissance company. Two years later, in support of the Jewish people establishing the State of Israel, the Brits requested reconnaissance support from the United States. Responding to that request, the 2d Marine Division Reconnaissance Company conducted beach surveys on Kuwait and Bahrain Island.

Records show that the Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion on the East Coast was officially activated 1 December 1950 at a tent camp area of Lejeune and later moved to the Stone Bay Camp. The Battalion was first commanded by Major Regan Fuller who surrounded himself with WWII combat-experienced, reconnaissance Marines. By the 1970s USMC Divisions had their own reconnaissance battalion and Marine Expeditionary (Amphibious) Forces (MEFs/MAFs) had their own Force Recon companies—more or less where we are today.

THE EARLY YEARS

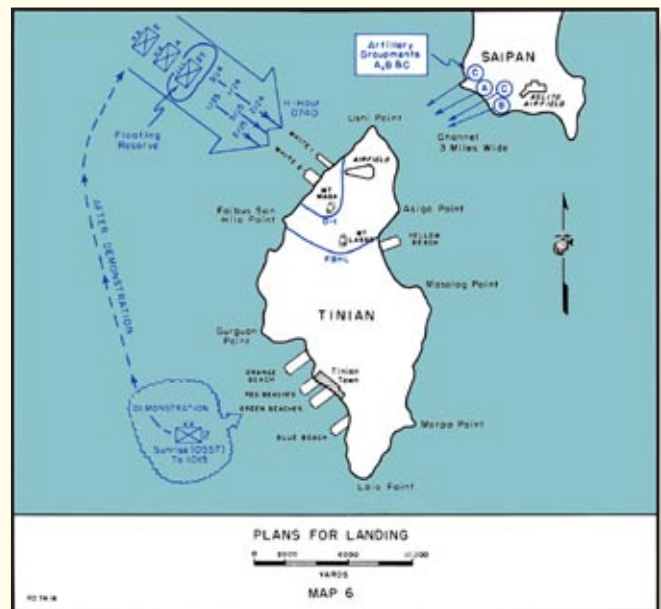
To begin, we will agree that any military historian worth his salt—professional or armchair—can readily correlate success on the battlefield with the commander's advanced, accurate knowledge about the enemy, atmospheric conditions, and both geographical and human terrain. Commanders with more precise, timely knowledge quite clearly have the edge on the battlefield over those with less. In order to gain this edge the commander needs an effective reconnaissance capability. Then when did the need for "amphibious reconnaissance" formally begin?

The first American doctrine for amphibious reconnaissance was written by Marine Maj Dion Williams in 1906. In it he wrote that only specially talented and experienced men should be assigned to this work. He listed that among the requisite qualities such a man should have was a through technical knowledge, a quick and energetic nature to ensure the work is accomplished without unnecessary delay, a sufficient resourcefulness to overcome unexpected obstacles, a desire to ensure results are kept confidential, and above all, exactitude of work.

Following WW I, practitioners recognized the need to employ aircraft and submarines in gathering advance battlefield knowledge for amphibious operations. The next step was to develop and equip a small organization that specialized in reconnoitering shore lines. Thus, in 1942, Captain James Logan Jones, father of former CMC General Jim Jones, led a small group of Marines, selected from First Marine Division intelligence sections, in experimenting with many different types of small landing craft including rubber boats, folding canvas boats and kayaks.

By July 1943, Jones' "group" had become an Amphibious Reconnaissance Company. On 9 July, the day Saipan officially was declared secured; Jones was ordered to scout out the Tinian beaches and their fortifications to determine their capac-

ity to handle the landing force and keep it supplied. This would be the company's first combat mission. The information his two platoons collected during the nights of 10 and 11 July convinced Admiral Turner to use the more desolate White Beach over the heavily defended Yellow Beach for the initial assault. The Japanese believed White Beach to be the least likely beach option for the landing force (landing area was both restricted and low cliffs made egress questionable) because they neither mined its entrance nor defended its flanks.



In April 1944 and for the rest of the war, the Amphibious Reconnaissance Company expanded into an Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion in order to train replacements, absorb lessons learned in recent combat, and free its companies for their missions.

MED & CARIB FLOATS:

From the start reconnaissance units were routinely attached to and deployed with battalion landing teams on scheduled six-month floats in the Caribbean or Mediterranean. This was the case on 18 October 1983, when a platoon from Company A, 2d Recon Battalion, attached to BLT 2/8, embarked aboard the USS Ft Snelling intending to relieve the recon platoon with BLT 1/8. At the time BLT 1/8 was part of the multi-national peacekeeping force in Beirut, Lebanon. On 21 October, with an uprising on the island of Grenada, the ships carrying BLT 2/8 were diverted to the island as part of "Operation Urgent Fury". BLT 2/8 mission was to quell the turbulence. On the 23rd, terrorists blew up the BLT 1/8's headquarters killing 239 US servicemen—mostly Marines.

