

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL SPECIAL OPERATIONS
INTEGRATION IN CONTESTED AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS

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General Studies

by

KEVIN J. WILLIAMS, MAJOR, USMC
B.A., College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, 2007

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
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Name of Candidate: Major Kevin J. Williams

Thesis Title: The Characteristics of Successful Special Operations Integration in
Contested Amphibious Operations

Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
David A. Anderson, Ph.D.

_____, Member
Jesse McIntyre III, M.B.A.

_____, Member
Daniel E. Longwell, M.A.

Accepted this 12th day of June 2020 by:

_____, Acting Director, Office of Degree Programs
Prisco R Hernandez, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL SPECIAL OPERATIONS
INTEGRATION IN CONTESTED AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS, by Major Kevin J.
Williams, 138 pages.

The current global security environment is dynamic. Inter-state strategic competition is the current priority of the US security apparatus, driving the development of military concepts oriented on large-scale combat while low-intensity conflict remains. This dynamic creates tension between succeeding in ongoing conflicts while innovating to establish the conditions for success in the future. The maritime domain is critical for the US to project power. Gaining operational access to a theater may require maritime forces to conduct forcible entry. Amphibious operations are among the most complex military actions, made more challenging by sophisticated anti-access and area-denial systems combined with the physical and geopolitical complexities of the littorals. Special operations forces represent a distinct instrument of military power and provide unique effects to joint warfare. In presenting a theory of special operations, Dr. Richard Spulak outlines five operations characteristics of special operations forces: relative superiority, certain access, integrated operations, unconventional operations, and strategic initiative. Considering the complexity of the future operating environment, what special operations forces characteristics best support contested amphibious operations to inform innovation and concept integration?

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Semper Fidelis

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ACRONYMS

AFO	Advanced Force Operations
GHQ	General Headquarters
MARSOC	Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command
NKPA	North Korean People's Army
OPE	Operational Preparation of the Environment
ROK	Republic of Korea
SAS	Special Air Service
SBS	Special Boat Squadron
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOG	Special Operations Group
UDT	Underwater Demolition Team
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Today's operating environment is inter-connected, global, and complex.

Competition with a range of state, proxy, and non-state actors contest the norms that define international order and exploit social seams in governance, resulting in persistent disorder. While this competition generally falls beneath the threshold of traditional armed conflict, the potential exists for a strategic miscalculation that could lead to large-scale hostilities. This ongoing competition weighed against potential outcomes creates tension between reaction and action. How does the Joint Force manage today's challenges while solving tomorrow's threats?¹

The 2017 National Security Strategy and nested 2018 National Defense Strategy highlight inter-state strategic competition as the US's primary national security concern.² Military leaders consider today's security environment challenged in every domain.³

¹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operating Environment 2035: The Joint Force in a Contested and Disordered World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), ii-iii.

² White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 2; US Department of Defense, *2018 Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 1.

³ US Department of Defense, *2018 Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 1-3.

Adversaries incorporate complementary political, military, and economic efforts to achieve “layered stand-off,” allowing them the space to pursue their objectives.⁴

The United States (US) is separated from most of the world by two oceans and requires extensive use of international waters and airspace to project and sustain power.⁵ In the event of conflict, gaining operational access may require performing forcible entry, “the projection of land forces onto hostile territory in the face of armed opposition.”⁶ Maritime forces conduct forcible through amphibious operations. Amphibious assaults, the form of amphibious operation for forcible entry, are among the most complex and challenging of military operations.⁷ Adding to this challenge is advanced adversary anti-access and area-denial systems.

Recognizing this challenge, General David Berger, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, states in the *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance* that the proliferation of anti-access and area-denial capabilities make the maritime domain contested from the US to the theater of operations. The impact of this increase in threat capability is that maritime forcible entry will not take the form of a, “massed naval armada . . . preparing

⁴ US Army Training and Doctrine Command, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 2018), iii.

⁵ US Department of Defense, *Joint Operational Access Concept* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 5.

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-02, *Amphibious Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), II-9.

to launch the landing force in swarms of ACVs, LCUs, and LCACs.”⁸ This potential paradigm shift reflects that adversary anti-access and area-denial efforts are driving concept development across the joint force.

Special operations are “operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments.”⁹ In US military practice, special operations forces (SOF) conduct special operations.¹⁰ Dr. Harry Yarger of Joint Special Operations University argues that SOF represent a distinct instrument of military power that can be employed discretely or “as an integrated part of national military power and joint warfare.”¹¹ Given this argument, SOF can likely contribute discrete capabilities to emerging military concepts.

US special operations doctrine lists twelve core activities. They are direct action, special reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, civil affairs operations, counterterrorism, military information support operations, counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, security force assistance,

⁸ United States Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 2019), 1, 5.

⁹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), GL-11.

¹⁰ Harry R. Yarger, *21st Century SOF: Toward an American Theory of Special Operations* (Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2013), 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

counterinsurgency, hostage rescue and recovers, and foreign humanitarian assistance.¹² Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) is the Marine Corps' contribution to the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Marine Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) are assigned the core activities of direct action, special reconnaissance, security force assistance, counterterrorism, foreign internal defense, and counterinsurgency. MARSOFF further supports countering weapons of mass destruction and unconventional warfare.¹³

In execution, special operations missions often integrate more than one core activity.¹⁴ Further, SOF apply core activities in different combinations based on unique operational requirements.¹⁵ Dr. Robert Spulak notes that understanding SOF in terms of missions and capabilities is impractical.¹⁶ Instead, Spulak offers five operational characteristics of SOF, that distinguish SOF from conventional forces. The operational characteristics summarize “what SOF can do, not how they do it.” They are relative

¹² US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, II-3.

¹³ US Marine Corps, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-05, *Marine Corps Special Operations* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 2018), 1-10.

¹⁴ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, II-2 – II-3.

¹⁵ United States Marine Corps, MCWP 3-05, *Marine Corps Special Operations*, 2-4.

¹⁶ Robert G. Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF* (Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2007), 2.

superiority, certain access, unconventional operations, integrated operations, and strategic initiative.¹⁷

Forward deployed SOF currently support national objectives worldwide, but also offer capabilities to enable emerging concepts. In his Strategy Research Project for the US Army War College, then Colonel Jeff VanAntwerp, US Army, explores the tension between maintaining the ability to win in the current fight (exploitation), and the need to innovate to succeed in the future (exploration).¹⁸ The purpose of this study is to determine the most important operational characteristics of SOF in the context of contested amphibious operations to inform future exploration for MARSOC.

Primary Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following question: In the context of great power competition, what are the most important characteristics of successful special operations in support of contested amphibious operations?

Secondary Questions

1. What factors characterize littoral environments and challenge conducting amphibious operations?
2. How are adversaries approaching competition and conflict and how is the US military adapting to meet that approach?
3. What capabilities and effects does SOF provide in amphibious operations?

¹⁷ Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 22-23.

¹⁸ Jeff VanAntwerp, “Army Special Operations Forces: The Leader’s Role in Innovation” (Strategy Research Project, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2017), 1.

4. How has SOF historically contributed to contested amphibious operations?
5. What characteristics enabled SOF to achieve effects in amphibious operations?

Assumptions

This research makes several assumptions. First, amphibious assault operations will continue to be a relevant joint forcible entry method. Second, MARSOC is uniquely suited to innovate SOF support paradigms for amphibious assault operations due to the shared identity with the Marine Corps. This assumption is relevant because each special operations service component maintains maritime capability. Naval Special Warfare, in particular, has deep institutional experience in amphibious special operations. The Marine Corps' reconnaissance formations also conduct amphibious advanced force activities. Third, the United States Marine Corps and USSOCOM have a desire for MARSOF to provide operational support to amphibious joint forcible entry.

Definition of Terms

Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC or MARFORSOC): the command assigned the mission “to recruit, organize, train, equip, and deploy task-organized, scalable, expeditionary Marine Corps SOF worldwide to accomplish the full spectrum of special operations missions assigned by the commander, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), the geographic combatant commanders (GCCs) via the theater special operations command (TSOC), or both.”¹⁹

¹⁹ United States Marine Corps, MCWP 3-05, *Marine Corps Special Operations*, 1-9.

Marine Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF): those Active Component Marine Corps forces designated by the Secretary of Defense that are specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations.²⁰

Maritime Forces: United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, and United States Coast Guard personnel, weapon systems, and organizations. A maritime force is any force constituted by the joint force commander to achieve operational objectives at sea or to achieve an objective on land from the sea.²¹

Sub-Threshold Competition: competition below the threshold for traditional armed conflict.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study is to analyze SOF effects integrated into contested amphibious operations. Specifically, it will analyze SOF effects through the framework of the operational characteristics of SOF. This study will provide context by examining persistent and evolving challenges in the current operating environment. While the literature review will consider sub-threshold competition for context regarding Preparation of the Environment activities, this study will not seek to examine the role of SOF in the context of competition. Finally, this research will focus temporally on the period from World War II and beyond and discuss SOF from western nations.

²⁰ United States Marine Corps, MCWP 3-05, *Marine Corps Special Operations*, Glossary, 7.

²¹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-32, *Joint Maritime Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), I-1.

Limitations

This thesis will remain at the unclassified level. This study will compile all research materials through open-source means. Certain special operations activities, governing documents, and operational histories are classified. Presenting this study at an unclassified level may limit the depth and detail of the analysis.

