

# Leatherneck

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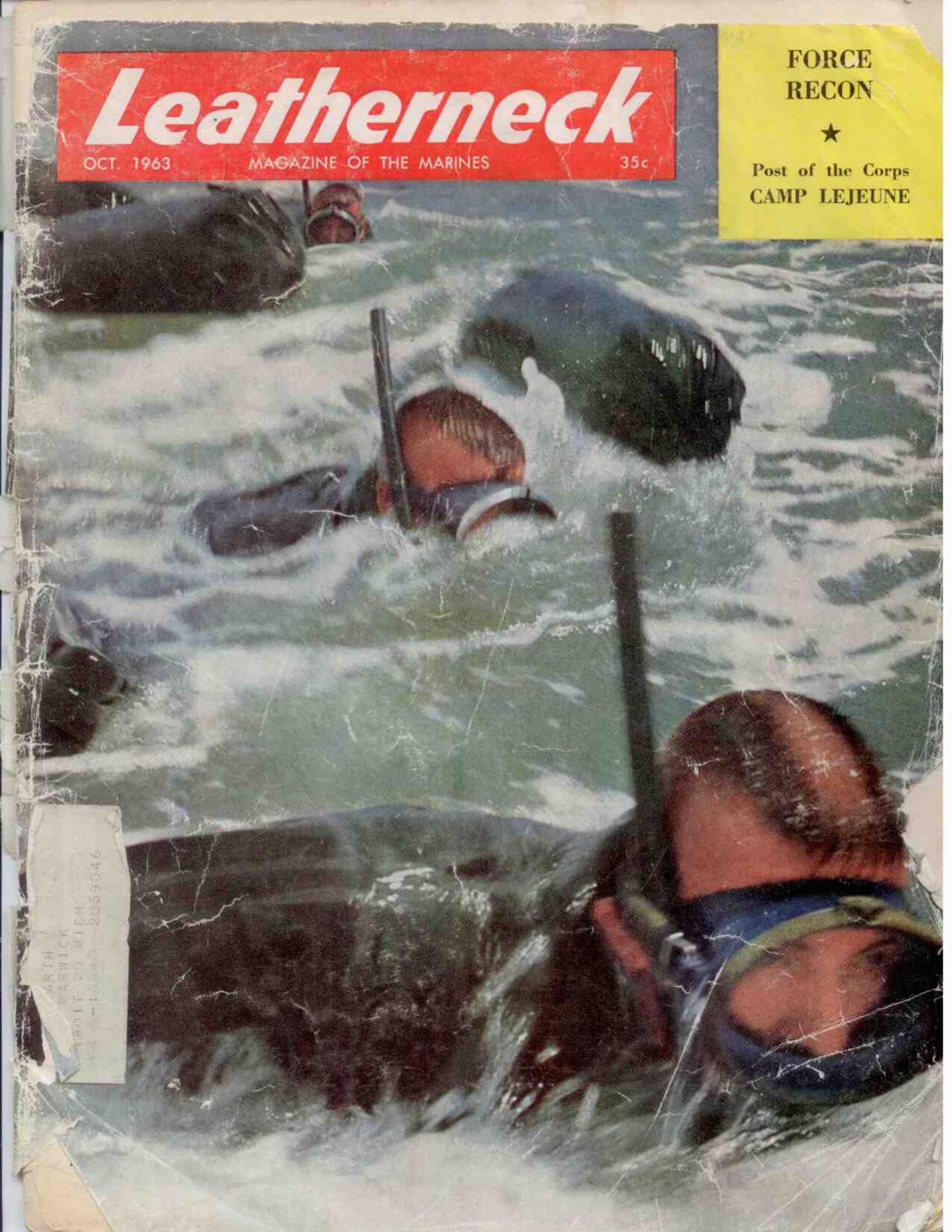
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FORCE  
RECON



