

# 21st-Century Marine Corps' Commandos

Why we need them and how we get there

by Capt Jeremy Carter

**T**he 2018 *National Defense Strategy* of the United States of America states that “it is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model.”<sup>1</sup> The Thucydides Trap suggests that as one nation begins to overtake another nation for supremacy, the most likely outcome is war. In fact, “12 of 16 instances of great power transition over the last 500 years” have resulted in war.<sup>2</sup> The Thucydides Trap, as stated by Stuart, “makes the power transition thesis arguably the most reliable predictive theory in international relations literature.”<sup>3</sup> Echevarria has written of the Preparation Paradox, “preparing for one type of conflict has merely increased the likelihood of having to fight a very different one ... if we become strong in conventional conflict, our foes will shift their efforts toward unconventional means; if we shift to unconventional capabilities to compensate, our adversaries will shift back toward conventional methods.”<sup>4</sup>

There are numerous scenarios in which the Marine Corps can find itself engaged in the near future. Matthew Burrows suggests that the three most likely world scenarios to occur by 2035 are (1) the New Cold War scenario, (2) the Fragmented World Scenario, or (3) the Strange Bedfellows Scenario.<sup>5</sup> *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, states that “during times of peace, the most important task of any military is to prepare for war.”<sup>6</sup> In Gen Berger’s *Commandant Planning Guidance*, he writes “as good as we are today, we will need to be even better tomorrow to maintain our warfighting overmatch.”<sup>7</sup> Since becoming our commandant, Gen Berger has provided

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**“Just because something is your core business—just because you’ve been doing it for years or perhaps even decades—does not necessarily mean you can be the best in the world at it. And if you cannot be the best in the world at your core business, then your core business absolutely cannot form the basis of a great company.”**

**—Jim Collins**

**“If Marines settle for what they think is ‘good enough,’ it may result in high casualties in the next fight.”**

**—MCDP 7, Learning**

**“Not the fortress, but the army that we send into the field secures our position of power in the world.”**

**—Gen Helmuth Karl Bernhard von Moltke**

his Marines with his intent on preparing and transforming our Corps for the next fight. One such initiative is to modernize our infantry and create commando-like Marines. However, the current proposals to modify the period of instructions

(POIs) at Infantry Training Battalion (ITB) and Advance Infantry Training Battalion, or to equip the infantry battalions with upgraded technology and capabilities will not create a commando-like infantry.

1. Humans are more important than hardware.
2. Quality is more important than quantity.
3. Special Operations Forces cannot be mass-produced.
4. Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.
5. Most special operations require non-Special Operations Forces assistance.

**Figure 1. SOF Principles.** (Figure provided by author.)

This is only partly because commandos cannot be mass-produced, a truth of special operations forces (SOF) (Figure 1). This is further compounded by an inadequate and non-existent selection process for which Marines report to ITB, which shapes the infantry in its entirety. While modernizing our infantry courses and setting higher standards will make our historic Corps more capable, effective, and lethal, it will not create commando-like infantrymen. This article will discuss how the Marine Corps can create *actual* Marine commandos: Marines who are selected, trained, and prepared to fight in 21st-century wars—wars in which we may not possess the technological overmatch we have enjoyed over the last 30 years—and dispersed operations will be critical.

#### What Is a Commando?

Arquilla states that “the term commando, which enjoys widespread modern use, initially referred simply to a unit of mounted infantry of some 100 to 150 guerilla fighters.”<sup>8</sup> While our infantry can and should become more commando-like, they cannot become commandos—primarily because the infantry is tasked with close operations. *MCDP 1-0, Operations*, states that close operations “will always be viewed as the decisive element in combat.”<sup>9</sup> While close operations are vital, commandos operate in deep operations, operations behind enemy lines with little to no support, and “afford commanders an opportunity to shape or prevent future close battles.”<sup>10</sup> While our doctrine states the GCE can participate in deep operations, deep operations “are primarily conducted by the ACE.”<sup>11</sup>

Many historians agree that World War II is the birthplace of modern special op-

erations. As stated by Colin S. Gray, “the study of history shows us what can happen, which we know for certain because it has happened ... history is by far the best educator for our strategic future.”<sup>12</sup> The Allies needed commandos in World War II because they did not have technological overmatch or initially possess the initiative—a situation which our Corps is potentially facing with strategic adversaries.

Following Dunkirk, the British took the lead with commando and special operations units, eventually creating the Special Operations Executive, the Jedburghs, the Long-Range Desert Group (LRDG), and the Special Air Service to name a few. The United States learned from the British and eventually created Underwater Demolition Teams (pre-cursor for the SEALs), Ranger battalions (who trained with the British commandos to gain combat experience), and Marine Raider battalions.<sup>13</sup> While the Army Special Forces (i.e., Green Berets) were officially formed in 1952, their selection, training, and missions are rooted in the Jedburgh program.<sup>14</sup> Of note, both the British and American commando units had a selection and training program to qualify them for their deep operations.