Significance

This topic is significant to the military profession because SOF's unique capabilities can potentially amplify the development of military concepts oriented on inter-state strategic competition. Assessing the relative importance of SOF's operational characteristics can inform the focus of innovation and capability development while still preparing for ongoing operational requirements. MARSOC's shared identity with the Marine Corps can potentially enhance interoperability, innovation, and experimentation for contested amphibious operations.²²

Organization

Chapter 2 will present a literature review of material relevant to the topic. Chapter 3 will explain the research methodology. Chapter 4 will analyze three historical case studies using the five operational characteristics of SOF, then present a comparative analysis of the case studies. Chapter 5 will present conclusions and recommendations for future research.

²² United States Marine Corps, MCWP 3-05, *Marine Corps Special Operations*, 3-1.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of a changing global security environment that is spurring the military to develop operations concepts. It outlines the importance of amphibious operations, identifies SOF operations characteristics, and limits the scope of the study to western special operations forces formed during or after World War II. Chapter 2 will present a literature review.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will begin by summarizing the maritime domain and the importance of amphibious operations as a method of power projection. The study will then review the definition and complexities of the littorals, the environment where amphibious operations occur. Next, the literature review will cover adversary force integration of competition and anti-access and area denial systems to achieve objectives short of conflict. The study then will review developing military concepts to address the contested warfighting domains generated by enemy stratagems. Finally, the literature review will examine special operations and SOF definitions, capabilities, theories, and constructs to establish how SOF can create effects in contested amphibious operations.

Why are Amphibious Operations Important?

This section describes the importance of the maritime domain and why amphibious operations will likely remain. To explore SOF's role in supporting contested amphibious operations, understanding the maritime domain and amphibious operations is pertinent.

US doctrine defines the maritime domain as consisting of “the oceans, seas, bays, estuaries, islands, coastal areas, and the airspace above these, including the littorals.”²³

²³ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-32, *Joint Maritime Operations*, I-5 – I-6.

The sea, along with areas of air, space, and cyberspace, provides global access, thus belonging to no single state. Collectively these environs constitute the global commons.²⁴

The United Nations International Maritime Organization notes that maritime transportation is vital to the global economy, with over 90 percent of the world's trade carried by sea.²⁵ The US Energy Information Administration assessed that 61 percent of the world's petroleum and other liquids production moved by sea in 2015.²⁶ The importance of the maritime environment to access and commerce makes it inherently strategic.

The US is separated from most of the world by two oceans and requires extensive use of international waters and airspace to project and sustain power.²⁷ Power projection describes a nation's ability to apply the elements of national power to achieve objectives.²⁸ The 2015 publication, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, scopes naval power projection as follows:

²⁴ US Department of Defense, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, 1.

²⁵ United Nations Business Action Hub, "International Maritime Organization (IMO) Profile," United Nations Business, accessed March 14, 2020, <https://business.un.org/en/entities/13>.

²⁶ US Energy Information Administration, "World Oil Transit Checkpoints," US Energy Information Administration, 2017, 1, accessed March 15, 2020, https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/special_topics/World_Oil_Transit_Checkpoints/wotc.pdf.

²⁷ US Department of Defense, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, 5.

²⁸ US Department of Navy, United States Coast Guard, and United States Marine Corps, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (Washington, DC: Chief of Naval Operations, 2015), 24. The elements of national power are (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic).

Naval power projection includes conventional strikes against targets ashore, integrated kinetic strikes and non-kinetic fires against enemy forces, advance force operations, raids, and all forms of amphibious operations, from ship-to-objective maneuver and sea-based fire support to forces ashore to missions conducted by Naval Special Warfare and Special Operations Forces.²⁹

The 2012 *Joint Operational Access Concept* terms the ability to project military power into a theater of operations with sufficient strength to conduct subsequent operations as operational access.³⁰ Establishing operational access may require performing forcible entry, “the projection of land forces onto hostile territory in the face of armed opposition.”³¹ Maritime forces conduct forcible through amphibious operations.

Amphibious operations are operations, “launched from the sea by an amphibious force (AF) to conduct landing force (LF) operations within the littorals.” Amphibious operations offer several advantages. Amphibious forces use the maritime domain as maneuver space, allowing friendly forces to gain access where the enemy is least prepared. Naval forces maneuvering at distance can impose multiple dilemmas on enemy forces by generating effects, “on, above, under, and from the sea.” Additionally, amphibious operations potentially remove diplomatic coordination or host-nation support requirements within a theater.³²

Amphibious operations also pose several challenges. Amphibious operations are intense, combined arms efforts that require significant support. Despite the improved

²⁹ US Department of Navy, United States Coast Guard, and United States Marine Corps, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, 24.

³⁰ US Department of Defense, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³² US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*, I-2 – I-3.

offset offered by long-range military systems, amphibious forces are subject to similarly capable anti-access and area-denial systems.³³ Amphibious assaults, the form of amphibious operations for forcible entry, are among the most complex and challenging military operations to conduct.³⁴ Finally, amphibious operations occur in the complex littoral environment.

What are the Littorals and What Challenges do they Present?

US doctrine defines the littorals as including “those land areas (and their adjacent sea and associated air space) that are predominantly susceptible to engagement and influence from the sea and may reach far inland.”³⁵ The military organizes the littorals into two segments. First, the seaward portion is “the area from the open ocean to the shore, which must be controlled to support operations ashore.” Second, the landward portion is “the area inland from the shore that can be supported and defended directly from the sea.”³⁶

The strategic importance of the littorals has consistently increased since the end of the Cold War.³⁷ US Naval War College Professor, Dr. Milan Vego, describes several factors underscoring the geopolitical importance of the littorals.

³³ Bradley Martin, *Amphibious Operations in Contested Environments: Insights from Analytical Work* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 1.

³⁴ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*, II-9.

³⁵ Ibid., I-1.

³⁶ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-32, *Joint Maritime Operations*, I-5.

³⁷ Milan Vego, “On Littoral Warfare,” *Naval War College Review* 60, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 31.

About 80 percent of all countries border the sea, and approximately 95 percent of the world's population lives within six hundred miles of the coast. Some 60 percent of the world's politically significant urban areas are located within sixty miles of the coast, and 70 percent within three hundred miles. About 80 percent of the world's capitals are in the littorals. The littorals account for about 16 percent of the world's oceanic expanse. Yet they are critically important because all seaborne trade originates and ends there.³⁸

The littorals present three significant challenges to amphibious operations. First, the human dimension is where several geopolitical trends intersect. Second is the physical challenges present in the varied littoral environment. The third challenge is the synthesis of overlapping warfighting domains and external influences.

Conflict is a human endeavor, and several factors increase the likelihood of future conflict in the littorals. Dr. David Kilcullen argues that the dynamic interaction of four factors shapes the littoral environment. First, the world is experiencing rapid population growth, with the most dramatic increase anticipated in underdeveloped countries. Second, over half the world's population lives in cities, with urban populations density rising.³⁹ Third, growth and urbanization are generating a parallel effect where people increasingly concentrate in the coastal cities. Finally, connectivity amplifies migration trends and is transforming conflict.⁴⁰

The second challenge to amphibious operations is the variation in physical terrain in the littorals. Vego observes that “the littorals differ considerably in terms of their sizes, distances, hydrography, oceanography, and the proximity of the landmass to the open

³⁸ Vego, “On Littoral Warfare,” 31.

³⁹ David J. Kilcullen, “The Australian Army in the Urban, Networked Littorals” (Army Research Paper No. 2, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 2014), 8-9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 13-17.

ocean.”⁴¹ Coral reefs, tides and tidal ranges, shallow water, and hinterland terrain present natural obstacles in the littorals. Mines, coastal defenses, and tactical obstacles constitute man-made challenges.⁴² This variation in physical features has an impact on maritime forces during an amphibious assault.

The third and final challenge is the synthesis of warfighting domains, physical terrain, and the human dimension. US military doctrine currently recognizes five warfighting domains: land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace.⁴³ Kilcullen frames the littoral environment as presenting nine domains: seabed, sub-surface, sea surface, land surface, super-surface (rooftops), subterranean, cyberspace, aerospace, and human (see figure 1). Kilcullen argues that each domain is interdependent, where actions on one will have impacts in the rest.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Vego, “On Littoral Warfare,” 34, 37-38.

⁴² Sydney Ellington, “Special Operations in Littoral Warfare” (Master’s Thesis US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 1995).

⁴³ US Army Training and Doctrine Command, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, iii.

⁴⁴ Kilcullen, “The Australian Army in the Urban, Networked Littorals,” 25.

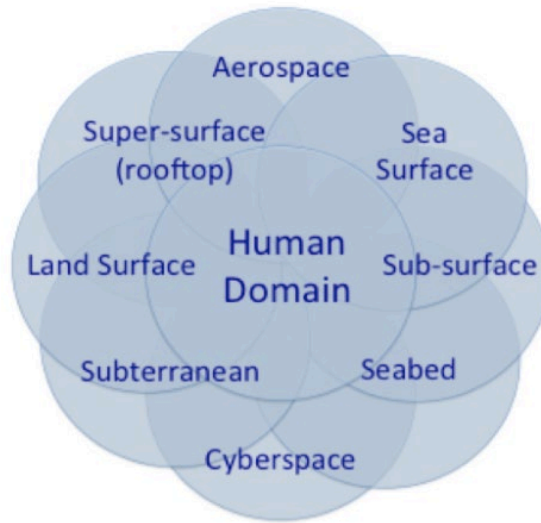


Figure 1. Kilcullen's Nine Littoral Domains

Source: David J. Kilcullen, "The Australian Army in the Urban, Networked Littorals" (Army Research Paper No. 2, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 2014), 26.