Post of the Corps  
CAMP LEJEUNE

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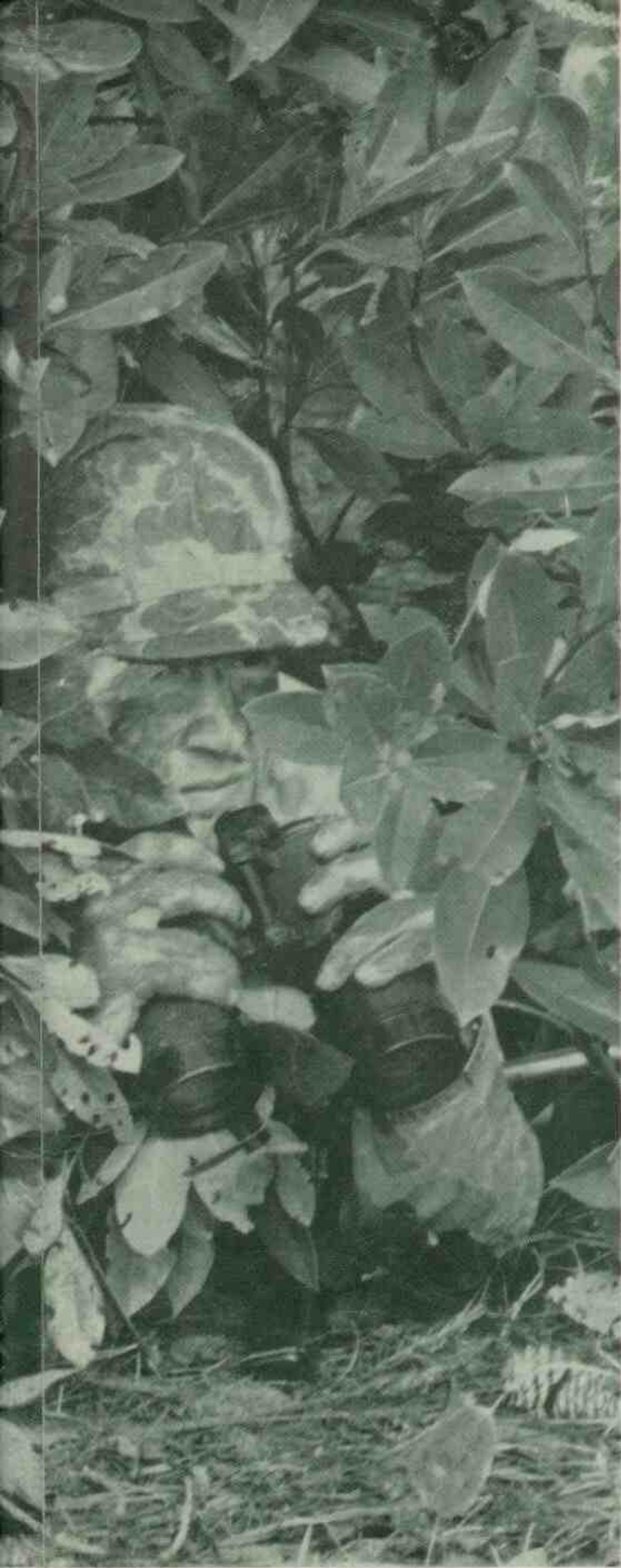




— STORY BY GYSGT MEL JONES —



— PHOTOS BY CPL J. G. McCULLOUGH —



# RECON RECON RECON all the way

**Pop them out of submarines, tap them out of aircraft, then Force reconners are ready to commence work, surrounded by enemy-types.**

**E**XECUTING AN amphibious operation without intelligence data is like trying to stuff an Amtrac into a seabag. It's rather an impossible task. Furthermore, it's costly . . . in lives. Imagine, if you will, the following spine-curler:

Only half of the assault force has reached the beach. The other half is still in landing boats, which are trying to wallow over a sandbar. Those of you who made it are being chewed up by artillery which has the beach boresighted. There's very little support from water-side because the Navy's trying to beat off enemy air superiority . . . the same aerial dominance which decimated the helicopter BLTs earlier. And nobody knows how many troops are staging inland, or, perhaps, already on the move toward you.

