

Who We Are and Where We Are Going

United States Marines: America's Expeditionary Commandos

by Maj Jonathan Schillo

The purpose of this article is to initiate a thoughtful and exciting conversation among Marines and across the Marine Corps so we can realize who we are, who we have always been, and how we, as a Service, can best step into our important role within the Joint Force, the DOD, across the intelligence community, and in support of the whole of government for 2030 and beyond. This conversation should be a good and healthy conversation, not fear-based or designed to foment extreme reactions to evolving capabilities and skillsets, but a conversation through which we all better understand who we are, where we are going, and how to codify, own, and communicate who we have always been as we prepare for the future. Marines are known as America's first to fight in any clime and place. The time is now to ensure that our Service's role is articulated, codified, and implemented across the Joint Force through DOD policy and that the Marine Corps' unique and relevant roles and capabilities are solidified through and within those policies. Additionally, we must effectively communicate our unique roles and capabilities through accurate and appropriate nomenclature and terminology as our Service steps into a critical place of importance aligned with the Joint Force and in support of the whole of government for 2030 and beyond. Across these efforts, we must communicate our unique capabilities and skillsets not only across the Joint Force but to our partners, allies, and our adversaries. The tone and tenor of this writing are informal, relaxed, and somewhat excited because that is how

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good conversations are. From good conversations, come good things—including good change. Semper Fi.

This article offers perspective and discussion on viewing the Marine Corps' role through a Joint lens and recommends implementation of DOD-level policy to codify Marine Corps roles and responsibilities within the Joint Force in support of *Force Design*

The time is now to ensure that our Service's role is articulated, codified, and implemented ...

2030 and beyond. It also proposes adopting the historically accurate term "commando" as a qualification-based naming convention to more accurately communicate and differentiate Marine Corps skills and capabilities within the Joint Force and across the whole of government. Lastly, it recommends an associated training solution to streamline numerous current programs of instruction (POIs) into a single well-resourced Marine Corps Commando course to enhance lethality, align and standardize training efforts, and ensure quali-

fication of both officers and enlisted Marines across numerous occupation fields in the skillsets needed to operate in austere and geographically dispersed environments—agnostic of MOS.

These efforts are inextricably interconnected and mutually supporting. They are addressed together to synchronize policy, messaging, and marketing of Marine Corps organizational skills and capabilities, and the streamlining of qualification-based training to enable the Marine Corps to step into a perpetually relevant high-impact role within the DOD and across the whole of government. As such, the Marine Corps can lead the Joint Force in enabling the United States of America to effectively gain and maintain a dynamic advantage within great-power competition (GPC) to 2030 and beyond.

The conversation within and surrounding this article is intended to energize and excite Marines and the Marine Corps as we shape our own destiny, scope our operational futures, and lead the Joint Force in evolving to meet national and theater-level strategic objectives. To do this effectively, we as Marines must know who we are and who we have always been as a Corps before we can chart our course to the future in support of *Force Design 2030* and beyond. Now is the time to remember our past, adapt to the present, and

forge our own future. Let's have a good conversation.

Who We Are and What We Do ... from a Joint Perspective

From a multi-Service and joint perspective, the Marine Corps' role, both historically and in emergent concepts, can be summed up in two words: expeditionary reconnaissance. The Marine Corps writ large is an expeditionary reconnaissance Service across all warfighting functions for the Joint Force. Traditionally, that role has been framed through the lens of the Marine Corps' role in naval operations, as outlined in Title 10, Section 5063, which states the Marine Corps must "provide Fleet Marine Forces ... for service with the fleet ... in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign." Naval campaigns are part of joint campaigns, which means that the Marine Corps is acting in accordance with Title 10 requirements in support of a joint campaign. In fact, the Marine Corps is specifically tasked in *DODD5100.01* to "Seize and defend advanced naval bases or lodgments to facilitate subsequent joint operations" (emphasis added).¹ Even through a historical lens, *this means that the Marine Corps is the expeditionary reconnaissance Service for the Joint Force, as part of the Naval Service.*