The littorals are complex environments where a significant portion of the world's population resides. The dynamic interaction of multiple factors in the littorals increases the likelihood of conflict there. The intersection of domains traditionally denotes an institutional transition in military authority or executing agency.⁴⁵ Synchronizing effects to conduct operations across domains is intrinsically complex. Enemy or adversary interaction adds extrinsic complications.

⁴⁵ Torbjorn G. Grimeland and Oscar van der Veen, "Maritime SOF in the Littorals: Theoretical Principles for Littoral Special Operations" (Master's Thesis, US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2016), 6.

What is Inter-State Strategic Competition?

Understanding competition is essential in considering SOF's role in supporting contested amphibious operations. The global operating model's contact layer orients on competition.⁴⁶ Inter-state strategic competition, and the potential transition to large-scale conflict, happens where people are. This context underscores the importance of the littorals.

Competition is a fundamental tool in international relations whereby state or non-state actors seek to advance their interests and gain an advantage. Competitors can cooperate, and friendly states can compete for outcomes that support their respective national objectives. Strategic relationships combine elements of both cooperation and competition. Competition below the threshold for traditional conflict, or sub-threshold competition, describes geopolitical interactions that do not meet the legal or institutional thresholds for a large-scale armed response.⁴⁷ Fundamentally, competition describes the space between peace and war.

Considerable literature exists presenting conceptual models describing competitive interaction between peace and war. US doctrine recognizes two forms of warfare: traditional and irregular. Traditional warfare is "a violent struggle for domination between nation-states or coalitions and alliances of nation-states." In contrast, irregular warfare is "a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy

⁴⁶ Department of Defense, *2018 Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 7.

⁴⁷ US Joint Chief of Staff, Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-19, *Competition Continuum* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), 1.

and influence over the relevant population(s).”⁴⁸ Given these definitions, sub-threshold competition is inherently irregular warfare.

Scholar Frank Hoffman of the Heritage Institute presents the “conflict spectrum” to organize conceptual models of sub-threshold competition “when attempting to characterize a given conflict by participants, methods, level of effort, types of forces, levels of organization and sophistication.” Hoffman argues that conflict progresses from gray zone or ambiguous interaction to irregular war to hybrid war to limited conventional war, and culminates in major theater war.⁴⁹ Figure 2 depicts the conflict spectrum.

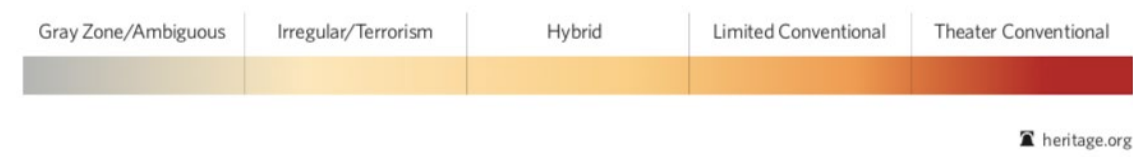


Figure 2. Spectrum of Conflict

Source: Frank G. Hoffman, “The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War” (Essay, Heritage Foundation Index of Military Power, 2016), 29, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://index.heritage.org/military/2016/essays/contemporary-spectrum-of-conflict/>.

⁴⁸ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), I-5 – I-6.

⁴⁹ Frank G. Hoffman, “The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War” (Essay, Heritage Foundation Index of Military Power, 2016), 26-31, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://index.heritage.org/military/2016/essays/contemporary-spectrum-of-conflict/>.

In 2019, the US Joint Staff introduced the concept of the “competition continuum,” which frames inter-state relations in a context of enduring competition conducted through a mix of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict.⁵⁰ Competition below armed conflict tends to be extended, indirect, and constrained, attributes that challenge military campaigning in this environment.⁵¹ Successful joint force action in competition will display the following characteristics:

First, the joint force should begin with the best possible understanding of how relevant actors will perceive action. Second, the joint force and its partners should conduct a broad array of activities: establish access to critical areas, forward position units, establish appropriate and timely presence, organize exercises, share intelligence, prepare the environment for crisis response, and conduct operations in the information environment, to include efforts to counter and undermine the competitor’s narrative. Third, the joint force and its partners should ensure the creative and flexible conduct of these activities within a fluid, strategic situation and pervasive information environment. Fourth, the joint force should conduct continual reassessment of the competitor’s intentions and capabilities, which will change over time.⁵²

Political Scientist Michael Mazarr identifies three elements of the sub-threshold competition. First, revisionism describes the aim of dissatisfied powers to “shift international rules, norms, distribution of goods, and patterns of authority to their benefit.”⁵³ Second, strategic gradualism seeks to accomplish political ends over time.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ US Joint Chief of Staff, JDN 1-19, *Competition Continuum*, i, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Challenging Era of Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2015), 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

Third, unconventional tools describe irregular approaches to statecraft that leverage ambiguity to remain below the threshold of traditional conflict.⁵⁵

Sub-threshold competition is the primary method adversaries employ to pursue revisionist objectives without triggering an armed response. While competition is inherently gradual, a miscalculation may lead to a rapid transition to conflict. SOF currently operates in the contact layer, positioned to assess adversary intentions and prepare the environment for conflict. To support competition, adversaries leverage anti-access and area denial systems, providing “standoff” to pursue their objectives.⁵⁶ Understanding anti-access and area denial capabilities are vital in exploring SOF’s role in contested environments.

What are Anti-Access and Area Denial Capabilities?

Operational access is a requirement that has existed as long as militaries have projected force across seas.⁵⁷ An adversary’s prerogative to contest that access is equally historic.⁵⁸ Overcoming “opposed access” requires defeating enemy anti-access and area denial systems.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*, 43-44.

⁵⁶ US Army Training and Doctrine Command, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, iii.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸ Sam J. Tangretti, *Anti-Access Warfare: Countering A2/AD Strategies* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 1.

⁵⁹ US Department of Defense, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, 5.

Anti-access and area denial systems are often described together but have distinct qualities. Anti-access efforts seek to exclude military forces from a theater or deny the use of the global commons. These actions might range from political and economic exclusion, to activities to deny basing, staging, transit, or over-flight.⁶⁰ The US military defines anti-access as “actions and capabilities, usually long-range, designed to prevent an opposing force from entering an operational area.” Area-denial describes “actions and capabilities, usually of shorter range, designed not to keep an opposing force out, but to limit its freedom of action within the operational area.”⁶¹ These two concepts constitute a “primary strategic challenge to the international security objectives of the United States.”⁶²

In his book, *Anti-Access Warfare: Countering A2/AD Strategies*, Captain Sam Tangretti, US Navy (retired), observes that militaries have employed anti-access and area denial strategies throughout history.⁶³ During World War II, Nazi Germany combined U-Boat attacks with coastal fortifications, mining, and obstacle emplacement to deny Allied powers access to occupied France.⁶⁴ In the Pacific, Imperial Japan seized key maritime terrain in the central Pacific to mount an “island-defending” campaign to

⁶⁰ Nathan Freier, “The Emerging Anti-Access/Area Denial Challenge,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/emerging-anti-accessarea-denial-challenge>.

⁶¹ US Department of Defense, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, 6.

⁶² Tangretti, *Anti-Access Warfare*, 1.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 135-137.

counter the anticipated “island-hopping” campaign required in War Plan Orange. The attack on Pearl Harbor, combined with a maritime defense-in-depth, sought to deny the US the crucial assets to enter the Pacific Theater.⁶⁵

The current concern with anti-access and area-denial capabilities is grounded in the development and proliferation of sophisticated technology with the ability to “sense” and “shoot” at long range.⁶⁶ Modern lethal anti-access instruments consist of long-range missiles, submarines, weapons of mass destruction, and space or cyberspace attacks. Proxy warfare and terrorism in other theaters constitute an alternative anti-access approach.⁶⁷ Anti-access systems can attack forward bases and disrupt critical sea lines of communication necessary to project power.⁶⁸

Modern area-denial assets are close-range weapons and obstacles designed to frustrate forcible entry and subsequent operations. These systems include ballistic and cruise missiles, mines, guided rockets, indirect fire systems, integrated air defense, anti-armor weapons, proxy networks, and irregular forces.⁶⁹ In the littorals, area-denial assets consist of aircraft, attack submarines, multi-purpose corvettes, fast attack craft, coastal missile or gun batteries, unmanned aerial vehicles, midget submarines, mines, and

⁶⁵ Tangretti, *Anti-Access Warfare*, 143.

⁶⁶ United States Department of Navy, United States Marine Corps, *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment* (Quantico, VA: United States Marine Corps, 2017), 5.

⁶⁷ Freier, “The Emerging Anti-Access/Area Denial Challenge.”

⁶⁸ US Department of Defense, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, 7.