Thus, we see a commando as an individual who is assessed, selected, trained, supported, and able to operate without control from their chain of command. Without an assessment and selection (A&S) process, a commando/commando-like unit cannot be created. While varying authors and publications will have differing views on the definition of commando, I offer this definition for a Marine commando: *a Marine who is assessed, selected, highly trained*

*and equipped, able to endure sustained hardship, and is supported by the Marine Corps to train and conduct operations deep behind enemy lines, and in areas without a defined enemy line, both in and out of uniform, with minimal guidance from their higher unit, often without higher, adjacent, or supporting units, in which their actions will have direct effects on the operational, strategic, and national policy levels of war.*

**“There are a dozen different ways of delivering destruction in impersonal wholesale, via ships or missiles of one sort or another, catastrophes so widespread, so unselective that the war is over because that nation or planet has ceased to exist. What we do is entirely different. We make war as personal as a punch in the nose. We can be selective, applying precisely the required amount of pressure at the specified point at a designated time. We’ve never been told to go down and kill or capture all left-handed redheads in a particular area, but if they tell us to, we can. We will.”**

**—Starship Troopers by Robert A. Heinlein**

**Marine Commando Assessment and Selection**

Col B.P. McCoy (Ret) states that we do not recruit from a “warrior class” and “that America does not possess a warrior culture.”<sup>15</sup> Currently, the Marine Corps does a good job of transforming civilians into warriors, which can be seen in the pride and discipline of a recent graduate of basic training, which is chronicled in Thomas Ricks’ book *Making the Corps*.<sup>16</sup> However, as stated by Jim Collins, “Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great ... The vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good—and that is their main problem.”<sup>17</sup>

***“Just because something is your core business— just because you’ve been doing it for years or perhaps even decades—does not necessarily mean you can be the best in the world at it. And if you cannot be the best in the world at your core business, then your core business absolutely cannot form the basis of a great company.”***

***—Good to Great by Jim Collins***

At the time of this submission, we assign civilians and our future enlisted Marines their MOS based on their (1) Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery, (2) the General Technician, (3) the Electrical, (4) the Mechanical, and the (5) Clerical scores. More troubling, disturbing, and truthful is that we assign

Marines their MOS based on the needs of the recruiting station:

Recruiters are bred to the axiom “shipping is king,” and many recruiters already know their applicants’ MOS the moment they walk through the door, regardless of the applicants’ true strengths and weaknesses that they will bring into our Corps. Whereas Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) evaluates 10 attributes for each and every one of their candidates, we, the Marine Corps, are not truly evaluating anything necessary for mission success in the recruiting station. We are not ensuring the right Marine has the right job, thus are limiting our lethality, effectiveness, and resiliency.<sup>18</sup>

While this process of MOS assignment is efficient, it is not effective. As stated by Gen McChrystal, “the pursuit of ‘efficiency’—getting the most with the least investment of energy, time, or money—was once a laudable goal, but ... Adaptability, not efficiency, must become our central competency.”<sup>19</sup> Coach Herb Brooks, the hockey coach of the 1980 Miracle on Ice United States hockey team, stated that “you win with people, not with talent. So, the quality of the people is very important in building your team.” In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins’ research demonstrates that great companies (1) possess level 5 leadership; (2) get the right people in the right places (while removing the incorrect people from the organization); (3) confront brutal facts; (4) apply The Hedgehog Concept (i.e., great at one task versus mediocre in numerous tasks); (5) possess a culture of discipline; and (6) and use technology, not as a main effort, but rather a supporting effort.<sup>20</sup>

Using these six principles researched by Collins as a guiding path, we see that a specific unit dedicated to these tenants is needed to elicit commando capabilities in the Marine Corps. Regarding the second principle, since there is no A&S process for an infantryman, we are not ensuring the right Marines are in the right places. Therefore, to create commando-like Marines, an A&S process must occur, similar to the tryouts utilized by Coach Brooks, or the A&S used by MARSOC, or any SOF unit.

***“Only men who do not mind a hard life, with scanty food, little water, and lots of discomfort, men who possess stamina and initiative need apply.”***

***—Call for volunteers for the British Long-Range Desert Group***

Fortunately, the Marine Corps’ leaders can reach to out to MARSOC to learn from their A&S course, which is incredibly professional, thorough, and effective. The A&S course for MARSOC tests each applicant on their dependability, initiative, integrity, interpersonal skills, determination, effective intelligence, teamwork, physical ability, adaptability, and stress tolerance. MARSOC learned that restricting their organization only to prior infantrymen was too restrictive and the command was missing out on a large portion of highly qualified Marines who possess the grit, intelligence, and drive to succeed in the SOF. Thus, the author recommends a

***“Are you willing to starve and suffer and go without food and sleep? I promise you nothing but hardships and anger. When we go into battle, we ask no mercy, we give none.”***

***—BGen Evans Carlson, the first commander of 2d Marine Raider Battalion***



four-week A&S course open to any MOS and to any rank willing to live the life of a Marine commando, similar to those of the British LRDG of World War II, or the Marine Raiders of World War II.