Nevertheless, the platoon with 2/8 landed on Grenada on the 25th and conducted, initially, perimeter security and, later, scouting patrols. By the 30th BLT 2/8 reembarked and set sail for Beirut. The platoon eventually landed in Beirut, Lebanon with BLT 2/8 on 17 November 1983 and while there, for two and half months, conducted foot patrols and ground reconnaissance missions.



Steel and Mike.

However, somewhere in the mid-1980s, the sharp edge of the reconnaissance battalion had become a bit dull. Observing this was a former reconnaissance officer and the then Division commander, MajGen OK Steele. Steele started at the top. In 1988, he hand-picked then LtCol "Iron Mike" Williams as his new battalion commander.

With Williams at the helm, the battalion was rebuilt. *Follow Me* met with Col Williams in October and learned that "the key to a high-quality reconnaissance organization is selecting the right Staff NCOs and NCOs." Former recon experience is essential. He added that he also had to get the right officers as well to provide the vision, supervision and 'leadership from the front' necessary for any organization but extremely critical for reconnaissance units. The SNCOs and NCOs were directly charged to recruit and screen experienced Marines who had the physical skills, mental adroitness, toughness, and an ability to work independently. *Follow Me* asked, "What was it like to lead a Recon Battalion?" Col Williams explained that "Recon Marines all have Type A personalities. You don't need to lead them in the normal sense—but you definitely need to constantly guide them because they will literally kill themselves trying to raise the bar for excellence."

Scuba diving, parachute jumping and ranger training imposed a heavy burden on Williams' three operational units—Companies Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie. Williams received Major General Steele's approval to create a fourth company—Delta Company. That company was tasked to lead all new personnel through a four-week "Reconnaissance Indoctrination Program" (RIP) that contained instruction in the history of the battalion, basic reconnaissance Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), and physical training to include open water swimming. Delta Company would also relieve the training burden borne by the operating companies in preparing selected personnel for then named 'Amphibious Reconnaissance Course' at Ft. Story, VA.; the Airborne Course and Ranger Course at Ft. Benning, GA., and several classified courses at Ft. Bragg, NC. The requirement for H&S Company personnel to successfully complete the 'RIP' quickly eliminated an 'Us and Them' attitude in the battalion while also providing a 'home grown' source of replacements for reconnaissance team members lost in combat.

Soon General Steele began to test his Division. He did this on a motor march to Ft Bragg, called the "Combined Arms Operation". The Division staff and subordinate command head-

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Returning from a dive near Onslow Beach, members of 2nd Recon BN, 2d MarDiv, come ashore after successfully locating an amphibious assault vehicle which sank during routine training. (Date?)

quarters, down to the battalion level, participated. This complex and challenging movement was led from the front by the entire 2d Recon Battalion conducting route and area reconnaissance.

During the exercise, heavy rains blanketed the column of Marines and flooded a small river in front of the Division that seemed to impose an impassable obstacle for their movement. About the time when the situation regarding forward movement grew hopelessly grim, Williams' CP received a radio message from one of his young recon Marines, a Lance Corporal, who, because of good training, hard work and diligence, discovered an old, submerged asphalt road that was not on any map but was clearly capable of supporting the Division and its heavy vehicles. The motor march was able to continue its progress unimpeded. Williams fondly remembers MajGen Steele's only comment, "I finally have a recon capability!"

GULF WAR:

On August 2, 1990, Iraq launched an invasion of Kuwait. According to 2d Recon's operations officer at the time, then Captain Anthony Osterman (now retired colonel), prior to that notorious act of war, "2d Recon had begun to focus on riverine and jungle ops in Central America as well as providing

"THE RECON CREED" (1st stanza)

Realizing it is my choice and my choice alone to be a Reconnaissance Marine, I accept all challenges involved with this profession. Forever shall I strive to maintain the tremendous reputation of those who went before me.

units to deploying MEUs. We now had to focus on desert warfare." Before the battalion left the States in December to join the already deployed forces that included its own Alpha Company--that had deployed with 4th MEB in August, it gathered as much information on desert patrolling from the 5th Special Forces Group as well as books on the British Long Range Desert Group operations in North Africa during WW II. The battalion received global positioning system (GPS) devices and did not have to use the 50 sextants that it had just purchased and planned to use in the desert.