⁶⁹ Freier, “The Emerging Anti-Access/Area Denial Challenge.”

ballistic missiles.⁷⁰ The consequences of failed regimes, sectarian violence, and terrorism present “unstructured” area-denial challenges.⁷¹

Vego, in his 2015 Naval War College Review article, “On Littoral Warfare,” describes the complexity, range, and lethality of China’s anti-access and area denial systems.

People’s Republic of China is currently developing sophisticated A2/AD multilayered defenses extending several hundred miles from the coast. These defenses consist of space-, air-, and ground-based radars, and over- the-horizon radars, bombers, fighter-bombers, and multipurpose attack aircraft carrying air-to surface missiles (ASMs) and ASCMs. The Chinese navy is also introducing into service large numbers of modern surface combatants armed with ASCMs, as well as AIP SSKs armed with ASCMs, torpedoes, and mines. Approaches to the Chinese coast are defended by numerous coastal missile and gun batteries. The Chinese have very large inventories of highly advanced mines. They also have at their disposal several hundred SRBMs and MRBMs for use against targets on land. They have developed antiship ballistic missiles with ranges of a thousand miles plus, as well as a highly integrated air-defense system (IADS) with sophisticated surface-to-air missiles and fourth- and fifth-generation fighter aircraft. The Chinese A2/AD assets also include highly advanced and hardened C2 networks, antisatellite weapons, and cyberattack capabilities.⁷²

The two main approaches for countering anti-access and area denial challenges are “outside-in” or “inside-out” approaches. The outside-in approach consists of systematically degrading enemy capability layer by layer. The inside-out method involves technological overmatch to rapidly target anti-access and area-denial systems,

⁷⁰ Vego, “On Littoral Warfare,” 60-61.

⁷¹ Freier, “The Emerging Anti-Access/Area Denial Challenge.”

⁷² Vego, “On Littoral Warfare,” 32.

effectively breaching the obstacle system.⁷³ The inside-out approach likely presents an opportunity to employ SOF capabilities. Concerns over the impacts of modern anti-access and area denial systems are driving current US military's concept development.

What Developing Military Concepts Address Contested Domains?

In 2019, General David Berger, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, released the *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*. The *Commandant's Planning Guidance* argues that the proliferation of anti-access and area-denial systems makes the maritime domain contested from the US to the theater of operations. The impact of this increase in threat capability is that maritime forcible entry operations will not take the form of a "massed naval armada . . . preparing to launch the landing force in swarms of ACVs, LCUs, and LCACs."⁷⁴ This assertion about the character of amphibious assaults is not new. Joint doctrine notes that the historical paradigm for amphibious operations has already shifter, with today's amphibious forces able to execute actions from a greater distance by both air and surface means.⁷⁵

Another concern driving concept development is that today's naval fleet is a product of post-Cold War presumptive naval superiority. Each ship within a current Amphibious Ready Group is a high-value unit, providing critical capabilities to the whole

⁷³ Sameer Josi, "Demystifying the Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) Threat," Medium, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://medium.com/@sameerjoshi73/demystifying-the-anti-access-area-denial-a2-ad-threat-d0ed26ae8b9e>.

⁷⁴ United States Marine Corps, *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, 1, 4-5.

⁷⁵ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*, I-1.

formation. The loss of one ship would degrade the unit's ability to accomplish the mission.⁷⁶ Advanced anti-access and area-denial systems increase the risk to high-value units and complicate setting the conditions for amphibious operations.

Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, is a developing Marine Corps operational concept focused on enabling sea control and sea denial in support of joint operations. Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations centers on establishing low-signature, distributed advanced bases with the ability to, “offensively target and strike adversary naval and air platforms, and defensively form the nucleus of an active maritime defense-in-depth.” Conceptually, these forward bases will host “inside forces,” enabling joint forces to “persist, partner, and operate within the range of adversary long-range precision fires.”⁷⁷ Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations is a foundational enabling capability for other naval and joint concepts serving to set conditions for surging war-winning power.⁷⁸

In 2018, the US Army’s Training and Doctrine Command released *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, an operational concept to address contested warfighting domains in the context of competition and conflict with peer adversaries. The central construct of multi-domain operations is to prevail in competition, penetrate and dis-integrate enemy anti-access and area denial systems, exploit the freedom gained by

⁷⁶ US Department of Navy, U.S Marine Corps, *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment*, 5-8.

⁷⁷ Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) Handbook: Considerations for Force Development and Employment* (Quantico, VA: United States Marine Corps, 2018), 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the penetration, and return to competition.⁷⁹ The implications associated with overcoming enemy standoff include enhancing combined arms and operating at echelon to converge effects, creating windows of opportunity for the joint force.⁸⁰

Current Marine Corps and Army operational concepts, informed by contested domains and modern enemy capabilities, involve echeloning effects to set conditions for decisive action. They combine inside-out and outside-in approaches to overcoming enemy systems. Distributed and integrated operations present an opportunity to leverage SOF effects.

Special Operations and Special Operations Forces

To establish an understanding of the characteristics of special operations supporting contested amphibious operations, reviewing existing special operations definitions and capabilities are relevant. Special operations and SOF are fundamentally linked in the American military context. If special operations present “ways,” then SOF are the “means.”⁸¹

Joint Publication 3-05, *Special Operations* defines SOF as “those Active and Reserve Component forces of the Services designated by the Secretary of Defense and

⁷⁹ US Army Training and Doctrine Command, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, vii-viii.

⁸⁰ Ibid., ix-x.

⁸¹ Yarger, *21st Century SOF*, 22, 27.

specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations.”⁸² Dr. Harry Yarger of Joint Special Operations University defines SOF as:

A strategic asset of Active and Reserve Component forces of the military services designated by the secretary of defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations. They are characterized by selectivity in personnel, atypically configured and equipped organizations and formations, specialized competencies and skill sets, and extraordinary training and education.⁸³

Yarger observes that ambiguity exists in the delineation between complex conventional missions and special operations. He notes that accepting that only SOF conduct special operations in American military practice removes this much of this ambiguity.⁸⁴

Doctrine and academics present several definitions for special operations. US joint doctrine defines special operations as:

Operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk.⁸⁵

Admiral William McRaven, US Navy (retired), defines special operations as, “conducted by forces specially trained, equipped, and supported for a specific target whose destruction, elimination, or rescue (in the case of hostages), is a political or

⁸² US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, GL-11.

⁸³ Yarger, *21st Century SOF*, 22.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁵ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, GL-11.

military imperative.”⁸⁶ Expanding on McRaven’s work beyond direct action missions, Dr. Robert Spulak defines special operations as “missions to accomplish strategic objectives where the use of conventional forces would create unacceptable risk due to Clausewitzian friction.”⁸⁷ Yarger offers an expanded definition of special operations, including in part:

Military operations conducted by Special Operations Forces. Special operations are overt, covert, and clandestine operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk nature, undertaken to achieve or support significant political or military objectives in support of national security and foreign policy. Such operations range across the spectrum of conflict from peace to war and make use of unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment, and training. They are often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments where the use of conventional forces is either inappropriate or infeasible.⁸⁸

Common themes in these definitions are political sensitivity, specialized equipment and competencies, and detailed training. The above definitions avoid linkages to specific activities. Understanding SOF capabilities is pertinent in exploring SOF activities supporting amphibious operations.

What Capabilities does SOF Provide to Amphibious Operations?

The current doctrine lists twelve special operations core activities. In execution, special operations missions often integrate more than one core activity.⁸⁹ Further, SOF

⁸⁶ William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995), 2.

⁸⁷ Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 1.

⁸⁸ Yarger, *21st Century SOF*, 21.

⁸⁹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, II-2 – II-3.

apply core activities in different combinations based on unique operational requirements.⁹⁰

Figure 3 lists the current special operations core activities.

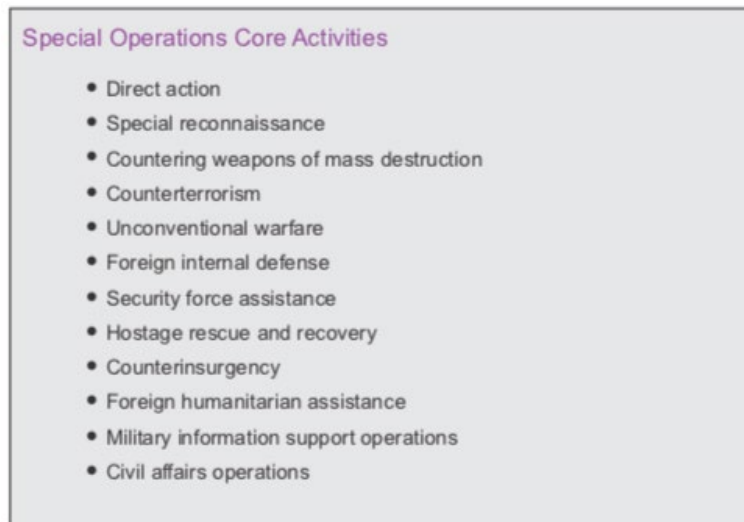


Figure 3. US Special Operations Core Activities

Source: US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), II-3.