Quite a nostril-pinching situation, huh? And one which will never occur as long as the Corps has G-2s. They are the folk who find out about hidden sandbars, guns, planes and troops before the landing force even slides over the horizon. And they pass the intelligence info on, so that proper whap-'em action can be taken.

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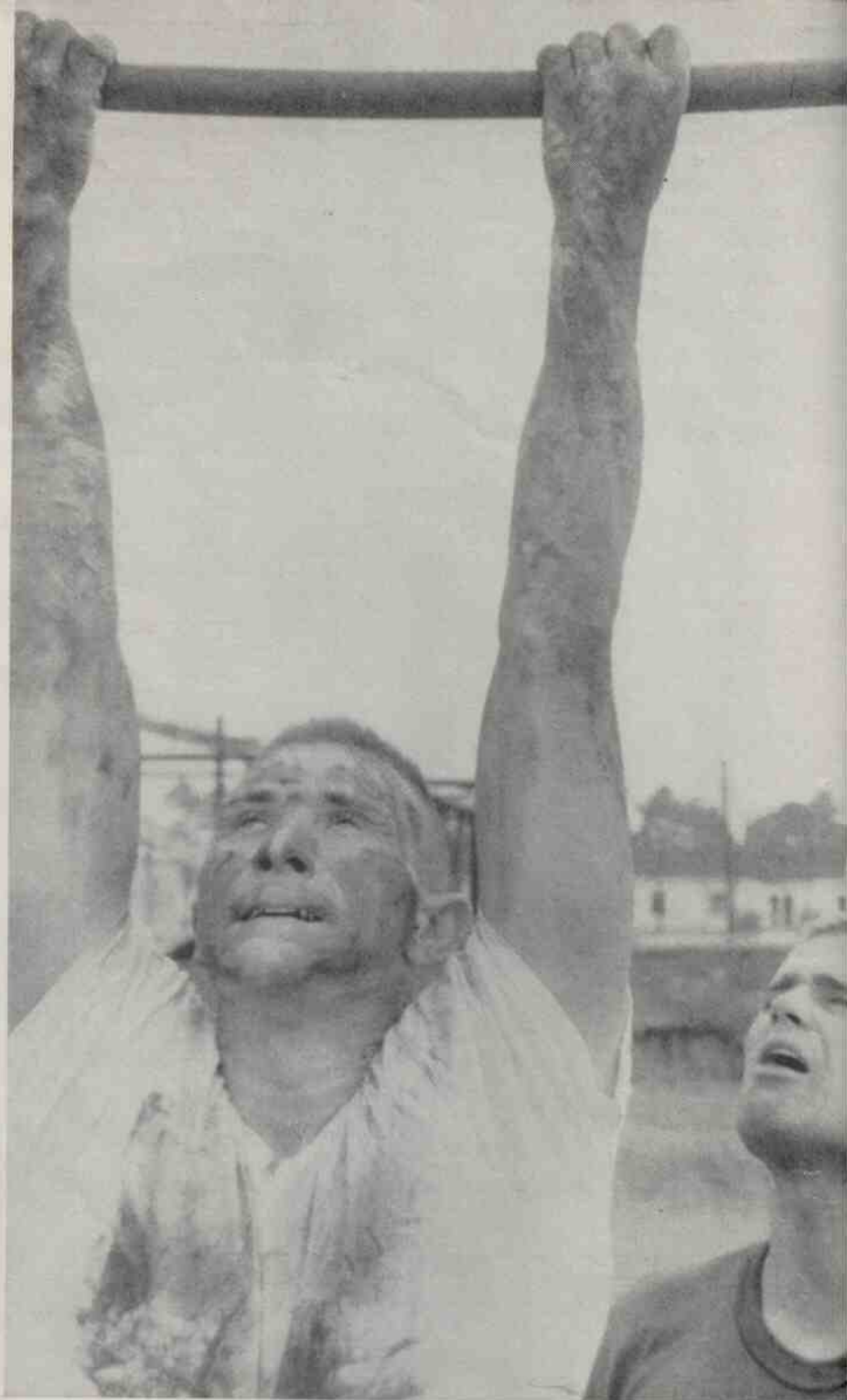
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Intelligence gatherers have many sources. To name a few; national agencies which have compiled information for years, natives (either displaced or still in the operations area as part of a guerrilla net), underwater demolitions teams, aerial photos, electronic devices . . . and on, and on.