The Marine Corps is often the first in and often the last out, now more postured to serve in a persistent stand-in role, answering information requirements for commanders and shaping the battlespace for the Joint Force—through all its actions and across all warfighting functions. Interestingly, this is the same role of recon and force recon elements within the MAGTF—reconnaissance and battlespace shaping for the MAGTF. The Marine Corps, as a Service, fulfills the same expeditionary reconnaissance role for the Joint Force that recon and force Recon Marines fulfill for the MAGTF. When looking at the strategic, operational, and even tactical picture through a joint lens, the expeditionary reconnaissance role is the same role that the Marine Corps writ large fulfills for the Joint Force



Marines are America's Expeditionary Commandos. (Photo by Cpl Aziza Kamuhanda.)

and even some other governmental elements across the instruments of national power. The Marine Corps is America's expeditionary reconnaissance Service, designed for limited-scale, self-sustaining operations in austere environments—combat and otherwise—who, when task organized into tactical units, work directly for a specified commander at echelon. The historic and doctrinal appropriate military term for this type of unit and the individual warrior of which they are comprised is a *commando*.²

For decades it was openly recognized and acknowledged across the DOD, within American society, and even globally that the Marine Corps was the first to fight and America's 911 Force. The Marine Corps has historically blazed the trail for the rest of the U.S. military, operationally and conceptually, even though we have failed to capitalize on numerous opportunities to codify those advancements, roles, and capabilities through law and DOD policy. As we again lead the way for the Joint Force to 2030 and beyond, we must not repeat our past failures, we must now *codify the Marine Corps as the Nation's expeditionary reconnaissance Service and the DOD executive agent (DODEA) for expeditionary reconnaissance.* This does not change who we are. It simply officially codifies who we have always been, especially from a multi-Service

and Joint perspective, and solidifies Marine Corps roles and relevance within the Joint Force and in support of *Force Design 2030* and beyond. Now is the time to codify our role and solidify our future.

For clarity, when saying we are an expeditionary reconnaissance Service, that does not mean that our duties culminate with multiple six to eight-person teams geographically dispersed answering information requirements and conducting disruption operations, even though that may be a part of it; nor does it mean that we cease using combined arms or maneuver warfare; nor does it mean that we stop meeting traditional theater-level or Global Force Management requirements; nor does it mean we change who we are as a Corps. In fact, the opposite is true. Even though we may like to think that we are a decisive effort in large-scale combat operations, from a joint perspective the Marine Corps serves as a force that conducts self-sustaining expeditionary operations, limited in time and scope, in which we collect data to answer information requirements in support of the fleet commander's, joint task force commander's, or geographic combatant commander's (GCC's) decision-making cycle and are postured to conduct combat or non-combat shaping actions to secure footholds through which to flow other forces, either into

or out of an area. Even our influence operations are designed to support such actions. These operations are clearly all-domain expeditionary reconnaissance—certainly from a Joint perspective— even if from within our Marine Corps internal microcosm we call these forcible entry, amphibious raids, embassy reinforcement, non-combatant evacuation, humanitarian assistance, sensing, influence, etc. From a Joint and whole-of-government perspective, the Marine Corps conducts different types of all-domain expeditionary reconnaissance operations designed to inform higher-level decision-making cycles or create time and space, through combat or non-combat operations, to support other follow-on actions.

To continue the illustration through the lens of more recent concepts, the Marine Corps Stand-In Force and recon/counter-recon roles even more perfectly demonstrate the Marine Corps’ function as the expeditionary reconnaissance Service. Even though we have MOSs trained and tasked to conduct reconnaissance for the MAGTF or other formations, from a Joint perspective expeditionary reconnaissance writ large across all warfighting functions is what the Marine Corps does as a Service—even if it has yet to be properly articulated or codified in doctrine or policy. This is why the Marine Corps has historically been viewed as an *elite Service, not a special force* within a larger, less specialized force. MAGTFs are the commandos of the Joint Force via the Naval Service and we must acknowledge, own, communicate, and market that fact.

