

The Need For A
Reconnaissance Officer MOS

Captain BJ Hodgins

Major Seay, CG14
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Somewhere in Camp Lejeune...

Colonel Smith sighed to himself as he sat down in his Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) briefing room for the capabilities briefings on which he had been waiting all day. He already knew what information was going to be presented; he was more interested in the presenters. The one to whom he was most looking forward was the MEU recon platoon commander as it was always a crap-shoot on how the young officer did. 2D Reconnaissance Battalion had sent him a brand-new second lieutenant only seven months out of Ground Intelligence Officers Course (GIOC) this time. He would have preferred the officer have had time as an infantry platoon commander but was just happy to have a recon platoon.¹ "Aww hell," he thought, "I wish someone would just tell me what makes a Reconnaissance Officer so that I know what they should know."

The Problem

Platoon and company commanders in the division reconnaissance battalions currently face few prerequisites, undergo no standardized screening process, and attend little required training before leading reconnaissance Marines. These

¹ 1st and 2d Force Reconnaissance Companies, prior to their disbanding, provided a Force Reconnaissance Platoon to the MEU Command Element (CE); 1st and 2d Reconnaissance Battalions provided a Reconnaissance Platoon to the MEU's Battalion Landing Team (BLT). With the passing of the force reconnaissance companies the various MEU CEs have, at times, elected to attach the reconnaissance platoons from the division reconnaissance battalions directly to the CE vice the BLT.

officers' experiences and expertise vary widely and once they are a member of the reconnaissance battalions their formal and on-the-job training continues to vary unit by unit and individual by individual. Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of the division reconnaissance battalions, the Marine Corps must create an additional MOS (AMOS) of Reconnaissance Officer to:

- A) Standardize training for reconnaissance platoon and company commanders Marine Corps-wide;
- B) Provide supported commands with a more standardized and consistent reconnaissance leadership;
- C) Ensure those officers with reconnaissance training and experience return to the reconnaissance battalions in more senior billets.

The Situation

Amphibious operations are some of the most complex operations a military force may undertake. To the complexities of conventional land-based warfare, the uncertainties and unforgiving nature of the sea and the inherent difficulties encountered in a very large ad hoc organization are added. Similarly, amphibious reconnaissance, while essentially little different from ground reconnaissance, is inherently complex. It requires personnel who can thrive in this chaotic and

decentralized environment; who can successfully complete very demanding training; who can become proficient in specialized tactics, techniques, and procedures; and who are proficient in the use of specialized equipment.

The Marines who conduct amphibious reconnaissance are specialists in their field and are valuable assets because of the time and resources the Marine Corps invests in them. Due to the nature of their job, they are required to be some of the best Marines in the Marine Corps, both intellectually and physically. The enlisted Marines are very deserving of their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) of 0321 Reconnaissance Man, earned upon completion of the Basic Reconnaissance Course (BRC).² Is it not then logical to assume that those who lead these Reconnaissance Men should also be specialists in reconnaissance operations?

The Conflict

Division reconnaissance platoons regularly detach from their parent battalions and work for the various MEUs. In Iraq, companies and platoons have detached at times and worked for infantry regiments and battalions. These detached company and platoon commanders are often the only officers in the supported commands with reconnaissance experience. With no reconnaissance

² Marine Corps Order 1200.17 Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) Marine Corps Manual. 23 May 2008 p. 3-37

officer MOS prerequisite defining a reconnaissance officer and what training or skills are required to fill a reconnaissance officer billet, the commanders employing attached reconnaissance units are faced with a disparity of abilities in the officers leading one of their most valuable assets. This lack of a standard and MOS requirement for reconnaissance officer billets also negatively impacts the reconnaissance battalions as the experience gained in more junior billets is lost as personnel rotate out of the community and never return.

Lacking an official standard, many informal definitions of a reconnaissance officer exist. Some would argue any officer serving in a reconnaissance officer billet is a "recon officer".³ Others would say it is an officer who has completed the twelve-week long BRC at the School of Infantry-West.⁴ Finally, many consider the mark of a recon officer to be one who has gained the MOS of 8026 Parachute/Combatant Dive Officer. However, these informal definitions do not adequately encompass the duties, responsibilities, and expectations of reconnaissance officers.

The IOC Graduate

³ This article will define reconnaissance officer billets as platoon, company and battalion commanders and operations officers of the three division reconnaissance battalions.

⁴ EWTGLANT formerly ran the Amphibious Reconnaissance Course (ARS) at Fort Story, VA; this was a mirror-image course to BRC on the West Coast. In 2007 the courses were consolidated (closing the Fort Story location) to the West Coast.