Plus, the Corps outfits whose busi-



**Mass grab-aletics (above left) are as routine as reveille, and they begin the day you report to Force Recon, and you're put into the training platoon. For weeks thereafter it's sweat, strain and ache, while an NCO bellows over your shoulder (above right).**

ness it is to gather intelligence information. There are, too, quite a few of these, if you count agents, photo recon squadrons and such. Which is all a rather lengthy way of giving just dues, while pointing out that ground recon units are a valuable addendum to intelligence rounding-up agencies.

Once the battle has been joined—or possibly just prior to H-Hour—the recon battalion (each division has one) gets the bulk of intelligence probes. Division Recon is responsible for the

area directly to the front and around its outfit's perimeter. Only rarely, if at all, will it probe deeply into enemy territory.

That's a job for Force Recon. And now that we've howdy-ed everyone from guerrillas to agents, let's concentrate on Force Recon.

There are two such outfits in the Corps today, the Second Force at Lejeune, and First Force out at Pendleton. Each is organized as a company, is affiliated with Force Troops and has

the same MO, as they say down at the precinct house. However, each of the companies will quickly jam you down a manhole if you say, "But they do this job better out in the other company." There's nothing vicious about this attitude. It's just that Force reconners—first, by nature and then by training—are a fiercely competitive breed. They refuse to believe there's any outfit, anywhere, better than they. Which is as it should be. As you'll understand later, a man has to be incredibly self-

sufficient, self-reliant and self-confident to be a successful reconner.

Back to the organization. Actually, we can be more specific than that, though we're reluctant to be. We should say, back to the organization of Second Force, from whence most of this material came. As pointed out, both Second and First Force recon are of the same mold. Either could have been used to illustrate the Peeping Marines' story. But Second Force was chosen for two reasons. First, it's closest. And, secondly, the manholes at Pendleton aren't as deep as those at Lejeune.

A company TO calls for 161 men who are placed into sections which have routine titles but which, in practice are far from prosaic. There's a Company Headquarters Section, a Supply and Service Platoon and six reconnaissance platoons of 15 men apiece. Now then, let's examine that a bit deeper. It goes without saying that the headquarters unit handles the companies' admin problems. But what a clerk-typist billet! Each man has to be recon qualified, which, as you'll see, is about as simple as whipping a pro-

football team singlehandedly. And the Supply and Service Platoon has a couple of rather unique sections; to wit, the Amphibious Equipment Maintenance Section (repairers of rubber boats, Scuba gear, etcetera), and the Parachute Maintenance and Repair Section (keepers of the 'chute loft).

The recon platoons are also a bit different. There are no squads. Instead, there are four-man teams . . . three of them per platoon. In addition, there's the platoon leader, platoon sergeant and an equipment NCO, who house-keeps the specialized gear.

The nucleus of a platoon is the team. Each is trained and equipped to be totally self-sufficient. And each is staffed with that objective in mind. Personnel-wise, there's a team leader (usually an E-5), his assistant (E-4), a communications man (no specific rank, but generally on up to E-4) and a scout (you guess). We repeat; on a mission, these four men are it. Once they've been committed to enemy territory, the entire operation is in their hands alone. For this reason, the men are cross-trained, especially in regards

to the radio equipment, which each reconner must be able to operate in case the comm man becomes a casualty.