Once in Saudi Arabia, 2d Recon began to insert teams in order to get a better feel of the Iraqi barrier plan and mine fields. Osterman told *Follow Me* that, "These teams were foot mobile and inserted by infiltration. One team from Company C had an emergency extract with the help of LAV when they were compromised. The team had been alerted by a circling OV-10 who helped cover them with supporting arms as they were extracted.

As the attacking forces geared up in anticipation of the 24 Febru-

ary 1991 attack through the Iraqi defensive lines, the commanding officer of one of the designated break-through battalions grew increasingly impatient with higher headquarters.

Retired Col Bruce Gombar, then lieutenant colonel and CO of 1/8, told *Follow Me* that he had repeatedly requested an aerial photograph of his break-through point in order to avoid obstacles placed in front of his attacking companies, prevent casualties and keep aligned with other Division organizations. Suddenly, the day before the attack, Gombar received a sketch of his break-through point that was so well done that he initially believed it to be a photograph. "A young recon troop drew it!"

Osterman explained, "We had one team come back with superb sketches of the minefields. Upon return, the Marine who drew them told us that he actually climbed a high power tower and sketched them. Shocked, we asked him, 'You did what?' He said that he figured he was safe. The Iraqis surely wouldn't think it was a Marine eight kilometers behind their lines sitting up in the air in the open. He also guessed that allied air wouldn't want to waste ordnance on some deranged Iraqi who was sitting in the open over 50 feet off the ground."

Shortly after that the 2d Recon Battalion followed in trace of the 6th Marines into Kuwait.

ORGANIZATIONAL INSTABILITY 1990s:

Col Bruce Meyers' book, *Fortune Favors the Brave*, while focusing on the history of the 1st Force Recon Company, sheds light on the frequent restructuring of the reconnaissance organizations in the Marine Corps. Meyers points out that what goes on in I MEF may not be the same as what goes on in II MEF and III MEF. This was the case at Lejeune in the 1990s.

In 1993, with the recent establishment of the 2d Light Armored Vehicle Battalion, a question arose at the highest level: How should this new organization be employed? Would they



2d Recon gun vehicle, Desert Storm.

be “dragoons”, the mounted infantry having speed, but dismounted when fighting? Or would they be employed on the flanks principally conducting reconnaissance missions? Beyond their drivers and mechanics, from which command would they source their scouts? The infantry regiments? Recon Battalion? 2d Recon’s Op Chief, Master Sergeant Ken Urquhart, who was in 2d Recon in 1992-1993 as a young Lance Corporal, told *Follow Me* that 2d Recon Battalion was deactivated in 1993. When that happened, one company remained and became the Division’s Recon Company, one company was transferred to the LAV Battalion, and one company was split in third with each infantry regiment getting one of the three platoons.

Col Williams noted that “They (2d Recon Battalion) did go through a tough period in the mid ‘90s when the battalion headquarters was disbanded” He added that “This ‘experiment’ was rightfully ended because of a lack of ‘serious’ support from the regiments and that’s when the 2d Recon Battalion was reconstituted.”

IRAQ:

2d Recon Battalion deployed to Iraq three times during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Then LtCol John Shafer (currently CO, 6th Marine Regiment, who will deploy to Afghanistan next month) led the battalion on its third Iraq deployment, during the period October 2007-June 2008. *Follow Me* asked the current Opera-

tions Chief, MSgt Urquhart, who was with the battalion at that time about the deployment. “Most of the time we were in Fallujah. Each platoon from my company patrolled from a base with hardened structures that we referred to as a ‘firm base.’ We’d patrol until we received sporadic fire, then we would initiate a ‘movement-to-contact’ to positively identify and engage the insurgents. In summary, we identified a lot of Al Qaida, terrorists and other bad guys; and we apprehended or killed a good many of them. In Iraq we also conducted a lot of COIN (counter insurgency) operations.”

Col Shafer added, “Our deployment marked a significant change in reconnaissance battalion employment in OIF. Two months into the deployment, and after significant assessment and analysis of insurgent activity, I was able to convince the Multi-National Force (MNF)-West Commanding General to place the recon battalion in general support of the ground combat element as opposed to the long-standing direct support role within a single regimental combat team’s (RCT’s) area of operations. For the first time a Marine unit (ours) was granted authority to conduct cross-boundary operations outside of the Marine Corps’ (MNF-W) boundaries. We specifically targeted several insurgents beyond what had traditionally been USMC battlespace. We also conducted interdiction operations to the west of Ramadi. We ended up spending on average 25 days per company per month outside the wire on active

missions. Our deployment netted two silver stars, over a dozen Bronze Stars with Combat V, and too many Navy Commendations and Navy Achievements with V to count... and all without a single purple heart. The Marines performed magnificently; they truly contributed to the legacy and mystique of modern Marine Reconnaissance. I could not be more proud than to have been associated with and led such professional Marines.”

