

**THE ETHOS OF THE ROYAL MARINES**

**THE PRECISE APPLICATION OF WILL**

**Dr Anthony King  
Department of Sociology  
University of Exeter**

**MAY 2004**

## **CONTENTS**

<b>Note, Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Biographical Note</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1. Defining Ethos</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Royal Marine and Commando Ethos</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Unity</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. Adaptability</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. Humility</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6. Standards</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>7. Fortitude</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>8. Commando Humour</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>9. Ethos at Work: Operations</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>10. Sustaining Ethos: Dit Culture</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>11. The Precise Application of Will</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>12. The Future of Royal Marines Ethos</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Appendix A: Maps</b>	
<b>Normandy 1944</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Port-en-Bessin</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Falkland Islands</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Mount Harriet</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Appendix B: Inculcating Attitudes</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix C: The Standards Debate</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>42</b>

**Note:**

This paper was commissioned by Brigadier Nick Pounds, in his capacity as Commandant of the Commando Training Centre, in December 2003. He intended it to be an independent and external report designed to assist the Royal Marines to articulate their ethos more fully. It is hoped that the report has gone some way to fulfilling Brigadier Pounds' remit.

**Abstract:**

The current debates about ethos in the military have been wrongly conceived. Ethos is not an intangible spiritual substance which is related in some unspecified way to the moral component of fighting power. Ethos refers simply to what a group does and how it does it. The ethos of the Royal Marines refers to their role and the way they achieve it. Since the Second World War, the Royal Marines have developed a three-fold role. They are a commando force specialising in amphibious, mountain and cold weather warfare. This difficult role requires certain characteristics which are developed in training; unity, adaptability, humility, standards, fortitude and a sense of humour. It is by means of these qualities that the Royal Marines are able to fulfil their role successfully. The ethos of the Royal Marines might be summarised as the precise application of will.

**Acknowledgements:**

This paper could not have been written without the advice and assistance of numerous individuals. I am grateful to Brigadier Nick Pounds for commissioning it and for giving me access to all aspects of training which has been very important to the wider research project of which this report is part. I am also grateful for his comments on earlier drafts of report. Throughout the period of research, the YO training team have been extremely tolerant and helpful. I am indebted to them all: Major Alex Case, Major Duncan Manning, Captain Richard ‘Aldie’ Alderson, Captain Chris Braithwaite (KORB), Colour Sergeants Kevin Cheeseman, Mark ‘Baz’ Thrift, ‘Woolie’ Wooltorton, Sergeants Peter Baldwin, Andy Bridson, John Byrne, Robbie Hawkins, Peter McGinlay and Martin Small. In Commando Training Wing, I am very grateful to Lieutenant-Colonel Conrad Thorpe for his enthusiastic comments on earlier drafts and for the fact that he rightly insisted I needed to see some recruit training and the All-Arms Course to develop the document. Major John Rye, Captain Phil Tinsley, Captain James Price and the training team of 864 Troop, Captain Tony Lever, Sergeant Tony Phillimore and Corporals Chris Dooley, Mark Leader, Steve Randell and Kevin Roberts were all generous with their time. (Former RSM) David Chisnall read and commented on the document and I benefited from my discussions with him. I am indebted to 40 Commando’s Manoeuvre Support Group who talked to me at length about Operation *Telic*, despite the fact that they were preparing for another deployment to Iraq. Finally, I am extremely grateful to the librarians at CTC, Angela Twist and Rachel MacEachern. They provided essential assistance while I was researching this document.

**Biographical Note:**

Anthony King is a reader in sociology at Exeter University. He has published books on football and social theory and is currently researching military culture and European defence policy.

email: [a.c.king@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:a.c.king@exeter.ac.uk)

tel: 01392 263259

## 1. Defining Ethos

Since the 1980s, it has become necessary for public services to justify themselves in order to secure adequate levels of state funding. In addition, since the end of the Cold War, the strategic situation has become increasingly complex for the military and security agencies with new security and defence threats emerging. The current concern of Royal Marines about their ethos is a response to these new economic and strategic pressures. Like other publicly funded services, the Royal Marines need to express their ethos so that they are able to ensure they have a useful role in the new millennium when new military and budgetary threats are imposing on them.

Although the military have felt the need to articulate their ethos in the 1990s, the discussions of it, although extensive, have been confused and unhelpful (e.g. *Naval Review* 1996). Ethos is initially defined in these discussions, following the Oxford English Dictionary, as ‘the characteristic spirit of a particular community’ (Macdonald 1996: 10). As such it is seen as part of or as supporting the moral element of fighting power alongside the physical and conceptual components. Yet, beyond a few adjectives (honour, commitment, integrity, courage, discipline) which remain abstract because they are never defined in relation to specific military practices, the analysis of ethos quickly moves on to quite different questions. Specifically, the analysis of ethos becomes a rumination on ethics. Commentators on ethos are, in fact, diverted by irrelevant questions of morality. In this way, the discussion of ethos focuses on the question of the relationship between the military and civilian society and the potential need for the military to be different from civilian employers. Above all, commentators begin to ask the difficult question of the morality of war and killing. This is clearly an important issue but it is a mistake to conflate ethos with ethics.<sup>1</sup> When ethos is confused for ethics, the subsequent discussions do nothing to justify the existence of a military organisation to a government which is seeking to reduce the defence budget nor do they help the military to define its role in a new era. The confusion of ethos with ethics has reached a high point in the USMC where the discussion of ethos is merely a way of trying to ensure that marines do not engage in illegal practices away from their duties. As such, ethos has almost nothing to do with the operational effectiveness of the Corps. It is little surprise therefore, that in an attempt to create an ethical Corps, the USMC has found it difficult to inculcate its new ‘ethos’ onto operational units. The ethos which they have identified as honour, courage and commitment is irrelevant to what these units actually do (Karcher 2001; Lance 2001). These are merely abstract words which have no practical usage.

In the Royal Marines, the same confusions have often been apparent. In response to the question of what their ethos is, most Royal Marines are unable to express any tangible concept; it is described merely as a jelly which must be nailed to the wall. The task is considered impossible. Ethos is regarded as something magical or sacred which somehow binds Royal Marines together but about which nothing can be said. Indeed, nothing should be said lest this magical mystery is profaned; ‘we should not let daylight in on the magic’, ‘ethos itself cannot be dictated, it can only be felt’ (CGRM 2000: A- 1). Current discussions of ethos reach only stalemate. Yet, all members of the military insist

---

<sup>1</sup> In fact, the ethics of any military force will be a product of its ethos. However, it is a mistake of the first order to confuse ethos – a description of what a military force does – with ethics – a discussion of whether those actions are moral.

that ethos is central to their role. There are two solutions to this paradox. Either, ethos is irrelevant to what the military actually do and the military is simply mystified about its significance. It is unspeakable because like the famous gas, phlogiston, which was once the subject of great scientific investigation, it does not actually exist. Alternatively, ethos exists but the military is unable to speak about it simply because they have misunderstood what they are talking about. It is plain that the latter is the case. The military have, up till now, struggled to discuss ethos not because it does not exist but because they have thought about it in the wrong way. When considering ethos, the military have abstracted from what they actually do until there is nothing left to discuss. In order to advance current discussions, it is necessary only to redefine what is meant by the term, ethos.

Despite the conceptual difficulties which have plagued current discussions, ethos is, in fact, one of the most tangible aspects of human reality. Every social group has an ethos for it is precisely the existence of an ethos which denotes a social group. Ethos certainly includes a spiritual dimension; it encompasses the shared understandings of the group. Yet it is more robust than this spiritual communion. Ethos refers simply to what a human group does and how it does it. Ethos refers to the collective goals which unite humans into recognisable groups and the way those groups together decide how to achieve their goals. Every single human group has an ethos; from football fans to bakers. When the members of a group no longer have an ethos; they dissipate once again into isolated individuals. At a theoretical level, ethos is a simple and tangible reality. Yet, this is not to say it does not present problems when it comes to studying it. In particular, although the underlying reality of every social group, ethos is sometimes difficult for the members of a group to recognise. This is not because it is abstract. The intangibility of ethos results not from its distance from every interaction but precisely the reverse. Ethos is often invisible and un-expressible by members of a group because it is assumed in every single interaction. Only weak groups need to point out their collective ends to members explicitly. In strong groups, the collective purpose and the shared ways of achieving that purpose are intimately understood by every member. They do not need to be expressed explicitly but they are already assumed in every single social encounter. In strong social groups, no encounter occurs without these common ends and means having already been assumed. Consequently, because every encounter presumes these common values and understandings, they become invisible to the members of a group. They become invisible but they are utterly critical to the group's existence.<sup>2</sup>

If ethos refers merely to what a military group does and how it does it, then ethos is not a supporting factor of the moral dimension. On the contrary, ethos underpins and encompasses all the three components of fighting power. Physical assets, moral values and concepts are not related to ethos; together they comprise the ethos of any fighting

---

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the Royal Marines, despite occasionally misperceptions, fully recognise that ethos refers to what they do and how they do it. In the Command General's report on the ethos of the Royal Marines, the comment of a serving marine was highlighted: 'ethos comes from what you do' (CGRM 2000: 3). It is possible to be more direct here and state that ethos is what you do. Indeed, although the CGRM document spirals around the central issue of ethos, ascending into abstract and imprecise discussions of core values and of the relationship between the military and contemporary society, the document finally affirms this 'perceptive' marine's comment: 'Our point of departure remains the requirement to articulate (and among ourselves first) who we think we are and what we think we are about. We articulate this when we articulate our ethos because ethos, as we have seen, comes from what you do, but in the action-centred world of the military, what you are is what you do. (CGRM 2000: 13)

force. To speak of any one of these elements in any context is to talk directly of the ethos of that military organisation. Each component of fighting power has a necessary bearing on what any military organisation does and how it does it. The primacy of ethos is illuminated most effectively by example. From 1750 to 1850, the British Army became adept at the battlefield tactics of time. In opposition to the column of France's revolutionary armies, the British preferred to deploy in lines. What these lines lost in terms of shock effect (emphasised by the French column), they gained in firepower (Holmes 2001; Howard 2000; Keegan 1994). The line maximised the amount of fire which could be brought to bear with the muskets which were then in use and, apart from the American War of Independence where extraneous factors came into play, the British were rarely defeated employing this tactic of the line. The use of the line necessitated the development of certain obvious qualities; exemplary drill, rigid discipline and almost incredible courage. In certain British regiments, these practices and the qualities associated with them are still highly prized. Once again, the ethos of the British Army at this time was not simply some spiritual aspect which supported the moral element. The very moral elements of rigid discipline, drill and courage were inextricably bound up with the conceptual elements (deploying in lines) and the physical assets (the musket). The ethos of the British Army referred to this whole phenomenon, just as the ethos of the French Army, inspired by nationalist and revolutionary ardour, prioritised élan and offensive action. It is notable that in the French Army of the Napoleonic era, the standards of musketry were lower than in the British Army. The ethos of the French Army emphasised shock not fire.

The ethos of a military organisation is not intangible, nor is it a subsidiary part of the moral component. Ethos refers to what a group does and how it does it. Ethos refers simply to how the military actually fights and how it organises and prepares itself to do so. In short, ethos is the mission and the means. However, although ethos is manifestly identifiable, the claim often made by Royal Marines that ethos is sacred or magical is not completely mistaken. Social groups exist insofar humans recognise a special bond of mutual obligation to each other. Consequently, it is understandable why Royal Marines should see their ethos as magical or sacred. For the Royal Marines to be a unified group, members of the Corps must invest their relationship with each other with a special power; they regard themselves as obligated to each other. However, although the bond between Royal Marines must be special in order for this group to operate effectively, their ethos is, nevertheless, not ineffable. The ethos refers to the common goals which the Royal Marines pursue and how they achieve them. A description of ethos does not profane the sacred. It recognises and describes what the special relationship between Royal Marines allows them to do. Moreover, a description of ethos may allow members of this organisation to recognise its distinctive characteristics and strengths. In addition, with a greater knowledge of itself, the Royal Marines may be better positioned in relation to an increasingly uncertain world.

## **2. Royal Marines and Commando Ethos**

The Royal Marines were first formed in 1664 as sea-soldiers for the Second Dutch War. The long history of the Corps is a source of pride to serving marines and the Globe and Laurel, the Corps cap-badge, is an important totem for this social group. However, the

role which the Royal Marines perform today – and subsequently its current ethos – has a much more recent history. In response to Churchill’s demand for the raising of raiding forces to harass the Continent after the debacle of May 1940, the first Commando units to be raised were explicitly Army ones, consisting of volunteers from all regiments and services. It is true that some Royal Marines volunteered for these forces but in so doing they resigned from the Corps itself. The Royal Marines only became associated with the commando role from 1942 when Admiral Mountbatten designated the Royal Marines for this role. The first Royal Marine Commandos was a volunteer unit, designated A Commando, and later renamed 40 Commando. Regular Royal Marine battalions were subsequently seconded to commando training, with those that failed the training process returned to the Division. The primary reason for raising Royal Marines Commandos was purely numerical - the Special Service Brigades needed enlarging - but there were also other significant reasons. In 1941, as commando units began to be raised, there was concern of how to use them properly. Admiral Roger Keyes, Chief of Combined Operations, cogently argued that these amphibious forces could be employed effectively only if they were closely integrated into the Royal Navy. He emphasized that the Army had no understanding of how to employ amphibious commando troops: ‘The War Office and the Army commanders have never had any use for them’ (Keyes 1981b: 229). The Royal Navy, by contrast, had extensive experience of transporting troops (above all the Royal Marines). It was at this point that the Royal Marines became particularly relevant. For Keyes, the conversion of the Royal Marines into a commando force would obviate the difficulties inherent in combined operations because the Royal Marines were already under the formal institutional control of the Royal Navy: ‘By using Marines in the initial stage [of an assault on Norway in 1940], when the time factor was of vital importance, the Royal Navy would be independent of delays consequent on combined action with a General, who might not work with the Admiral as well as Wolfe did with Saunders off Quebec’ (Keyes 1981a:37; see also *Globe and Laurel* August 1942: 74). Citing the historical precedents of the Heights of Abraham and Zeebrugge, Keyes and, then, Mountbatten claimed that the Royal Marines were Britain’s natural commando force, which role had been usurped by the Army. In fact, the Royal Marines became a commando force due primarily to immediate operational and institutional reasons; it was in the Royal Navy’s (and the nation’s) interests that they should become a commando force because the Royal Navy would have closer control over these forces and would, therefore, be able to deploy them more effectively. Interestingly, the Royal Marines themselves, unlike Mountbatten and Keyes, did not see the commando role as their obvious birthright. There was considerable friction between the Commando Royal Marines and their blue-bereted associates during the War and up into the 1950s when the Royal Marines became a totally commando-oriented, green-bereted organisation. It is noticeable that in various accounts of Achnacarry, some Royal Marines who were seconded to commando training were not initially enthralled by its ethos. Some Royal Marines officers were appalled that they would have to undergo the same training as their men (Gilchrist 1960: 68-69). In the Corps magazine, *Globe and Laurel*, suspicion of the commando role is clear. There are few initial references to the commandos in 1942 at all. In December 1942, the editors apologized for the absence of any report on the Dieppe raid which was attributed to the fact that the correspondent had ‘over-indulged in the sort of rough fun and games to which commandos are addicted’ or more bluntly ‘perhaps his

green beret has gone to his head!’ (*Globe and Laurel* December 1942: 271). Although a joke, the tone of the apology demonstrates a clear distinction between the Royal Marines and the new commando formations, of which the former were minimally suspicious. In August 1942, *Globe and Laurel* published a feature article from the *Picture Post* which described Commando Training and which argued that the Royal Marines were the natural force to adopt this role. The piece concluded memorably:

The commandos are tough. Vaagso is the proof of that. The Marines are tough. Crete and Norway – where they fought two hopeless Thermopylaes – are the proof of that. Wait till they mill in together. (*Globe and Laurel* August 1942: 75)

Although the piece intended to demonstrate the natural union of Royal Marines and Commandos, it in fact highlighted the difference between them. Were the forces as compatible as the author made out, then his argument would have been supererogatory and the Royal Marines would have moved naturally in the 1940s to a commando role. The piece urged a union of the forces precisely because the Royal Marines saw no necessary connection between themselves and the Commandos. The positioning of the article in the *Globe and Laurel* was also extremely significant. It was clearly intended as a way of publicly expressing and easing the mounting tensions between the new Commando units and the established blue-bereted Divisions. This tension persisted after the War. General Sir Jeremy Moore, for instance, has recorded hostility on the part of blue-bereted officers for his selection of the commando role above a traditional Royal Marines one (Neillands 2000: 44). For them, he had betrayed the true Royal Marines ethos.

