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UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
PARACHUTE UNITS



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UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS PARACHUTE UNITS

By

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Prior to 1940, most Marines thought of parachutes only in terms of airplane pilot and passenger safety. The effective utilization of parachutists in combat by the Germans early in that year prompted the Marine Corps to consider the use of such units.

A study by the Division of Plans and Policies, Headquarters Marine Corps, envisaged similar problems for parachute landed forces as for amphibious landed troops. This report indicated the need for a thorough study of the area of employment as early as practicable in the planning stage and made specific recommendations on the organization of Marine parachute troops and the tactical employment of such forces. It enumerated the probable objectives of parachute troops and summarized by recommending that the Marine Corps develop such a force in spite of the cost and time that would be required.(1)

Marine thinking on parachute troop organization is revealed more fully in a Division of Plans and Policies memorandum which anticipated that a parachute unit would include a full infantry battalion, one platoon of pack howitzers, and additional antiaircraft and antitank units along with three units of fire for all arms and three days rations and water.(2)

After his consideration of the parachute problem, the Director, Division of Aviation, Headquarters Marine Corps, pointed out that the procurement of materiel and the training of personnel were the chief problems. The possible locations of training centers and the procurement of materiel, including airplanes, received detailed attention. Thorough studies of the personnel problem emphasized that parachute trainees should have particularly high physical and mental qualifications and should be volunteers.(3)

Early in 1940, the Commandant stated that the question of paratroop and airborne activities for the Marine Corps was under consideration.(4) Naval attaches were requested to furnish reports of recent parachute activity on the part of the Germans, Russians, and French, in particular. The Division of Plans and Policies put forth a tentative recommendation for the formation of a tactical parachute organization. Marine parachute troops were conceived as light shock troops whose function was:

- (1) to act as a reconnoitering and raiding force to secure and transmit information or to destroy strategic installations of sufficient importance to warrant the risk of the force;
- (2) to act as a spearhead, similar to an advance force, which siezes and holds critical terrain features;
- (3) to act as a force which can be placed in large numbers into a position of tactical advantage where it can operate as a self-sustaining unit for a considerable length of time.(5)

On 17 October 1940, the Director of Plans and Policies, recommended to the Commandant that officers be allowed to participate in the parachute program. The Commandant determined that the Marine Corps would have a number of parachute units in the Fleet Marine Force and that application for that duty would be accepted from lieutenant colonels and below.(6)

The Marine Corps' plan for the parachute program was revealed in a letter of the Commandant stating that the Marine Corps planned to train one battalion of each regiment as air troops to be transported and landed by aircraft. Parachute troops were to be trained in the proportion of one company of parachutists to each air troop battalion, making a total of about 150 parachutists.(7)

The Marine Corps' parachute program actually got under way on 26 October 1940, when a detachment of 2 officers and 38 enlisted men arrived at Lakehurst, New Jersey, to form the first Marine class of the Parachute School.(8) From 28 October until 6 November, the class trained on the parachute towers at Hightstown and then moved on for further conditioning prior to jumping from aircraft. From 6 through 21 December, the trainees made three or four jumps from a transport plane at an altitude of 1,000 feet, and on 12 January 1941, the class made a jump from a Navy blimp.(9) Next came further jumping from transport planes, and after a total of ten jumps, the first class of Marine parachutists was qualified.

Since the earliest days of Marine aviation, individual aviators and parachute riggers had been trained in parachuting in Navy schools. But now that parachute units were soon to be organized within the Marine Corps, the need for more riggers was apparent. Most of the enlisted graduates of this first Marine parachute class were ordered to attend the Parachute Materiel School at Lakehurst.(10)

Meanwhile, the second class of 3 officers and 44 enlisted men had assembled at Lakehurst and had undergone preliminary instruction in preparation for work on the Hightstown towers during the period 30 December 1940 through 15 January 1941.(11)

Both the first and second classes of the Parachute School graduated on 26 February 1941, with the first class qualified as parachutist and parachute riggers and the second class qualified as parachutists.(12) On 10 March, the second class and six riggers from the first class were transferred to San Diego to form the nucleus of the first Marine parachute company. This unit was designated 1st Platoon, Company A, 2d Parachute Battalion, as most of its personnel came from the 2d Marine Division. The third class from Lakehurst was also transferred to San Diego to make up the second platoon of Company A. It was intended that subsequent platoons should make up another company, with one battalion of each infantry regiment eventually scheduled to have a parachute company.

However, Marine concepts on parachute unit organization now changed and were confirmed along the following lines:

1. In view of the existing temporary limitations on direct parachute training due to shortages in facilities, it appears desirable to emphasize the original concept of a parachute battalion as a unit equipped and trained for any type of duty that may be required of it. There will be occasions when the use of parachute troops as such will be impracticable. Although the time and expense involved in training should normally preclude the use of parachute troops as infantry, they should be available for special missions, such as reconnaissances and raids for which their specialized training fits them.

2. With this end in view, it is desired that both individuals and units be trained for such special missions. Such training should include instruction in the technique of landing operations, the use of rubber boats, combat patrolling, scouting, intelligence, sabotage, and combat engineering, including demolitions.