AFGHANISTAN:

During Operation Enduring Freedom, 2d Recon Battalion deployed to Afghanistan from November 2010 to June 2011. From a command and control standpoint, the battalion was under the operational control (OPCON) of the Division and in direct support of Regimental Combat Team-2 (RCT-2) and later RCT-8. While there, they operated in the Upper Sangin Valley, south of the Kajaki dam and northwest of Sangin—more or less in no man’s land. Their operating area was and is referred to as an “OpBox”.

Follow Me asked the CO of the 2d Recon Battalion, LtCol Lawrence “Sonny” Hussey, about the type of missions the battalion conducted while deployed. He said that frequently their operations were referred to as “Battlefield Shaping” The most common missions were to map the physical terrain (canals, farmlands, vegetation, and roads) and to map the human terrain (identify where enemy is operating; find out who are the

continued...



In the swamp.



Trench-fare

bad guys; identify who are the senior Taliban leaders; identify the friendly Afghan Leaders). Other missions were to disrupt the Taliban's lines of communication in a more kinetic way through ambushes and sniper attacks.

Follow Me interviewed Captain John Nobles who led the 1st Platoon of 2d Recon's Alpha Company during the OEF deployment He provided this report during the interview.

For the majority of the time the company operated out of the small Forward Operating Base Alcatraz. Alcatraz was located in the desert, 40-50 meters outside of the fertile "green zone" about half way between Sangin and Kajaki. Located on the eastern side of the Helmand River, we patrolled at night between 1-6 kilometers into the green zone and setup in the Taliban's backyard. We knew that as soon daylight came, "Things would go "kinetic."

Unlike the cities and large villages where the grunts encountered IEDs on a daily basis, we did not have many IEDs in the enemy's home territory. The green zone was quite rural made up of small "compounds" that had one or two houses with a courtyard and a wall around them. Occasionally, some compounds were tied together one to another, but most were separated by 30-100 yards. Back at Alcatraz we studied satellite images to determine which compound to visit, occupy



Capt John Nobles.

and set up to wait for the Taliban to attack. We selected only occupied ones because the unoccupied ones would surely be "IED'd".

We arrived at the selected compound in the middle of the night without notice. We were always invited in and immediately began filling sandbags and preparing firing positions for our machine guns, LAAWs, M40 sniper rifles and M203 grenade launchers. By morning we were ready and hoping that they would attack.

Sure enough, at sunrise the Taliban had realized that we had

slipped in and couldn't stand it! They used small handheld "I com" radios and we monitored everything they said. "Infidels in our backyard! Let's attack them!"

They operated in 3-4 man cells and they attacked from used multiple fighting positions. I never saw the cells converge. Soon we'd hear them say, "We have the infidels surrounded. None will get out alive!" Then their commander would give orders to each cell one at a time: "Are you ready?" "Yeah." "Are you ready?" "Yeah." Soon we heard, "Attack!" "Attack!"

We loved it because it would be a real turkey shoot.

Our Company commander was great because he coordinated all the indirect fire support we needed. We could get HIMARS [M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System] from Camp Leatherneck and Excalibur rounds [155mm Precision Guided Extended Range Artillery Projectiles] from the 10th Marines battery up in Kajaki.

Toward the end the tour the Taliban fighters changed from 19-year old locals to 30-year old men not from the local area. The locals led us to believe they were from Pakistan.

Depending on the amount of damage caused by the fire fight, we gave our compound hosts between \$50-\$200 in FOU [For Official Use] Funds. They were more than pleased. We told them to tell the Taliban that "The Marines forced them to surrender their house and to hide the money." We continued the coveted reputation, earned earlier by 1st Recon, as the Taliban would tell the locals that, "These foreigners are neither Marines nor Special Forces they are far worse than that! They are 'Spawns of Satan'."

My platoon was lucky because, as many fire fights we were in, we didn't have any casualties.

Captain Nobles is now a platoon commander in the 2d Force Recon Company.



In position at compound.