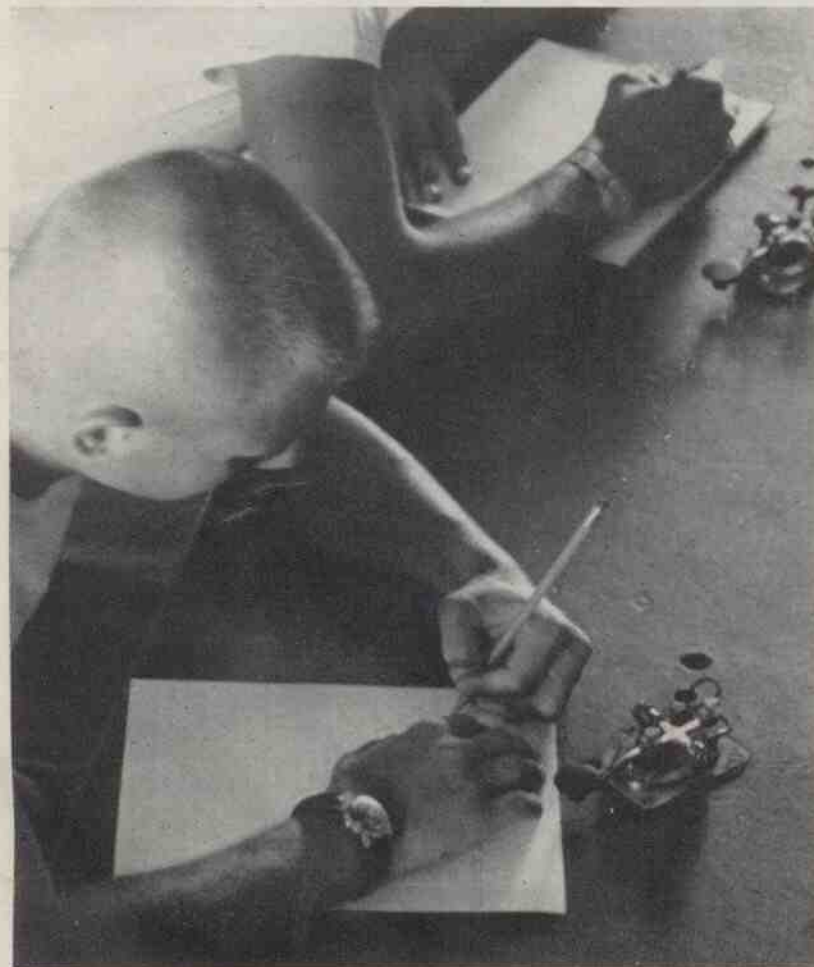
This final note concerning organization; Force Recon companies no longer have Pathfinder Platoons, the outfits which used to be solely concerned with seeking out, then manning, helicopter landing zones for vertical envelopment landings. The companies still have Pathfinder potential, and can establish HLZs and direct chopper assault waves, but it's no longer one of the primary missions. Other Marine units have been given the job.

Now, then, before we delve too deeply into missions, let's see what it takes for a man to become qualified.

First, and primarily, you must be a volunteer, because, from the beginning, the recon folk are going to be probing your motivation.

It begins when you're put into the training platoon, as all applicants are. For two or three weeks, you'll regard sleep as a blessing and relaxation as a downright luxury. You'll either be heaving your chin over a bar, shoving your chest off the ground, or raising

**Recon comm transmissions are made by Key, and each man has to know how to transmit (below left). In addition, map and compass comprehension (below right) can mean the difference between success or failure—plus life or death—while on a mission.**



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all the way

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**Initially, all reconners must attend jump school at Ft. Benning, Ga. Then there are "live" jumps about once a week when they get back to the company, plus additional snapping-in hours when it's "suit up" (top left), then "out the door" (top right).**

your knees to your beltline so often you'll almost come to believe people weren't born with the facility for remaining motionless. And you'll cram map reading, compass practice and scouting and patrolling into your system.