From all appearances the Marine Corps seems to be intentionally moving more and more into the expeditionary reconnaissance space for the Joint Force, while simply updating our approach and tool kit to do more effectively what we have always done, but now in both physical and non-physical domains. As ever, the Marine Corps as a Service and across all warfighting functions conducts expeditions in any climate and place, now including the cyber, information, and space domains to answer information requirements for fleet commanders, joint task force com-

manders, or GCCs to inform decision points and be ready and able to conduct associated full-spectrum, all-domain operations (battle-space shaping from a Joint perspective) to create physical maneuver space for follow-on elements of the Joint Force or create cognitive maneuver space to influence actors in a way which does not require an increase in the further buildup of U.S. forces. This is an all-domain expeditionary reconnaissance from a Joint and even whole-government perspective. This is what the Marine Corps has always

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done and who we have always been, we are currently just finding ways to accomplish the mission in new climates and places (e.g. new domains, within GPC and beyond.) The Marine Corps is and has always been the Nation’s expeditionary reconnaissance Service. We need to build on that fact as we adapt to new domains and codify within the Joint Force through DOD policy now.

Let’s Make it Official: Solidify and Codify Marine Corps Roles by Assignment as DOD EA for Expeditionary Reconnaissance

To solidify and codify the Marine Corps’ roles as the Joint Force’s expeditionary reconnaissance Service, the Marine Corps should be assigned as the DOD EA for expeditionary reconnaissance by either the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Defense, or Congress.³ A DOD EA is defined as: “The DoD Component head, or official required in statute, to whom the Secretary of Defense or Deputy Secretary of Defense has assigned specific responsibilities, functions, and authorities to provide defined levels of support for operational missions, or administrative or other designated activities, that involve 2 or more DoD Components.”⁴ The

DOD further describes the concept of EAs as such: “DOD Executive Agents (DOD EA) designations are specifics, responsibilities, functions, and authorities assigned by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Defense to the head of a DoD Component, typically the Secretary of a Military Department” and are “most often used when the Secretary of Defense decides a DoD-wide support function or task would be most effectively, economically, and efficiently carried out if assigned to the Secretary of a Military Department.”⁵

Even though assigning DOD EA specifically to a DOD component, vice a secretary of a military department, is less common it can be done in situations where the “DOD Component (typically a Defense Agency or a Combatant Command) has substantial responsibility to execute a very noteworthy task or the function is particularly sensitive and/or complex, as differentiated from its overall organic mission.”⁶ As stated above, in some cases, Congress can specifically direct the establishment of a DOD EA.⁷ Currently, it appears that no other Service is assigned the function of expeditionary reconnaissance. The Marine Corps should be immediately assigned as the DOD EA for expeditionary reconnaissance, and this should be codified through updates to *DODD 5100.01, Functions of DOD and Major Components, Enclosure 6*. This will benefit the U.S. Government, the Joint Force, the Marine Corps, as well as U.S. partners and allies.

By assigning the Marine Corps as the DOD EA for expeditionary reconnaissance, the U.S. Government and the Joint Force would enable a streamlined and standardized process for certifying and validating training requirements, operating procedures, and reporting procedures across the Joint Force and potentially the whole of government where appropriate. This will directly result in promulgating unified standards, requirements, and procedures across DOD and beyond. As the Marine Corps takes the lead in these efforts for the DOD, this will streamline reconnaissance methods and standards between Services and functional components. It will also streamline in-

formation reporting across all types, means, and methods of expeditionary reconnaissance, resulting in a smooth-flowing system across the DOD for more rapid formulation of information from across multiple domains into actionable intelligence. This can then be used to directly enable joint, combined, and whole of government operations. As the standards develop and solidify across the DOD, they could be exported as appropriate to key partners and allies resulting in more effective communications and intelligence sharing in current and future multi-national operations—which will be key to success within GPC. This will not detract from any other Service or functional component conducting reconnaissance training or operations, nor would it detract from current Marine Corps Global Force Management requirements. It simply enables the Marine Corps to take on the role within the Joint Force of validating and certifying reconnaissance requirements, training, procedures, and reporting. This would be done in a similar fashion as the Army's EA role for all parachute training and the Navy's EA role for all diving and explosive ordnance disposal training. Furthermore, this would solidify the Marine Corps' tactical role and relevance as the go-to force for expeditionary reconnaissance within the Joint Force, in perpetuity, potentially even enabling the Marine Corps to establish a Joint Reconnaissance Training Center—justifying access to funding and authorities not previously available. This is talent management at a joint level, which codifies the Marine Corps as an integral and indispensable part of the Joint Force now and well beyond 2030.