In his 1995 Naval Postgraduate School Thesis, then Lieutenant Sidney Ellington, US Navy, lists several unique capabilities SOF provides in a littoral environment. Ellington categorizes these capabilities as direct action (SOF as a weapon system),

⁹⁰ United States Marine Corps, MCWP 3-05, *Marine Corps Special Operations*, 2-4.

special reconnaissance (SOF as a sensor), and other unique capabilities..⁹¹ Table 1 presents these capabilities.

Table 1. Ellington's Unique Capabilities SOF Brings to Littoral Environments

UNIQUE CAPABILITIES SOF BRINGS TO LITTORAL ENVIRONMENTS		
DIRECT ACTION: SOF AS A WEAPON SYSTEM	SPECIAL RECONNAISSANCE: SOF AS A SENSOR	OTHER UNIQUE CAPABILITIES
-Raid -Demonstration -Combat Swimmer Attack -Stand-Off Weapon Attack/Target Designation -Sabotage -Personnel Abductions -Sniper Operations	-Harbor Penetration -Coastal or Riverine Boat Patrol -Underwater Reconnaissance -Inland Reconnaissance	-Non-Combatant Evacuation -Foreign Internal Defense -Visit, Board, Search and Seizure -Strike Rescue -Oil Platform Assault -Mini-Submarines

Source: Table created by the author. Content derived from Sydney Ellington, "Special Operations in Littoral Warfare" (Master's Thesis, US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 1995), 39-68.

Another activity SOF may perform in littoral environments is Preparation of the Environment, "an umbrella term for activities conducted by selectivity trained SOF to prepare the operational environment for potential special operations." Preparation of the environment consists of operational preparation of the environment (OPE) and special operations advanced force operations (AFO).⁹²

⁹¹ Ellington, "Special Operations in Littoral Warfare," 39.

⁹² US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, IV-3.

OPE develops knowledge of the environment, establishes both human and physical infrastructure, and initiates target development to shape the operating environment in probable or prospective operating areas. OPE activities include:

Passive observation; area and network familiarization; site surveys; mapping the information environment; the operational use of individuals; developing nonconventional assisted recovery capabilities, use of couriers, developing safe houses and assembly areas; positioning transportation and telecommunication assets; and cache emplacement/recovery.⁹³

Special operations AFO, the next component of Preparation of the Environment, are operations conducted ahead of the entry of main forces to set conditions for actions against a specific adversary.⁹⁴ Special Operations AFO integrates several OPE actions including, “close-target reconnaissance; tagging, tracking, and locating; reception, staging, onward movement, and integration of forces; infrastructure development; and terminal guidance.” AFO also includes direct action operations to seize fleeting opportunities.⁹⁵

Michael Repass, in his 2003 Strategy Research Project for the US Army War College, visually depicts how OPE and AFO relate in the lead-up and transition to conflict (figure 4). Of note, Repass uses the term Operational Preparation of the Battlespace for OPE.

⁹³ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, IV-3.

⁹⁴ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2018), 2-8.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

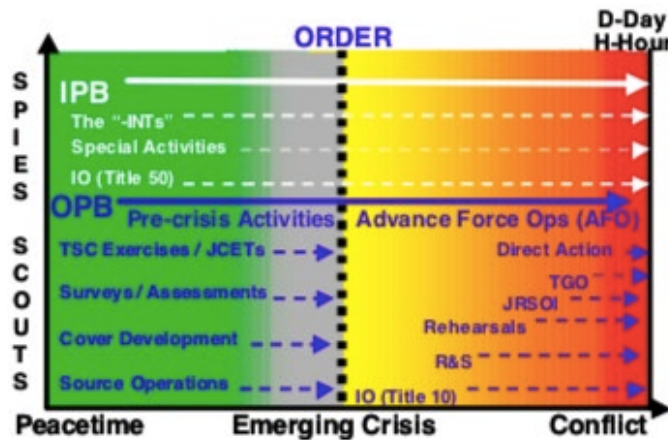


Figure 4. Repass's Preparation of the Battlespace

Source: Michael S. Repass, "Combating Terrorism with Preparation of the Battlespace" (USAWC Strategy Research Project, Carlisle, PA, 2003), 20.

In *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF*, Spulak argues that special operations, and SOF, cannot be understood simply in terms of missions, skills, and capabilities.⁹⁶ Reviewing special operations theories and constructs is prudent in understanding the most important characteristics of special operations in contested amphibious environments.

What Theories of Constructs Exist Regarding SOF Employment?

Special operations theory serves to explore the qualitative differences between SOF and other instruments of military power. The qualitative differences captured in theory are essential as they describe how SOF achieves effects.⁹⁷ While the following

⁹⁶ Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 2.

⁹⁷ Yarger, *21st Century SOF*, 27.

review is not exhaustive, it captures pertinent themes applicable to the characteristics of special operations in amphibious environments.

McRaven's 1995 publication, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare Theory and Practice*, presents an intellectual framework for successful direct-action raids. The work outlines six principles that, when integrated into planning, preparation, and execution, allow a small force to overcome Clausewitz's frictions of war and achieve relative superiority over an enemy.⁹⁸ McRaven argues that the principles of simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed, and purpose, integrated with the "moral factors" of courage, intellect, boldness, and perseverance combine to overcome the frictions of war.⁹⁹

Figure 5 depicts McRaven's special operations model.

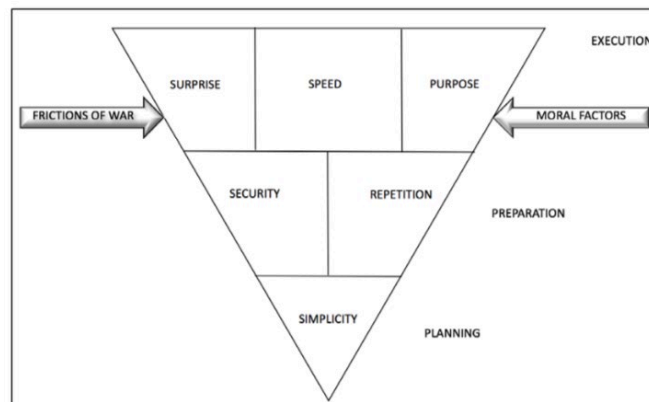


Figure 5. McRaven's Special Operations Model

Source: William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops. Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995), 11.

⁹⁸ McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 5-8. McRaven defines Clausewitzian friction as consisting of chance, uncertainty, and the will of the enemy.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 8-11.

McRaven's publication established a tactical framework that contributed toward broader special operations theories. Following McRaven's model, then Lieutenant Commander Torbjorn Grimeland of the Royal Norwegian Navy and Major Oscar van der Veen of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, in their 2016 Naval Postgraduate School thesis, examine successful principles for maritime SOF operating in littoral environments.

From a review of military theory and analysis of eight case studies, Grimeland and van der Veen developed six principles of littoral special operations: deliberate planning, tailored force, specified mobility, joint support, cover and concealment, and innovation.¹⁰⁰ These principles, like McRaven's, provide a tactical intellectual framework for littoral raids but don't broadly address SOF effects in joint operations.

In 2019, Army University Press released *The Competitive Advantage: Special Operations Forces in Large-Scale Combat Operations* as part of the Large-Scale Combat Operations Series. Through an analysis of twelve case studies, the authors developed two primary themes. First, operational synergy describes integrated conventional echelons and SOF effects, generating powerful maneuver dynamics. Second, SOF access to denied areas in the deep battlefield levied unexpected dilemmas on the enemy that conventional maneuver forces could exploit.¹⁰¹

The study further identified four unique capabilities SOF leveraged to frustrate the enemy. First, "the indigenous approach" is the ability to transform local mass into

¹⁰⁰ Grimeland and van der Veen, "Maritime SOF in the Littorals," 27.

¹⁰¹ Robert M. Toguchi and Michael E. Krivdo, ed., *The Competitive Advantage: Special Operations in Large-Scale Combat Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, 2019), 1-2.

combat power. Second, “developing understanding and wielding influence,” where access enabled early recognition of local, regional, or transregional threats and opportunities. Third, “precision targeting” describes direct action and counter-network activities. Finally, “crisis response” represents rapidly deployable alert forces and persistent deployed and dispersed units..¹⁰²

In 2007, Spulak released *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF*. Spulak’s publication offers a theory for special operations expanded beyond direct action raids. His theory is:

Special operations are missions to accomplish strategic objectives where the use of conventional forces would create unacceptable risk due to Clausewitzian friction. Overcoming these risks requires special operations forces that directly address the ultimate sources of friction through qualities that are the result of the distribution of the attributes of SOF personnel..¹⁰³

Spulak argues that friction determines the requirement and limitations of military forces and clarifies the distinction between SOF and conventional forces..¹⁰⁴ Spulak adopts Professor Barry Watts’ three ultimate causes of friction for his theory:

1. Constraints imposed by human physical and cognitive limits.
2. Informational uncertainties and unforeseeable differences between perceived and actual reality.”
3. The structural nonlinearity of combat processes..¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Toguchi and Krivdo, *The Competitive Advantage*, 2.