3. The potential usefulness of units so trained appears obvious, particularly for the type of operations for which the Marine Corps is preparing, and this conclusion is amply borne out by reports from abroad.(13)

As more Marines finished their training, it became possible to start organizing a complete parachute battalion in keeping with this new policy. Company A of what was to become the 1st Parachute Battalion was formed at Quantico on 28 May 1941, and Headquarters Company of the Battalion was organized on 10 July. These companies were attached to the 1st Marine Division until 28 July when they were attached to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.(14)

Attracted by the desire for adventure and the extra pay of \$50 per month for enlisted men and \$100 per month for officers on parachute duty provided by Congress on 3 June (15), many young Marines volunteered to join the 1st Parachute Battalion activated at Quantico on 15 August.(16) The battalion

was first composed of Headquarters Company and Company A. Company A, 2d Parachute Battalion was redesignated Company B, 1st Parachute Battalion on 20 September, (17) and on 28 September, the battalion moved from Quantico to New River for further training. Here, on 28 March 1942, Company C was organized, thereby completing the battalion. (18)

At the same time that the 1st Parachute Battalion was being organized on the East Coast, the 2d Parachute Battalion was being formed at Camp Elliott, San Diego. On 23 July 1941, Company B, 2d Parachute Battalion was activated and attached to Division Special Troops, 2d Marine Division. (19) Personnel of this company cadred the 2d Parachute Battalion organized 1 October. (20) Company A was organized 7 February 1942, and with the organization of Company C on 3 September, the 2d Parachute Battalion was at full strength. (21)

After the outbreak of war with Japan, the parachute training facilities at Lakehurst were expanded, and on 1 May 1942, the Parachute School Detachment was established within Marine Barracks, Naval Air Station. (22) To further Marine concepts in parachute training, parachute training schools operated by the Marine Corps were established at San Diego on 6 May and at New River on 15 June 1942. On 3 July, Headquarters Company and Company A, Parachute Training School were organized at Camp Gillespie, San Diego, soon to become the center of Marine Corps parachute training.

By November, New River was producing about 50 graduates monthly to send to the West Coast as replacements in existing parachute units or to become members of new parachute units. Camp Gillespie, by this time, was turning out about 70 graduates per month, and by the spring of 1943 it had increased its output to about 100 per month. Such numbers were sufficient to meet current needs, and, after forming the 4th Parachute Battalion (less Company B) the New River School closed as of 1 July. Thereafter, 20 men were transferred from New River each two weeks to the Gillespie Parachute School. (23)

The 1st Parachute Battalion entrained for Norfolk on 7 June 1942, embarked in the USS Mizar on 10 June, and sailed, via the Panama Canal, for Wellington, New Zealand, arriving on 11 July. (24) On 18 July, the battalion embarked in the USS Heywood for rehearsals at Koro, Fiji Islands, in preparation for the Guadalcanal Operation.

The 1st Parachute Battalion took part in the assault of Gavutu, British Solomons Islands, on 7 August. Pushing their way inland despite numerous casualties, the parachutists bore the brunt of the fight to overcome the stubborn Japanese resistance. By nightfall, the Marines of the battalion were engaged in mopping up the island. The following day saw Tanambogo the target, with the 1st Parachute Battalion assisting the infantry units making the attack. Considerably depleted of personnel by its Gavutu experiences, the battalion moved to Tulagi on 9 August.

Here, it rested and reorganized until 8 September, when, in conjunction with the 1st Raider Battalion, it carried out a successful raid on Japanese supply areas near the village of Tasimboko, Guadalcanal.

Upon returning from this raid, the 1st Parachute Battalion and the 1st Raider Battalion occupied Lunga ridge overlooking Henderson Field, Guadalcanal. On the 11th, enemy probes into the Marine positions warned of an impending attack. The night of 13-14 September witnessed a determined but futile attempt by the Japanese to penetrate the Marine lines.

On 18 September, the 1st Parachute Battalion was withdrawn from Guadalcanal and moved to Noumea, New Caledonia. Here it remained at Camp Kiser (named for 2d Lieutenant Walter W. Kiser, USMCR, killed at Gavutu) for a year training for further combat.(25)

The 2d Parachute Battalion sailed from San Diego on 20 October 1942, and arrived at Wellington on 31 October. The battalion encamped at Titahi Bay, 14 miles north of Wellington. It remained here until 6 January 1943 when it sailed for Noumea, New Caledonia to continue training with the 1st Parachute Battalion. On 1 April 1943, the 2d Parachute Battalion became an element of the newly organized 1st Parachute Regiment and was reorganized with Companies A, B, and C being redesignated Companies E, F, and G, respectively.(26)

The 3d Parachute Battalion, with Headquarters Company and Company A becoming its first organic units, was organized 16 September 1942 and assigned to the newly created 3d Marine Division stationed at San Diego.(27) Company B was activated 10 November and Company C, 10 December 1942. By 25 December, the battalion was up to strength and had achieved a high state of proficiency in its training.

On 4 January, the 3d battalion was attached to Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, Camp Elliott prior to its departure overseas in two echelons on 5 and 13 March. By the 27th of the month, the parachutists had arrived at Noumea and were settled at Camp Kiser to continue their training. On 1 April, the 3d Parachute Battalion became an organic unit of the 1st Parachute Regiment and was reorganized with Companies A, B, and C being redesignated Companies I, K, and L, respectively.(29)

In addition to the 2d and 3d Parachute Battalions, the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment was composed of the 1st Parachute Battalion, Regimental Headquarters and Service Company, and Regimental Weapons Company. Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Williams, formerly commanding the 1st Parachute Battalion, was appointed commanding officer of the regiment on its formation.