Where We Are Going: Differentiating the Marine Corps' Market-Share within the Joint Force

So how does the Marine Corps, through a joint lens, effectively articulate, communicate, and differentiate its market share from other Services and functional components?

We have already discussed how the Marine Corps is and has been the Nation's expeditionary reconnaissance Service and even how our combat and

non-combat operations are designed to be self-sustaining, limited in scale, and pave the way for follow-on Joint operations tied to operational and strategic objectives. That means that most—if not all—Marine Corps tactical operations, from a joint perspective, are either some type of advanced force effort to answer information requirements (*i.e. reconnaissance*) or they are follow-on battlespace-shaping operations within the larger reconnaissance picture which

That term also communicates that a force can operate within territory potentially controlled or influenced by an adversary—as a Stand-In Force might. The term *commando* has its roots in deep military history that is much older than one might initially consider.

Even though the term is used currently by the United Kingdom's Royal Marines, it goes back further than that. The term was used by the Dutch Afrikaans-speaking Boers during the



Marines acting as the Nation's Expeditionary Commandos: 31ST MEU—Golf Company Marines operating from the sea, on the land, and in the air. (Photo by by Cpl Brennan Pries.)

culminates in a planned withdrawal (*i.e. a raid*). Again, all these actions pave the way for and are in support of joint operations, with the Marines as a Service conducting forward expeditionary reconnaissance operations. As stated before, this is why the Marine Corps has historically been viewed as an elite Service, not a special force within a larger, less specialized force.

As stated earlier, the historically accurate military term for units and the warriors who conduct these types of operations is *commando*.⁸ That same term accurately communicates elite combat unit capabilities but still differentiates the smaller elite group from larger not-as-elite Army infantry formations. That term communicates skills and capabilities retained by Marine Corps units which are based on but also exceed traditional infantry skills.

Boer Wars of the late 1800s and early 1900s.⁹ The Boers used this term to describe their all-volunteer horse-mounted scouting and raiding parties, whose hit-and-run guerrilla-style tactics were very effective at sabotaging and disrupting large-scale British operations, communications, and logistics.¹⁰ The Boer “Kommando” operations were so successful that the British reverted to controversial scorched-earth tactics across thousands of farms to eventually pull out a so-called victory—something that would likely result in crushing political repercussions or even allegations of international war crimes today.¹¹ The British eventually won because of their brutal tactics, but in today's GPC environment, the results could be very different. This makes one consider the potentially significant impact of dispersed commando operations when

looking at smaller nations versus larger nations—specifically the potential for the Marine Corps and its partners within INDOPACOM—influencing and shaping the actions of larger-nation adversaries there. The term *commando* even has deeper roots than South Africa. It can be traced all the way back to the late or Vulgate Latin word *commendare*, which is the root word for the words *command*, *commander*, *commend*, *commendation*, and *commando*.¹² All these terms have to do with authority: ordering, recommending, entrusting, or bestowing.¹³ When looking at ancient Roman military formations, two units emerge that appear very similar Boer Kommandos, Royal Marine Commandos, and Marines: the Roman *Exploratores* and *Speculatores*, who conducted operations designed to answer commander’s information requirements and shape the battlespace ahead of and in conjunction with their respective legions.¹⁴

If one considers a Roman legion, operating in the far reaches of the empire, it could be considered similar to a modern day joint task force. The *Exploratores* were troops, many of whom were horse-mounted, who conducted long-range reconnaissance for the Roman commanders and operated ahead of the legion’s main body.¹⁵ Given

their mobility, they could have been used as a persistent reconnaissance and battlespace-shaping force while maintaining a limited-scale raid capability and even fighting as light cavalry during pitched battle. This sounds very similar to LtCol Adam Yang’s description of the Marine Corps Stand-In Force as a “Maritime Cavalry” element in his September 2022 *War on the Rocks* article—certainly a *commando* function from a historical perspective.¹⁶ The *Speculatores* conducted deeper reconnaissance and forward battlespace shaping for Roman commanders through more clandestine and persistent reconnaissance and intelligence operations.¹⁷