The standard prerequisite for platoon and company commanders is that they have completed the Infantry Officer Course (IOC) (which means they are either an 0203 Ground Intelligence Officer or 0302 Infantry Officer) and have successfully passed a physical screening and, in some cases, an interview.⁵ Infantry Officers are eligible to join one of the reconnaissance battalions following their initial two or three year tour in the operating forces as a platoon commander in an infantry battalion. Ground Intelligence Officers have also followed this track in the past, though recently some have been assigned to the reconnaissance battalions as their initial operating forces tour (following graduation from GIOC).

The IOC grad is a good start, but reconnaissance operations require more, and different, skill sets than do infantry operations. In 2007, the Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps (HQMC) Plans, Policies & Operations (PP&O) conducted a Front End Assessment (FEA) to examine the tasks that a reconnaissance officer performs in the conduct of his duties. Of the sixty-eight critical skills the FEA identified for reconnaissance officers, 0203 Ground Intelligence Officers and 0302 Infantry Officers currently do not receive training in thirty-three of

⁵ The physical screening varies by battalion but typically involve a physical fitness test and a water proficiency evaluation similar to the former Combat Water Survival-2nd Class standards.

them.⁶ Broadly grouped into the following three categories, these gaps are Sniper Employment, Reconnaissance Planning to include the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP), and Command and Control (C2) issues such as reporting, operating a Reconnaissance Operations Center (ROC), debriefing, etc.

The BRC Graduate

A BRC graduate is also a poor standard for a recon officer because the course teaches just that- basic reconnaissance. It is not designed to prepare officers for the complexities of leading a specialized unit that often operates independent of its organic battalion or company. Upon comparing the 2007 FEA to BRC, one finds that this course does not fill the gap in training. BRC is an incredibly demanding and valuable school but of the nearly 660 hours of instruction during the fifty-five training days, much of it is spent on skills in which IOC grads have already had considerable training and expertise: combat water survival, physical fitness, heliborne operations, land navigation, fire support, demolitions, and most aspects of communications and patrolling. The remaining modules-

⁶ Major Brian L. Gilman, USMC, Reconnaissance Advocate & MOS 0321 Occupational Field Manager, Ground Combat Element Branch, Operations Division, Deputy Commandant Plans, Policies & Operations, e-mail interview by author, 25 September 2008; "ROAG (Reconnaissance Operational Advisory Group) 1-08 Read Ahead Info April 2008." Powerpoint presentation e-mailed to author by Master Sergeant Chad D. Ramsey, Enlisted Reconnaissance Advocate, Ground Combat Element Branch, Operations Division, Deputy Commandant Plans, Policies & Operations, on 10 December 2008.

Surveillance, Amphibious-Boats, Amphibious-Swim, Combat Hunter and parts of the communications and patrolling modules- are valuable training for reconnaissance officers but do not fill the training gap.⁷ Even if this school has value for the officer, very few officers have recently attended BRC due to the increased throughput of enlisted Marines through that course.⁸

The Jump/Dive Officer

And finally, the jump and dive training does not make one a reconnaissance officer. These schools merely teach methods of insertion and not any specific reconnaissance skills. No matter how you get there, reconnaissance begins once you cross the line of departure into enemy territory.

The Training Gap

If then the only prerequisite is to have completed IOC and the traditionally accepted definitions are lacking, what then makes a reconnaissance officer? Or more importantly, what should be done to ensure MAGTF commanders get qualified reconnaissance officers? Again, consider the 2007 FEA assessment, thirty-three untrained skills in three critical areas- Sniper Employment, Reconnaissance Planning, and Command &

⁷ Annex A

⁸ Gunnery Sergeant James A. Treadwell, USMC, Course Chief, Basic Reconnaissance Course, e-mail correspondence with author 20 January 2009.

Control. That is an amazing statistic with many implications to the young officer who finds himself in command of a reconnaissance platoon; he quickly realizes no required or formal training exists for him in his new billet and before execution he may not be afforded any opportunity to learn nearly one half of the tasks expected of him.

The Solution

The solution is to create a Reconnaissance Officer AMOS with associated prerequisites and standards. This is not a "pipeline" training concept where officers are cadred through a series of schools before arriving at a reconnaissance unit. Instead, this method continues the long-standing practice of training officers once they arrive at the reconnaissance battalions; it is a "roadmap" of three courses and training events that will fill the gaps identified by the 2007 FEA and serve as prerequisites to earn the Reconnaissance Officer AMOS. All the schools and training events currently exist or could be established with very little cost to the Marine Corps.