The history of the Corps and the *Globe and Laurel* itself are an essential part of the ethos of the Royal Marines today but it is important to realise that contemporary ethos is not a natural product of three hundred years’ service. The ethos of today’s Marines emerged in the 1940s as the Corps took on the commando role and became completely institutionalized in the 1950s when the Royal Marines were reduced to a single brigade; 3 Commando Brigade. At that point, Royal Marine ethos and the commando ethos became indivisible. The history of the Corps and the *Globe and Laurel* are significant because they support and affirm this commando ethos, appropriated relatively recently by the Corps. It is noticeable that the *Globe and Laurel* are now always imagined to be attached to a green beret. The blue beret, once taken as the symbol of the true Royal Marines, is now reserved only for untrained marines. The *Globe and Laurel* signify the Royal Marines’ separateness from other infantry units and denotes their distinctive, *commando* identity. It does not communicate to Royal Marines serving today the once honourable roles of naval gunnery or regular light infantry. The institutional memory of the Royal Marines remains important not because the Royal Marines really are the direct descendants of those soldiers who fought at Trafalgar then, but because this institutional memory imbues the current commando ethos of the Corps with a sacred tradition. The current appeal to a three hundred year history is a case of an invented tradition. Current practices and the current ethos are given a history longer than they in fact deserve in order to empower them in the imaginations of serving marines today. The symbol of the *Globe and Laurel* remains appropriate because, like the forebears, the Royal Marines today must be prepared to fight and win anywhere. The difference is that their current

commando role – the way they fight – has little to do with their forebears who also wore this badge, although for both, the globe was their theatre of operations. The badge has effectively changed meanings in the course of history, once communicating a noble blue-bereted role, now signifying the green-bereted commando role. The ethos of the Royal Marines today is a commando ethos and, ultimately, the commando ethos is now embodied by the Royal Marines.<sup>3</sup>

The indivisibility of the commando and Royal Marines identity is clearly demonstrated by the Commando Course itself. There are many non-Royal Marines commandos (about 30 per cent of 3 Commando Brigade) who perform vital support roles in the Brigade; 29 Commando Regiment, 59 Commando Squadron Engineers, for instance. The purpose of the All-Arms course is to train and test members of the three services in order that those who pass can take their place within the Brigade. Unlike the Second World War, where the Royal Marines came to the independent Basic Commando Training Centre at Achnacarry as candidates, the Royal Marines are in complete charge of the All-Arms course. The course is based in the Commando Training Wing at Lympstone and is run by a Royal Marines training team, assisted by green-bereted army staff. The Royal Marines are the guardian of commando standards, determining who will be allowed to join this exclusive club. Similarly, the indivisibility of the commando ethos from Royal Marine ethos is demonstrated on the Commando Course for recruits and Young Officers (YOs). The candidate who most displays the commando qualities (which does not necessarily mean that they are the best candidate on the course) is awarded the Commando Medal. Although the Medal reflects the commando values, these values are in practice indistinguishable from Royal Marines qualities. A recruit who wins the Commando Medal embodies the ethos of the Royal Marines. From 1942 until the 1950s when there were blue- and green-bereted Royal Marines, it would have been possible to identify Royal Marines values independently of commando ones. An excellent Royal Marine might lack many of the essential qualities which are represented by the Commando Medal. In the *Globe and Laurel*, for instance, 45 Commando's correspondent draws a clear line between commando and Royal Marines values. He regretted that 'we have lost many officers, NCOs and men' who failed to pass the course at Achnacarry but jokily encouraged others to volunteer for commando service; 'it is safe to say that if you can run like an antelope, climb like a gibbon and carry a load like a packhorse, all at the same time of course, you are missing your vocation where you are and should come along and be one of us' (*Globe and Laurel* October 1943: 251). The line between 'us', commandos, and 'you', Royal Marines, is stark. Today there is no such disjunction. The Commando Medal represents the central values of the Royal Marines for the Medal like the *Globe and Laurel* itself is worn by a green-bereted individual.

For the last sixty years, that is, in the years of institutionally effective memory, the Royal Marines have been a commando organisation. Commando units differ from line regiments in the kinds of missions which they carry out. Commando units are designed to operate in the most difficult circumstances. They are a theatre-entry force which will often operate in environments where the enemy outnumber and out-gun them.

---

<sup>3</sup> It could be argued that the Parachute Regiment also operates according to a commando ethos (but with its own version of it relating to their different role). It is interesting to note that the Parachute Regiment originated from No.2 Commando during the Second World War and when all Army commando formations were disbanded in 1946, their members transferred directly into the Parachute Regiment.

Commando units are able to achieve objectives which might be unattainable by other units by exploiting high levels of professional skill and endurance. As part of its commando role, the Royal Marines specialises in amphibious assaults and in mountain and cold weather operations. These specialisms are a historic product. The amphibious role is directly related to the Second World War where all green bereted commando units, be they Army or Royal Marines, operated from the sea. The mountain role also comes from the Second World War. A Commando Snow and Mountain War Training Camp, created in the winter of 1942, eventually became part of the Brigade Patrol Troop of 3 Commando Brigade (Dunning 2000: 163). The Royal Marines' mountain specialism has historical roots in its Second World War amphibious role as well. One of the main obstacles which threatened amphibious operations were cliffs and the commandos developed a Cliff Assault Wing during the Second World War. By 1970, the Cliff Assault Wing had expanded its sphere of operation beyond cliff-climbing to mountaineering in general and became the Mountain and Arctic Warfare Cadre (Foster 1993: 102-3). These two historically separate origins of the Royal Marines' mountain warfare specialism have now merged and are institutionally indistinguishable. The result is that Royal Marines are regarded as amongst the best mountain troops in the world. Amphibious and mountain commando operations are the specific task of the Royal Marines Commandos, although their sphere of activities extends to all theatres.<sup>4</sup> The Royal Marines have a certain way of carrying out their commando mission – and this distinctive mode of operation is their ethos.

### **3. Unity**

Military organisations are necessarily hierarchical. Under the pressure of combat, a clear chain of command is essential. The Royal Marines no less than other military organisations have clear and well-established chains of command; deference to authority has become a matter of habit. Yet, the Royal Marines are a peculiar military organisation. While a chain of command is clear and respect for rank is evident, a unified spirit infuses the Royal Marines. Although divided by rank, Royal Marines are unified by their commando role. Above all, they are unified by the fact that they all wear the green beret. The wearing of the same head-dress is not in itself necessarily significant. However, the green beret represents the fact that all Royal Marines officers and men have passed through the Commando Training Centre at Lympstone, attaining the required standard. Apart from the SAS and SBS, the Royal Marines are a unique military institution in that officers and men train alongside each other from their first day in the Corps. Recruits see Young Officers training at Lympstone on a daily basis and they see that the Young

---

<sup>4</sup> The central features of Royal Marine ethos described below are those which are held as ideal by the Corps – although, as the material discussed reveals, there is substantial evidence to demonstrate that these standards exist in Royal Marine practice. It is likely that individual Royal Marines sometimes fail to act in a way which is in line with Royal Marine ethos. These individual lapses are deliberately not discussed in this document, although the Royal Marines might themselves be able to use the definitions provided here to determine when members of the Corps act in ways which are against Royal Marine ethos. It should also be noted that, although Royal Marine ethos is distinctive, reflecting the different role which the Corps perform, there will be elements of their ethos which are shared with other parts of the British Armed Forces. This is only to be expected since the British Armed Forces operate according to the same doctrine and the Royal Marines share standard operational procedures with the British Army.

Officers have to submit to the same regimes of discipline and physical examination as themselves. Indeed, the recruits cannot but note that the regime which the officers have to endure is significantly harder than their own course. Although not the most significant difference between officer and recruit training, one of the most visible differences between the standards required is the fact that officers must perform three of the four commando tests in a faster time than the recruits. Particularly striking is the fact that officers have to complete the thirty-mile march across Dartmoor in 7 hours as opposed to the recruits' 8 hour limit. The higher standards required of officers was exemplified recently when an injured YO took this commando test alone with a Recruit Troop in December 2003. He began his 30 miler behind the recruit syndicates and, in order to pass the test, had to ensure that he finished the course in front of them all. Chasing the recruits was intended to give him incentive but it was also deliberately designed to demonstrate to the recruits not only that officers had to do the same things as the recruits but that more was demanded of them. The common training of men and officers is a vital element of commando ethos. It fosters a genuine solidarity between the ranks which is critical to operational effectiveness. It is noticeable that Royal Marines will often describe the Corps as a family and it is significant that the Corps is small enough so that Royal Marines will be aware of the reputation of other Royal Marines, even though they may never have personally worked with them. Social unity is maintained by continuous personal interaction among the Royal Marines and communicated by word of mouth. This solidarity persists throughout the career of a member of the Royal Marines and is exemplified in various stories which marines tell to each other. The full significance of these stories will be discussed below (see 10. Sustaining Ethos: Dit Culture). For instance, a commando unit were once training on Dartmoor on a difficult exercise in winter. The marines were struggling to dig trenches which kept filling up with water. During his inspections of their position, the RSM was asked by a marine whether the CO, with whom the RSM was sharing a trench, also dug his own trench. The marine presumably assumed that the CO would be above such tasks. The RSM replied, 'If he doesn't help dig it, he doesn't get to use it'. Whether the CO did in fact dig his own trench or not cannot be confirmed, but the RSM's reply wittily demonstrated the close solidarity between the ranks. Not only was the solidarity between the RSM and the CO highlighted, as would be expected, but the RSM was able to emphasise the unity of experience which united Lieutenant Colonel with a junior marine. In the Royal Marines, everyone has to dig their own trenches. This unity of effort induces a feeling of social unity.<sup>5</sup>

The link between the ranks is further emphasised by the Royal Marines practice of 'Corps commissioning' officers. Each year a number of marines and corporals will be selected for officer training and put through the YO course, sometimes trained by sergeants under whom they had previously served. It is widely believed in the Royal Marines that it would take a 'small-minded' sergeant to resent this promotion of a junior.

---

<sup>5</sup> Kiplings' poem which describes the strength of the wolf being the pack and vice versa is often cited by marines when discussing ethos (e.g. CGRM 2000: 2). Although imprecise, the poem evokes the centrality of unity and loyalty to Royal Marine ethos. There are other reasons why a wolf pack should be so attractive as a image to Royal Marines. Not only are wolves social animals that operate together but they exist in mountainous and arctic environments and are known for their hardiness and intelligence. A wolf is an appropriate totemic animal for a commando organization.

Neither do Corps Commissioned officers want or need to hide their origins. Corps Commissioned officers who have won the King's Badge will wear this insignia which categorically marks their original status as marines on their officer's uniforms. Indeed, General Pounds wore his King's Badge on his uniform until his death. The uniform is now significantly displayed at the Royal Marines Museum at Eastney, symbolising to all who see it that while there is a chain of command in the Royal Marines, there is minimal social distinction between the ranks. Whatever the rank, those serving in the Corps are unified by the fact that they are all Royal Marines, from most junior marine to General.

The unity of the Royal Marines is specifically emphasised during the Commando Course, when unselfishness is highlighted as one of the commando qualities. In training, Royal Marines are expected to assist their fellows in all circumstances. There are numerous stories which illustrate when this selflessness has been demonstrated; that is when the individual has specifically prioritised collective goals above his own well-being. In the early 1990s, a YO Batch on its Commando Course was performing its firing test after the completion of the Endurance Course. After eight rounds, one of the YO's rifles jammed and he was unable to clear the weapon. His Batch-mate firing beside him noted his colleague's difficulties and, not knowing whether his colleague had scored the requisite eight hits before his weapon jammed, acted immediately. He had already achieved his eight hits and put his last two rounds into his Batch-mate's target to ensure that the latter passed the shooting test and would not have to re-do the whole of the Endurance Course. The Commandant and OC of Officer Training Wing were present at the incident and recorded the highest praise for the YO who had assisted his Batch-mate. They emphasised that the act precisely embodied the commando virtue of selflessness.

It is interesting that P Company, the airborne brigade's selection test, involves few group tests and even those tests which are done in a group, the log and stretcher races, are judged by individual performance. By contrast, although there are certain criteria tests which individuals must pass in order to complete the Commando Course, the group effort is encouraged to a much greater extent. Royal Marines who have directed the All Arms course have noted that when candidates first arrive, they are divided by their cap-badges. Gradually, during the course as they have to work closely together on yomps and attacks, a new sense of unity emerges in the group and this unity properly reflects the commando spirit. P Company is designed to produce a different kind of soldier for a different kind of role; it reflects a quite different ethos.