THE WAY FORWARD:

LtCol Hussey knows that his battalion will continue to be the eyes and ears of the commander. And in anticipation of increased operations in littoral hotspots around the world, the battalion will focus on continuing to build and/or regain the full amphibious capabilities it once had, such as Beach and Hydrographic Surveys from Over-The-Horizon (OTH) and amphibious insertion to collect intelligence on objectives or targets ashore. There are several initiatives in the works to develop and clarify the Marine Corps' requirements and expectations for its reconnaissance units in the future operating environment, especially for post-OEF. The focus will be on advance force operations (AFO) and shaping operations which are critical for gathering intelligence and setting the conditions for a supported commander.

Hussey added that his command will continue to work with state-of-the-art communication enhancements in order to be more responsive to the Division Commander at greater, remote distances. This is essential for the passing of near real-time information quickly and efficiently to answer time-sensitive intelligence gaps or to call on supporting arms against a target or objective area. Again, this ties in to AFO and shaping operations where timely updates are vital for a commander to make informed decisions.

LtCol Hussey told *Follow Me* that according to the Force Structure Review, by 2015, each Division's Recon Battalion will lose one line company and end up with an H&S company, two line companies and retain administrative control of the MEF's Force Recon Company. With the structure changes, adaptation will be the key, but 2d Recon Battalion will adjust and drive ahead as it always has with a professional force of highly trained warriors, prepared to take on whatever challenges lie before them.

Follow Me extends its thanks to the many contributors quoted in the feature and to retired SgtMaj Mack Duke and the 2d Reconnaissance Bn Association for providing the historical notes used in the article.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT TODAY'S RECON

- Recruits can have a recruit contract guaranteeing their assignment to a recon billet if they successfully pass through several hurdles such as boot camp, School of Infantry, and Basic Reconnaissance Course. (In the past the enlisted were sourced from mostly infantry organizations.)
- About 50% of the new Marines lose their option by not passing the Basic Reconnaissance Course. They then become 03XXs.
- Officers are former 0302s or 0203s. With recon they can now pick up a 0307 secondary.
- The enlisted MOS is now 0321.
- There are 1,165 Marines with an 0321 MOS in the Marine Corps. 2d Recon Bn has 519 personnel.
- Retention of 0321s is good since enlisted men can both stay within the recon organizations and can be assigned to B billets.
- Once a recon platoon begins forming up, the Marines are schooled, trained then deploy together. Schools include:
 - *Joint Fires Observer School (JFOS) to learn surface to surface fires leaders with 60s, 81s, artillery, M777s/120mm mortar, and Artillery Rocket system.*
 - *Joint Tactical Air Controller School (JTACS) to learn how to control air strikes and UAVs (Predators and Reapers)*
 - *Sniper School*
 - *Airborne*
 - *Ranger School (Not all go through the Army Ranger/Pathfinder schools but enough attend to give the platoon that capability.)*
 - *Pathfinder School*
 - *Marine Combatant Diver School (MCDS)*
 - *Marine Corps Combatant Diver Course — Navy Diving Salvage and Training Center, Naval Support Activity Panama City, Florida*
 - *Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape School — Navy Remote Training Sites; NAS North Island, CA or NAS Brunswick, ME*
 - *Army Airborne School — Fort Benning, GA*
 - *United States Army Static Line Jumpmaster School (Fort Benning, Georgia)*
 - *United States Army Ranger School (Fort Benning, Georgia)*
 - *Special Operations Training Group Schools (i.e. Urban Sniper, HRST, etc.) (SOTG) — One SOTG exists under each MEF; I MEF, II MEF, and III MEF.*
 - *Recon and Surveillance Leaders Course — Ranger School, Fort Benning, GA*
 - *Pathfinder Course — Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, or Army Air Assault School, Fort Campbell, Kentucky*
 - *Military Free Fall (John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center) / Multi Mission Parachutist Course (CPS Coolidge, AZ)*
 - *Military Free Fall (Jumpmaster) School — John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School*
 - *Mountain Leaders (Summer/Winter) Course — Pickle Meadows, CA*
 - *Scout Sniper Course — School of Infantry (West), Camp Pendleton, CA; Camp Lejeune, NC; Quantico, VA; or MCB Hawaii*
 - *Mountain Sniper (Bridgeport, California)*
 - *Reconnaissance Team Leader Course (Camp Pendleton, CA)*
 - *Scout/ Sniper Team Leader Course*
 - *Methods of Entry / Breacher (MCB Quantico, VA)*
 - *Joint Terminal Attack Controller (Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Atlantic/Pacific)*
 - *High Risk Personnel (HRP) Course — MCB Quantico*