In short, you'll be pushed during the training phase, both physically and mentally. Why? Because your instructors *want you to quit!* If you do, you're not the type Force Recon is looking for.

But, shucks, who can't take a little boot camp all over again? So, you don't quit. You graduate to become part of the company. Friend, your training is just beginning, because Force reconners are perhaps the most diversely schooled Marines in the Corps. Stay with the company long enough and you could attend all these:

Airborne School, at Ft. Benning, Ga., a must because all recon personnel must be jump qualified.

Underwater Swim School, at Key West, Fla., to indoctrinate you into the world of liquid.

The Submarine School, at New London, Conn., where you'll practice buoyant ascents in a 100-foot deep tank.

The U. S. Army Ranger School, Ft.

Benning and environs, for its discipline, and its swamp, mountain and desert schooling.

The Mountain Leadership School, at Pickel Meadows, Calif., where you'll learn just what the title implies.

Escape and Evasion Course, also at Pickel Meadows, to show you what POW compounds are like and teach you how to escape, evade and survive off the land.

The Jungle Warfare Training Center, Ft. Sherman, Panama, for instruction in the techniques of jungle travel and survival.

All this, and company training, too. But, if you manage to survive some or all of these courses, you're well on your way to becoming "Recon . . . recon . . . all the way!"

And you're more than ready to fulfill Force Recon's mission.

Just what is Force Recon's primary mission? In the words of officialdom, ". . . to obtain information on the enemy, weather and terrain necessary for the planning and conduct of amphibious operations." The key lies in the last half of that statement. Force Recon is *not* a local command tool, although every commander on the line

has use of the material the reconners send back. Force Recon is a tactical gathering agency for a staff which is planning an entire operation, usually a Fleet Marine Force or amphibious corps group of planners.

Nor, certainly, is Force Recon the *only* fact-finding agency. It's used to augment other means of intelligence gathering, such as UDT and aerial photo runs. For the most part, recon teams are dispatched on a single-mission basis, to obtain one set of facts needed to ensure the success of an operation. Some typical jobs:

Recon probable landing beaches; plotting texture, gradients, berms and natural and man-made obstacles. If necessary, a team could make a hydrographic survey (shoals, surf conditions, obstacles in water, etc.), but this is properly the domain of the UDTs, and Force Recon would do it only if the Navy experts weren't available.

Establish outposts within enemy territory to observe staging areas, airfields, avenues of approach to the beaches and such. In general, watch the other guy and report on what he does.

Rove over an assigned area, spotting guns, minefields, etc., so that our pre-



assault shoot-'em-ups will have definite coordinates to pop at.

Check on the trafficability of terrain; beach exits, bridge capacities and that sort of thing.

Those, of course, are quite general assignments. But specific missions are variations of those themes.

How would missions become allocated, then carried out? Let's create a circumstance.

For some days now, the lights at FMF headquarters have been blazing into the a.m. At nearby ports, amphibious ships are gathering, loading. Road nets into the embark ports are filled with convoys. All the usual signs are there . . . something's going to happen. Only a handful at headquarters actually know that a vertical envelopment landing will take place within a week. Those who are responsible for such things have the operation nearly planned. They know how many Marines will be needed for the job, and they have a better-than-tootin' idea of what the landing forces will face.

But there are still a couple of head-scratchers. Such as: (1) There's an inland waterway just behind one of the beaches. . . . Will it pile up the BLT? and (2) The other crew seems to have a large area about 50 miles inland which they've taken great pains to camouflage and otherwise hide . . . could it be an assembly area, or is it a storage depot?