While selflessness is prized and rewarded, those who do not contribute to the collective good are criticised and ultimately ostracised. In units, in particular, to be called 'jack' is the ultimate condemnation. In recruit training, the importance of the 'buddy-buddy' system is repeatedly emphasised to recruits. Recruits are, for instance, encouraged to assist each other in preparing themselves for drill, even though the presentation of oneself for drill seems a wholly individual task. On parade, drill leaders stress to new recruits the requirement to help each other with the cleaning of their boots, checking each other off, even suggesting that if one recruit is particularly good at something, he should be tasked to perform that role for all his colleagues while they repay his help by assisting him in other ways. In the field, the poor performance of recruit troops is often put down to the fact that individuals within the group are 'jack'. Unity of effort is constantly and forcefully emphasised; most procedures – such as harbour drills - depend precisely upon collective effort and recruits are reminded of the importance of joint action by collective

punishments. In YO training, the Batch is deliberately given more independence than recruit troops so that they can develop their leadership abilities. This independence is vital but it creates a potential problem since ‘jack’ individuals, if cunning enough, can conceal their selfishness from the directing staff. To remedy this, the directing staff teach the YOs how to recognise a selfish individual who does not contribute to the group and to isolate that individual with the aim of excluding him from training. In fact, this isolation of selfish individuals from a YO Batch is a crucial part of training. It demonstrates to the batch, the unity of effort which is required in the Royal Marines. The group which finally passes out of YO training consists only of those members who are committed in every instance to their fellows. The expectation is that Royal Marines should be selfless filters into everyday social interactions. For instance, when on training exercises with the YOs, the directing staff will always offer their hot drinks or any food they have opened to the other directing staff present. This exchange of food and drink occurs irrespective of rank. On a recent exercise, a Troop Officer had difficulty lighting his stove to heat a drink between two deliberate attacks. The stove eventually burned fitfully and only half warmed his hot chocolate. Nevertheless, despite his difficulties in heating his drink, he immediately offered it to the Troop Sergeants who were present. A commando unit cannot operate under the difficult conditions in which it finds itself unless all its members instinctively prioritise collective goals and seek to help each other to contribute to their fulfilment. Close social unity allows commando units to operate effectively in environments of stress where less cohesive groups would simply disintegrate.

The selflessness encouraged in training finds a more general expression in the Royal Marines in the form of loyalty. Royal Marines are loyal towards the Corps which, in practice, means that they consider the interests of their colleagues before their own. More particularly, the command of officers and NCOs is dependent upon the fact that they have served and cared for their men; they have demonstrated their loyalty to their men in return for which they are respected and followed. In his biography of his time in the Corps, Carney Lake describes this loyalty as arising ‘through the phenomenon of shared hardship and experience’ (Lake 1994: 28). This loyalty, in the first instance towards fellow Marines and ultimately to the Corps, distinguishes the Royal Marines from many civilian institutions, the members of which knowingly work only for a salary and not for each other. This cross-rank loyalty is graphically demonstrated by the dedications respectively written by Carney Lake, a junior NCO, and Nick Vaux, a Major-General, in their books on the Royal Marines.

To the riflemen and recce-troopers, corporals, troop sergeants and officers of Her Majesty’s Royal Marines Commandos, whose honourable profession I had the privilege to follow for six years, this book is dedicated with respect and affection. (Lake 1994: vii)

This book is dedicated to Royal Marines with nicknames like ‘Smudge’, ‘Taff’, ‘Chalky’, and ‘Sticks’, who have enriched my career with challenge and humour. In this short war, they displayed the legendary courage, endurance and discipline that have so often made the British invincible. It was my exceptional fortune to command 42 Commando when they proved this once again. (Vaux 1986: x).

Despite the apparent gulf in rank of the two authors, the dedications are almost identical in tone. The sense of debt to others is palpable in both, demonstrating a close bond of loyalty which unites the Corps.

This solidarity between the ranks is operationally important. It is interesting to note that this solidarity between the ranks may have improved significantly in the last decade. In the 1970s and early 1980s (with the obvious exception of the Falklands), the Royal Marines were deployed primarily on Northern Ireland peace-keeping duties or on relatively static, though arduous, Northern flank duties in Norway. Clearly, the Royal Marines Commandos have been always been tasked for expeditionary roles anywhere in the world, as their list of campaigns since the end of the Second World War demonstrates, but expeditionary missions have now once again come more dramatically to the fore. As Operations *Jacana* and *Telic* demonstrate, Royal Marines are now as likely to be deployed east as west of the Suez which was not the case in the 1970s and 1980s. It is noticeable that, in the 1970s and 80s, senior officers remember the relationships between officers and men very differently. One senior officer, for instance, recalled that when he was a subaltern in the early 1980s, the COs of units differed very significantly from COs now. These old COs had distinctively bad tempers and when they lost their temper, which they frequently did, they went almost mad. The results were in the short-term effective; things did get done because the entire unit was afraid of the CO. However, because they were feared, the COs were hated. Consequently, they ‘lived in a bubble’ because their subordinates were afraid to tell them important information lest it provoke a violent reaction. This style of officership was plainly not optimal, especially for a commando force. Another senior officer confirmed the point, though he was more critical of the officer corps as a whole. He recalled that when he joined the Corps as a recruit, the relationship between officers and men was much more distant. Officers were arrogant and were seldom seen in close contact with their men. This senior officer condemned the culture of the officer corps at that time; ‘It really did not make me proud to be a marine’. He claimed that the growing unity between officers and men and the improvement in officership began to occur in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s directly as a result of the new kinds of operations. It is possible that both senior officers exaggerate the difference between officer culture in the past and the present and that, perhaps, better relations persisted in the past – in the 1970s and 1980s – than they recall. It is noticeable that in Carney Lake’s account of his time with 40 Commando in the 1970s, there is no suggestion at any stage in the book that his officers were arrogant and, indeed, at various points the closeness of officers and men is highlighted. For instance, he describes a riot in Belfast in which a CO and six marines stood together in the face of a crowd (Lake 1994: 76). Although their memories may exaggerate the arrogance of officers in the past, the testimony of the senior officers emphasises a crucial point, unity between the officers and men is now of paramount importance. It is a fundamental feature of the Royal Marines. The senior officer in any situation is formally recognised to have authority in the Royal Marines. However, it is also expected that this officer will take advice from his subordinates. Indeed, in interactions, the quality and frequency of the advice which senior officers receive is very good because an openness is encouraged between ranks in the Royal Marines – fostered in the first instance at Lympstone. Subordinate ranks can talk with unusual freedom with senior commissioned and non-commissioned officers. The openness between the ranks in the Royal Marines and the

genuine solidarity within the Corps is directly relevant to operational effectiveness. On commando operations, units are put under extraordinary levels of pressure. The tasks which must be performed are difficult even without the interference of the enemy. This requires unity of effort. Common training and social solidarity are a critical part of Royal Marines ethos because they allow the Royal Marines to perform their commando mission.

#### **4. Adaptability**

Social unity allows marines to speak easily across the ranks and this social solidarity facilitates the development of a second important element of Royal Marines ethos. Social unity allows the institution as a whole to be adaptable. It has become institutionalised that the Royal Marines should be open to information and opinion from every available angle and be prepared to adapt to this new knowledge. This openness to knowledge is an appropriate ethos for a commando force. The commando role demands an ability to adapt at short notice and to respond to new developments. While manifestly self-confident and proud of itself, the Royal Marines are noticeably open to external institutions whether civilian or military.<sup>6</sup> Training methods at Lympstone have been significantly developed after input from sports scientists at the University of Swansea and psychological dimensions of training have been examined to maximise the number of recruits who pass out, while maintaining standards.

It is possible to exemplify the adaptability of the Royal Marines from the highest organisational and strategic down to tactical levels. In the face of the new strategic environment, the Royal Marines have developed and now adopted a new orbat described in the document, *Commando 21*. Although this document is a detailed statement of the evolution of commando units into the next century, it involves two prime developments both of which have been implemented and employed operationally on Operations *Jacana* and *Telic*. *Commando 21* outlines the adaptation of the commando units in the Brigade. Instead of three, basically interchangeable rifle companies and a support company, commando units now consist of two 'close' companies, more or less traditional rifle companies, organised for the assault role, and two 'stand-off' companies, armed with Milans and sustained-fire GPMGS and heavy machine guns (HMGs). The creation of stand-off companies within units is an important development and, especially in relation to the Milans and HMGs, moves these companies and perhaps the units themselves away from the strictly light-infantry role which was the commando's exclusive mode of operation. Whereas, commandos in the Second World War carried only Bren guns and 2-inch mortars, Brownings and Milans are difficult to carry. However, although eroding some of the commando units' non-vehicular mobility, the development of stand-off companies have made the units more powerful and therefore ultimately more independent and flexible. *Commando 21* also envisages a much more vehicle dependent commando unit. BVs (soon to be replaced by ATV(P)s) have been exploited more fully while Pinzgauers and Land-Rovers, recently introduced into commando units, have been central to deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, in particular, the adoption of vehicles proved essential, even though, within the Royal Marines Commandos, there was

---

<sup>6</sup> This document is a case in point. In discussions of this paper, one senior officer stressed that he wanted be told how to make the Royal Marines better.

little precedence for such vehicular dependence. Nevertheless, so successful was the use of the vehicles in Afghanistan, that the Royal Marines have assisted in the development of doctrine on the use of Land-Rovers and Pinzgauers. The point here that while the traditional form of commando mobility – the boot – remains essential, in the new global context, vehicular mobility has become necessary if the British armed forces are going to be effective in dominating large and potentially hostile areas. It is important to recognise the vehicles are not signs that commando units have become weaker and now need transport whereas in the past they were strong enough to walk everywhere. New roles demand greater mobility, flexibility and firepower. Only the adoption of new forms of transport has allowed the Royal Marines to fulfil these new roles. The Royal Marines have adapted their force structure and their methods of operations in the face of new threats and demands. *Commando 21* demonstrates the centrality of adaptability to the Royal Marines. Ironically, it demonstrates that in order to stay true to their ethos, the Royal Marines may have to transform themselves so radically that they are fighting in a quite different way to their forebears. Commando ethos demands flexibility which allows the Royal Marines to operate in ways which are not strictly part of their commando past.

This adaptability is demonstrated at the tactical level. After the Iraq conflict in 2003, Brigadier Jim Dutton was impressed by the USMC fire support. Unlike every other military organisation which employs sequential fire support, with air-support preceding or following artillery support, the USMC have developed a simultaneous system of fire support, where air and artillery fire is co-ordinated for simultaneous strike. The effect of co-ordinated fire-support is devastating but it is extremely difficult to achieve and requires extensive training. Brigadier Dutton wants the Royal Marines to develop this simultaneous fire-support capacity and is currently in discussions with the Royal Artillery to develop it. There are numerous other examples of tactical adaptability. En route to the Falkland Islands in 1982, it was decided that the Royal Marines Gazelle helicopters required additional armament in order to protect them. It was decided that they should be equipped with GPMGs slung beneath the cockpit or on the skids. In order to develop the best design, a competition was arranged within the Royal Marines Air Squadron with each flight, developing ways of fixing these guns to their Gazelle helicopters. The winner's design would be adopted by the entire squadron. Of course, each crew only had what was on board ship available but, despite the limited resources, a successful design was developed which was employed operationally on the Falkland Islands themselves. Interestingly, almost exactly the same process occurred on HMS *Ocean* before Operation *Telic*. There, the Manoeuvre Support Group (MSG) designed new mounts on its Pinzgauers for GPMGs by improvising with angle-irons and other available material on board ship. In action, the mounts for the GPMGs worked extremely well. The members of the MSG were conscious that their innovativeness was in line Royal Marine traditions. Once ashore in Iraq, tactical adaptability continued to be demonstrated by the marines. Before this conflict it was widely believed that mortars were ineffective in urban warfare. The high trajectory and the limited payload of a mortar bomb seemed to render them irrelevant to house clearing. However, in Iraq, commando units developed an innovative new way of using 51mm mortars (theoretically the least useful in urban warfare). Instead of setting these weapons in their usually upright position with bombs delivered on a curving trajectory, mortars were positioned nearly horizontally, wedged sideways against sandbags or banks. Bombs were slotted in sideways and then fired on flat trajectories into

the side of houses to create mouse-holes through which the assaulting marines could climb. Adaptability is central to what the Royal Marines Commandos do and how they do it; it is fundamental part of their ethos.

It is interesting to consider the origins of this adaptability. It seems probable that the Royal Marines emphasis on adaptability is a product of the maritime and, more specifically, amphibious environment in which they operate. The Royal Navy sees itself as a 'can-do' organisation. Although the phrase is unfortunately American, it has an identifiable and grounded meaning. When the Royal Navy deploy, they become self-sufficient. By necessity, they will be operating many miles from their home bases in Britain and they must therefore seek to achieve their missions with the materials immediately available to them. They cannot call for additional support which, in many cases, is weeks away. The Royal Navy is 'can-do' in the sense that it will attempt to achieve any mission which is given to it, with the means which it has available. The Royal Navy's history is replete with examples of this characteristic; it is a part of naval ethos. The Royal Marines Commandos demonstrate a similar ethos but they have not learnt adaptability from their parent institution by osmosis. They prize adaptability because this is a quality which amphibious missions demand, just as the Royal Navy's maritime missions demand adaptability from it. Operating in a similar environment with related tasks, these two institutions have developed a shared characteristic.

Royal Marines are consciously aware that adaptability is an essential part of their organisational culture. Innovation and improvisation are specifically tested in training. An important part of the Commando Course involves uncertainty. YOs undergoing this Course are on 24 hour stand-by. They do not know what they will be asked to do nor when they will be asked to do it. The Course specifically demands from them an ability to improvise instantly drawing on the resources of the group to achieve their missions. In the language of the Royal Marines, commando must be able to 'cuff it'; they must be able to act off the cuff, producing results in any given circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Royal Marines take pride in their ability to innovate and improvise, regarding even the most difficult tasks as initiative tests; they boast that 'no cuff is too tough'.<sup>8</sup> Royal Marines are institutionally prepared for uncertainty and for the need to adapt and improvise. It seems likely that commando adaptability is at least partially derived from their amphibious role, but the Royal Marines' adaptability has produced innovations which are very distant from any specifically sea-borne activity.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Some concern that health and safety issues has interfered with the development of initiative at recruit level was expressed. For fear of legal action, CTC has to control and direct recruits more closely than in the past with the result that they are more dependent upon NCOs.

<sup>8</sup> Royal Marines sometimes attribute their ability to improvise to the small size. Unlike the much larger army with it specifically designated roles for different regiments, the Corps must be flexible enough to fulfill a diversity of roles in order to sustain itself. Although the British Army as a whole is some 14 times the size of the Royal Marines, it is a mistake to think that the Corps is small. At 6000 men, it is the largest single Regiment in the British forces and its size (especially since it is such a unified force) is one of its prime strengths. In the new economic and strategic environment, the concentration of resources and the economy of scale which the Royal Marines offer are very attractive to government.