¹⁰³ Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

Spulak argues that, due to selection, SOF will exhibit a smaller and tighter distribution of personnel with a higher average score within any given military attribute (endurance, stress tolerance, aptitude, performance).¹⁰⁶ This tighter distribution of attributes creates three distinct qualities of SOF that address the ultimate sources of friction.¹⁰⁷

1. Elite Warriors: SOF are engaged directly in the fundamental nature of war and the implementation of strategy, destroying the enemy, or creating his fear that he will be destroyed.
2. Flexibility: SOF units have a much larger range of capabilities and are more independent of other military forces than conventional units.
3. Creativity: SOF can immediately change the combat process, altering the way in which the tension is accommodated between threatening or performing destruction and avoiding it.¹⁰⁸

Spulak also offers five operational characteristics that distinguish SOF from conventional forces. The operational characteristics summarize “what SOF can do, not how they do it.”¹⁰⁹ Spulak’s operational characteristics of SOF are:

¹⁰⁶ Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 10-12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 17, 20. Quotations summarizing Spulak’s qualities taken from Yarger, *21st Century SOF*, 31.

¹⁰⁹ Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 22-23.

1. Relative superiority is the ability of small special operations units to gain a temporary decisive advantage, even over a larger or well-defended enemy force.
2. Certain access is the ability to rapidly and securely transport, insert, and extract SOF, typically undetected, allowing operations in areas where or when conventional military operations are not possible.
3. Unconventional operations is the ability to directly alter the way in which the tension between threatening and avoiding destruction is managed to conduct operations—for example, operating autonomously and independently, establishing and utilizing the capabilities of foreign military and paramilitary forces, sabotage, and subversion.
4. Integrated operations is the ability to address transnational and asymmetric threats by integrating elements of national power and operating with other military forces and nonmilitary agencies.
5. Strategic initiative is the ability to create and maintain initiative against an enemy at the strategic level by an orchestrated campaign of engaging carefully selected objectives unavailable to conventional forces.¹¹⁰

This study will analyze Spulak's operation characteristics of SOF to determine the most important characteristics in contested amphibious environments.

¹¹⁰ Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 23.

Summary

This literature review first examined the maritime domain and reviewed the importance of amphibious operations in projecting power. The literature review continued by discussing the littoral environment and the challenges surrounding it. The study then examined how adversaries are blending competition with anti-access and area-denial systems to pursue objectives below the threshold for conflict. The literature review then examined current military concepts, SOF capabilities in the maritime domain, and existing SOF theories and constructs that articulate how SOF achieves effects. This research will attempt to discern the most important SOF operational capabilities in contested amphibious operations. The following chapter will outline this study's methodology to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Case Study Selection

This study will analyze three historical case studies to assess the significance of the five operational characteristics of SOF in contested amphibious operations. These cases demonstrate variation regarding the timeframe, conflict, theater, and special operations method.

1. 1st and 2nd Marine Raider Battalions in Guadalcanal: United States Marine Corps (1942)
2. Amphibious Special Operations Forces, Operation Chromite, Korea (1950)
3. The Falklands War: United Kingdom Special Forces (1982)

These case studies demonstrate warfighting domain variance, with SOF inserting sea to land, air to land, or land exclusively. This case selection spans 40 years, varying degrees of conflict, and multiple executing forces in terms of design, maturity, nationality, and relationship to conventional forces. All SOF come from western militaries, formed during or following World War II. This selection of cases also varies in terms of strategic national execution, with some operations being coalition efforts while others were unilateral endeavors. Collectively, these cases provide a sense of the importance of each operational characteristic.

Case Study Analysis

The historical cases selected for this study present multiple SOF actions integrated into joint operations rather than focusing on the tactical execution of a single

special operations mission. This study will review each case using a narrative of the operation covering the strategic background, an overview of the integrated special operations force, the operation's objectives, the execution of the operation's integrated special operations, and the result of the operation with particular focus on enabling effects. Following the narrative, this study will analyze each case using the five operational characteristics of SOF to assess each characteristic's contribution to the operation's outcome.

The analysis of each case is qualitative. This study will organize the historical case's integrated special operations and summarize the action, unit, task, result, and enabling effects each special operation achieved. The analysis will then rate the contribution of the operational characteristic of SOF to each special operation. Each characteristic's contribution to the operational outcome will be assigned an ordinal value with "1" representing a limited contribution to operational success and "3" representing a critical contribution to the action's outcome.¹¹¹ The scores are described below.

1. Limited reflects the characteristic having no discernable impact on the operational result, being irrelevant for the conduct of that specific mission, or requiring an unplanned reallocation of joint warfighting resources.
2. Moderate reflects the operational characteristic playing a role in enhancing the operation's outcome, but conventional instruments could achieve similar effects or an integration relationship was routine.

¹¹¹ Likert scale rating, graphic organization, and radar chart presentation inspired by Grimeland and van der Veen, "Maritime SOF in the Littorals," 45-47.

3. Critical demonstrates a situation where employing the characteristic was vital in creating a decisive advantage or removing significant risk to the operation.

The ordinal scores for each integrated special operation will generate an average value for each characteristic during the historical case. Table 2 presents an example of how this study will rate the characteristics in an individual case study.

Table 2. Rating Principles on an Example Operation

EXAMPLE OPERATION								
Action	Unit	Task	Enabling Effects	Relative Superiority	Certain Access	Unconventional Ops	Integrated Ops	Strategic Initiative
Reconnaissance on Location 1	Special Force 1	-Reconnaissance	-Identified enemy disposition	1	3	3	2	2
Assault on Location 2	Special Force 1	-Direct Action Assault	-ENY garrison surrenders	3	3	2	3	3
Reconnaissance on Location 3	Special Force 2	-Reconnaissance	-Identified enemy disposition -Destroyed 4x ENY aircraft	1	2	3	2	2
Key Terrain Seizure at Location 4	Special Force 2	-Secure key terrain -RSOI	-ID opportunity -Seized/RSOI	2	3	3	3	3
Indigenous Operations Location 5	Special Force 1/2	-Reconnaissance -Ambush	-Potential disruption of ENY operations	2	3	3	1	2
AVERAGE ORDINAL SCORES				1.8	2.8	2.8	2.2	2.4

Source: Created by the author.

This study will visually display the values of the Likert scale assessment of the characteristics in each operation using a radar chart (figure 6). The chart consists of concentric pentagons, with each pentagon representing an increasing in ordinal score intervals. Each point of the pentagon aligns to an individual characteristic. The averaged ordinal values displayed above are plotted on the chart, resulting in a series depicting an individual five-sided geometric shape representative of that case study's assessment.

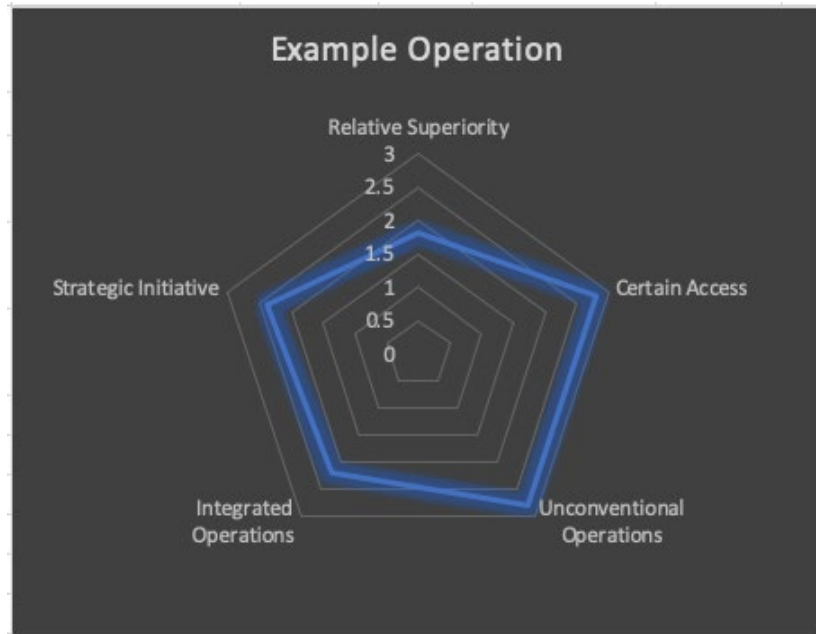


Figure 6. Example Operation Assessment Visualization

Source: Created by the author.

Visualizing each case studies' assessment with the radar chart enables comparative analysis by overlaying all the case study scores onto a single radar chart. This convergence of data will show which characteristics are most important in the context of the selected case studies.

This study will conclude with a summary of the findings and recommendations for policy implications and future research.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Case Study #1: United States Marine Raiders in the Guadalcanal Campaign, 1942

This case recounts the activation of the earliest US special operations units of World War II and their initial employment during a contested maritime campaign.¹¹² In the early 1940s, Marine Corps viewed itself as an elite force and had no desire to form specialized units with a focus separate from supporting large-scale amphibious assaults. Under political pressure, the Corps fought to retain the Raiders within its command structure.¹¹³ The Marine Corps resourced the first two Raider Battalions with seasoned Marines, emerging equipment, and specialized training. As the war progressed, the Raiders increasingly acted as conventional infantry. Underutilization of the Raiders' unique skills, attrition, and the demands of the war contributed to the decision to disband the units in early 1944.¹¹⁴ The actions of the Marine Raiders in the Guadalcanal Campaign provide a useful scenario to analyze the operational characteristics of SOF.

¹¹² Stephen Mark Houseknecht, "The Elite of the Elites: The U.S. Marine Raider Battalions, 1942-1944: A Case Study in Elite Military Organizations" (Master's Thesis, Missouri State University, 2015), 33.