Down goes the nod to the Force Recon CO and he and his staffers begin huddling with the operation planners. After reviewing the nature of the business and the intelligence data on hand, the Recon CO decides that two teams can handle the job. He designates the teams, then re-huddles with the staffs. There are still many questions to be answered:

How will the team get in?

OK, one by water for the behind-the-beach recon and the other by air because the objective is quite a ways inland and there's some rolling, lightly wooded terrain about 10 miles from the objective which would make an ideal

drop zone.

How about the communications set-up?

Take AN/GRC-9s or RS-1s . . . the comm officer will establish the nets. The inland team will come up every four hours and at any other time it feels necessary. Because the beach group has a one-nighter, it will use the radio only if absolutely needed.

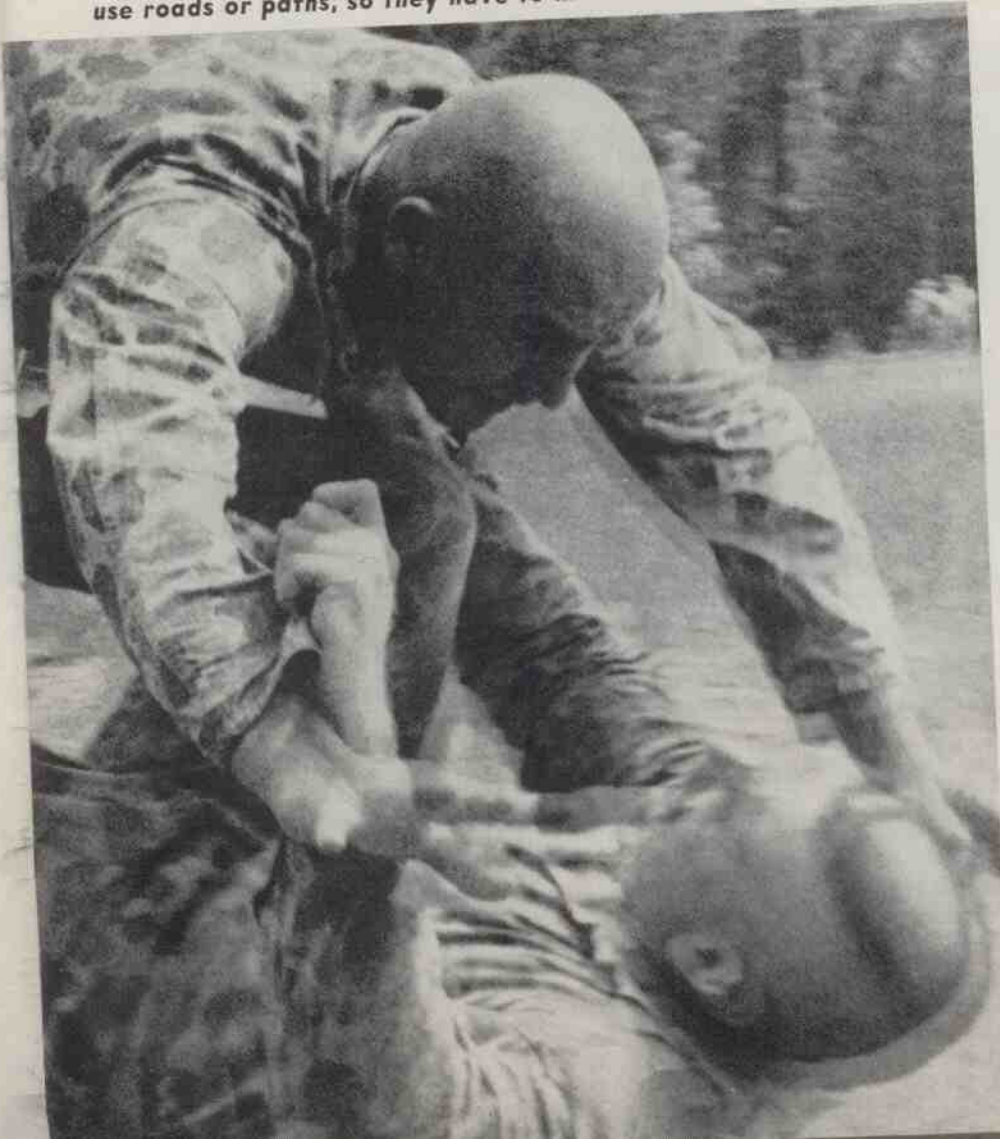
How will the teams exit?