<sup>9</sup> During the foot and mouth crisis in 2000, CTC demonstrated Royal Marine adaptability. New training areas were found very quickly - in many cases in the United States - so that the effects of the crisis on training were minimal in terms of the throughput of recruit troops. The use of US training areas has had an interesting unintended effect. Training with the USMC has now become an established part of YO training

## 5. Humility

The Royal Marines' adaptability is closely related to another element of their ethos: humility. As the Royal Marines often say, 'understatement is a religion in the Corps'. This is not just false modesty. Arrogant organisations do not have anything to learn from others and arrogance leads to inflexibility and rigidity. In order to be able to adapt and innovate, it is essential that the Corps, while proud of its standards, remains sufficiently self-critical – humble enough – that it can recognise and adopt the good practices of other institutions. It is essential that the Royal Marines are humble enough to learn new methods even from the most unlikely sources which might make success in the future more likely. Humility also contributes to the social unity between the ranks. Throughout YO training, the need for independent, initiative and confidence is stressed to the YOs. However, although YOs must lead, the style of leadership style which is inculcated is distinctive. Conceit is not tolerated. YOs are expected to lead by the fact that they are professionally competent and they take care of their men and NCOs.

In a recent YO training exercise, YOs were practising their orders at Okehampton Battle Camp. Members of a YO section were taking turns giving orders on a hypothetical operation in which an observation post (OP) was being inserted in the vicinity of Scorhill on the eastern side of Dartmoor. The section sergeant de-briefed each YO at the end of their orders, advising him where he had made mistakes and giving him an indication of what his grade would have been had this been a formal test. One of the YOs stood up to give his orders and, in line with the convention, employed a bivvy pole to point out details on the models and illustrate his orders. However, in describing the scheme of manoeuvre, the YO adopted an unfortunate manner. He pointed the bivvy pole at respective members of the section, barking, 'You', at each in turn when he described his colleagues' roles. At the end of this YO's orders, the sergeant criticised the YO's style of command very severely. He emphasised that arrogantly pointing a bivvy pole at members of one's section was totally inappropriate: 'Don't say "You" when you are talking to your marines. They will dismiss you as a cocky twat'. An arrogant officer is the just object of the most extreme forms of vilification. Neither the offending officer nor the other YOs present could have misunderstood the point. Arrogance is antithetical to officership in the Royal Marines. In fact, the importance of humility goes all the way down the chain of command in the Royal Marines. A sergeant described the corporals in the Royal Marines as the backbone of the Corps and emphasised that it was their pride in getting the sections working well which made the Royal Marines, the force that they were. However, in order to be an effective corporal in close and constant contact with subordinates, the essential quality was humility. Corporals could be effective only insofar as they adopted an open style of command in which they were prepared to be flexible in their dealings with junior members of their section.<sup>10</sup>

---

which is operationally significant in the light of the fact that British forces are drawing ever closer to America.

<sup>10</sup> The importance of humility – and learning from others, including subordinates – was emphasized recently by Major Generals Julian Thompson and Nick Vaux. Julian Thompson cited an example in Cyprus in the 1950s when a junior marine proposed the idea of setting cordons to catch EOKA operatives from inside villages outwards. The troop would pretend to drive through the village, stop and rapidly deploy into a cordon from the centre of the village. The result was that Thompson's troop caught three operatives

The Royal Marines are an elite force and consequently, there is always a danger that while they might remain humble towards each other they might view outsiders with contempt. There is evidence that the Royal Marines are capable of this arrogance towards others. The Army are known as ‘Percy Pongo’ and, although not as crude as the Parachute Regiment’s term - ‘craphat’ - for all non-airborne forces, this phrase is minimally unflattering. Similarly, the Royal Navy themselves are occasionally referred to as ‘matelots’ while the RAF are known as ‘crabs’; although the criticisms of the RAF among the Royal Marines seem universal across the Royal Navy and the Army. The Royal Marines need to be careful that their *esprit de corps*, their unity and loyalty to one another, does not spill over into arrogance and contempt for others. In point of fact, although some Royal Marines may be contemptuous of others, such disdain for other units and services is perhaps the preserve of the more junior ranks; precisely those individuals who are less certain of their own ‘Royal’ heritage because they have not served long enough in the Corps. In YO training, the term ‘Percy Pongo’ is never expressed by directing staff. Indeed, the directing staff have never suggested to the YOs that they have joined an elite unit or that the Royal Marines are the ‘best’. The YOs may well believe that they are joining Britain’s finest fighting force but such assumptions are neither affirmed nor denied. The directing staff communicate only the importance of achieving the required standards. There is no hyperbole or attempt to idealise the Corps for the YOs. Other combat arms and support services are not vilified for their inadequacies. They simply have their ways of doing their business. Indeed, many other combat units are praised for their professionalism. For instance, the tank regiments are held in very high regard. Moreover, it is stressed that without supporting arms the Royal Marines would be unable to operate. The Royal Marines are well aware of their dependence upon other non-commando forces and as long as those other units or arms perform their different roles professionally, the Royal Marines are respectful to them.<sup>11</sup>

As with adaptability, the amphibious role may have played a part in stimulating humility as an essential part of Royal Marines ethos. In a recent briefing given to the YOs at HMS Dryad by the Maritime Warfare Centre, the Royal Naval and Royal Marines instructors described amphibious doctrine in detail. At the same time, they emphasised the ethos which was a necessary part of successful amphibious operations. Commander Reece, the instructor, in particular repeated what he regarded as the central point: ‘Liaise, liaison, liaison’. For him, amphibious operations could not be conducted without a willingness to communicate with the other services and units involved. Amphibious operations involve a necessarily joint approach and co-ordinating this joint effort requires constant communication. In the description of the command ship, the *Albion* in this case, the instructors outlined the structure of the planning cell within the ship and indeed, by means of a slide, illustrated the spatial lay out of the combined operations room in the ship, with its flag, fire support, movement and ship’s operations cells. Both the Royal Naval commander and the Royal Marines lieutenant colonel emphasised that spatial

---

whereas previous missions had failed because villagers had spotted Royal Marines setting their cordons from outside and had warned EOKA operatives to hide.

<sup>11</sup> This respect for others is demonstrated across the ranks. Sergeants on the YO training term independently concurred with Major General Nick Vaux, who emphasized the importance of respect for others in a recent presentation on leadership to the YOs. He emphasized that it was their duty as leaders to ensure that young marines did not adopt an arrogant attitude.

proximity was essential to amphibious operations. It was necessary to have face-to-face contact not only between the Commander Amphibious Task Force (CATF) and the Commander Land Forces (CLF) but also between other essential support services. Clearly, the constant liaison required of amphibious operations and the fact that this liaison must be conducted face-to-face demands certain qualities from Naval and Royal Marines officers. They must avoid arrogance and inflexibility. The optimum command style in an amphibious environment is humility and openness. The needs, limitations and capabilities of others must be recognised and understood. Conceit will prevent this vital flow of information.

Although a robust fighting force, Royal Marines humility extends to the Corp's treatment of their enemies and, it is consequently, important to their operational effectiveness. There are numerous examples of the operational benefits of humility. After the end of the conflict the British forces employed Argentine prisoners to clean up Port Stanley. Instead of using force and intimidation, Argentine prisoners were given sweets and chocolate to build a co-operative relationship between them and their captors and to encourage compliance on their part. The Royal Marines found that this humane strategy was extremely efficient, minimising wasteful tension and aggression between the two forces. The Argentines worked harder for the Royal Marines precisely because they were willing agents. Although directed at a civilian population, 42 Commando demonstrated similar qualities in Iraq. Within 24 hours of taking Um Qasr, they had arranged a football match with local civilians in order to promote good local relations, even while the unit was still seeking to dominate the area militarily. The unit subsequently re-furnished a local school and, according to the CO, took as much pride in this humanitarian work as they had in their soldiering. This humane and humble treatment of the civilian population has paid political dividends.

## **6. Standards**

The Royal Marines are a unified and adaptable organisation. Yet, alone these qualities do not make them a military unit. Many successful civilian organisations share these same qualities and regard solidarity and adaptability as an intrinsic part of their ethos. The success of the Royal Marines as a military organisation involves unity and adaptability but these aspects of Royal Marine ethos are effective only insofar as the Royal Marines develop sound professional practices. Without this sound professional basis, flexibility could lead to idiosyncratic or disastrous military action. The environment in which commandos operate is complex, dangerous and uncertain and consequently successful action in this sphere requires the highest standards of soldiering. It also requires all Royal Marines to adopt unified military procedures until they become instinctive. In response to unforeseen problems on operations, Royal Marines must instantly fall back on drills in order to achieve their mission. More specifically, they must all fall back on the same drills and know that others will follow these procedures whatever the situation. Training is intended to develop common procedures which will be instantly and collectively followed by marines on operations. Instant recourse to collective drills is most likely to ensure success on difficult operations. It is not coincidental that the standards of drill and operational procedures are extremely high in the Royal Marines.

The Royal Marines demand high standards of personal cleanliness. Even in the

field, Royal Marines are required to wash themselves thoroughly and in camp a high standard of cleanliness is demanded. There is little doubt that some of the concern with cleanliness has become a means of distinguishing themselves from other combat arms in the Army. Cleanliness has become a status marker for the Royal Marines. It is possible that the standards of cleanliness in the Royal Marines are derived from the Royal Navy, whose concerns for hygiene on board ship are well known. Cleanliness is not just a status marker, however, separating the Royal Marines from the Army. It is operationally important. Although between 1940 and February 1942, the first commandos were trained at Inverailort, the standard training of the commandos during the Second World War took place at Achnacarry Basic Commando Training Centre near Spean Bridge under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Vaughan. Vaughan had originally been an RSM with the Guards and while developing completely new training methods for the commandos, he maintained a Guard-like emphasis on drill and personal cleanliness. It surprised many trainee commandos and visitors that there was a drill square at Achnacarry. Yet, drill formed a small but significant element of commando training and extremely high standards of cleanliness was demanded by Vaughan. He believed that dirtiness was a sign of indiscipline which would be catastrophic on the difficult missions for which the commandos would be tasked. Even under the trying conditions of Achnacarry, Vaughan demanded that all trainees and their equipment were clean. Vaughan constantly emphasised that the commandos, who were initially perceived as unmilitary hooligans, 'glamour boy' or 'café gangsters', had in fact to be the most self-disciplined soldiers (St George Saunders 1949: 43). This same emphasis on personal cleanliness is still present in the Royal Marines today and, as in 1940, it denotes self-discipline and, therefore, the ability to perform demanding military missions. The connection between personal cleanliness and operational effectiveness is demonstrated to recruits and YOs in training. In November 2003, on returning from a period at Britannia Royal Naval College, some YOs had relapsed into casual disciplinary standards. The guilty individuals received illuminating remedial instruction. For three nights, they were forced to sleep on the bottom field, adopting the standards and procedures which are demanded in the field. In this way, the punishment illustrated that the Royal Marines concern with personal cleanliness is directly related to operational effectiveness. On commando operations, it is essential that all ranks can be trusted to look after themselves and their own equipment.

The collective but instinctive performance of drills is inculcated very effectively through the physical training which Royal Marines undergo at Lympstone. All Royal Marines have to master the ability to climb and cross ropes. One of the most demanding elements of this rope training is the 'rope regain'; a technique which seems to have little apparent operational importance. This regain involves hanging from a horizontal rope, swinging up to hook the rope with the feet and then pivoting back onto the rope, using the counter-weight of a leg to lever the body back into position. The evolution was originally developed at Achnacarry on the so-called 'cat crawl' and is still carried out at Lympstone in exactly the same fashion as it was in Achnacarry some sixty years ago. The rope regain is an important element of the physical training which the Royal Marines undergo and this aspect of it will be discussed below. However the regain also emphasises the importance of rigorous drill. The regain is a difficult and technical operation. It is practised on ropes just above ground level, then above the water tank until it is finally

tested on the assault course during the Commando Course. On the Tarzan Assault Course, candidates must perform a half-regain on almost the last obstacle of a difficult 13 minute course. It is here that the importance of drill is emphasised. Under extreme physical and mental pressure, recruits and YOs will be most successful if they are able to reproduce the regain as instructed in the course of training. When marines perform the regain successfully it is an impressively rapid and agile action. In a single swing, they drop under the rope and then swivel instantly back onto the rope in a single fluid action, using one leg as a counter-weight. They reach the end of the obstacle rapidly and are quickly onto the swing bridge and the slog up to the gate vault and the 30 foot wall. The rewards of excellent personal drills – which are collectively adhered to – are demonstrated. Those recruits that have failed to internalise these drills will either fall from the rope – inevitably failing this Commando test – or will perform the regain badly, wasting time and energy unnecessarily.

The same emphasis on collectively unified drills is emphasised in other forms of physical training. Although perhaps less emphasised than in the Parachute Regiment (effectively the Army Commandos), speed marching is an important element of commando training. Commando operations will often require rapid movement to and from the objective. Speed is an essential weapon for commando units which can offset their numerical or material inferiority by the surprise created by arriving suddenly at unexpected times and places. Consequently, from the 1940s commandos have always emphasised the need for marching. In training at least, speed marches are not tactical exercises. They are conducted in a manner which would be impossible if the enemy were in the vicinity. Troops march along roads with no concern for their exposure to enemy fire. Especially since speed marches are not tactical manoeuvres, it would be conceivable that any grouping or any method of advance might be possible. In theory, speed marching troops could march just as effectively in random, dispersed groups. Certainly, there is no intrinsic reason why they should march in step. When Royal Marines speed march, however, there is a definite procedure which is always adopted. Their webbing will be organised on a pattern and all will carry their rifle sloped downwards beneath their right arm, hanging on a shoulder strap running back over their left shoulder. A speed march develops its own distinctive rhythm, the marching troop acts like a train, its beat hammered out by boots marching in step; the importance of this step is emphasised by the directing staff who deliberately put the tallest to the back in order to attain a stride length that everyone can maintain. The speech march inculcates a collective sense of purpose to the Royal Marines and physically illustrates the importance of unified drills. It does so under sometimes extreme pressure for the very collective rhythm which the marching troop develops sustains even flagging members. It is unlikely that Royal Marines will ever speed-march in an operational environment. However, the emphasis on precise collective drills which it illustrates under arduous physical conditions is directly relevant to the roles which commandos are likely to be asked to carry out. *In extremis*, Commandos must automatically adopt collective procedures which maximise their group power; the speed march imbues precisely these qualities. It is an important part of Royal Marines ethos and, equally, marine ethos is plainly visible in the speed march. The same attention to collective drills under physical pressure is in evidence in the gym where all recruits and YOs perform the same exercises. It is particularly notable in circuit training; those individuals on the jogging phase will run on the spot with their lower arms bent out

straight in front of them. Like the speed march, this is a tidy and precise way of performing this exercise to which all adhere. It imbues a sense that, however physically punishing, the same collective standards must be maintained. It is important to recognise that apparently anachronistic practices like the rope regain or the speed march are relevant to the operational effectiveness of the Royal Marines.