The organization of the 4th Parachute Battalion per se began on 2 April 1943, with the activation of Company B at Camp Elliott, San Diego.(31) On 1 July 1943, the remaining elements of the Battalion (Headquarters Company, Company A, and Company C) were formed at Camp Lejeune by redesignation of the New River Parachute Training Battalion. After crossing the country by train, the battalion joined its Company B at Camp Pendleton. Here the 4th remained in a training status until it was disbanded on 19 January 1944.(32)

In the Southwest Pacific, meanwhile, the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment moved from Noumea to Guadalcanal in September 1943. During the last two days of that month, the entire regiment was transferred to Vella Lavella in the New Georgia Island group. On 27 October 1943, a task force consisting of the 2d Parachute Battalion, reinforced with a machine-gun platoon from the regimental weapons company, a boat detachment of four navy-manned landing craft (LCP(R)s), and an experimental rocket detachment, moved by sea to Choiseul Island.(33) Landing without opposition, the force began a diversionary raid designed to assist the main landing of the 3d Marine Division on Bougainville. After several patrol clashes, primarily intended to make the Japanese believe a large force was on the island, the parachutists attacked the boat basin at Sangigai, killing a number of the enemy and destroying the installations and barges. Next, the Marines hit the Warrior River location of the Japanese. After burning enemy supplies on Guppy Island, the force returned to its base camp to prepare for the anticipated retaliation of the enemy. By this time, the main landings on Bougainville were underway, and on the night of 3 November, the task force was withdrawn from Choiseul to Vella Lavella, its mission of misleading the Japanese in the area successfully accomplished.

The 1st Parachute Battalion sailed from Vella Lavella on 22 November, and, on the following day, it landed at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville to be attached to the 2d Raider Regiment in I Marine Amphibious Corps reserve. On 27 November, the battalion was assigned a raiding mission northwest of Koiari, Bougainville for the purpose of disrupting communications, destroying enemy forces and supplies, and gathering information. On the 29th, the 1st landed in the vicinity of Koiari, but, when heavy enemy fire made it apparent that the raid could not be successfully completed, the force was withdrawn, protected by naval gunfire and 155mm heavy artillery fire.

On 3 December 1943, the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment (less its 1st and 2d Battalions) embarked at Vella Lavella and arrived at Empress Augusta Bay the following day. By the 5th, this force, supported by elements of the 3d, 9th, and 21st Marines, was occupying an outpost line forward of the main division positions, engaged in fighting off enemy patrols. For the next four days, the parachutists fended off the Japanese and sought an opportunity to outflank or penetrate the enemy positions. On 10 December, the parachutists were relieved by elements of the 9th and 21st Marines and became 9th Marines' reserve.

On 22 December, the 1st Parachute Battalion, Regimental Weapons Company, and a platoon from Headquarters and Service Company, attached to the 2d Raider Regiment, relieved the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines in the vicinity of Eagle Creek, Bougainville. The parachutists remained in position patrolling and continually strengthening their defenses until relieved by elements of the 132d Infantry Regiment, 27th Army Division, on 11 January 1944.

Late in the previous month, the Marine Corps had been directed by the Chief of Naval Operations to abandon its parachute program, thereby releasing about 3,000 personnel for other duty and saving \$150,000 monthly.(34) The 1st Parachute Regiment, less its air delivery section, was ordered to return to San Diego, where its personnel were to be used for forming cadres of the 5th Marine Division.(35) The air delivery section was equally divided, and its elements were redesignated as air delivery sections of I Marine Amphibious Corps and V Marine Amphibious Corps, respectively. The first echelon of the regiment left Bougainville on 15 January 1944, and on 29 February, the regiment was disbanded in San Diego.(36)

Parachute training for Marines had proved to be of little value. There were no combat paradrops by Marines during World War II, although some, such as Kolombangara in July 1943, Kahili and/or Kara Airfield on southern Bougainville in September 1943, and Kavieng Airfield on northern New Ireland in October 1943, were considered.(37) Several reasons account for this:

- (1) The lack of sufficient lift capacity. Not more than six of the VMJ (transport) squadrons could be concentrated by Marine Corps Aviation for a single operation, permitting possible transport of only one reinforced battalion.
- (2) The lack of shore-based staging areas for mass flights.
- (3) The long distances between objectives.
- (4) Objectives assigned to the Marine Corps were generally small in area and densely defended, thereby being unsuitable for mass parachute landings.(38)

The Marine Corps parachute troop program went the way of the Marine Corps glider program, already abandoned as not feasible in the spring of 1943. The Secretary of the Navy had been among the many Americans impressed by the German employment of gliders and paratroops in the capture of Crete. As a result, the Marine Corps was directed to set up a glider program. At first, it was intended that the Corps should have 75 gliders and 150 Marine pilots, which were considered sufficient to transport two battalions. But by June 1942, the program envisaged 1,371 gliders and 3,436 pilots and co-pilots, providing

the capability of lifting 10,800 men. It was shortly realized that this type of activity was impracticable, for gliders were useless without powered aircraft, and a glider/transport combination could not fly in bad weather or over long distances. In view of the island-hopping mission of the Marine Corps in the vast expanses of the Pacific, it was decided to terminate the program. After reaching a maximum strength of 36 officers and 246 enlisted men with 21 gliders organized into Marine Glider Group 71 of two squadrons, H&S and VML-711, the Marine Corps Glider Program was abandoned on 29 May 1943.(39)

Shortly after the end of World War II, some consideration was given to the idea of converting a Marine division into an airborne division consisting of parachute and glider units.(40) The revealed impracticability of such units for Marine operations during World War II, however, soon resulted in a lack of interest in this type of activity within the Marine Corps.