Given that these units conducted operations to answer information requirements and shape the battlespace for the Roman commander ahead of the main body—and the Latin word *commendare* communicates ordering, recommending, entrusting, or bestowing, and is the root word for both *commander* and *commando*—one can see the logical evolution from the Latin of the military term *commando*. The *commander* of a large military formation, also referred to as a *commandant* (sound familiar?) in some Latin-based European languages, directly *orders* and *entrusts* a group of elite troops to operate ahead of the larger less elite force

and conduct reconnaissance, raids, and battlespace-shaping operations in support of the commander’s end states.¹⁸ Following that linguistic evolution, one can see how these types of elite units and their warriors, over time, became referred to as *commando*.

When comparing these Roman units to current Marine Corps capabilities, parallels can be drawn between the *Exploratores* and Marine reconnaissance/force reconnaissance and light-armored reconnaissance units. When looking at the *Speculatores*, parallels can be drawn between Marine reconnaissance/force reconnaissance and other elements within the Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise. That would make these units the MAGTF’s *commandos*. As outlined previously, what Marine reconnaissance/force reconnaissance, light-armored reconnaissance, and certain Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise elements do for the MAGTF, the MAGTF and the Marine Corps—as a Service—do for the Joint Force, across all warfighting functions. Therefore, Marines are the Joint Force’s *commandos* via the Navy. We always have been. Now is the time to recognize and own who we are and who we have always been: Marines, America’s Expeditionary *Commandos*.

Concerns and questions surrounding the Marine Corps infantry and their role may immediately rush to mind. Well, what if I told you that from a joint perspective that Marine Corps infantry is not actually infantry; you guessed it, they are *commandos* whose operations largely consist of raid operations at echelon. This is so because, from a joint perspective, the Marine Corps should always be prepared to turn over seized areas or battlespace to the Army occupation force, conduct a *planned withdrawal*, and be prepared for follow-on raid operations. Of course, shoot-move-communicate infantry skills are baseline training for *all* Marines, officers and enlisted. All Marine Corps combat-arms units, and the infantry field especially, are and have always been more than simple infantry personnel. We are and always have been America’s



Marine Corps 03xx and combat arms are more than infantry from a Joint perspective. (Photo from DVIDS.)

Expeditionary Commandos. We, as a Corps, must recognize that and claim that reality now. By continuing with an inaccurate infantry naming convention, we are hurting our marketability to the GCCs, our Marines, and our Nation by failing to differentiate our market share.

To understand why, from a joint perspective, all Marines are qualified as infantry personnel, we must go back to a Marine Corps World War II-era MOS manual. The *United States Marine Corps Manual of Military Occupational Specialties, NAVMC 1008-PD* (Revised) of June 1945 outlines the infantry officer “1542,” infantry chief “812,” and the rifleman “745.”¹⁹ Of specific note, the infantry officer and infantry chief were the only MOSs that specifically contained the “infantry” naming convention.²⁰ Of course, mortar men and machinegunners existed, but the description of the rifleman was very telling:

Loads, aims, and fires a rifle, and employs hand grenades and bayonets to destroy enemy personnel and to assist advance against an enemy position. May operate a flame thrower. May perform supervisory duties incident to the control coordination, and tactical employment of a fire team or one or more squads.