The drills which are taught at Lympstone are replicated in the field at the level of personal administration and tactics but they are also inculcated at the conceptual level. YOs are instructed how to think tactically under pressure in the field and to be proficient at planning and at giving orders. The training team demonstrate the standards which are required of officers and, through a long period of apprenticeship, YOs develop tactical awareness to the required standard. In recent contact drills at CTC and section attacks on Woodbury Common, troop sergeants emphasised both the precise conceptual sequences which YOs had to perform but simultaneously they encouraged the YOs to think carefully about these drills and to adapt them if they could develop better procedures. It is essential that commandos instinctively adopt collective and mutually supporting drills. Individual marines and officers must automatically adopt collective responses to threats and uncertainties. The standards which are demanded of recruits and YOs at Lympstone may at certain points be mysterious to them. However, these standards are directly relevant to the dangerous and complex tasks which commandos must perform in difficult physical environments. Successful commando operations depend upon highly trained troops who respond as one to crisis and it demands precision at the level of planning and execution. Personal cleanliness, instinctive practical and tactical procedures are important elements of Royal Marines ethos playing directly into the commando role.

It is important to recognise that Royal Marines standards are not in contradiction with its adaptability. On the contrary, only a force with extremely high standards of personal self-discipline and collective drills can be innovative. Poorly co-ordinated organisations cannot be adaptable in the face of new situations for individual adaptations lead only to chaos. Individuals do not adapt flexibly to new developments in line with the collective purpose but simply develop random and incoherent patterns of action. Effective flexibility requires an instinctive sense of collective purpose and procedures on the part of individual members. In this way, individuals adopt forms of action, which while new, are recognisably in line with accepted practice. Others can recognise and predict what the individual member will do. The commando role demands adaptability from the Royal Marines but they can be flexible only insofar as they have attained an extraordinary degree of unity among their constituent members. In a difficult situation, marines will ‘cuff’ it; but it would be a mistake to think that the virtuosity which they display on operations is anything other than the product of long and arduous training in which standards of collective and personal drill are extremely high. The ethos of the Royal Marines is, therefore, adaptability by the necessary maintenance of military standards. Of course, the maintenance of standards itself contributes very significantly to the unity of the Royal Marines since it creates a distinctive collective identity. Only those who are capable of achieving the required standards can be members of this organisation and this common sense of achievement unites highest ranking officer with the most junior marine.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the inculcation of attitudes, see Appendix C.

## **7. Fortitude**

Since the storming of the Iranian embassy in 1980, elite military forces have become the focus of almost pathological public attention. A mystique has developed around these forces which misrepresents what the men who serve in them are actually like. One of the most serious errors of perception is that members of elite forces, like the Royal Marines, are extraordinarily fit. The Royal Marines and other elite units are regarded as super-athletes. In line with this emphasis on purely physical performance, the public have generally been fascinated by the specific physical tests which Royal Marines and other elite forces undergo. It is true that Royal Marines are fit by the woeful standards of the general British public but in reality, the Royal Marines' fitness is not extraordinary, although the Royal Marines have attracted a disproportionate number of athletes of international standard. Generally marines are as fit as serious amateur sports players. Here the parallel ends. The Royal Marines are not trained to be athletes and to focus purely on their physical tests as sporting achievements is to mis-perceive the nature of Royal Marines training and indeed the role of the tests themselves. Royal Marines are trained to operate in a demanding and dangerous environment. Their training is intended to develop fortitude. Exceptional performance is superfluous but consistent performance, whatever the conditions, is required. Royal Marines must have the fortitude to carry out tasks when they are tired and when the tasks seem almost overwhelming. They must have the moral courage to persist. Commando units rely above all upon the ability of their members simply to endure.

All aspects of Royal Marines training develop fortitude. The majority of training takes place in the field in all weathers and Royal Marines are expected to perform physical tasks even after days of field exercise. The Commando Course is, of course, an essential aspect of this training and specifically tests for these qualities. As already mentioned, the current Commando Course is a development of the Achnacarry Basic Commando Training Course. In fact, although the spirit of the course – arduous and dangerous training requiring the highest standards of self-discipline in the field – is the same, the purely physical tests are very different than those which were conducted at Achnacarry. There was no 30 miler in Scotland, although there was a 36 hour scheme, where troops were required to march the 18 miles from Achnacarry up Ben Nevis and back with a bivouac under tactical conditions. There was no Endurance Course and the speed march was 14 or 15 miles long rather than the current 9. It is clear that the particular tests which commandos are made to endure are not quite as important as the fact that their fortitude should be tested to the limit. It is noticeable that the tests developed at Achnacarry were the product of expedience not science and these tests themselves embodied the commando spirit of innovation and imagination.

Although the Commando Course is very different to the tests which candidates experienced under Lieutenant Colonel Vaughan and training is continually evolving at Lympstone [see Appendix D], there is one element of commando training which replicates the original course at Achnacarry almost exactly, however; the rope-work. The training staff at Achnacarry developed a so-called Tarzan Course in the beech trees of the grounds and across the Archaig River. This course involved rope swings, toggle rope bridges across the river, cat crawls and the famous 'Death ride' (as it was then called - now the Death Slide) which was designed as a means of crossing rivers. The rope work at Achnacarry was designed to test the courage, agility and determination of candidates.

There was a direct operational reason for their inclusion in the course. On operations in the Second World War, commandos carried with them a six foot rope with a toggle and loop on it. These toggle ropes could be strung together and used to scale cliffs or cross rivers and they were in fact used for these purposes in the course of campaigns in the Second World War. It was essential that prospective commandos be adept at their use. There is no toggle bridge at Lympstone but the rope obstacles on the bottom field are almost exact replicas of those employed at Achnacarry. Like the ropes at Achnacarry, they test the physical strength, agility and courage of candidates and, as already noted, they demonstrate graphically the importance of correct drill. In contrast to their Second World War forebears, it is unlikely that Royal Marines will have to cross a river by a death slide or climb a cliff by means of a toggle rope. Climbing technology has moved on considerably since 1942. However, the rope-work which commandos undergo is nevertheless relevant as it familiarises them with ropes and height which remain an intrinsic part of cliff assault, mountain and heliborne operations. Significantly, the Foggin Tor section of Commando Training for recruits when they learn cliff assault and descent techniques has recently been moved from Week 14 to Week 27 because recruits had developed insufficient aptitude and strength for ropes by Week 14; they needed more time on the bottom field.<sup>13</sup> Ropes remain more generally important to the operational effectiveness of the Royal Marines since they demand upper body strength which marching and running do not. The 30 foot rope climb is particularly useful here since it demands a total and explosive commitment, while failure is marked by a conspicuous and ignominious return to earth. Indeed, normal Army assault courses are conspicuously lacking in the demands they make of overall agility and specifically upper body strength. The rope-work also assists the commandos operationally in another way. Rope-work is intellectually important. It opens up the potential for different kinds of movement over and across spaces which are initially deemed impassable. The ropes embody the commando ethos; they demand fortitude (determination, physical and mental endurance) and adaptability.

The ropes are also important ritualistically and this ritualistic importance should not be disparaged. All social groups require a common tradition to which members are collectively committed. Through these recognised traditions, the solidarity of the group is sustained because the members are consciously oriented to the same collective goals. The ropes connect Lympstone Commando Training Centre directly with the Basic Commando Training Course at Achnacarry. They tie Lympstone symbolically to its past. The ropes are then a sacred symbol of the commando past and when trainees at Lympstone grasp the ropes on the bottom field, they are knowingly repeating the acts which the ancestors have performed for sixty years. The ropes are a critical ritual in the formation of the commando spirit since they unify all members of this organisation past present and future. They constitute a decisive rite of passage, which inculcates appropriate commando values of fortitude but which also sustain social unity with the Royal Marines. The ropes are an important element of the Royal Marines ethos.

The other striking aspect of Royal Marines physical training is its emphasis on water. The endurance course requires total immersion and the crossing of several pools,

---

<sup>13</sup> The operational importance of rope-work is demonstrated by recent debates at CTC about the ropes used on the 30 foot wall. MLs have suggested that the hawser rope which is currently used should be replaced by black, climbing rope with knots in it since this is the kind of rope which would be employed on operations.

one of them chest deep in winter. On the bottom field, many marines and YOs fall into the tank on failed regains and the tank itself has become a standard disciplinary measure. Royal Marines are immersed frequently in training and voluntarily immerse themselves thereafter. These immersions do not strictly improve the physical fitness of the Royal Marines. However, immersion in cold water is one of the most effective ways of undermining human morale. Being cold and wet is an extremely demoralising experience. Consequently, although not directly contributing to the fitness of recruits and YOs, the immersions which they endure develops and tests fortitude. Fortitude is operationally important in mountain and amphibious environments. On the All Arms Course, candidates often look forward to ‘Interest’ week when they undergo amphibious training at Poole as a break from the physical pressures of the Course until they experience the week itself. ‘Interest’ week involves numerous drenchings aboard LCUs, as well as full immersions in the cold sea during capsizing drills. In retrospect, it is seen as one of the hardest weeks of the course. It is operationally important that marines develop sufficient fortitude to endure immersions; Royal Marines must perform their drills whatever the conditions. The tank and the water tunnels are an important way of instilling this fortitude. Since they are likely to be cold and wet on amphibious or mountain operations, Royal Marines must be inured to it at Lympstone.

In recent deployments, fortitude has been essential to the Royal Marines and never more so than on Operation *Jacana* in Afghanistan. There, in the first phase of operations, 45 Commando ‘yomped’ through the Afghan mountains at an altitude of 11,000 ft carrying enormous weights of over 120 pounds. Newly passed out marines of 18 and senior officers and NCOs of 40 years of age (perhaps strictly beyond their physical prime) endured this experience. These men were not super-athletes or elite mountaineers. They were marines, drawing on that crucial Royal Marines characteristic, fortitude. Clearly, whatever the current debates about Commando training, it is developing very considerable fortitude among the recruits who pass out.

## **8. Commando Humour**

One of the commando qualities is cheerfulness in the face of adversity. Although apparently superfluous, humour is extremely important to the operational effectiveness of the Royal Marines. Commando units will of necessity find themselves in extremely trying operational circumstances in which death or injury are likely. A sense of humour allows Royal Marines to operate in these circumstances by coming to terms with the dangers they face.<sup>14</sup> It is important to recognise how humour allows individuals to face danger. Most obviously, a sense of humour reduces a hazard by making it seem less serious in the mind of an individual. It is almost certain that operational humour performs this role in reducing the size of certain difficulties in the imagination of marines. Yet, the

---

<sup>14</sup> In discussions of Operation *Telic*, the 40 Commando’s MSG emphasized the importance of humour to the conduct of their mission. Indeed, recalling the event, it was not the memory of fear which was paramount in the members of this group’s minds but the memory of funny incidents; troops falling into mud while debussing from Chinooks at the Manifold Metering Station or simply the look on comrades’ faces at certain points in the operation. During the ambush near Abu Al Khasib, a team member in the leading vehicle was amused by the fact that the Iraqi gunman who had opened fire could have missed his colleague’s oversized head – so big was the target presented to him.

way humour does this is significant. Humour relies on shared understandings. It draws on common experiences which allow the mocked object or situation to be put in an incongruous situation which all recognise. In this way, humour only operates within a social group and the more cohesive the social group, the easier it is for it to make jokes. The common resources upon which wits can draw to point up incongruities are richer and more deeply understood by other group members. Humour is able to reduce the individual's fear to the extent that it emphasises that individual's membership of a social group. Humour highlights membership and emphasises the solidarity between group members. In referring to a common heritage, it affirms the group and in the shared euphoria of laughter it binds members together ever more closely. Laughter in the face of danger is as important for group solidarity as symbols of collective identity such as the green beret. It is interesting that on the disastrous raid at Dieppe, a commando turned to his officer and quipped, 'Jesus Christ, sir, this is nearly as bad as Achnacarry' (Gilchrist 1960: 4). In a stroke the commando had reduced the real dangers which they faced by emphasising the common bond which held officer and man together. The Royal Marines are correct to emphasise a sense of humour as one of the prerequisites of being a commando. It fosters the social unity which is critical to operational effectiveness. Indeed, the marines have instituted humour into training and even the Commando Course itself. The idea of a 'funny' is given official legitimacy in the instructions for recruits and officer training. Although the funny changes according to the directing staff, a typical sanctioned funny is conducted at the water tunnel on Woodbury Common when recruits are given an acquaintance visit. One of the sergeants demonstrating the tunnel pretends to get stuck half way through while the other sergeants feign panic. In fact, the apparently drowning sergeant is breathing on a pre-placed diving apparatus which has been hidden in the tunnel. The watching recruits are horrified and willingly assist in attempts to bail out the water tunnel, even though it is fed by a running stream, until their gullibility is demonstrated by the emergence of an unharmed sergeant from the water tunnel. The demonstration lessens the recruits' fear of a potentially worrying obstacle. The fact that these 'funnies' demonstrate that even authority figures are not entirely serious is important. Through their 'funny', the sergeants point to a unity of experience with the recruits. Recruits and sergeants are unified by laughing at the same thing.

Humour is also important in encouraging adaptability. The sergeants have stepped out of their formal role of authority. They have shown that they can see themselves from outside. The joke at the water-tunnel satirises the subordination of the recruits to the sergeants. It demonstrates the absurdity of the recruits' automatic obedience to sergeants and ultimately suggests that, while recognising the chain of command, marines should not unthinkingly follow orders. Through this fun or humour, Royal Marines of all ranks can distance themselves from their role, recognise how others see them but more specifically all can see more clearly what their role is and what is expected from them. The sense of humour enhances the social unity with the Royal Marines, binding together officers, NCOs and marines, and by allowing Royal Marines to step out of the shackles of a formal situation, it encourages adaptability. Humour allows the natural order to be questioned and changed if necessary.

## 9. Ethos at Work: Operations

The ethos of the Royal Marines is developed in training but the true testing ground of ethos is on operations. There appropriate and inappropriate ethos are demonstrated in a stark light. Military organisations with poor ethos will suffer defeat – often disastrous defeat – while those with a functionally sound ethos will triumph; successful organisations will have a clear role and an effective means of fulfilling it. Their ethos is strong. The ethos developed at Achnacarry and Lymptstone is detectable in Royal Marine operations. In training, the Royal Marines try to develop an ethos of unity, adaptability, humility, high professional standards, fortitude and humour. Exactly these qualities are evident when they deploy. The ethos of the Royal Marines is clearly demonstrated by various historical examples. There are three particularly obvious ones; 47 Commando's assault on Port-en-Bessin in Normandy on 7 June 1944, 42 Commando's assault of Mount Harriet in 1982 and 40 Commando's seizure of the oil pumping installations on the Al-Faw Peninsula in 2003.