Prerequisites

Ground intelligence and infantry officers should continue to serve as reconnaissance platoon commanders following an initial operating forces tour as their IOC training and past

experience are necessary starting points. The reconnaissance battalions should continue physically screening and interview their prospective new officers before inviting them to join their ranks.

Training

Once joining one of the reconnaissance battalions, a new platoon or company commander would attend the Intelligence Collection and Reconnaissance & Surveillance Planning module of the Ground Intelligence Officers Course curriculum. This three-week module is part of the twelve-week long GIOC located at the Navy-Marine Corps Intelligence Training Center in Dam Neck, Virginia. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, the course had five empty seats and they project to have as many as twenty-eight empty seats in FY09, more than enough seats to accommodate the relatively small number of reconnaissance battalion officers needing this training.⁹

Next, these officers would attend the three-week Scout-Sniper Platoon Commander Course (SSPCC) at Weapons Training Battalion (WTBN) Quantico. This course runs four times a year with thirty seats per class. Last year there were approximately ten unfilled seats; again, the capacity exists at the school to

⁹ Captain Arturo J. Derryberry, USMC, Director, Ground Intelligence Officers Course, e-mail correspondence with author 9 January 2009.

accept additional students.¹⁰ By working with these commands and filling empty seats the reconnaissance battalions could easily send their relatively small number of officers through these courses.¹¹

The reconnaissance battalions would then round out this training with a standardized in-house amphibious reconnaissance course. At a minimum this course would incorporate amphibious skills such as finning and small-boat operations as well as the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP), ROC operations, C2, working within a separate command, etc. The course would run simultaneously to current battalion training activities with the classroom work formatted as officer Professional Military Education (PME) and company training time.¹² This in-house course could be a single three-week long evolution or a series of events offered over a longer period, depending on the battalion's training schedule. Together, these three courses fill both the gaps identified by the 2007 FEA and address the amphibious training present at BRC.

10 Captain Eric P. Tee, USMC, Officer in Charge, Sniper School, Weapons Training Battalion Quantico, e-mail correspondence with author 8 January 2009.

11 0203 Ground Intelligence Officers already complete the full GIOC curriculum which incorporates the SSPCC prior to receiving their MOS.

12 GIOC also teaches a MCP module though the MCP and command and control training may be more easily run within the battalions using a standardized curriculum and the resident subject matter experts.

The Reconnaissance Officer AMOS

Once the officer has completed these training requirements and has served for a length of time in a reconnaissance officer billet, his command would then petition HQMC that he be granted the Reconnaissance Officer AMOS. Ideally, the officer completes this training prior to being assigned to a deploying platoon. In the current environment, a platoon commander would complete this training while preparing for a MEU deployment. Those officers heading to Iraq or Afghanistan as part of a reconnaissance company or battalion deployment would attend these schools as the schedule allows. While not a pre-requisite for platoon command, this AMOS would be a requirement for the more senior billets in the reconnaissance battalions, such as company commander or operations officer.

The cost of this training is six weeks of TAD expenses away from the command and a total of nine weeks of time to generate a much more capable reconnaissance officer. This process also involves the entire unit in developing their officers and ensuring they consistently give supported commands a well-trained, knowledgeable reconnaissance officer.

Counterarguments

A counterargument to this proposal concerns the Reconnaissance Unit Leader's Course (RULC) currently in

development. This course is tentatively scheduled to begin in the 4th quarter of 2010 and should address the training deficiencies the 2007 FEA identified.¹³ As the curriculum is still in development, it is impossible to state whether or not this course will fill the entire gap the 2007 FEA identified or if additional training will still be required. Given that the SSPCC and GIOC have in place proven curriculum and instructors, the RULC may best be designed to incorporate the in-house amphibious reconnaissance and MCPP training proposed above. This will save money and reduce the school manning requirements by limiting overlap and redundancy in officer training.

Regardless, many will state that the school completion code (of RULC) is sufficient to designate a Reconnaissance Officer. This course may create such an officer, but a school code cannot be applied to a unit Table of Organization (T/O), only an MOS defines the billet requirements. A method to ensure qualified reconnaissance officers return to the reconnaissance community will still not exist (other than the unit executive officers and monitors searching through the manpower databases).

Another counterargument is that this proposal does not go far enough, that more specialized training is required to

13 Maj Gilman, e-mail correspondence with author, 25 September 2008; ROAG 1-08 Read-ahead.

produce a true Reconnaissance Officer.¹⁴ However, the above solution is meant to articulate a method to fill the deficiencies identified by the 2007 FEA and to standardize the reconnaissance officer community. Just as the Marine Corps sends enlisted Marines through BRC, awards them the 0321 MOS and then sends them through the more specific training; IOC, experience as a platoon commander, and the roadmap outlined above provide the foundation for the reconnaissance officer and set the stage for the follow-on training to have meaning. And by ensuring these officers have the opportunity to return to the community through their AMOS, they will, over time, have the occasion to get more valuable training.