Must be capable of field stripping, assembling, and performing minor maintenance of weapon. Must have general familiarity with the fundamentals of infantry tactics. Should be proficient in the use of such weapons as a rifle, automatic rifle, carbine, pistol, rocket launcher, rifle grenade, hand grenade, flame thrower, and bayonet. Should be proficient in the techniques of hand-to-hand combat.²¹ When reading the description of a rifleman, while not using terminology as detailed as current Training and Readiness (T&R) standards or terms that have evolved since 1945, it becomes clear that this rifleman is nearly identical to the Marine Corps infantryman today, specifically when considering the emergent Company Arms Room concept.²² Therefore, the phrase *every Marine a rifleman* is intended to communicate that every Marine is qualified in infantry skill



Now is the time to recognize and codify what Marines have always been—America’s Expeditionary Commandos, via the Navy. (Photo by Sgt Chris Stone.)

sets as a *baseline*. This is evident in the infantry T&R standards across the Marine Combat Training program of instruction (POI) through which every non-infantry enlisted Marine is trained. The same is true for Marine Corps officers and is evidenced in the length and focus of The Basic School when compared to the Army Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course (IBOLC). The Basic School is a 29-week long course, for all Marine Corps officers regardless of MOS, which focuses on infantry-centric T&R standards and culminates in a “war” between two reinforced infantry companies. The U.S. Army’s IBOLC is a 19-week course, specifically for U.S. Army Infantry Officer Platoon Leaders, which focuses on similar infantry skills as The Basic School but appears to not go as far in the company-level reps and sets within that course.²³ This is not to take anything away from the outstanding training that the Army conducts across its occupational specialties but merely to point out that within Marine Corps training and qualifications, from a joint perspective, infantry skillsets and qualification are the baseline for every single Marine, both officer and enlisted. Every Marine a rifleman and every officer a rifle platoon commander communicate that all Marines are qualified as infantrymen, especially from a joint

perspective. This is one of the things that makes us so unique within the Joint Force and across military Services globally. This is a key component of our ethos. We cannot and should not ever forget this fact. In fact, we need to recognize and own this fact and build upon it now. The Marine Corps needs to acknowledge that infantry qualification is *already* the baseline for every Marine, and from a joint perspective, what we have considered Marine infantry and even other combat arms and support to combat arms fields are really Marine Corps Commandos. As such, we must evolve our training solutions, qualifications, and naming conventions to reflect this fact and differentiate our unique Marine Corps market share within the Joint Force and across the whole of government.

If we want to communicate the fact that the Marine Corps is an elite Service, specifically within our combat arms formations, we must not continue to insist on infantry as the naming convention of our 03xx MOSs, when the word itself is historically relatively derogatory when communicating capability sets, since infantry are “foot soldiers, [a] force composed of those too inexperienced or low in rank to be cavalry” and is derived from the same root word as *infant*.²⁴ Additionally, contin-

ued use of the term infantry for Marine Corps 03xx MOSs fails to differentiate the Marine Corps' unique capabilities and market share from those of Army infantry. This could have potentially negative impacts when seeking missions from the GCCs, our customers; seeking funding from Congress; and seeking best-suited recruits across our Nation. By adopting the term *commando* to distinguish Marines who already are or who will become qualified as such across Marine combat arms and support to combat arms formations, we will begin to effectively distinguish and communicate the Marine Corps' essential market share within the Joint Force and across the whole of government.

What the United States Marine Commando Course and Qualification Concept Could Look Like

While this term should be adopted as outlined above, the Corps should not limit commando qualification training only to specific MOSs. It should certainly be required across all ground combat arms, reconnaissance, and certain Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise occupational specialties and also with support to combat arms billets within these units and formations. The reasoning behind this is that within the littorals, island chains, mountains, rivers, and jungles (specifically in INDOPACOM), no matter what a Marine's MOS may be the skillsets required to operate effectively within those environments between line of departure and objective rally point on any movement are:

1. Small unit patrolling, scouting, and associated mission planning.
2. Small boat operations and associated combat swimmer techniques.
3. Long-range communication and call-for-fire training.
4. Small arms and claymore employment training to effectively execute immediate action drills while patrolling and scouting.

Commando qualification training, across multiple MOSs, would work much in the same way Ranger School works in the Army. If someone is going to a ground combat arms, "Victor," or

reconnaissance unit within the Marine Corps, or maybe even a Marine Littoral Regiment, no matter what their MOS is they must first graduate commando qualification training to ensure that they have a common baseline in the necessary hard skillsets outlined above to not only survive but effectively do their job in those environments, thrive in cooperation and competition, and win in combat—no matter what their MOS may be. However, the commando qualification will likely not be a requirement for personnel in units that do not require those skill sets to effectively do their job.