### Marine Commando Basic Training Course

As mentioned, there are five unofficial truths of SOF (Figure 1). Following being selected, a process that would test each applicant on their ability to deal with failure, their determination to endure sustained hardship, their ability to solve problems, and their ability to perform in an isolated environment, among other factors. Marines would attend a basic training course (BTC) to become a Marine Commando. The BTC would only be the baseline of proficiency for the Marine Commandos, since the profession would require a lifetime pursuit of knowledge, one dedicated to continual improvement.

As seen in Figure 3 and mentioned earlier, a Marine Commando could not be mass-produced. Typically, official courses within the Marine Corps are divided into phases. I recommend the phases for BTC be called blocks. The importance of the nomenclature comes from the concept of periodization, a philosophy of training athletes to perform to their highest potential. Block periodization is based on the principle of focusing on a select skill while maintaining proficiency in other domains. According to the National Strength and Conditioning Association, the Nation's premier organization on training, athlete development, and human performance, periodization is "a logical method of planning training interventions in a sequential and integrative fashion in order to maximize training-induced physiological and performance outcomes."<sup>21</sup>

Periodization involves balancing the volume and intensity of conditioning with the needed motor skills and specific practice to elicit optimal performance and is traditionally broken down into cycles known as microcycles (one–four weeks), mesocycles (weeks–months), and macrocycles (months–years). Periodization can apply such strategies as classical, wave, incremental, varying volume, varying intensity, and reactive

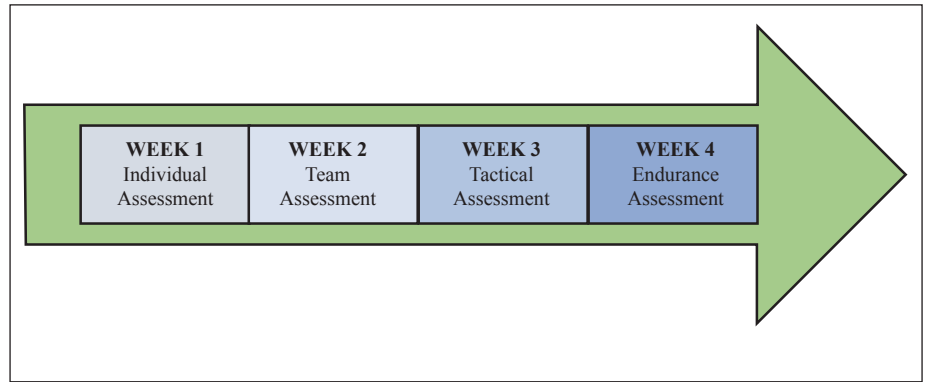


Figure 2. Marine Commando Assessment and Selection. (Figure provided by author.)

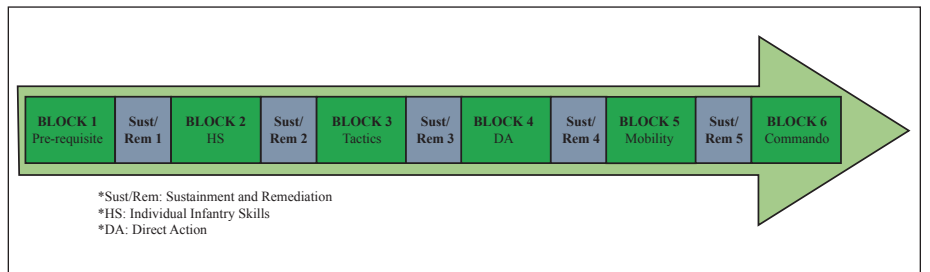


Figure 3. Marine Commando BTC. (Figure provided by author.)

programs to balance volume and intensity, and strategies of linear, concurrent, conjugate, concentrated, block, taper, and competition modes to manipulate training units.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Vladimir Issurin defines and proposes the use of block periodization for elite athletes because block periodization

assumes the use and sequencing of specialized mesocycle-blocks, in which highly concentrated training workloads are focused on a minimal number of motor and technical abilities. Unlike traditional periodization where simultaneous development of many abilities is prevalent, the block concept proposes consecutive training of carefully selected components.<sup>23</sup>

In essence, the proposed basic course would consist of highly concentrated POIs, in which each block would focus on those core skills, which would be sequenced in a manner to elicit the greatest outcome. Geoff Colvin states "the differences between expert performers and normal adults reflect a life-long period of deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain."<sup>24</sup> Colvin states that deliberate practice is (1) "designed specifically to improve performance,"