Conclusion

An AMOS assignment process would delineate the prerequisites, requirements, and duties of a reconnaissance officer. This AMOS eliminates the unwritten hierarchy in reconnaissance units regarding who is or is not a "real" reconnaissance officer. By incorporating already existing training and what is already done "in-house", the Marine Corps would generate more professional and more consistently trained officers than in the past. Finally, it would lead to better and

¹⁴ Some of these schools are as follows: Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE), Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC), Helicopter Ropes Suspension Techniques (HRST), BRC, Basic Airborne, MCD, etc.

more proficient reconnaissance organizations as the officer leadership rotates out and then back into the community.

Word Count: 2297

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Annex A

2007 Front-End Assessment Tasks that are unique to Recon Officers and not trained at TBS or IOC¹⁵

Task #	TASK
	DUTY AREA A - PATROL
15	Develop and transmit reconnaissance reports
	DUTY AREA C - RAID
36	Coordinate sniper support at the objective
	DUTY AREA E - BOAT
78	Plan amphibious surface insert/extract operations
	DUTY AREA M - OPERATIONS
145	Conduct HQ planning and coordination
146	Operate Reconnaissance Operations Center (ROC)
148	Operate a Surveillance and Reconnaissance Center (SARC)
149	Advise a supported commander on the capabilities and limitations of a reconnaissance team, platoon, company and battalion
150	Advise a supported commander on ground reconnaissance employment TTPs and considerations in support of offensive operations
151	Advise a supported commander on ground reconnaissance employment TTPs and considerations in support of defensive operations
152	Advise a supported commander on ground reconnaissance employment TTPs and considerations in support of counter-insurgency operations
153	Advise a supported commander on ground reconnaissance employment TTPs and considerations in support of security cooperation operations
154	Employ ground reconnaissance teams, platoons and companies in support of MAGTF operations
160	Employ sniper teams in support of MAGTF operations
161	Plan intelligence support requirements in support of reconnaissance and surveillance planning
162	Plan intelligence support requirements in support of raid planning
163	Develop an intelligence collection plan
166	Develop the reconnaissance and surveillance plan
167	Conduct mission analysis in a deliberate planning environment
168	Conduct course of action development in a deliberate planning environment
169	Conduct course of action analysis in a deliberate planning environment
170	Conduct course of action comparison in a deliberate planning environment
171	Conduct mission analysis in a rapid planning environment
172	Conduct course of action development in a rapid planning environment
173	Conduct course of action analysis in a rapid planning environment
174	Conduct course of action comparison in a rapid planning environment
175	Plan contingency plans in support of reconnaissance and surveillance operations
176	Apply understanding of the authorities and reporting requirements of command support relationships, while developing operational plan
177	Prepare and conduct a formal brief for the supported commander
178	Plan sensitive site exploitation
180	Integrate ground reconnaissance operations into the targeting process
182	Debrief reconnaissance teams
	DUTY AREA N - COMMUNICATION
187	Supervise ROC communications plans and procedures
239	Develop a communication plan

¹⁵ "Recon-unique Officer Tasks." 2007 FEA Recon task assessment. Word document e-mailed to author by Master Sergeant Chad D. Ramsey, Enlisted Reconnaissance Advocate, Ground Combat Element Branch, Operations Division, Deputy Commandant Plans, Policies & Operations, on 10 December 2008.

Annex B

Basic Reconnaissance Course Academic Summary¹⁶

<u>Title</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Combat Water Survival	
Water Survival	23.00
Water Survival Performance Examination	8.00
	Total: 31.00
Physical Fitness	
Combat Conditioning	54.00
BRC Swim Screen Performance Examination	2.00
Combat Conditioning Performance Examination	9.00
	Total: 65.00
Heliborne	
Heliborne Operations	1.00
Maintain Mountaineering Equipment	2.00
Knots and Rope Management	6.00
Knot Tying Performance Examination	2.00
Rappelling Operations	3.00
Rappel Performance Examination	1.00
Fast Rope Operations	3.00
Fast Rope Performance Examination	1.00
Special Patrol Insert/Extraction Operation	2.00
Special Patrol Insert/Extraction Performance Examination	1.00
	Total: 22.00
Land Navigation	
Introduction to Land Navigation	1.00
The Lensatic Compass and Compass Skills	2.00
Grid Coordinates	1.50
Marginal Information	1.00
Directions and Azimuths	1.00
Elevation and Relief	1.00
Graphic Scale and Distances	1.00
Orientation, Resection, and Intersection	4.50
Reconnaissance Military Occupational Specialty Road Map	0.50
Pace Count	1.00
Land Navigation Techniques	2.00
Land Navigation Practical Application	26.50
Satellite Navigation (GPS)	6.00
Satellite Navigation (GPS) Performance Examination	2.00
Land Navigation Performance Examination	16.00
Land Navigation Remedial Performance Examination	16.00
	Total: 83.00
Communications	
Introduction to Communications	1.00
HF Radio Communications	5.00
UHF Radio Communications	4.00