Interestingly, the Marine Corps already has a standing POI that trains all the needed skillsets outlined above. That is the Basic Reconnaissance Course, the course that qualifies reconnaissance Marines in their primary MOS. If the Corps uses Basic Reconnaissance Course as a baseline and in-

... the Marine Corps already has a standing POI that trains all the needed skillsets ...

tegrates key elements of the relatively new Infantry Marine Course and the long-standing Infantry Officer Course to create a streamlined Marine Corps Commando course, then the Corps will have established a single streamlined and consolidated qualification-based training course to enhance lethality, increase survivability, and qualify Marines across multiple MOSs in the hard skills needed to win within GPC and beyond. As this occurs, the Corps can divest from multiple duplicative POIs across numerous fields and reinvest wisely for maximum capability gain. Skills previously trained across numerous POIs (to include some elements of officer training, scout training across multiple MOSs, combat swimmer courses, small boat courses, etc.) could all be streamlined and consolidated into a single tailored POI which would be-

come the standard for being qualified as a Marine Corps Commando. Of course, a grandfather plan would be built into the concept to recognize those who have already completed similar training and attained these types of qualifications previously within their Marine Corps careers.

Specifically, for the Victor units, this concept would train and qualify all infantry Marines going to these units in the amphibious and scouting skillsets previously only trained to within Marine reconnaissance schools and thus enabling Victor units to have Marines fully qualified to conduct scouting and amphibious operations upon arrival to their units from entry-level training. Once at the Victor units, the battalion gunners could then build commander-driven weapons packages to reinforce the arms room concept—with Marines attending additional follow-on formal schools as needed. For other combat arms units, it would provide the same baseline training and commando qualification while enabling their units to focus on whatever their specified function may be. Furthermore, this in no way detracts from the absolute necessity of the Marine reconnaissance/force reconnaissance units and the associated skillsets, capabilities, and MOSs. In fact, this concept codifies a required commando qualification course (note: currently met under Basic Reconnaissance Course T&R standards) for all recon Marines, including recon officers. This continues to ensure that all hard skills and current follow-on qualifications are achieved; however, with the commando qualification becoming the baseline training across numerous occupational fields, the door can now be open for potential follow-on cross-training and certification in specific disciplines which enables relevant, timely, and effective all-domain reconnaissance, across numerous echelons, without divesting any of the current capabilities achieved within the Marine recon occupational field.

As the Marine Corps moves toward 2030, it must be able to sense, make sense, and act across all domains in support of the Joint Force and the whole of government. The "act" part



Marine Corps Commandos—it's not just the 03xx's: A joint terminal attack controller with 1st Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, 1 Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group. (Photo by LCpl Gadiel Zaragoza.)

may include various types of further sensing and reconnaissance, counter reconnaissance, precision limited-scale raids, securing footholds for follow-on forces, larger-scale combat operations, building naval kill-webs, and other key actions with high-impact outcomes at the operation and strategic levels. It may include information collection, influence operations, or reconnaissance for and facilitation of expeditionary logistics. It may include partnered operations or interactions with U.S. or foreign diplomats or also support to the intelligence community. The possibilities are endless. By adopting the term *commando*, and the associated qualification training, we are differentiating our market share across the Joint Force and accurately communicating the role the Marine Corps has always filled and will continue to fill. This term communicates that the Marine Corps is owning its role in the Joint Force as an elite, mature, and combat-capable force that conducts expeditions in austere places and can operate across the entire sense, make sense, and act spectrum. By establishing Marine Corps Commando qualification training, available to numerous Marines—regardless of MOS—we are ensuring that these Marines have the hard skills and survivability to win in dynamic and austere environments.