¹¹³ Robert E. Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak: GI Dagger Marines of the OSS* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, United States Marine Corps, 1989), 11-12.

¹¹⁴ Jon T. Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995), 40.

Background

On the morning of December 7, 1941, airplanes from the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked the US Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, killing 2,100 servicemembers, sinking or damaging eight battleships, and destroying 81 combat aircraft.¹¹⁵ The following day, the United States declared war on Japan.¹¹⁶

Within a week of Pearl Harbor, Japan landed troops on the Philippine Islands, captured the US garrison on Guam, and laid siege to Wake Island.¹¹⁷ On December 22, 1941, the first conference between US and British strategic leaders, code-named ARCADIA, commenced in Washington, DC, to discuss the war in Europe and the Pacific. As the meetings began, William J. Donovan, then the US Coordinator of Information, delivered a memorandum to the White House.¹¹⁸ Donovan's message proposed:

There that be organized now, in the United States, a guerilla corps independent and separate from the Army and Navy, and imbued with a maximum of the offensive and imaginative spirit. This force should, of course, be created along disciplined military lines, analogous to the British Commando principle, a statement of which I sent you recently.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Oscar F. Peatross, *Bless 'em All: The Raider Marines of World War II* (Irvine, CA: ReView, 1995), 1.

¹¹⁶ Kenneth J. Clifford, *Progress and Purpose: A Developmental History of the United States Marine Corps 1900-1970* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, 1973), 66.

¹¹⁷ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 1-2.

¹¹⁸ Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 1-4.

¹¹⁹ Donovan to F. D. Roosevelt, December 22, 1941, reproduced in Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 236.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, while attending the Arcadia Conference, expressed support for American commando forces to Roosevelt and Navy Secretary Frank Knox.¹²⁰ Since the devastating withdrawal from Dunkirk in June 1940, elite British commandos executed raids against Axis targets along the occupied European coast, boosting national morale and capturing the American public's attention. With the President and Knox interested in forming commando units, attention turned to the Marine Corps to source the manpower.¹²¹

After World War I, the Marine Corps institutionally focused on developing the capability for offensive amphibious operations.¹²² In the 1930s, Marine Corps Schools began refining amphibious practices into doctrine. The 1935 *Tentative Landing Manual*, published in 1938 as *Fleet Training Publication 167*, included amphibious raids as both discrete operations and integrated actions. The Fleet Landing Exercises of the 1930s experimented with landing reconnaissance and raiding parties. By early 1941, the Corps decided to test committed units for raiding and reconnaissance missions.¹²³

The Marine Corps designated 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, to test unit-level specialization in raiding. The battalion focused on rubber boat insertion from high-speed transport destroyers, experimenting with reconnaissance, raids, feints, and long-range operations. On January 6, 1942, the battalion was assigned directly to General

¹²⁰ Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 6.

¹²¹ Houseknecht, "The Elite of the Elites," 45-49.

¹²² Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 12.

¹²³ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 9.

Holland Smith's Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet, and renamed the 1st Separate Battalion.¹²⁴

On January 8th and 9th, Admiral King, Commander-in-Chief of the US Fleet, dispatched memorandums to Major General Thomas Holcomb, Commandant of the Marine Corps, detailing the president's interest in commando units. On January 13th, James Roosevelt, the president's son and Marine Captain sent correspondence to the Commandant recommending the Marine Corps form commando units.¹²⁵ In early February, Holcomb renamed the 1st Separate Battalion to the 1st Marine Raider Battalion. Holcomb then directed the formation of a 2nd Marine Raider Battalion to support the Pacific Fleet.¹²⁶

Marine Raider Battalions

While both Raider Battalions shared roles and functions for their respective fleets, the units were distinct in organization and focus. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Merritt Edson, a highly regarded veteran of Nicaragua, the 1st Raiders largely retained a traditional infantry structure and associated individual armament. Edson reduced company manning to fit on transport destroyers, outfitted the weapons company with lighter systems, and built a unit that consisted of seasoned Marines as opposed to draftees or recruits. Unit training emphasized marksmanship, physical fitness, and light infantry

¹²⁴ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 9-10.

¹²⁵ Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak*, 9-10.

¹²⁶ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 12-13.

tactics.¹²⁷ Edson anticipated his formation would execute reconnaissance, feints, raids, diversionary landings, flank attacks, initial beachhead seizures, or main landings integrated within regiments or divisions.¹²⁸

In contrast to the 1st Raiders, the 2nd Raiders organized from scratch. Major Evans Carlson, a veteran of Nicaragua and presidential confidant, assumed command of the battalion with Captain James Roosevelt as his executive officer. During duty in China, Carlson observed both nationalist and communist forces, embedding with Mao Zedong's 8th Route Army. An advocate of guerilla operations, Carlson believed the 2nd Raiders would conduct distributed, autonomous operations behind enemy lines and beyond the range of supporting fires.

Carlson formed the 2nd Raiders into six companies, each consisting of two rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. The battalion created "fire teams," organizing squads into three teams of three Marines to increase small unit control. Each fire team was armed with an M1 Garand, a Thompson sub-machine gun, and a Browning Automatic Rifle, lending outsized firepower at echelon. Unit training emphasized long-distance movement, scouting, patrolling, close combat, and privation. Upon completion of their basic skills package, the 2nd Raiders conducted several weeks of amphibious training in California and Hawaii.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 3-4, 10-11.

¹²⁸ Houseknecht, "The Elite of the Elites," 75.

¹²⁹ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 6-8, 12-17.

As both Raider battalions completed training between April and June of 1941, they were positioned forward in the Pacific. The 1st Raiders moved to American Samoa while the 2nd Raiders relocated to Hawaii.¹³⁰ Both battalions continued to train as events in the Pacific determined their pending employment.

Objectives of the Operation

By early May, Japan had destroyed most of the combined Allied fleet in the Pacific and captured considerable territory, including Wake Island, the Philippines, and Corregidor. As Japan moved to seize the southern Solomon Islands, a combined Australian and US fleet met the enemy in the Coral Sea, halting their advance during a costly two-day battle.¹³¹ In late May, Admiral Chester Nimitz, the commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet, began reinforcing the US base at Midway for a pending Japanese attack. Companies C and D of the 2nd Raiders augmented the defense. Between June 1st and 4th, Navy and Marine aviators defeated the Japanese attackers, creating the initiative for the Allies to transition to the offense.

At the end of May, Edson proposed that the 1st Raiders attack a Japanese seaplane base on Tulagi, an island in the lower Solomon Islands. General Douglas MacArthur initially opposed the operation, but victory at Midway transformed the Solomon Islands into a strategic objective. Guadalcanal, where the Japanese were constructing a runway, became the primary objective for the 1st Marine Division's Operation Watchtower. The 1st Raiders would seize Tulagi supported by 2nd Battalion,

¹³⁰ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 19, 29-30.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 18-19, 33.

5th Marines. Meanwhile, Nimitz tasked the 2nd Raiders to conduct a raid on Makin Atoll in the Gilbert Islands to divert attention from Operation Watchtower.¹³²

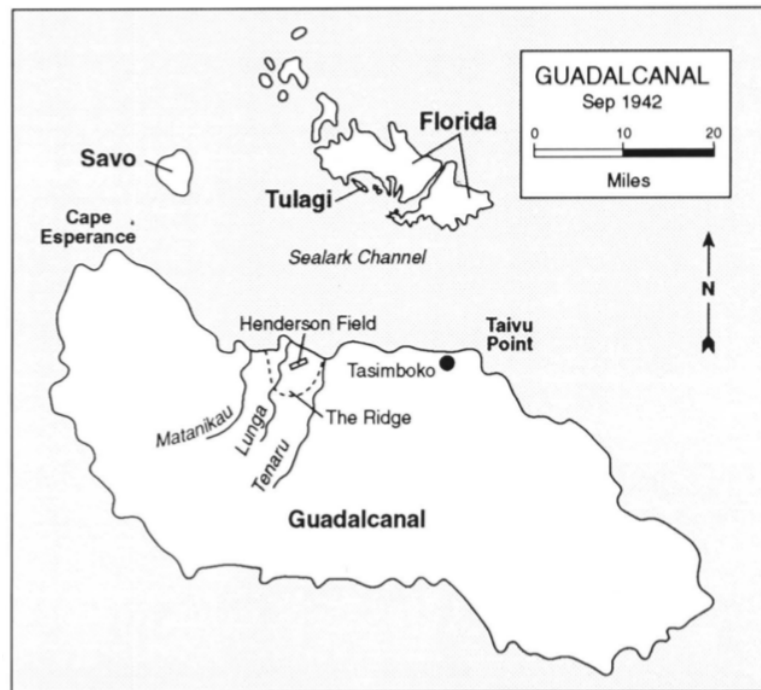


Figure 7. Guadalcanal Area of Operations

Source: Jon T. Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995), 12.

Execution

Intelligence reporting for Guadalcanal was elusive. Allied sources estimated that the Japanese military had 5,000 soldiers and laborers on the island, including a reinforced infantry regiment and an anti-aircraft artillery battalion. Former residents and coast-watchers familiar with Tulagi provided better reporting supporting the pending assault.

¹³² Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 6, 9.