Port-en-Bessin was a small coastal port which linked the right flank of the British-Canadian sector (Gold, Juno and Sword beaches) with the left flank of the American sector (Omaha and Utah beaches) [see Appendix B for map]. It was a strategically significant site, therefore, and was strongly defended by the Germans who recognised its potential significance. 47 Commando were landed at Gold Beach on D-Day and then had to make a rapid ten-mile advance west to Port-en-Bessin to be ready to attack the town at the designated hour on D+1. By the time they arrived on their start-line at 17.30 on 6 June, they had lost 5 officers and 73 other ranks as well as much of their equipment and weapons (Neillands 2000: 158). The assault of Port-en-Bessin took place at the appointed hour, 16.00 on 7 June with many of the marines armed with German weapons. The town was defended by three main positions, one south of the town, another to the west of the harbour and the most important one on an eastern feature overlooking the town which formed the lynch-pin of German defence, with several pill-boxes situated on it [see Appendix B for map]. The first objective was seized without difficulty and the second was also seized quickly, despite taking fire from flak ships moored in the port. The eastern feature proved more difficult. The Royal Marines' base at Point 72, south of the town, came under attack from the German garrison stationed a mile further south and the CO, Lieutenant-Colonel Philips, was unsure whether to continue with the assault on eastern feature or to defend his base at Point 72. At that point, Captain Cousins reported that he had found a narrow zig-zag path up the hill and that with twenty-five men he could take the position by surprise. In the event, Philips gave Cousins double the men requested as well as support from machine-guns and the one remaining mortar. Captain Cousins led 'A' and 'Q' troops up the zig-zag coastal path. After a heavy fire-fight, the objective was seized by 22.00, though Captain Cousins was himself killed during the assault. At Point 72, the Germans had overrun the Commandos' base but they were driven back at dawn (Lockhart 1950: 126-7; Neillands 2000: 164-5; Thompson 2000: 333-4; Ladd 1978: 194-5; Ladd 1998: 186-191; *Globe and Laurel* June 1944: 146).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> There are some small discrepancies in these various accounts where certain commentators claim the Hill 72, rather than the Commando base at the bottom of it was retaken. I have drawn chiefly upon Ladd's 1994 account since it is the most authoritative. The central point – that the attack demonstrates key aspects of Royal Marine ethos and above all adaptability - is not in doubt; all accounts describe Captain Cousins' discovery and use of the zig-zag track.

General Sir Brian Horrocks described 47 Commando assault as one which most exemplified World War II. More specifically, the attack demonstrated the commando ethos developed at Achnacarry. In order to achieve their objective the Royal Marines demonstrated fortitude, enduring an opposed landing, in which significant losses were taken, and marching rapidly to their start-line in dangerous circumstances. They showed adaptability in re-equipping themselves with German weapons and re-organising the depleted troops; Q and A troops were effectively merged for the assault on Hill 72. Adaptability was decisively demonstrated by Captain Cousins' route through the wire. The success of the attack was, of course, underpinned by unity and by high standards of collective drill inculcated by Vaughan at Achnacarry. In his history of the Royal Marines, Bruce Lockhart emphasised how this attack demonstrated the ethos of the Corps; 'I have said more than once that Royal Marines are trained to meet the unexpected, and not for the first time, and assuredly not for the last time a Royal Marines officer improvised safety out of threatened disaster' (Lockhart 1950: 126).

Nearly forty years later a similar ethos can be detected in 42 Commando's assault of Mount Harriet on 11-12 June 1982. Mount Harriet was considered to be one of the most difficult objectives for British forces in their attempt to re-take Port Stanley. It was heavily defended from assault from the east by numerous bunkers and heavy machine gun positions [see Appendix B for map]. In the build-up to the assault, 42's reconnaissance patrol had found a way into the Argentine positions by making a wide south-flanking march around the mountain which, by crossing minefields, circumvented fixed defensive positions. Lieutenant Colonel Vaux decided that if a reconnaissance patrol could reach the top of the mountain by this route, then it was likely that a company could do the same (Thompson 2000: 576). While J Company feigned an attack on the western slopes of the mountain where the defences were heaviest, K and L Companies marched round to the south-eastern starting line for 22.00. K and L Companies advanced to within 100 metres of the Argentines before coming under fire. They overwhelmed the surprised Argentines and, for the loss of two marines and 20 wounded, Mount Harriet and Goat Ridge were taken. Mount Harriet is rightly held up as an example of the Commando ethos. The assault demonstrated the adaptability and innovativeness of the Royal Marines as well as their professional standards. Vaux's assault was hazardous and had K or L Company been caught on their approach marches, they would have been severely exposed. They attained their start-line unscathed because of the standard of collective drills right through the unit. In addition, there was sufficient solidarity within the Commando so that Nick Vaux could trust the companies to prosecute his bold plan and, in turn, they trusted their CO to have tasked them with an achievable mission which would take the position with minimal loss of life. It was noticeable that the reconnaissance platoon of an accompanying Army unit which were tasked with securing the start-line showed a quite different ethos. They were found by K Company chatting and smoking on a fence by the start-line (Neillands 2000: 408). The Royal Marines demonstrated high standards of fieldcraft in their tactical manoeuvring on the mountain itself (Foster 1993: 143). The Royal Marines had also shown fortitude, humour and unity in enduring the climatic and geographic conditions of the Falklands.

A similar ethos was demonstrated in the recent Iraq conflict. Both publicly deployed units, 42 and 40 Commando performed extremely well in difficult circumstances but 40 Commando's heliborne seizure of the Manifold Metering Station

(MMS) and two oil terminals (PPLs)<sup>16</sup> on the Al Faw Peninsula on 20-21 March 2003 was an outstanding feat of arms. The seizure of these sites was regarded as strategically essential not only politically but because the Anglo-American forces wished to avoid any repeat of the Gulf War when Saddam Hussein had ignited entire oil-fields in order to degrade the Coalition's ISTAR advantage. The smoke from the oil-fires obscured targets from the air. The assault on the oil installations involved a simultaneous assault the MMS and the PPLs by 40 Commando. Bravo Company was tasked to seize the PPLs near the coast (while US Navy Seals took a platform out to sea) while Charlie Company and the MSG seized the MMS. The plan was dangerous and complex, requiring high levels of skill, and was the subject of intense and detailed preparation. Detailed scale models and aerial photographs of the objectives were created so that all members of 40 Commando was thoroughly familiar with their mission. They knew the ground so intimately so that commanders knew how many paces there were between the helicopter landing sites and the objectives and had already plotted both into their GPS systems. The careful planning process was supported by extensive rehearsals in Kuwait where all marines became familiar with the precise layout of the objective. The precision at the point of planning and preparation was essential for this dangerous mission. However, despite all the preparation, the mission drew on the marines' ability to adapt and innovate almost from the start. Due to pylons, the Chinooks could not land at the designated sites and the MSG was dropped onto the objective into a depression full of mud and in the opposite direction to that which they had rehearsed.<sup>17</sup> Under sporadic gunfire from an unexpected enemy at company strength, Charlie Company and the MSG quickly re-oriented to the situation assisted by the Sergeant Major who walked nonchalantly down the road as the rest of the company covered for cover. Corporal Peter Watts<sup>18</sup> launched an assault on the major concentration of the enemy in a position just beyond the MMS's compound, even though this was in a free-fire zone. Demonstrating high professional standards, he conducted a 'text-book' section assault and his loud commands, with which the marines had become intimately familiar during training, inspired confidence in them. In the event, despite the difficulties of the mission, 40 Commando seized the MMS and PPLs rapidly without sustaining enemy inflicted fatalities, although 8 members of the Brigade Patrol Troop were killed when a helicopter crashed in a storm before the assault. The speed and boldness of the plan which took the enemy by surprise reflected Royal Marine ethos. The plan demonstrated the innovative commando approach which itself is only possible because of the standards demanded of the Royal Marines and the close unity between the ranks. Although 40 Commando was tasked only with the seizure of the MMS and the PPLs, they re-organised themselves immediately and within 72 hours cleared the entire Al Faw Peninsula.

40 Commando's next major action came as they advanced on Abu Al Khasib during Operation *James*. The MSG, mounted on Pinzgauers and accompanied by 4 Challenger Tanks, was tasked with guarding 40 Commando's western flank. In the early hours of the morning of 30 March, the MSG was ambushed by an irregular force of some

---

<sup>16</sup> The PPLs consisted of an oil pipeline which rose up out of the ground for a few meters providing maintenance and pumping access at two locations near to the coast before going out to sea.

<sup>17</sup> The vehicle of accompanying members of the US Navy Seals was bogged down in this mud and the Navy Seals played no useful role in the assault.

<sup>18</sup> Corporal (now Sergeant) Watts was awarded an MC for his part in the action.

150 Fedayeen fighters. The ambush was initiated when a single Iraqi fired a salvo at the first vehicle as it drove along a raised road beside a date palm grove within which was a settlement of several buildings. The leading team immediately de-bussed and went automatically into fire and manoeuvre drills, closing with the enemy and forcing him to withdraw. At the same time, they heard over their Personal Role Radios (PRRs) that the group had come under attack with intense fire from the date palm grove. The intention of the Fedayeen forces was clearly to split the MSG and thereby inflict casualties upon them. The leading MSG team withdrew back to their vehicle and like the rest of the MSG took cover behind the raised road. For the next 19 hours, the MSG engaged the enemy in a heavy fire-fight in which they, with the support of artillery, air-support and the Challengers, held off and inflicted heavy casualties on the irregular fighters. Although two Pinzgauers were lost, the MSG group had no casualties despite the weight of incoming fire, including numerous RPG rounds. Although the air and artillery support played a significant role in transforming an ambush into a successful withdrawal and final dispersal of the enemy, the high professional standards of the marines, their close social unity and their adaptability were critical to the survival of the MSG. The MSG resorted automatically to collective fire and manoeuvre drills, both on foot and from the vehicles, and noted the success which suppressive fire had on enemy fire. At the same time, members of the group supported each other closely. Anti-tankers automatically and without command assisted the machine-gun teams; at considerable personal danger, one anti-tanker ran to a vehicle to retrieve a bag of 7.62 link for a GPMG crew. Similarly, machine-gun teams operated Milans and LAWs when necessary. As members of the MSG themselves stated afterwards the battle at Abu Al Khasib, graphically demonstrated that once again 'no cuff was too tough'. Yet the virtuosity this group displayed was the product of rigorous and extensive training in which the highest standards were maintained. In the cases of 1944, 1982 and 2003, Royal Marines ethos has stood up to the test of combat and the three examples show an underlying and enduring pattern. In each case, unified, highly professional commando units have sought to unhinge the enemy by surprise and or by adapting with unexpected rapidity to the situation. In each case, they were resoundingly successful.

## **10. Sustaining Ethos: Dit Culture<sup>19</sup>**

Informal humour is perhaps surprisingly critical to the operation of commando units. There are other informal methods by which the ethos of the Royal Marines is maintained. One of the most important of these is the telling of stories about events which have occurred to Royal Marines on or off operations. 'Spinning dits' has become almost institutionalised among the Corps so that this story-telling has become a recognised form of socialising. It constitutes an important element of Royal Marines leisure time and the messes are the prime arena in which dits are told. Yet, the manifest humour and

---

<sup>19</sup> The term 'dit' seems to be derived from the naval term, 'ditty-box'. This was a box in which sailors kept personal items. However, the meaning seems to have changed somewhat by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Contributors to the *Globe and Laurel* sent their reports from the 'ditty box' (*Globe and Laurel* September 1941: 312). The ditty-box here seems to refer to the desk at which correspondents wrote or to a box or bag in which he kept his own notes, from which the report would be compiled. It seems probable that the term 'dit' then became specifically attached to the stories, stored in or sent from the 'ditty-box'.

irreverence of dits should not obscure their important professional function. A good dit has an important point. The dit embodies and communicates the essential values of the Royal Marines to its members. The dit constitutes an informal and mainly unwritten form of ethos, denoting appropriate standards of conduct in a diversity of comic, tragic, obscene or bizarre circumstances. The Royal Marines have a dit for every occasion and a good dit is precisely the one which correctly reflects 'Royal' understanding of itself.

The Royal Marines are themselves well aware of the role that dits play. In instruction sessions at CTC, the training team will explicitly employ 'dits' to enliven and exemplify each training sequence. For instance, in a recent observation post (OP) instruction session, one of the troop sergeants exemplified the importance of not compromising the OP by reference to the difficulties in which the Brigade Patrol Troop found themselves in Afghanistan in 2002, after their OP had been exposed. Similarly, in a period of PW handling the instructing sergeant employed his own 'dits' from the recent Iraq conflict where he had processed some 60 prisoners. The conscious use of dits was exemplified in a subsequent period on section attacks given to the YO Batch. A YO raised the question of what would happen if there was little cover for the attacking section. This raised an interesting discussion which was finally resolved by an attending YO troop officer who had served with 42 Commando in the Iraq conflict. He stated that in an open environment, with little cover, longer range weapon systems would be exploited. The enemy would be engaged earlier with artillery and air-support. He described how this had happened in Iraq. In every contact, all weapon systems had been used in the first instance to devastating effect before sections even needed to employ small arms fire. Section leaders, he noted grimly, needed to be armed with brooms to sweep up the remains of the enemy. He concluded this description with the words: 'end of dit'. It was clear to everyone present what the purpose of this dit was. It is noticeable that when Royal Marines have trained other military forces, especially those of Arab states in the Gulf, they have found an absence of ingrained military culture – 'dit culture' - which renders instruction difficult. The military in these countries lack the rich informal culture which is typical of the Royal Marines – and the British forces more widely – and which is actually critical to appropriate practice.

Perhaps less obvious is the fact that Royal Marines ethos is also communicated through dits which have apparently nothing to do with military operations. Almost all dits communicate a message about what is considered to be appropriate conduct in the Royal Marines and therefore have a bearing on operational effectiveness – even if indirectly. In the run-up to Christmas 2003, there were understandably perhaps more dits being swapped in the Officers' Mess at Lympstone than at less festive times of the year. One of these illustrated the important social role which dit culture plays in the Corps. A Royal Marines officer had been enjoying pre-Christmas celebrations at a fellow officer's house nearby. The evening had involved significant alcoholic refreshment and the regulation period of undress in the living room. At 4.00 am, the visiting officer decided to leave but on being unable to find any of his clothes except his boxer shorts, he decided to make the short run back to CTC, although he was not entirely sure of the direction of his journey. Undeterred, he ran through the rain, almost naked along the Exmouth Road until he arrived somewhat more sober at the gates of CTC. There, he confronted a problem. He was without his identity card. Fortunately, one of the guards recognised him and allowed the officer to take refuge in the mess where he had a hot shower and eventually after a

short nap, reported for duty at 8.00am. The story communicated most of the basic elements of Royal Marines ethos. It denoted fortitude; the officer ran all but naked back to CTC in the middle of a winter's night. It emphasised solidarity between the ranks; the guard recognised the officer and could share the joke of his undress with him. Finally, it emphasised adaptability. Despite having missed a night's sleep, the officer was on parade at 8.00 am. He could complete a day's work, despite his condition. Dit culture is an important means by which Royal Marine ethos is inculcated and sustained. Indeed, ultimately dit culture has itself become part of Royal Marines ethos. It is a crucial means by which the Royal Marines communicate to each other the required knowledge, skills but also attitudes which is critical to the performance of their role.