(2) "it pushes just beyond, but not way beyond, your current limits," (3) "it can be repeated a lot," (4) "feedback on results is continuously available," (5) "it's highly demanding mentally," and (6) "it isn't much fun."<sup>25</sup>

Between each block, would be a remediation block for three purposes, specifically for (1) remediating the knowledge and skills taught prior to the course, (2) restoration of the body to elicit optimal adaptations and performance, and (3) additional professional military education, primarily for staff non-commissioned officers and officers. Regarding remediating the skills taught in prior blocks, the data from the Infantry Training Unit Feedback (ITUF) program, a six-week program executed by ITB-East in the summer of 2020, where 907 Marines were assessed at ITB-East and 260 Marines were assessed in the operating forces on Camp Lejeune from three different infantry battalions, demonstrated that Marines are not retaining the information taught to them during ITB. More disturbing, the Marines in the operating forces are not improving their knowledge of the basic information taught to them at ITB.

Figure 4. DATA FROM ITB-EAST'S ITUF PROGRAM

MOS	H&A Signals	0300	MOS	Patrols	Total Average
0311 (n=505)	65.01 ± 17.84 63.28 ± 21.18 (n=40)	61.89 ± 14.56 65.18 ± 11.85 (n=102)	55.91 ± 17.83 67.92 ± 17.19 (n=95)	61.26 ± 24.63 59.31 ± 24.45 (n=63)	61.02 ± 14.03 65.13 ± 13.91 (n=105)
Weapons (n=199)	62.16 ± 17.30 56.09 ± 14.97 (n=66)	61.85 ± 13.51 60.01 ± 11.07 (n=77)	65.62 ± 15.81 64.63 ± 14.07 (n=45)	53.04 ± 25.00 47.13 ± 24.72 (n=66)	60.63 ± 13.30 57.05 ± 13.21 (n=78)
0331 (n=77)	63.38 ± 17.04 50.00 ± 13.04 (n=16)	60.99 ± 13.99 62.12 ± 9.88 (n=23)	70.27 ± 14.90 75.13 ± 9.39 (n=16)	52.72 ± 26.51 47.77 ± 24.49 (n=15)	61.02 ± 5.40 61.06 ± 13.48 (n=24)
0341 (n=80)	58.81 ± 17.97 56.02 ± 15.16 (n=44)	61.33 ± 13.01 58.14 ± 11.65 (n=45)	58.33 ± 14.32 57.99 ± 12.41 (n=27)	51.80 ± 24.01 45.83 ± 25.39 (n=42)	57.57 ± 12.18 53.75 ± 12.57 (n=45)
0352 (n=42)	66.31 ± 15.58 67.22 ± 11.76 (n=6)	64.47 ± 13.56 63.94 ± 9.92 (n=9)	71.08 ± 15.01 70.27 ± 19.11 (n=2)	55.98 ± 24.36 53.57 ± 23.50 (n=9)	64.22 ± 13.47 63.26 ± 11.81 (n=9)
All MOS (N=704)	64.20 ± 17.72 58.39 ± 17.68 (n=109)	61.88 ± 14.26 62.74 ± 11.88 (n=179)	58.65 ± 17.82 66.13 ± 16.35 (n=140)	58.92 ± 24.99 53.17 ± 11.88 (n=129)	60.91 ± 13.87 61.18 ± 14.18 (n=183)

Legend:  
 N (Total Population)  
 n (subpopulation)  
 \* n=505 (505 0311s tested at ITB)  
 \* N=704 (704 total Marines assessed at ITB)  
 \*Top Row is ITB Students  
 \*Bottom Row (red) is Fleet Marines with less than a year in the Operating Forces

\*Using a 2-Tail, 2-Sample Equal Variance T-Test, we obtain a p-value of 82.2, thus we can statistically conclude there is no difference in the retention rate between an ITB student and a Marine who has been in the Fleet 2–12 months.

Figure 4. Data from ITB-East's ITUF Program. (Figure provided by author.)

(Figure 4). Broadly, when using a 2-Tail, 2-Sample Equal Variance T-Test, the data obtained a p-value of 82.2, which statistically concluded there was no difference in the academic retention rate between an ITB student and a Marine who had been in the operating forces 2–12 months. (When comparing two or more populations, statistical tests can be run to determine if there is a significant difference between the populations. The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between the populations. A p-value < 0.05 allows you to reject the null hypothesis at a 95 percent confidence interval [i.e., there is a meaningful difference]. A p-value > 0.05 means you cannot reject the null hypothesis and that any observed difference could be a result of either sampling or experimental error.)