The concern for developing other means of transporting forces by air did not diminish, however. Marine interest in the air delivery of supplies and equipment by parachute remained a matter of continued research. World War II had proved the value of this technique, and tests of types of parachutes and containers for equipment were made over the succeeding years. Limited numbers of personnel continued to be trained in parachuting in Army schools. Aircraft crews and passengers still had a need for parachutes, while riggers and air delivery personnel made parachute jumps as part of the training for their specialties. On 10 January 1944, a parachute riggers school was established at Cherry Point, North Carolina.(41) Improvements were made in personnel parachutes with the nylon back type chute being adopted in February 1945.(42)

On 1 January 1946, the Parachute Materiel School at Camp Lejeune, originally established in 1942, was transferred to the Marine Corps Aviation Technical School, Marine Corps Air Station, Quantico.(43) By December 1947, this school received a quota of 15 enlisted men per six-week class.

Consideration of the tactics of airborne attack was not neglected. Airborne research and techniques developed by the Army were continually monitored by the Marine Corps. Many writers with experience in Marine activities voiced their ideas. For example, Major General Pedro del Valle analyzed the Pacific War on the basis of what might have happened had the Marine Corps possessed ready airborne forces during its war with the Japanese.(44)

In the Marine Corps Gazette of April and May 1949, Lieutenant Colonel Ormond B. Simpson wrote of air transportability problems within the Marine Corps. In this article, reference is made to the directive of the Commandant to the senior field officers of the Marine Corps requiring the development of

operating procedures and logistics data for the air transport of tactical units of both ground and air commands within the Fleet Marine Force.(45) Over the next several years, the thinking of the Marine Corps regarding parachute usage was generally limited to considerations on how to best execute this directive.

Until 1957, the chief Marine interest in parachuting continued to center around the air delivery requirements of the Marine Corps and parachute equipment and maintenance for Marine Aviation. In that year, the studies, research, and evaluation of Marine Corps requirements for parachuting, conducted over the previous 20 years, were culminated in the formation of a new unit utilizing the paradrop of Marines. This was the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company which was organized at Camp Pendleton on 19 June by redesignation of the 1st Amphibious Reconnaissance Company.(46)

The primary missions of this company were:

- a. To accomplish testing and developmental missions incident to amphibious reconnaissance, parachute reconnaissance, and parachute pathfinding for the helicopter assault, and to evaluate and report results of such tests and developmental activities.
- b. To conduct pre-assault and post-assault amphibious and parachute reconnaissance in support of a landing force.
- c. To conduct pre-assault and post-assault parachute and other pathfinder missions in support of a landing force.(47)

The force reconnaissance company, as a part of the Marine air-ground task force, was designed to be employed to extend the ground reconnaissance capability of the force beyond the coverage provided by the reconnaissance company of the Marine division of the force. It was to exploit this capability by conducting ground pre-assault reconnaissance by amphibious or parachute means; ground post-assault distant reconnaissance via helicopter and parachute means; and battlefield surveillance by establishment and displacement of helicopter-lifted observation posts.

The company would also provide parachutist or other pathfinder services in the form of pre-assault navigational assistance to helicopters in approach and retirement lanes and terminal guidance to assault waves in the helicopter landing zones.

The extent and value of the work of the parachutists of the reconnaissance company are revealed in the capabilities of the company:

The Force Reconnaissance Company is functionally organized to enable it to plan and execute, with the support of tactical and transport aircraft, helicopters, and Naval shipping the following simultaneous tactical missions in support of the Fleet Marine Force to which attached:

- (1) Amphibious reconnaissance of at least five BLT landing beaches during the pre-D-Day period and provision of the same number of coast-watcher stations or inland observation posts after D-Day.
- (2) Pre-D-Day parachute reconnaissance of a maximum of two helicopter landing zones of three sites each, plus the approach and retirement routes thereto, together with other key installations in the objective area of a Marine Air/Ground Task Force. Post D-Day reconnaissance by parachute or helicopter means of critical areas of intelligence interest by a maximum of five parachute reconnaissance teams to a distance, beyond that covered by Division Reconnaissance Battalion(s), up to 100 miles from the forward trace of contact of the Marine Air/Ground Task Force.
- (3) Parachute or other pathfinder support to assault waves for a maximum of three helicopter landing zones of three sites each. This number of zones will suffice for the needs of one infantry regiment. There would be no pathfinder reserve available for short-notice additional operations, or to provide casualty replacement of qualified personnel.
- (4) The above capabilities are combat capabilities, but do not provide for on-the-spot casualty replacement by qualified personnel. Neither do they reflect the administrative requirements for qualified parachute drop zone control and safety parties for peacetime maneuvers (which will reduce the maneuver tactical capability by the equivalent of one landing zone pathfinder team).