### **11. The Precise Application of Will**

The ethos of the Royal Marines today is a commando ethos. This ethos revolves around the specific commando role which Royal Marines have carried out since 1942. These tasks demand unity, adaptability, humility, standards, fortitude and a sense of humour. The Royal Marines inculcate these virtues in training and utilise them on operations. The operational results are clear. Since their origins as a commando force in 1942, the Royal Marines have successfully achieved the missions for which they were tasked whether they were peace-keeping duties or combat operations in the Falklands or Iraq. It is possible to summarise the ethos of the Royal Marines in more direct terms. The ethos of the Royal Marines involves the precise application of will. This phrase might stand as a useful summary of all that the Royal Marines Commandos have sought to do in their sixty year history. The Royal Marines apply will rather than mere violence because they are often engaged in peace-keeping duties where the appropriate response is the show of force not the use of violence. Moreover, the word 'will' also denotes the internal qualities of the Royal Marines; they are determined and self-disciplined. They are able to impose themselves on dangerous situations only insofar as they themselves have sufficient will to do so. It is essential to emphasise that the Royal Marines' ideal is to use will in the most efficient manner. As Lieutenant Colonel Vaughan well knew, the environment in which commandos would operate demanded precision. It required a careful, disciplined approach, assuming the highest professional standards. The application of will in all circumstances has to be precise, if it is to be effective.

In his famous work on aboriginal religion, Durkheim argued that social groups exist only insofar as their members recognise them. Consequently, social groups required rituals in which these groups gathered and physically denoted this commitment to each other. One of the most important aspects of these ritual gatherings were the symbols which the social groups created for themselves and which they invested with sacred significance. The totem of the group symbolised the relationship between the members and crucially all the members of the group recognised what the totem, this symbol of the group, demanded from them, as members. As Durkheim noted 'without symbols, social sentiments could have only a precarious existence' (Durkheim 1976: 230-1). Humans need physical objects to represent their relationships to each other. Totems represent the existence of groups and symbolize appropriate action on the part of group members. Durkheim noted that for the most part symbols were ultimately random. The flags for which soldiers have died are ultimately just pieces of cloth. A symbol becomes powerful

not because the materials of which it is made have intrinsic properties but because it is invested with meaning by the social group. However, although symbols can be arbitrary, many of the most powerful symbols do in fact communicate some of the central characteristics of the group which uses them as a totem. Aboriginal clans use clever or feared animals as totems since the clans see themselves as clever or powerful. Similarly in European history, military organizations have favoured fierce animals such as dragons, lions or eagles as their symbols since these animals seem to communicate the ethos to which these groups aspire. The original commandos choose a green salamander passing (unscathed) through fire as a badge and it is believed that the selection of green for the commando beret is a reference to the original salamander. In relation to the Royal Marines, the Globe and Laurel are undoubtedly the most prominent symbols of this organisation. However, there is a secondary symbol which in fact communicates the ethos of the Royal Marines today rather more clearly than the Globe and Laurel; the Commando Dagger. The Commando Dagger was developed as a weapon at Achnacarry by two instructors, Fairbairn and Sykes, and was produced by Wilkinson and Sword (Dunning 2000: 97). Fairbairn and Sykes were continually looking for new kinds of weapons for commando missions and thought that a small, fighting knife could be useful against sentries. However, the weapon soon became more important for symbolic rather than functional reasons, being adopted as the badge of Achnacarry and the commandos more generally. The symbolic potency of the Commando Dagger is obvious. Like all the best symbols, it is simple and stark image with dense connotations. The Commando Dagger is a precision weapon which requires intelligence, fortitude, skill and agility for its use; commandos must close with the enemy and maximize the element of surprise in order to use it effectively. It communicates precisely the commando assault ethos. It is not just that the Dagger demands a particular kind of ethos for its use but the Dagger comes to represent the qualities which individual commandos themselves must possess. They must be hard, sharp and quick, like the Dagger itself. The Commando Dagger is the perfect embodiment of Commando and, therefore, Royal Marines ethos.<sup>20</sup>

In current political debates, the importance of public relations and of marketing has been widely recognized. All institutions, not just companies selling commodities, now try to advertise their central assets through the use of memorable logos and phrases. In promoting themselves to the public and in defending themselves against budgetary cuts, the Royal Marines might consider maximizing the use they make the Commando Dagger, as a powerful symbol. One advantage of the Dagger over the Globe and Laurel is that it communicates a message even to an ignorant public; everyone understands what a fighting knife does and how it is used. It does not need the explanation required of the Globe and Laurel and it is a simpler, more direct image. Moreover, it visually represents the defining ethos of the Royal Marines; the precise application of will. The Dagger is a precision weapon which demands will from its user. Only the Royal Marines can finally decide whether a phrase like 'the precise application of will' or a symbol like the

---

<sup>20</sup> The problem with using the Commando Dagger as a 'logo' for the Royal Marines, is that the Corps does not have total ownership of it. The army units attached to 3 Commando Brigade also employ this symbol. However, since the Royal Marines are now the guardians of the Commando ethos because they set the standards for those who would wish to join this Brigade, it could be argued that they effectively allow the support units in 3 Commando Brigade to use a Royal Marine symbol, the Commando Dagger. The Royal Marines effectively loan their commando symbol to others and without the Corps, the symbol itself would mean nothing. The Corps is the steel of this blade.

Commando Dagger are appropriate ways in which to represent itself to those outside the Corps. However, if the Corps wishes to communicate its mission to government and to the public, it may need to think seriously about appropriate symbols and messages which effectively communicate what the Corps does and how it does it. If the Royal Marines want to affirm their ethos both to themselves and to outsiders, it is better to think in terms of dense and tangible symbols like daggers than to reach for high-sounding but ultimately vacuous words like honour or integrity. The public and government will interpret abstract words like honour by reference to their own experience, not with knowledge of the specific practices which Royal Marines have in mind when they talk of these worthy qualities. The Commando Dagger evokes a rich and appropriate set of associations, even among the most unmilitary audience.

## **12. The Future of Royal Marine Ethos**

Concerns about ethos have arisen in the context of institutional and strategic uncertainty. Military organisations have to justify themselves to government and adapt themselves to a complex strategic situation. Military organisations are not always the most adaptable. Their combat role demands discipline and rigidity in the face of intense pressure and, consequently, in response to new threats they simply turn inwards and repeat drills which seem to inspire confidence and which seem to offer the best hope of survival. There are numerous historical examples of the ossification of military ethos; Japanese Samurai, the Janissaries, the French Army in the 1930s and British cavalry regiments in the First World War. In the new millennium, the Royal Marines need to ensure that they are capable of carrying out the roles relevant to the new strategic situation. Global intervention in peace-keeping and war-fighting operations will become the norm. In fact, the ethos of the Royal Marines is in fact extraordinarily well developed to operate and indeed thrive in the current environment. The post-Cold War era will demand adaptable forces with the highest professional standards. The Royal Marines can be confident that they are among the world's fore-runners on these criteria. The danger which confronts the Royal Marines is not then that they have an inappropriate ethos for the contemporary era. On the contrary, the main danger which confronts them is that they will worry about ethos too much. The Royal Marines ethos will develop insofar as the Royal Marines are deployed operationally. Ethos develops automatically with a role. The Royal Marines should concentrate on ensuring that they have a continuing role in the new era and they should be innovative in developing new roles for themselves just as their forebears appropriated the commando role for themselves, abandoning the formerly honourable blue-bereted role. In his contributions to recent doctrine discussions, Andrew Gordon has expressed the point in a usefully direct way: 'a military with a clear mission already has a doctrine' (Gordon, A 1997: 47). This could be usefully paraphrased with reference to ethos. A military with a clear mission already has an ethos. The mission and the means to achieve it are its ethos.

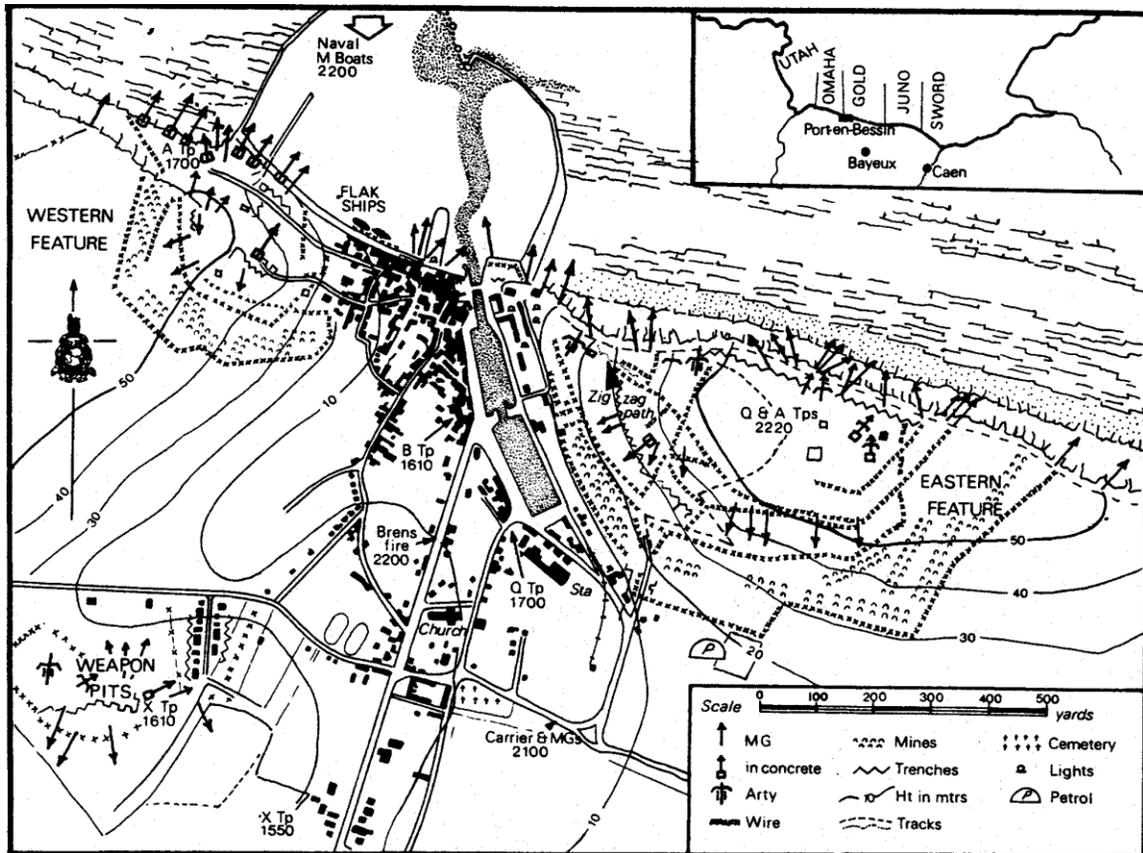
It is clear that in the post-Cold War context, new global threats have emerged for which amphibious forces are perfectly suited (Headquarters Royal Marines and Maritime Warfare Centre 1997: 6). The Royal Marines have the lead on this amphibious role in Europe, while the United States Marine Corps, although incomparably larger, envies the procedures and practices of the Royal Marines. The commando amphibious ethos will

ensure the survival of the Royal Marines in at least the foreseeable future and, indeed, it is likely that the next decades will prove to be a high-point in the history of the Corps. There are other roles which the Royal Marines could also fulfil. Recent commentators on the European Security and Defence Policy have argued that Europe requires a 5000-strong special force capability. In order to preserve its future, the Royal Marines could do worse than persuade the British Government and its European partners that it already possesses such a capability: 3 Commando Brigade. It is already practice that the special forces draw only from the Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment for support and it is noticeable the Royal Marines are working increasingly alongside Special Forces. The SBS always maintained this relationship in the past but there is a growing association between the Royal Marines and the formerly more distant SAS, not least because nearly half of British Special Forces are now drawn from the Royal Marines. Royal Marines are increasingly becoming the force of choice as support for the British Special forces. Moreover, as the special forces are coming under increasing pressure, with more and more demands for operations being put upon them, the Royal Marines are well positioned to pick up the more conventional but nevertheless specialist operations which would have formerly been conducted by the SAS and SBS. Indeed, the Fleet Protection Group already performs certain tasks which employ specialist, 'black' skills, aimed at counter-terrorist activity. The three commando units of 3 Commando Brigade could, for instance, carry out the company or unit assault missions, reconnoitred by Special Forces. By appropriating these specialist roles for itself, the Royal Marines will necessarily develop an ethos which will sustain it for the foreseeable future. The critical issue for the Royal Marines is to ensure that they have a role. So long as they affirm the essential features of Commando ethos - unity, adaptability, humility, standards, fortitude and humour - it is unlikely that the Corps will be superfluous to requirements. As human history has proved, there will, unfortunately, always be a need for cold steel; that is, the precise application of will.