Beach group swim back to the delivery craft. Inland team hike overland to an abandoned airstrip 15 miles south of their objective where a plane will drop in and pick them up.

Let us point out that the above is simplified almost to the point of ABC's. There are countless considerations before even a single decision is reached. As an example, look at the "entry means" alone. It'll take a paragraph or two.

A team making a water entry has a choice of delivery vehicles. It could be dropped off from an APD (Assault Personnel Destroyer) or other high-

**Recon training is as versatile as it is tough. For example . . . it takes coordination through practice to whap an opponent quietly but rapidly (bottom left). And reconners never use roads or paths, so they have to know how to traverse darn-nigh impassable terrain (bottom right).**



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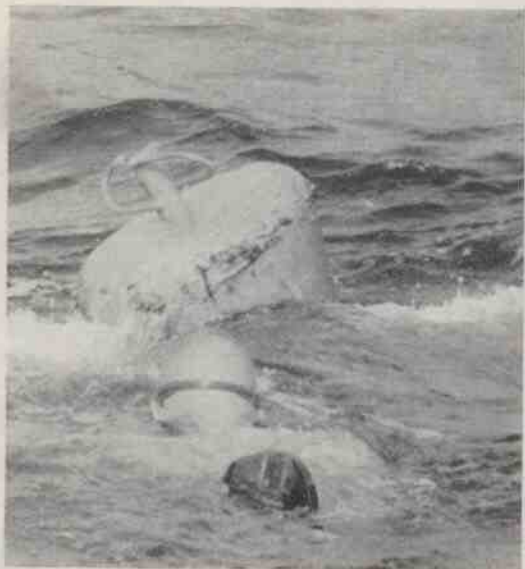
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speed surface craft. It could, if time were pushing, and there weren't any drop zones handy, parachute into water, sink the 'chutes and swim ashore. Or, it could debark from a submarine, in one of two ways. The sub can surface and the team rubber-boat part way in, or the sub remains submerged and the teams exits from the escape hatch.

The latter is best whenever possible. The probability of being detected is sliced to a minimum.

The group going in by air has problems ranging all the way from phases of the moon to the type of aircraft used for delivery. Jets are fine for cutting time-to-target minutes, but they can't be rigged for static lines and



**A buoy attached to the submerged submarine is the "meet me here" spot after a team locks out (top left). After the swim in, the team gathers on the beach to change from wet gear to "cammies" which were carried in waterproof packages.**

even if they could, static jumping from jets is riskier than taking a snooze on a tank path. Which means the team has to free fall, which, in turn, means that the plane has to gain enough altitude so the chutists can activate at 2200 feet. With conventional aircraft, on the other hand, the man can static-line out from 700 feet and be on the ground 30 seconds later. That's three

times faster than a free fall from a jet! But, then, that conventional transport is going to take longer getting over the DZ (drop zone), and that extra minute or two may be all the enemy needs to get busy.

So, as you can see, there are no formula decisions. Each must be arrived at independently, after juggling enough pros and cons to put a pro-

fessional gambler into retirement.

So that we can illustrate the two means of delivery, we'll assume that the beach team will lock out of a sub, and the inland foursome will static-line from a Navy CIA Trader.

Back to the mission.

After the Recon and landing force planners have finished round-tabling, the reconners make up an op order for