Missions performed by the Force Reconnaissance Company are concerned solely with the clandestine acquisition of military information and intelligence, and the provision of pathfinder guidance and support to helicopter assault waves. This company is not capable of performing offensive or defensive operations or raids, but it is capable of providing internal security for its own organic installations in the field.

In order to provide sufficient qualified parachutists for its force reconnaissance companies, the Marine Corps sends about 120 Marines per year to the Infantry School, Fort Benning to

attend the Airborne Qualification and Jumpmaster Course, which is a five-week course designed to instruct and train parachutists. The two platoons of the force reconnaissance company utilizing parachutists are the parachute pathfinder platoon and the parachute reconnaissance platoon.

The Parachute Pathfinder Platoon is the tactical unit of the Force Reconnaissance Company which discharges the Commander's mission of provision of control points in approach and retirement lanes, and terminal guidance for assault waves of helicopters in the helicopter landing zones. The Platoon performs this function utilizing electronic and visual guidance aids, radios, and airborne radio relay. It is capable of providing pathfinder services, after entry into the helicopter landing zones or approach routes by parachute or other means, in a maximum of four helicopter landing zones of three sites each under tactical conditions.

The Parachute Reconnaissance Platoon is the tactical unit of the Force Reconnaissance Company which discharges the commander's mission of acquisition of information and intelligence on helicopter approach and retirement lanes, helicopter landing sites, and deep inland areas, by the employment of parachute reconnaissance teams. The Platoon performs this function in operations from carrier or land-based aircraft of a variety of types. It is capable of conducting pre-D-Day reconnaissance of a maximum of four helicopter landing zones of three sites each, plus the approach and retirement routes thereto, and other key inland installations in the objective area of the Marine Air/Ground Task Force. Subsequent to D-Day it is capable of parachute reconnaissance of critical intelligence interest to a distance of up to 100 miles from the objective area, employing a maximum of ten parachute reconnaissance teams.

OPERATION STONEWALL, conducted in Southern California in September 1957 by the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company, is an example of the type of activities engaged in by such an organization. Each reconnaissance and pathfinder team was scheduled to make a night paradrop into a drop zone about 55 miles from Camp Pendleton. The reconnaissance teams were assigned realistic objectives in the form of flood-control dams 15-20 miles from the drop zones. After successfully dropping into the zones, the teams made their respective ways to assigned objectives, obtained photographs and water samples, and returned for pick up by Navy low performance aircraft. Some teams were seized by "partisans," but most returned safely with the desired information. The pathfinder teams jumped on alternate nights with a mission of establishing a night helicopter landing zone. The actual helicopter landing was cancelled, and the pathfinders were ordered to bury their equipment and to then move the 35

miles overland to Camp Pendleton. Avoiding aggressor patrols as well as the eyes of local law enforcement agencies, the pathfinders succeeded in returning to camp undetected.(47)

OPERATION STRONGBACK, held from 11 February through 13 March 1958 on Okinawa, furnished an even more complete workout for the platoons of the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company. In this operation, the parachute reconnaissance platoon was attached to force troops and the pathfinder platoon was attached to MAG-16, the air unit of the Marine Air/Ground Task Force. In the exercise, two of the five reconnaissance teams dropped into specific zones six nights before the date of the actual exercise. Two more teams parachuted into the objective area the following night, with the final team executing its drop on the third night. The first four teams executed the longer missions. All teams performed effectively in clarifying, confirming, and correcting previous intelligence. A two-man radio relay team, which parachuted into a relay point on the night of D-minus-5, received messages from the reconnaissance teams and relayed them to high performance re-transmission aircraft. By previous arrangement, reconnaissance teams contacted the radio relay teams at appointed times on the nights of D-minus-5, D-minus-4, and D-minus-3, when the high performance re-transmission aircraft also arrived on station. Four of the five reconnaissance teams were recovered by low performance aircraft at varying times on D-minus-2 and D-minus-1 from a pick-up site at a small airfield in the objective area. The fifth team and the radio relay team remained in the objective area and later joined up with the helicopter assault force. All teams were prepared to remain in the objective area for later join-up had the aircraft recovery failed. Injection of parachute reconnaissance teams into the objective area gained valuable and timely information on the enemy, weather, and terrain. The pathfinder platoon dropped four teams into the selected landing area, established and operated two primary and two alternate helicopter landing zones. Each landing zone handled flights of five planes at each landing site. In the pathfinder actions, too, success through careful planning, training, and execution was achieved.(48)

On 1 June 1958, the 2d Force Reconnaissance Company was formed at Camp Lejeune by redesignation of the 2d Amphibious Reconnaissance Company.(49) This company followed the pattern of the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company, training extensively at Camp Lejeune, Fort Bragg, and in the Virgin Islands. With its establishment, the Fleet Marine Forces of both the Atlantic and Pacific areas had improved reconnaissance as well as pathfinder and helicopter terminal guidance capabilities.