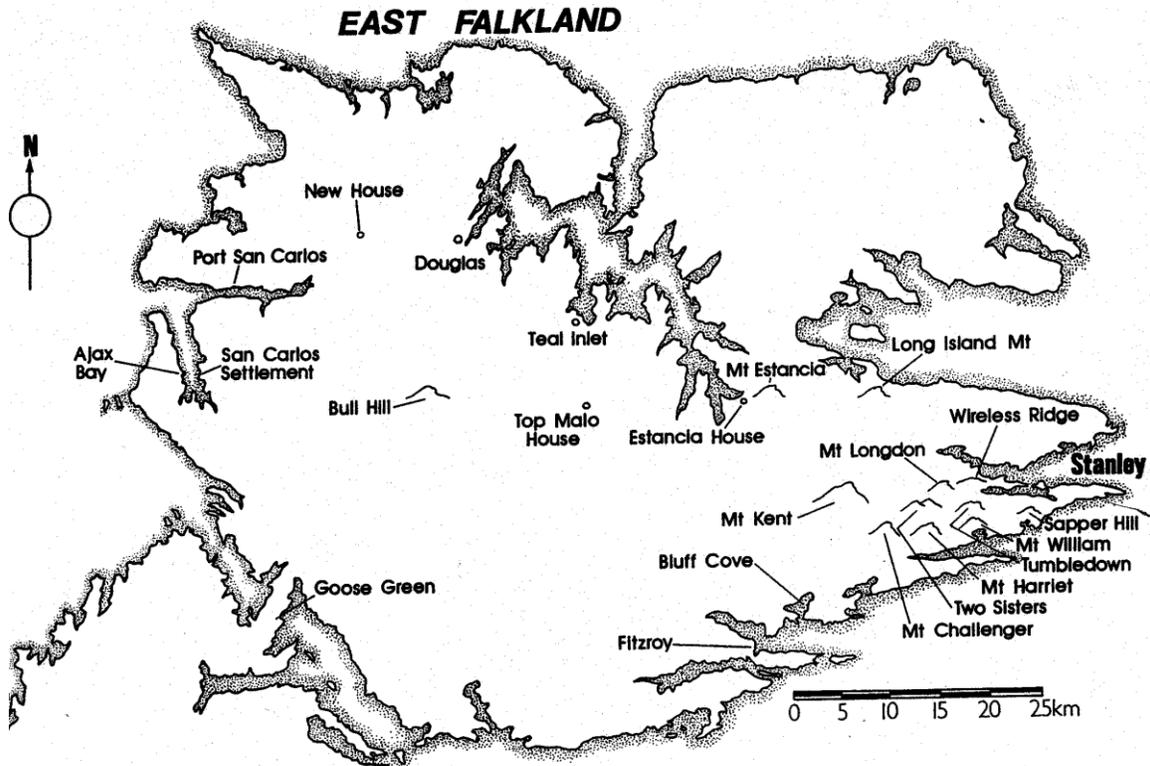
# Port-en-Bessin

Source: Ladd 1994: 187



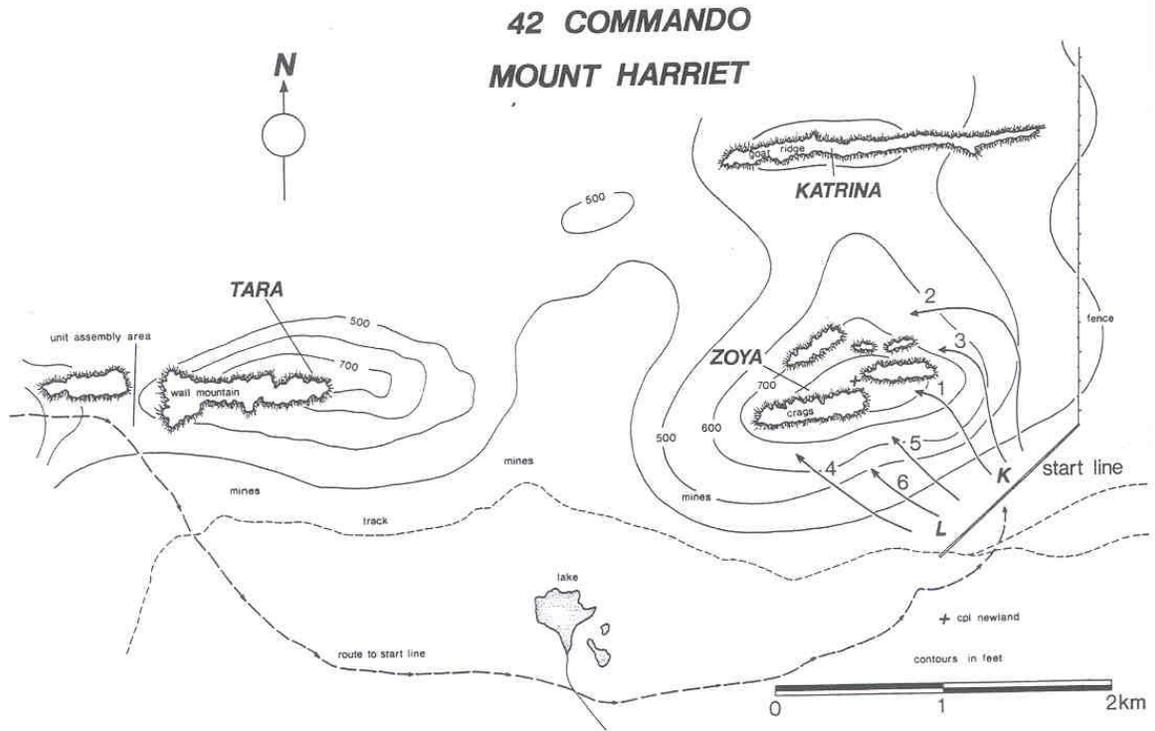
Falklands 1982

Source: Ladd 1994: 349



# Mount Harriet

Source: Ladd 1994: 390



## APPENDIX B: INCULCATING ATTITUDES

At Lympstone, training is understood to involve three elements; it is the inculcation of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Teaching skills and knowledge are relatively straightforward or at least it is obvious when skills and knowledge have been learnt; recruits know things and can perform certain tasks. The inculcation of attitudes seems more problematic and nebulous. Since attitudes are closely associated with ethos and are therefore central to the maintenance of the Corps some concern has been expressed about the difficulty of ensuring that the right attitudes have been inculcated. Although understandable, the concerns are founded on a mis-perception. Like ethos, it is wrong to think that attitudes are internal and private possessions which can be inferred only indirectly and inaccurately from outward appearance. Attitudes are not merely manifest in physical performance. Correct public performance constitutes in and of itself the right attitude. By correct performance, an individual demands from himself and demonstrates to others the appropriate attitude. Recruits and YOs at Lympstone undergo a significant drill programme in their first fifteen weeks. Significantly, the aim of this apparently operationally pointless instruction is to unify the troops and Batches and to inculcate proper military bearing. Appropriate bearing and therefore, a proper military attitude is not invisible. Proper bearing and military attitude are demonstrated to recruits and instructors alike insofar as recruits are able to perform drill manoeuvres correctly. Attitude is a public phenomenon. It is impossible to perform acts properly with the wrong attitude or to perform acts improperly with the right attitude; doing something correctly is in and of itself to demonstrate the right attitude (even if later an individual may disdain his performance). There is one drill manoeuvre which is particularly striking in this regard, because it is employed away from the drill square: proving. In almost their first session of drill, recruits and YOs are taught how to prove. The action is distinctive. In order to prove, a marine comes to attention and raises his right up sharply, angled slightly forward, with the palm facing inwards, fingers together and thumb cocked. The distinctive flat-handed, cocked thumb action derives from the fact that this is the quickest and most efficient way of bringing the hand up from its position by the seams of the trousers when a marine is standing to attention. The act of proving is distinctive and has an important function. It demonstrates self-discipline, self-confidence and decisiveness on the part of the performer and is unambiguous to commanders. In proving correctly, a marines automatically demonstrate that they have a military attitude. They recognise their place in this particular group and what is required of them if this group is to operate effectively; for instance, that commanders need clear communications from their subordinates. Interestingly, the act of proving quickly extends beyond its purely drill square use and at this point it becomes clear that recruits and YOs have learnt appropriate attitudes. Among the YOs for instance, not only do they prove in tactical situations - before section attacks or in response to quick battle orders - but the gesture is employed in the classroom. When YOs ask questions in lectures, they do not return to the student methods, which would be functionally adequate and with which most are familiar from undergraduate days. They do not weakly raise crooked arms, pointing a finger hopefully towards the ceiling; they prove. Arms come up abruptly, palms outstretched, figures together, thumb cocked in a manful, confident gesture. The Commando Training Centre

will know when they have inculcated the correct attitudes in recruits and YOs – and therefore whether the correct ethos has been instilled – if recruits and YOs publicly act in the appropriate ways. Public action will demonstrate correct action and, of course, public action extends to speech. To employ the correct words and phrases is not a mere convenience; it demonstrates that recruits and YOs are beginning to think in a military way. They have absorbed the attitudes and ethos of the Royal Marines precisely because they adopt the public codes – the words and phrases - by which the Marines mark themselves out as a group. As recruits and YOs begin to use the correct doctrinal words instinctively talking about FUPs, LDs, FRV and ERVs while employing informal ‘Royal’ language like ‘scran’, ‘wet’, ‘cracking on’ or ‘threaders’, they are publicly denoting their membership of this group. They have the right attitude insofar as they use these words in the right context. CTC does not need to worry about inculcating the correct attitudes. So long as it demands the proper professional standards from recruits and YOs and so long as recruits and YOs act publicly in the correct way in the context, it is self-evident that the appropriate attitudes – and ethos – have been imparted. Of course, acting correctly publicly does not merely involve performing for senior officers on parade. Public performance extends to every act which is done with other Royal Marines, whether it be in the field, in the mess or on a run ashore. Correct attitude will be demonstrated when a member of the Royal Marines behaves in all these contexts in a way which is consistent with Royal Marines standards.

## **APPENDIX C: THE STANDARDS DEBATE**

The Commando Training Centre is responsible for producing sufficient marines to sustain 3 Commando Brigade and under the pressure to produce sufficiently qualified marines, certain training procedures have been changed. Indeed, the criteria tests have undergone important changes. The Commando tests now take place for recruits after a range firing tests instead of immediately at the end of an exercise as in the past. The course of the 30 miler, in particular, has undergone considerable alteration in recent years. Firstly, the old finishing point at the Cross Furzes was changed to Shipley Bridge when it was noted that the Cross Furzes finish was not in fact precisely 30 miles and the farmer objected to his property being used by the Royal Marines. In the light of safety considerations – casualty evacuation procedures are problematic on the ridge running down from Ryders Hill to Pupers Hill and beyond - the 30 miler now contours around the north side of Ryders finishing close to Two Bridges at the Dartmoor Training Centre. It is an open question whether this course is easier than the old course. However, there is a widespread feeling among the Corps that standards have slipped somewhat and that the tests themselves have become easier because candidates are given more rest before they undergo them. It is widely believed that there are recruits passing out now who would not have previously passed out, though this observation, is usually appended with the apparently contradictory point that on recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, very young marines straight from Lympstone had performed admirably.

Given the pressures on them, the Royal Marines need to be flexible about their training and even their tests. They should not reify the specific tests themselves but ensure that the standards appropriate to the new strategic context and new role which 3 Commando Brigade will have to fulfil are properly developed at Lympstone. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the ritualistic role of Commando training and of the tests themselves. Social groups employ common symbols to unify themselves and to recognise members. One of the most important symbols is the rite of passage by which the would-be members are tested. Only those with the appropriate qualities will pass. As common badges of membership, rites of passage become sacred for groups and it becomes important to the group that all members have performed the same procedure in order to become members. If initiates undergo dramatically different ordeals, there is no common experience to unify members. In relation to the Commando tests and to training more widely, it is to be expected that Royal Marines invest this process with sacred importance and are extremely anxious that would-be members undergo the same rites as they themselves performed. The difficulty of ensuring standards, especially in relation to the Commando tests, is compounded by the process of allowing re-runs. Although a standard procedure of long-standing, this does allow a degree of flexibility into the assessing procedure which may encourage the belief that justice, although formally given, has not been substantively done. It is noticeable that if all the recruits or YOs, and not just the weaker candidates, had to re-do certain tests, there would be little doubt that standards had been lowered. The culture of allowing re-runs creates certain institutional difficulties for CTC. There are two contradictory processes currently at work in the Royal Marines in relations to their training and the Commando tests.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, in the

---

<sup>21</sup> It could be argued that two elements of Royal Marine ethos come into contradiction here: humility and adaptability which allows flexibility in training and testing and encourages CTC to give individuals the best possible chance conflicts with the demands for standards.

face of new kinds of recruits who must be trained for new missions and the constant demand for numbers, Lympstone has to be flexible with its training. On the other, serving members of the Corps necessarily want recruits and YOs to have undergone the same tests as they themselves underwent. There is an obvious compromise here. The sacred quality of the tests can be preserved while Lympstone retains its right to alter training so long as the tests and the training more widely undergoes slow and considered evolution. The sacred tests must not be profaned; that would undermine social unity in the Corps and be antithetical to Royal Marines ethos. Yet, it is also necessary that the institution remain flexible enough so that necessary changes can be made; to ossify outmoded forms of training or testing is no less a serious error than profaning what is sacred. Ultimately, the proof of the standards maintained at Lympstone is on operations. So long as recruits passing out of Lympstone perform their role as they have been, then serving marines can be sure that whatever the tests or the structure of the training programme, recruits and YOs alike continue to be tested to the full.

## **Bibliography**

- Commandant General Royal Marines. 2000. *The Royal Marines Ethos: Identity and Fighting Effectiveness*.
- Dunning, J. 2000. *'It had to be tough'*. Romsey, Hants: James Dunning Publications.
- Durkheim, E. 1976. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Foster, N. 1993. *The Making of a Royal Marines Commando*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson.
- Gilchrist, D. 1960. *Castle Commando*. London: Oliver and Boyd.
- Gordon, A. 1997. 'The Doctrine Debate: Having the last word' in Duffy, M, Farrell, T and Sloan, G (eds.) *Doctrine and Military Effectiveness: Strategic Policy Studies 1*. Exeter: Exeter University Press.
- Headquarters Royal Marines and Maritime Warfare Centre. 1997. *The United Kingdom Approach to Amphibious Operations*. London: Ministry of Defence.
- Holmes, R. 2001. *Redcoat*. London: Harper Collins.
- Howard, M. 2000. *War in European History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Karcher, M. 2001. 'Passing the Torch: retired Marines instil Corps' Values in Youth' *Leatherneck*, September.
- Keegan, J. 1994. *A History of Warfare*. London: Pimlico.
- Keyes, R, Lord, Admiral of the Fleet. 1981a. 'Keyes to Churchill, 29 April 1940' in Halpern, P (ed) *The Keyes Papers Volume III: 1939-45*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Keyes, Lord, Admiral of the Fleet. 1981b. 'Keyes to Ismay 6 November 1941' in Halpern, P (ed) *The Keyes Papers Volume III: 1939-45*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Ladd, J. 1998. *By Sea, By Land: The Royal Marines 1919-1997*. London: HarperCollins.
- Ladd, J. 1978. *Commandos and Rangers of World War II*. London: Macdonald and Jane's.
- Lake, C. 1994. *Reflected Glory*. London: Orion.
- Lance, D. 2001. 'Marine Corps Values Program in 2001: Where are we now?', *Marine Corps Gazette*, September.
- Little, R. 1996. 'Ethos IV', *Naval Review*.
- Lockhart, B. 1950. *The Marines Were There*. London: Putnam.
- Macdonald, J. 1996. 'Ethos – What is Important?' *Naval Review*, 1996.
- Neillands, R. 2000. *By Sea and Land: the story of the Royal Marines Commandos*. London: Cassell.
- Salmon, J. 1994. 'Foreword' in Lake, C. 1994. *Reflected Glory*. London: Orion.
- St George Saunders, H. 1949. *The Green Beret*. London: Michael Joseph.
- Thompson, J. 2000. *The Royal Marines: from sea-soldiers to a special force*. London: Pan.
- Vaux, N. 19186. *March to the South Atlantic*. London: Buchan and Enright.