¹⁶ "Basic Reconnaissance Course – Program of Instruction, v2008" (Dated 20080501). PDF document e-mailed to author by Gunnery Sergeant James A. Treadwell, Course Chief, Basic Reconnaissance Course, on 19 September 2008.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Hours</u>
VHF Radio Communications	11.50
Field Expedient Antennas	16.00
Field Expedient Antenna Performance Examination	4.00
Communication Security	5.00
Radio Operating Procedures	4.00
Satellite Radio Communications	4.00
Operate a Handheld Radio	6.50
Communication Annex Review	0.50
Communications Written Examination	1.00
Communication Performance Examination	4.50
Total:	67.00
Fire Support	
Introduction to Supporting Arms	2.00
Call For Fire	7.00
Call For Fire Performance Examination	8.00
Total:	17.00
Demolitions	
Employment of the M18A1 Claymore Mine	2.50
M18A1 Claymore Mine Performance Examination	1.00
Demolitions	6.00
Demolitions Performance Examination	1.00
Demolition Exercise	4.00
Total:	14.50
Surveillance	
Observation Devices	6.00
Observation Devices Performance Examination	0.50
Topographic Sketching	2.50
Panoramic Sketches	3.50
Sketching Performance Examination	2.00
Surveillance of an objective	3.00
Reconnaissance Reports	6.00
Reconnaissance Reports Performance Examination	4.00
Combat Photography	6.00
Combat Photography Performance Examination	1.00
Initial Terminal Guidance	2.50
Total:	37.00
Patrolling	
Warning Order	1.00
Patrol Route Planning and Overlays	2.00
Overlay Performance Examination	0.50
Combat orders and Annexes	1.00
Patrol Order	4.00
Terrain Models	2.00
Introduction to Reconnaissance Patrolling	1.00
Organization and Individual Duties in a Reconnaissance Patrol	1.00
Selection and Preparation of Patrolling Equipment	1.00
Patrol Rehearsals and Inspections	1.00
Immediate Action Drills	4.00
Danger Areas	3.00
Observation Post/Hides	1.50
Patrol Base	2.00

<u>Title</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Departure and Re-entry of Friendly Lines	3.00
Patrol Report	1.00
Individual Camouflage and Concealment	1.00
Objective Rally Point	3.00
Movement Techniques and Control Measures	4.00
Patrol Coordination	1.00
Introduction to Raids	1.00
Patrolling Practical Application	18.00
Patrolling Annex Review	1.50
Patrolling Annex Written Examination	2.00
Patrolling Performance Examination	144.00
Total:	204.50
Amphibious - Boats	
Introduction to Nautical Navigation	1.00
Nautical Compass	2.00
Dead Reckoning	1.00
Coastal Piloting	12.00
Nautical Charts	3.00
Nautical Navigation Performance Examination	4.00
Maintain a Small Craft	6.50
Maneuver a Small Craft	22.00
Prepare Equipment for Transit in a Maritime Platform	1.00
Operate a Small Craft Performance Examination	4.00
Total:	56.50
ANNEX K Amphibious - Swim	
Execute a Surface Swim	15.50
Waterproofing and Packing of Patrolling Equipment	2.00
Surface Swim Performance Examination	2.00
Clandestine Landing and Withdrawal	9.00
Clandestine Landing and Withdrawal Performance Examination	0.50
Surf Observation and Report	2.00
Surf Observation and Report Performance Examination	0.50
Beach Survey	2.00
Beach Survey Performance Examination	2.00
Techniques of Soft Duck/Helicast Operations	5.00
Helicast Performance Examination	1.00
Hydrographic Survey	5.50
Hydrographic Survey Performance Examination	1.00
Confirmatory Beach Reconnaissance Report	1.00
Amphibious Annex Review	1.50
Amphibious Annex Written Examination	3.00
Total:	53.50
Combat Hunter	
Combat Profiling	2.00
Combat Profiling Practical Application	2.50
Combat Profiling Performance Examination	1.25
Total:	5.75
Total Academic Hours:	656.75