On 12 October 1960, Sub Unit # 1 of the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company was established at Camp Pendleton. On 19 November, Sub Unit # 1 embarked from San Diego on the USS MacFaffin for Okinawa. Here, on 13 December, it became an integral part of the 3d Marine Division.(50)

SUMMARY

Parachutists within the Marine Corps have come and gone as they have been needed to carry out the mission assigned. In the history of Marine aviation, the parachute has been, and is, a part of the equipment of the pilot or aircraft passenger. From May 1941 until February 1944, the Marine Corps had limited paratroop units, but never did such units drop against an actual enemy. From 1944 until 1957, Marine interest in parachuting centered in the air delivery of supplies and equipment. In June of the latter year, the force reconnaissance company, comprised of an amphibious reconnaissance platoon, a parachute reconnaissance platoon, and a parachute pathfinder platoon, came into existence. These parachute platoons, in their respective capacities of providing the latest intelligence and of guiding the helicopter assault force into the selected landing zones, contribute materially to the ready combat effectiveness of our Fleet Marine Forces.

NOTES

- (1) Div Plans and Policies Memo to Head, Div Plans and Policies, dtd 10May40, Subj: Organization of Parachute Units for the Marine Corps, Suggestions on (Subject File: Parachute Troops, USMC, HistBr, G-3, HQMC), hereafter cited Parachute Troops.
- (2) 1stMarDiv Memo, dtd 14May40, Subj: Logistics Calculations for Parachute Battalions (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (3) Dir Div Av ltr to Dir Div Plans and Policies, dtd 17May40, Subj: Parachute Troops (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (4) CMC ltr to CG, MCB, San Diego, AO-275-dm/423, Ser 438940, dtd 19Aug40, Subj: Marine Parachute Training, quoted by Capt R. H. Williams, USMC, in U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, July 1941, p. 14; CMC ltr to CNO, dtd 15May40, Subj: Parachute Troops (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (5) Dir, Div Plans and Policies Memo to MGC, dtd 17Oct40, Subj: Parachute Training (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (6) CMC Note for Headquarters Bulletin, dtd 17Oct40 (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (7) MGC ltr to Ch BuNav, dtd 22Oct40, Subj: Air and Parachute Troops Training (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (8) Muster Rolls, Parachute Detachment, NAS, Lakehurst, N. J., Oct40 (Unit Diary Section, Personnel Department, HQMC.)
- (9) The New York Times, 12Jan41, p. 18.
- (10) Williams, "Marine Parachute Training," op. cit., p. 15.
- (11) Div Plans and Policies Memo to CMC, dtd 31Dec40, Subj: Inspection of Parachute Detachment (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (12) Williams, "Marine Parachute Training," op. cit., p. 18.
- (13) MGC ltr to CG, 2dMarDiv and CG, 1stMarDiv, dtd 7Apr41, Subj: Parachute Troops (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (14) Muster Rolls, 1st Parachute Battalion, May-July1941.
- (15) Public Law 98, 76th Congress, 3Jun41; HQMC Circular Letter No. 583 of 19May42, Subj: Changes in Marine Corps Manual, 1940 - Ch 24, 25, and 26 (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (16) Muster Rolls, 1st Parachute Battalion, Aug 1941.

- (17) Muster Rolls, 2d Parachute Battalion, Sep 1941.
- (18) Muster Rolls, 1st Parachute Battalion, Mar 1942.
- (19) Muster Rolls, Company B, 2d Parachute Battalion, Jul 1941.
- (20) Muster Rolls, 2d Parachute Battalion, Oct 1941.
- (21) Muster Rolls, 2d Parachute Battalion, Feb 1942 and Sep 1942.
- (22) Muster Rolls, MB, NAS, Lakehurst, N. J., May 1942.
- (23) Dir, Div Plans and Policies ltr to CMC, dtd 7Oct42, Subj: Parachute Schools (Subject File: Parachute, 1520-30-135, Central Files, HQMC.)
- (24) Muster Rolls, 1st Parachute Battalion, Jun-Jul 1942.
- (25) LtCol Frank O. Hough, USMCR, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, USMC, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr. Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II, Vol. I (Washington: HistBr, G-3, HQMC, 1959), pp. 250ff.
- (26) Muster Rolls, 2d Parachute Battalion, Oct-Nov 1942, Jan 1943, Apr 1943.
- (27) Muster Rolls, 3d Parachute Battalion, Sep 1942.
- (28) 1stLt Robert A. Aurthur, USMCR, and 1stLt Kenneth Cohlma, USMCR. The Third Marine Division (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), pp. 25-26.
- (29) Muster Rolls, 3d Parachute Battalion, Apr 1943.
- (30) Muster Rolls, 1st Parachute Battalion, Apr 1943.
- (31) Muster Rolls, Company B, 4th Parachute Battalion, Apr 1943.
- (32) Muster Rolls, 4th Parachute Battalion, Jul 1943, Jan 1944.
- (33) Maj John N. Rentz, USMCR. Bougainville and the Northern Solomons (Washington: HistSec, Div PubInfo, HQMC, 1948) p. 106ff, and, unless otherwise cited, the source of the following account of the 1st Parachute Regiment.
- (34) CNO ltr to CMC, dtd 24Dec43, Subj: Parachute Program (Subject File: Aviation Activities, General, 1165-10, Central Files, HQMC.)
- (35) CMC message to CG, 1stMAC, dtd 30 Dec 1943, Subj: Parachute Program (Subject File: Aviation Activities, General, 1165-10, Central Files, HQMC.)