Finally, Marines should be recognized by being authorized to wear a Marine Corps Commando badge upon graduation from the course. By awarding a badge, we are incentivizing and recognizing their efforts in achieving this qualification, at an extremely minimal cost, which will likely result in increased opportunity and feeling of fulfillment across that population equaling higher retention. As with most other demanding qualifications (not primary MOSs, but qualifications), such as Naval aviator, astronaut, aircrew, Marine Corps combat aircrew, Naval parachutist, explosive ordnance disposal, or combatant diver, within the Marine Corps a qualification badge should be associated with achieving the Marine Corps Commando qualification. Napoleon Bonaparte said, “A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of coloured ribbon,” the same is true of Marines and certainly would apply to a United States Marine Corps Commando qualification badge.²⁵ Let us start recognizing our Marines for what they have achieved within the Service and leverage that to positively and more effectively communicate our capabilities and unique skillsets across the Joint Force, to the GCCs, to Congress, and to the American people.

Actions Now for Beyond 2030 ...

Immediately, the Marine Corps should be assigned as the DOD executive agent for expeditionary reconnaissance and fulfill that role and function as a Service across the DOD. As the marker of the year 2030 is fast approaching, we must consider the role of the Marine Corps beyond that time as well. Understanding that as Marines we have been the ground combat force for the Naval Service and must maintain that role, we must also understand that we support the Joint Force through all our actions. As this article has articulated repeatedly, from a joint perspective those actions are all types of expeditionary reconnaissance—across all domains and warfighting functions. When the Marine Corps becomes the DOD EA for expeditionary reconnaissance, we will have taken the first step in codifying and solidifying our future as an indispensable, unique, and relevant asset—as a Service—to the Joint Force and within the DOD in perpetuity. Since every operation, both now and in the future will require the movement of things and people (an expedition) to sense, make sense, and act on information in some way, shape, or form while being prepared to take follow-on actions, the assignment of DOD EA for expeditionary reconnaissance codifies the Marine Corps' role as the lead across expeditionary reconnaissance considerations for these types of operations—forever.

Additionally, the Service needs to immediately recognize that infantry qualification is the existing and historic baseline for all Marines. The Service must also recognize Marine Corps combat arms and certain support to combat arms elements for who and what they have always been—Marine Corps Commandos. Such a term is historically accurate and differentiates the Marine Corps' market share from other Service and functional components across the Joint Force. As such, the Marine Corps needs to establish a Marine Corps Commando course to qualify both officers and enlisted—not tied to only specific MOSs but to required skillsets—and adopt naming conventions across the service that re-

flect this qualification. Additionally, the Corps must institute a grandfather plan for current Marine Corps combat arms and support to combat arms personnel who have already qualified in these skills across their careers and establish a Marine Corps Commando qualification badge to visually communicate capabilities and qualifications accurately to the Joint Force, to GCCs, to Congress, and to the American people.

For the last twenty-plus years, the Marine Corps has been used as a second land army, much in the same way it was in Vietnam. This has caused Marines to forget who we are and from where we came. We have forgotten who we are as Marines; we have forgotten that we are an elite Service, leading the way for the Joint Force across many operations both special and otherwise. In forgetting who we are and failing to adapt our perspective, we have ceded our role to others and become force providers to others doing our missions in our place. Historically, we have led the way for the rest of the military across air, land, and sea. We have reconned, scouted, and raided; we have seized key terrain, secured footholds, and cleared entire cities leading the way for the Joint Force and other Services; we have blazed their paths and spearheaded the way for others as part of the Joint team; we have fought and bled and died in any clime and place and across all-domains for our Country, for other peoples' countries, for our families, and each other. Going back to 1775, we are and have always been Marines—America's Expeditionary Commandos.

Now is the time to recognize and reclaim who we are and who we have always been as we take on our correct roles within the Joint Force. Let us remember who we are; let us help our Joint Force and our Nation remember who we are; and let us make our adversaries remember who we are. Now is the time to build on our history, adapt to the present, and forge our own future. As we, the Marine Corps, take the next steps outlined in this article we will continue to shape ourselves, our Marines, and the generations of Marines to come to lead, fight, and win within GPC and beyond.

We will adapt. We will overcome. We will blaze the way for others. We will go where others fear to tread and make a way for them—on this world and others—because we are Marines. We have a limitless future ahead. It is time to write our next story.

I will see you on the objective. Fortis Fortuna Adiuvat. Semper Fidelis.

Notes

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