Additional major findings from the ITUF program demonstrated that after 17 weeks of cumulative Marine Corps training, which included Basic Training and the first phase of ITB, that 7.86 percent of future infantrymen could not hit a silhouette target once with 10 rounds when going from the standing to the prone in a time span of 25 sec-

onds (N=89), 54.92 percent could not apply a tourniquet correctly (N=193), the average expressive knowledge on fire team formation was 39.3 ± 32.17 percent (N=194), the average receptive knowledge on fire team patrols was 62.20 ± 26.60 percent (N=194), and the average ability to reduce a fortified structure correctly was 62.89 ± 10.10 percent (N=194). More troubling is that

**More troubling is that Marine students halfway through the POI at ITB outperformed Marines at the end of the POI ...**

Marine students halfway through the POI at ITB outperformed Marines at the end of the POI in hand and arm signals (2.94 percent, p = <0.5), and 0300 academic knowledge (2.65 percent, p = <0.5), and outperformed the Marines who had been in the operating forces for 2–12 months in hand and arm signals (8.75 percent, p = <0.1) and the ability to identify patrols (8.85 percent, p = <0.1). The findings of ITUF should

not only help drive the shaping of a future commando unit, but also that of the Marine Corps' infantry, which has been suggested previously.<sup>26</sup>

Concerning restoration of the body, the reader can look at the figures (Figures 5–7 on the following pages).<sup>27</sup> Regarding professional military education, the non-commissioned officers and junior Marines will be tasked with being the subject-matter experts on the weapon systems and tactics while the staff non-commissioned officers and officers will be tasked with the conceptual knowledge. This is a concept already established and proven within the Marine Corps. However, since commandos punch above their weight class by being a tactical unit that affects operational, strategic, and national policies, the staff non-commissioned officers and officers need to be able to have intelligent and productive conversations with colonels, generals, ambassadors, agencies, and foreign leaders, which can be accomplished through professional military education during the sustainment and remediation blocks.

Without diving into the specifics of the proposed commando course, we can see that the blocks should be sequenced correctly, with appropriate sustainment, remediation, and restoration training. Block 1, pre-requisite training, would involve such competencies as communication, medical, and Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape training, which is consistent with the concept and train-

ing of Phase 0 at the Individual Training Course. Block 2, Individual Infantry Skills, would focus on the specifically targeted abilities such as combat marksmanship, machinegun gunnery, mortar gunnery, basic demolitions, rockets, and anti-armor skills. Block 3, Tactics, would consist of traditional Marine infantry tactics with an emphasis on the small unit and decentralized actions by small-unit leaders. The small-unit action

is consistent with Admiral McRaven's definition of a successful special operation, which "defies conventional wisdom by using a small force to defeat a much larger or well-entrenched opponent" and is "conducted by forces specially trained, equipped, and supported for a specific target whose destruction, elimination, or rescue (in the case of hostages), is a political or military imperative."<sup>28</sup>

Block 4, Direct Action, would be similar to the POI conducted at Individual Training Course and would instill confidence in our political leaders on the ability of the Marine commandoes to conduct sensitive and perilous missions with a high risk to force. Block 5, Mobility, would involve the ability to move forces to and from the objective over the land, through the water, and by air. Lastly, Block 6, Commando, would provide the skills necessary to conduct operations deep behind the enemy lines, without support from higher, adjacent, or supporting units, whose effects would impact the operational, strategic, and national levels of war. Historical examples of how commandos/commando-type warriors can impact the war effort during absolute war can be seen with the British during World War II during such operations as Operation POSTMASTER, Operation DRYAD, Operation BASALT, Operation JOSEPHINE B, Operation ALBUMEN, and Operation ROAST, or how the Special Air Service and LRDG were instrumental in facilitating the seizure of North Africa.

### Force Design and Organization

In my opinion, a regiment would be needed for the critical mass to make impacts on the operational and strategic level of war during a full-scale conflict. The proposed command structure can be seen in Figure 8 (on following page). The commando unit should be commanded by a two-star general, similar to that of MARSOC since a two-star general will have more power, influence, and authority than a colonel, who typically commands a regiment. Headquarters should be stationed in Quantico due to its strategic placement near Washington, DC, the Marine Corps Headquarters, Camp Lejeune (where MARSOC is located), and Fort Bragg (where the Army