- (36) Muster Rolls, 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, Jan-Feb44.
- (37) Col Warner T. Bigger interview by HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 26 Apr 1961.
- (38) Col O. H. Wheeler, USMC, Div PubInfo, ltr to 2dLt John N. Uhler, Jr., USMC, dtd 30 Dec 1947 (Subject File: Parachute Troops.)
- (39) Robert Sherrod. History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), p. 129.
- (40) LtCol Rathvon M. Tompkins, USMC. "To War by Air." Marine Corps Gazette, Jan 1947, pp. 9-14.
- (41) CMC ltr to CG, Cherry Point, dtd 10 Jan 1944, Subj: Parachute Riggers School (Subject File: Parachute School, 1520-30-135, Central Files, HQMC.)
- (42) CMC ltr dtd 17 Feb 1945, Subj: Parachutes (Subject File: Parachutes, Adoption of, 1165-50, Central Files, HQMC.)
- (43) CMC ltr dtd 20 Dec 1945, Subj: Parachute School (Subject File: Parachute School, 1520-30-135, Central Files, HQMC.)
- (44) MajGen Pedro del Valle, USMC. "Tactical Possibilities of Airborne Attack." Marine Corps Gazette, Dec 1947, pp. 22-25.
- (45) LtCol Ormond B. Simpson, USMC. "Air Transportability in the Marine Corps." Marine Corps Gazette, Apr 1949, pp. 10-15, May 1949, pp. 28-33.
- (46) Muster Rolls, 1st Force Reconnaissance Company, Jun 1957.
- (47) Marine Corps Test Unit #1, MCB, Camp Pendleton, Test Projects Report #6, dtd Jun 1957 (HistBr, G-3, HQMC), p. 1-B-2, and, unless otherwise cited, the source of the following account.
- (48) Maj Bruce F. Meyers, USMC. "Force Recon." Marine Corps Gazette, May 1961, p. 53.
- (49) BGen Herman Nickerson, USMC. "Force Recon - By Land, Sea, and Air." Marine Corps Gazette, Feb 1959, pp. 46-47.
- (50) Muster Rolls, 2d Force Reconnaissance Company, Jun 1958.
- (51) Muster Rolls, SU #1, 1st Force Reconnaissance Company, Oct-Dec 1960.

APPENDIX A

COMMANDING OFFICERS, PARACHUTE REGIMENT AND BATTALIONS

NOTE: Compiled from Muster Rolls, Unit Diary Section, Personnel Department, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps.

1st Parachute Regiment

LtCol	Robert H. Williams	1 Apr 1943	-	14 Jun 1943
	None shown	15 Jun 1943	-	16 Jun 1943
LtCol	Richard W. Hayward	17 Jun 1943	-	30 Jun 1943
LtCol	Robert H. Williams	1 Jul 1943	-	15 Jan 1944
Maj	Richard Fagan	16 Jan 1944	-	23 Feb 1944
	None shown	24 Feb 1944	-	29 Feb 1944

1st Parachute Battalion

Capt	Robert H. Williams	15 Aug 1941	-	31 Aug 1941
Capt	Marcellus J. Howard	1 Sep 1941	-	
Capt	Robert H. Williams	2 Sep 1941	-	10 Sep 1941
Capt	Marcellus J. Howard	11 Sep 1941	-	
Capt	Robert H. Williams	12 Sep 1941	-	23 Sep 1941
Capt	Marcellus J. Howard	24 Sep 1941	-	
Capt	Robert H. Williams	25 Sep 1941	-	12 Oct 1941
Capt	Marcellus J. Howard	13 Oct 1941	-	14 Oct 1941
Capt	Robert H. Williams	15 Oct 1941	-	23 Oct 1941
Capt	Marcellus J. Howard	24 Oct 1941	-	28 Oct 1941
Capt	Robert H. Williams	29 Oct 1941	-	21 Nov 1941
Capt	Marcellus J. Howard	22 Nov 1941	-	
Capt	Robert H. Williams	23 Nov 1941	-	7 Dec 1941
Capt	Charles A. Miller	8 Dec 1941	-	9 Dec 1941
Capt	Robert H. Williams	10 Dec 1941	-	14 Dec 1941
Capt	Charles A. Miller	15 Dec 1941	-	16 Dec 1941
Capt	Robert H. Williams	17 Dec 1941	-	19 Dec 1941
Capt	Charles A. Miller	20 Dec 1941	-	26 Dec 1941
Capt	Robert H. Williams	27 Dec 1941	-	31 Dec 1941
Maj	Robert H. Williams	1 Jan 1942	-	27 Mar 1942
Maj	Marcellus J. Howard	28 Mar 1942	-	30 Mar 1942
Maj	Robert H. Williams	1 Apr 1942	-	7 Jul 1942
Maj	Charles A. Miller	8 Jul 1942	-	5 Sep 1942
Capt	Harry L. Torgerson	6 Sep 1942	-	8 Sep 1942
Maj	Charles A. Miller	9 Sep 1942	-	17 Sep 1942
Capt	Harry L. Torgerson	18 Sep 1942	-	26 Sep 1942
LtCol	Robert H. Williams	27 Sep 1942	-	31 Mar 1943
Maj	Brooke H. Hatch	1 Apr 1943	-	27 Apr 1943
Capt	Robert G. McDonough	28 Apr 1943	-	30 Apr 1943
Maj	Robert G. McDonough	1 May 1943	-	9 May 1943
Maj	Richard Fagan	10 May 1943	-	5 Jun 1943
Maj	Robert G. McDonough	6 Jun 1943	-	7 Jun 1943
Maj	Richard Fagan	8 Jun 1943	-	10 Jan 1944
Maj	Robert G. McDonough	11 Jan 1944	-	29 Feb 1944