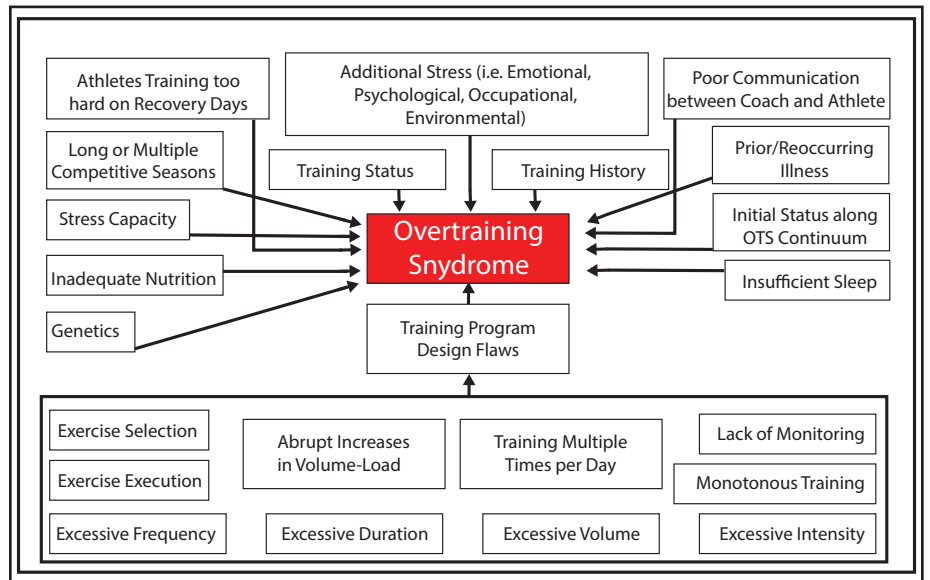


Figure 5. Cause of overtraining. (Figure provided by author.)

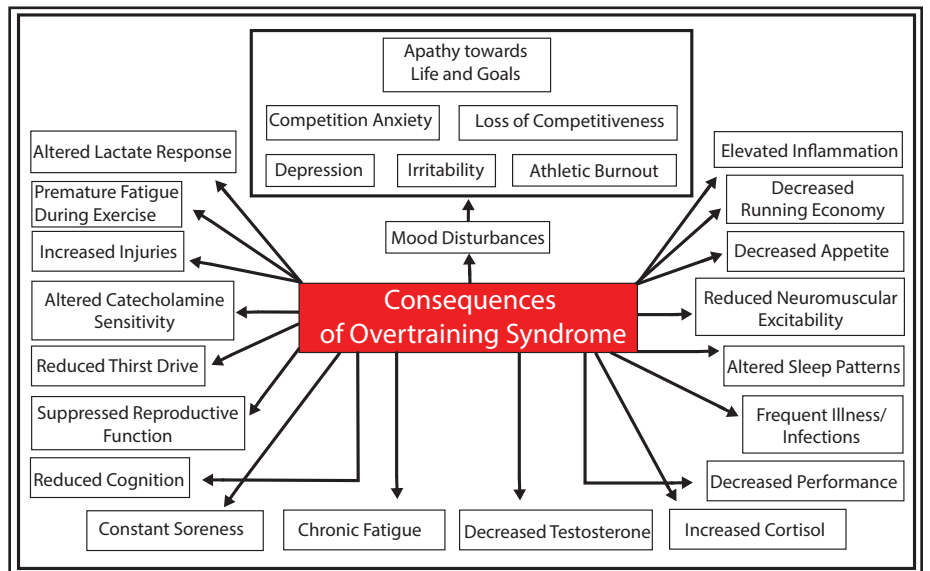


Figure 6. Consequences of overtraining. (Figure provided by author.)

Special Operations Command and Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) are located). Besides equipping, training, and personal management, a primary function of Headquarters Command would be selling the unit's capabilities to Congress, United States Special Operations Command (USSOC), and JSOC, as well as achieving appropriate authorities and permissions to conduct operations, which would involve the application of liaison officers. The commando unit would need to have liaison officers with the USSOC, JSOC, and

other relevant units to create mutual and symbiotic partnerships. An essential relationship would be with our own reconnaissance forces, specifically Force Reconnaissance. Like the LRDG and Special Air Service in World War II in the Africa Campaign, our Force Reconnaissance combined with our Marine Commandos would create an additive effect on the battlefield and increase our combat power.

I propose three operational deployable battalions be commanded by a colonel. The purpose of a colonel versus a

lieutenant colonel is once more to help influence the use of the unit's application. 1st Battalion would be located at Camp Pendleton and be focused on being the subject-matter experts and the unit responsible for developing and testing new tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and developing equipment for mountain warfare and cold weather fighting. The 2d Battalion would be located at Camp Lejeune and be tasked with being the subject-matter experts for evolving rural and jungle warfare, while 3d Battalion, being stationed at Twentynine Palms, would be responsible for desert and hot weather warfare. Each battalion would be equally responsible for urban combat. As stated by our Commandant, "training must be focused on winning in combat in the most challenging conditions and operating environments—from the thin air and high altitudes of the mountains, to the sweltering heat of triple canopy jungles, and including the sprawling self-organized chaos of dense urban terrain."<sup>29</sup>

**"The purpose of all training is to develop forces that can win in combat."**  
—MCDP 1

Each battalion would have four companies, with each company having four platoons, with each platoon having four squads. The benefit of using four subordinate units beneath the battalion level is two-fold. One, if the mass of a large unit is needed for an operation, the commander can task out security, support, and assault, while possessing an organic reserve unit. *MCDP 1-3, Tactics*, stresses the importance of the reserve in being able to exploit success.<sup>30</sup> Second, the units could facilitate increased dispersed operations by having the ability to influence different regions. For example, a platoon could influence four to eight to twelve areas, if the squads would conduct split squad operations.

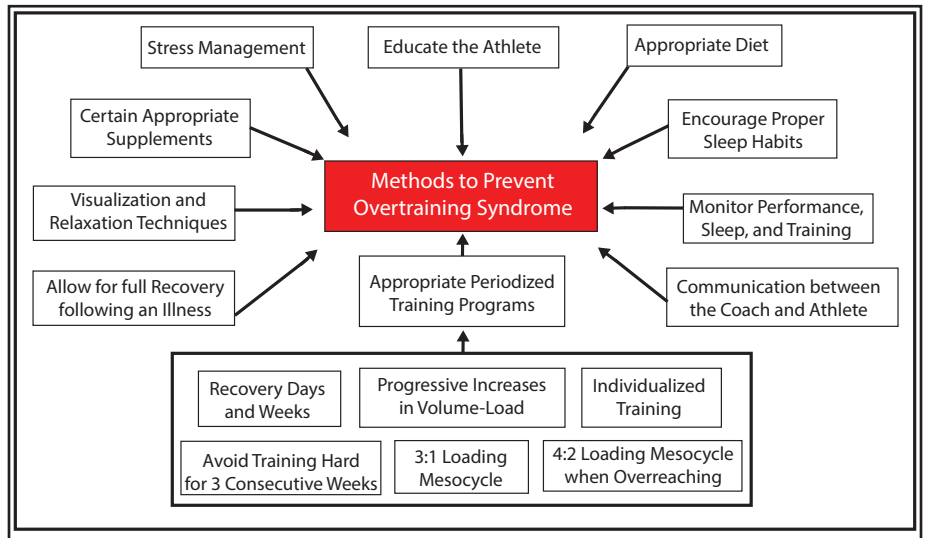


Figure 7. Methods to prevent overtraining. (Figure provided by author.)

Being a commando unit, decentralized and small-unit action should always be the intent, unless mass is needed for an operation—especially considering a contested environment where dispersed operations provide security. (The enablers and support elements would also go through their own assessment and selection process and basic training

course. Like the MAGTF concept, the enablers of MARSOC, and the enablers of Detachment 1 [the testbed unit for MARSOC], the units' success will be on synchronizing the warfighting functions.)

**Deployments and Work Ups**  
One crucially and vitally important

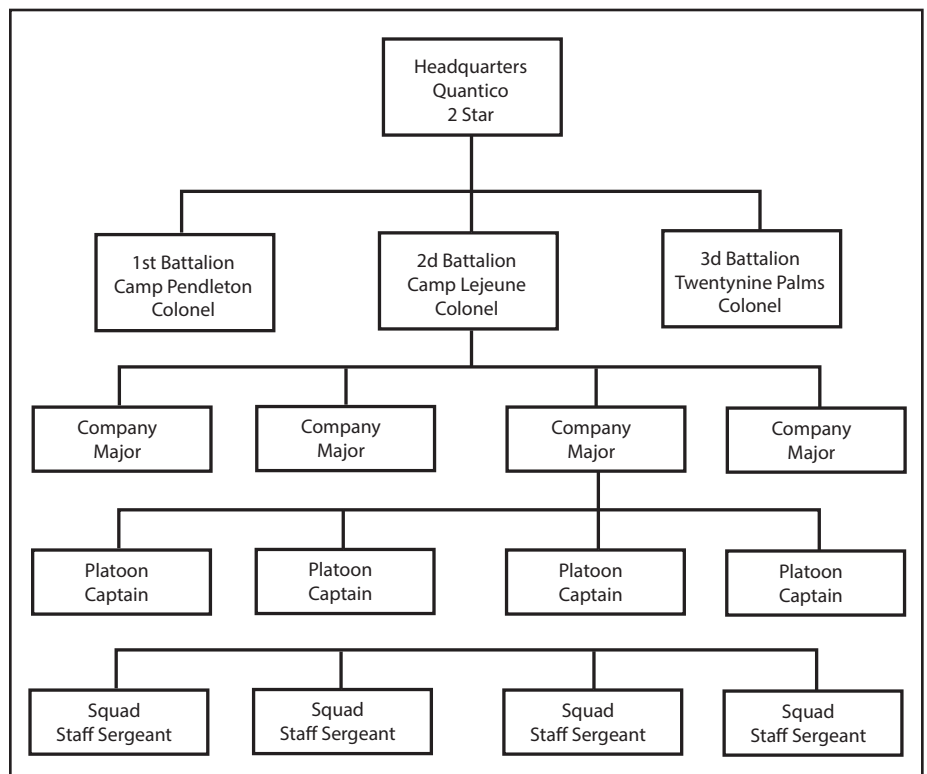


Figure 8. Proposed command structure. (Figure provided by author.)



advantage of the proposed Marine Commando concept differing from that of MARSOC is that the Marine Corps would retain tactical control and operational control OPCON of the Marine commandos. When a Marine completes that process of earning the MOS of a 0372-Critical Skills Operator and 0370-Special Operations Officer, the Marine Corps does not possess tactical control or operational control of that Marine for the rest of their career. Both tactical control and operational control of the Critical Skills Operator and Special Operations Officer will come from USSOC. While the Marine Corps indirectly benefits from MARSOC, our Marine Corps does lose the ability to directly exploit their skills and tasks their capabilities in combat zones.