2d Parachute Battalion

Capt	Charles E. Shepard	1 Oct 1941	-	31 Dec 1941
Maj	Charles E. Shepard	1 Jan 1942	-	5 May 1942
Maj	Richard W. Hayward	6 May 1942	-	13 Aug 1942
Maj	Robert T. Vance	14 Aug 1942	-	17 Aug 1942
Maj	Richard W. Hayward	18 Aug 1942	-	20 Sep 1942
Maj	Alfred T. Greene	21 Sep 1942	-	27 Sep 1942
Maj	Richard W. Hayward	28 Sep 1942	-	7 Mar 1943
LtCol	Richard W. Hayward	8 Mar 1943	-	31 Mar 1943
LtCol	Victor H. Krulak	1 Apr 1943	-	7 Nov 1943
Maj	Warner T. Bigger	8 Nov 1943	-	6 Dec 1943
Maj	Tolson A. Smoak	7 Dec 1943	-	19 Dec 1943
Maj	Warner T. Bigger	20 Dec 1943	-	29 Feb 1944

3d Parachute Battalion

Maj	Robert T. Vance	16 Sep 1942	-	22 Nov 1942
Capt	Donald B. Hubbard	23 Nov 1942	-	27 Nov 1942
Maj	Robert T. Vance	28 Nov 1942	-	9 Dec 1943
Maj	Harry L. Torgerson	10 Dec 1943	-	20 Feb 1944
	None shown	21 Feb 1944	-	29 Feb 1944

Parachute Battalion, New River (Later 4th Parachute Battalion)

Capt	Bruce B. Cheever	1 Jan 1943	-	6 Jan 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	7 Jan 1943	-	20 Jan 1943
Capt	Bruce B. Cheever	21 Jan 1943	-	30 Jan 1943
Capt	William J. McKennan	31 Jan 1943	-	1 Feb 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	2 Feb 1943	-	9 Feb 1943
Capt	Bruce B. Cheever	10 Feb 1943	-	16 Feb 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	17 Feb 1943	-	28 Feb 1943
Maj	Bruce B. Cheever	1 Mar 1943	-	8 Mar 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	9 Mar 1943	-	12 Mar 1943
Maj	Bruce B. Cheever	13 Mar 1943	-	16 Mar 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	17 Mar 1943	-	31 Mar 1943
Maj	Bruce B. Cheever	1 Apr 1943	-	9 Apr 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	10 Apr 1943	-	18 Apr 1943
Maj	Bruce B. Cheever	19 Apr 1943	-	5 May 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	6 May 1943	-	7 May 1943
	None shown	8 May 1943	-	18 May 1943
Maj	Justin G. Duryea	19 May 1943	-	21 May 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	22 May 1943	-	5 Jun 1943
Maj	Justin G. Duryea	6 Jun 1943	-	18 Jun 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	19 Jun 1943	-	22 Jun 1943
Maj	Justin G. Duryea	23 Jun 1943	-	27 Jun 1943
LtCol	Marcellus J. Howard	28 Jun 1943	-	29 Jun 1943
Maj	Justin G. Duryea	30 Jun 1943	-	

APPENDIX B

HONORS OF PARACHUTE REGIMENT AND BATTALIONS

NOTE: Compiled from Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual, NAVPERS 15,790 (Rev. 1953). Washington: Department of the Navy; Muster Rolls, Unit Diary Section, Personnel Department, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps; and, Jane Blakeney. Heroes, U. S. Marine Corps, 1861 - 1955 - Armed Forces Awards - Flags. Washington: Printed for the author, 1957.

1st Parachute Regiment

ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER

Consolidation of the Solomons Islands 30 Sep 1943 - 11 Jan 1944

VICTORY STREAMER WORLD WAR II

1 Apr 1943 - 29 Feb 1944

1st Parachute Battalion

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION

Solomon Islands Campaign 7 Aug 1942 - 9 Aug 1942

ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER

Guadalcanal-Tulagi Landings 7 Aug 1942 - 9 Aug 1942
Capture and Defense of Guadalcanal 10 Aug 1942 - 18 Sep 1942
Consolidation of the Solomons Islands 30 Sep 1943 - 11 Jan 1944

VICTORY STREAMER WORLD WAR II

7 Dec 1941 - 29 Feb 1944

2d Parachute Battalion

ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER

Consolidation of the Solomons Islands 27 Oct 1943 - 11 Jan 1944

VICTORY STREAMER WORLD WAR II

7 Dec 1941 - 29 Feb 1944

3d Parachute Battalion

ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER

Consolidation of the Solomons
Islands

30 Sep 1943 - 11 Jan 1944

VICTORY STREAMER WORLD WAR II

16 Sep 1942 - 29 Feb 1944

4th Parachute Battalion

AMERICAN CAMPAIGN STREAMER

1 Jan 1943 - 19 Jan 1944

VICTORY STREAMER WORLD WAR II

1 Jan 1943 - 19 Jan 1944