During periods outside of absolute war, the companies should deploy as they would be intended to operate during absolute war; that is dispersed. The unit should deploy as a company but operate in multiple areas of operation. Unless the mass of a company is needed, the unit should deploy as platoons or squads. For example, a platoon could be attached to a MEU, a platoon could be attached to a Marine Air Ground Task Force MAGTF, with the remaining two platoons attached to a SOF unit. Similar to the companies, the platoons should strive to further decentralize and conduct squad deployments with units to spread out the combat power of the unit. When possible, the unit should strive to attach to units, such as those in USSOC or JSOC on deployments, to (1) provide relevancy to the unit, (2) gain additional experience within the unit, and (3) create relationships that will be called upon for the next conflict.

Regarding the workup, a benefit of using a four-company structure is that the battalion can apply a 3:1 workup to deployment ratio. During the first period of the workup, the Marine Corps could use the unit to test new gear, work with leaders on solving operational problems (i.e., operating in a completely denied area without technological overmatch), or conduct Feasibility of Support training, rather internal to the Marine Corps, with a sister Service, or abroad with our international partners. The second

**TABLE 1: MARINE COMMANDO'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE UPON GRADUATING THE BTC**

	Ranger from RASP	Green Beret from Q-Course	Sailor from BUDS
Combat Fitness	>	>	<
Marksmanship	>	>	>
Medical	>	>	>
Battle Drills	>	>	>
Patrolling	>	>	>
Direct Action	>	>	>
Mobility	>	>	<
Deep Operations	>	>	>
The Individual	>	>	>

**Legend:**  
 = we could produce a Marine of equal capacity  
 > we could produce a Marine of greater capacity  
 < we could not produce a Marine of equal or greater capacity  
 \*RASP: Ranger Assessment Selection Program  
 \*Q-Course: Special Forces Qualification Course  
 \*BUDS: Basic Underwater Demolition Schools

**Table 1.** (Table provided by author.)

part of the workup would be focused on additional schooling for the Marine commandos. As mentioned, to be in this unit, one must be a lifelong learner and continually strive to learn more about their trade. The third portion of the workup would be dedicated to the unit training and the specific needs of the deployment.

**Fortunately, the Marine Corps possesses the culture and doctrine needed for a commando unit.**

**The Culture and Doctrine Needed**

Fortunately, the Marine Corps possesses the culture and doctrine needed for a commando unit. This statement is evident and validated throughout our history. In 1805, Lt Presley O'Bannon and his Marines crossed 600 miles of Libyan Desert and attacked Tripoli.<sup>31</sup> During the Banana Wars, dispersed units conducted foreign internal defense with their experiences gained compiled and chronicled into their *Small Wars Manual* (1940) and applied in the

Combined Action Platoons in Vietnam. Additionally in Vietnam, Force Reconnaissance Marines demonstrated to be extremely capable of deep reconnaissance missions,<sup>32</sup> POW extractions,<sup>33</sup> and snatch and grab missions.<sup>34</sup> Of note is the infamous mission conducted by Marine Corps sniper Carlos Hathcock, where he killed a North Vietnamese Army General deep behind enemy lines.<sup>35</sup> During the invasion of Grenada, the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, "we have two companies of Marines running rampant all over the northern half of this island, and three Army regiments pinned down in the southwestern corner, doing nothing. What the hell is going on?" Lastly, during the Persian Gulf War, Task Force Grizzly, a 1,600 Marine contingent began to infiltrate into Kuwait two days prior to ground war resulting in the capturing of 540 prisoners and the destruction of an artillery battery and three tanks.<sup>36</sup>

**Conclusion**

We possess the culture, doctrine, and quality of Marines needed to possess a commando unit; a unit that can operate deep behind enemy lines, against any adversary while impacting above the tactical level of war. However, we need a unit with higher permissions, authori-



ties, and increased mobility than what we currently possess to provide Congress with additional options for 21st-century conflicts. From Table 1, we can see that the proposed commando concept would provide our decision makers with additional options upon a Marine graduating from the BTC. However, as mentioned, the BTC is just the starting point and baseline expectation for the capabilities of the unit. In closing and as stated by our Commandant, “I believe in my soul that Marines are different. Our identity is firmly rooted in our warrior ethos. This is the force that will always adapt and overcome no matter what the circumstances are. We fight and win in any clime and place.”

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