Approximately 2 miles long and 1,000 yards wide, Tulagi's rugged geography consists of two razor-back ridges separated by a plateau, with the island surrounded by a coral reef. Intelligence planners believed 1,800 enemy soldiers and laborers occupied Tulagi, concentrated in the built-up former British colonial center on the southeast portion of the island. To avoid the enemy's primary defense, the 1st Raiders and 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines would assault across the reef at Blue Beach, 2,000 yards from the enemy's principal defense.¹³³ From the beachhead, the battalions would split, with the 1st Raiders clearing southeast into the main enemy force.

The main task force for Operation Watchtower assembled in late July off Koro Island to conduct rehearsals before sailing for the objective area. In the early hours of August 7th, the amphibious task force passed Guadalcanal, separating into two landing groups near Savo Island. Just after 6 a.m., naval guns and aviation commenced preparatory fires, suppressing enemy positions and destroying multiple enemy seaplanes on both Tulagi and Gavutu. The Raiders landed in echelon with waves of Higgins boats running aground, forcing the heavily loaded Marines to wade ashore through fifty yards through chin-deep water. Deploying across the width of the island, the Raiders turned southeast and advanced.

¹³³ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 10.

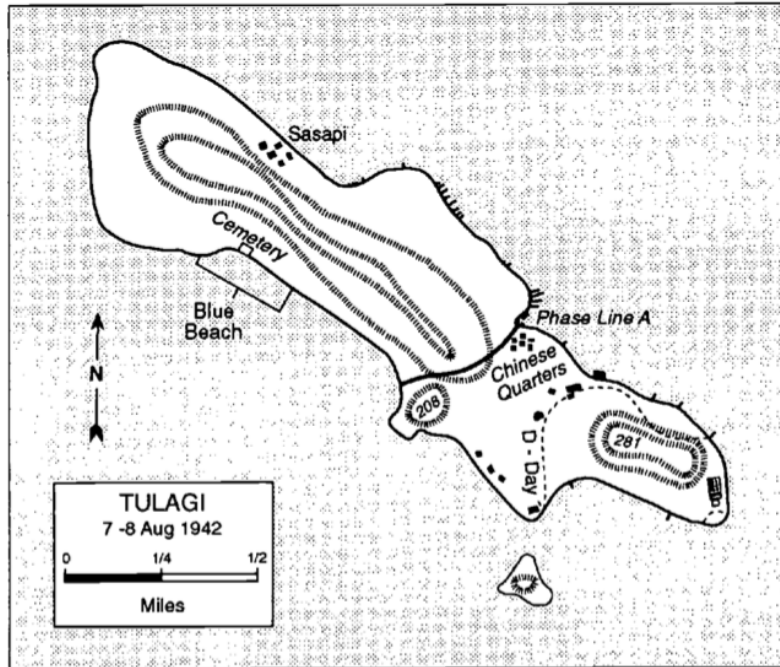


Figure 8. Tulagi

Source: Jon T. Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995), 9.

Dense vegetation, steep terrain, and sporadic enemy opposition slowed the Raiders' movement. Pausing at a phase line northwest of the colonial center, battalion mortars and machine guns provided suppression as the rifle companies attacked into massive resistance.¹³⁴ Leveraging organic weapons and naval gunfire, the Raiders closed with enemy defenders concentrated on Hills 208 and 281, using demolitions to reduce positions in caves and bunkers. As evening approached, the Raiders transitioned to defense, repelling multiple infiltration and counterattacks originating from Hill 281. The following morning, August 8th, the 1st Raiders and infantrymen from 2nd Battalion, 5th

¹³⁴ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 34-40.

Marines cleared the final enemy defenses.¹³⁵ In seizing Tulagi, the Raiders lost 38 killed and 55 wounded, which represented nearly one-tenth of the command.¹³⁶

The night of August 8th, a task force from the Japanese 8th Fleet surprised Allied naval forces near Savo Island, penetrating the nocturnal screening force before attacking.¹³⁷ The Japanese task force sank a destroyer and four cruisers, damaged multiple ships, and killed 1,200 sailors. The Allied navy withdrew under the pressure which stranded the Marines ashore.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, in Hawaii, Companies A and B of the 2nd Raiders boarded two submarines, the USS *Nautilus* and USS *Argonaut*, for the 2,000-mile transit to the Makin Atoll.¹³⁹

With the battle on Guadalcanal representing the US's first offensive action of the war, planners believed a raid into enemy territory would deter Japan from rapidly reinforcing. Makin Atoll, in the Gilbert Islands, provided a realistic target. The *Nautilus* and *Argonaut* surfaced in driving rain and high seas in the predawn hours of August 17th. As the Raiders prepared to embark, currents swept away three of the twenty rubber boats and saltwater fouled the fuel for several outboard motors. Changing course, Carlson

¹³⁵ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 10.

¹³⁶ Joseph H. Alexander, *Edson's Raiders: The 1st Marine Raider Battalion in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 102.

¹³⁷ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 45; Trent Hone, "Give them Hell!: The US Navy's Night Combat Doctrine and the Campaign for Guadalcanal," *War in History* 13. no. 2 (April 2006): 180.

¹³⁸ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 10.

¹³⁹ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 51; Duane Schultz, *Evans Carlson, Marine Raider* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2014), 56-57.

ordered both companies to land together. As the Raiders departed, not every boat knew the changes to the plan.¹⁴⁰

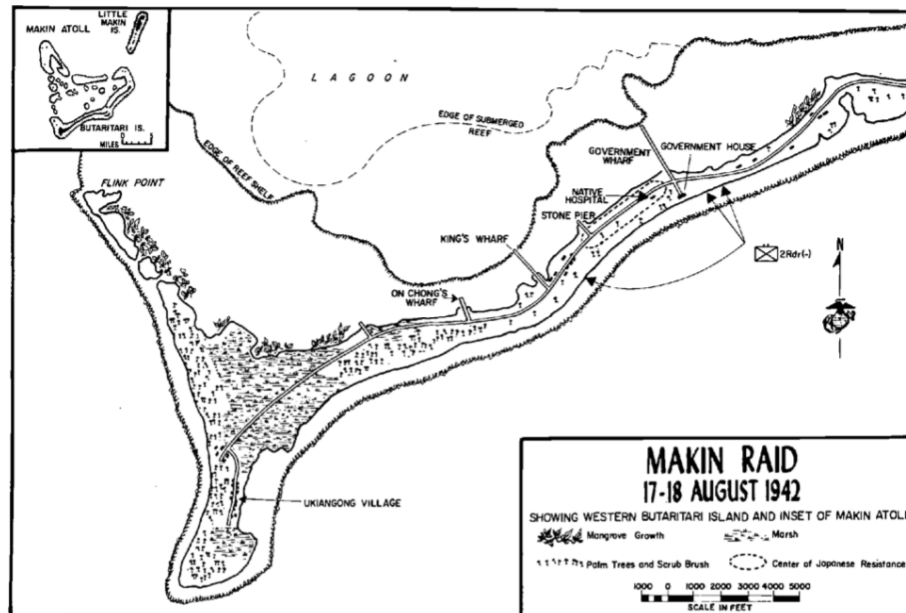


Figure 9. The Makin Raid

Source: Jon T. Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1995), 7.

The main body reached shore with one boat team, led by 1st Lieutenant Oscar Peatross, landing alone to the southwest. As the Raiders organized, a machine gun discharged, compromising the assault. Rapidly moving toward the lagoon-side of the island, the Raiders' engaged committed Japanese defenders, repelling two banzai attacks.¹⁴¹ With the main body in contact, Peatross's patrol moved independently,

¹⁴⁰ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 52-55.

¹⁴¹ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 6.

clearing the Japanese command post and killing the garrison commander.¹⁴² By mid-morning, no organized defensive of the island remained. However, due to native reports, Carlson believed a sizeable Japanese force endured.

Mounting intermittent air raids, the Japanese attempted to reinforce with two seaplanes. Raiders destroyed both planes with machine guns and antitank rifles, and the *Nautilus* sunk two Japanese boats with its deck guns. As evening approached, Carlson, ordered the Raiders to withdraw to the submarines. Heavy surf and broken outboards transformed the withdraw into a disaster, overturning boats, dumping equipment, and stranding the majority of the raid force. Concerned about his wounded and the fate of the president's son, Carlson attempted to surrender in a moment of doubt. Raider patrols likely killed the Japanese soldier carrying the message. The next morning, the situation improved.

The next morning, as more boat teams broke through the surf, Carlson mounted patrols across the island to demolish military installations and equipment. Contacting the submarines, the Raiders changed their extract to the lagoon-side of the island. Reaching the vessels that night, the 2nd Raiders began their return to Hawaii. The Makin Raid resulted in 84 enemy soldiers killed, two seaplanes destroyed, and two boats sunk. Eighteen Raiders were dead and twelve missing. Despite being a chaotic operation, the raid represented the US's first victory on land.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 53-54.

¹⁴³ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 7-9.

On August 30th, following three weeks on Tulagi, the 1st Raiders moved onto Guadalcanal, combining with the remnants of the 1st Parachute Battalion to augment Vandergrift's reserve.¹⁴⁴ Eager to recapture Guadalcanal, Japanese forces mounted continuous air raids and reinforced troops through naval convoys known as the "Tokyo Express."¹⁴⁵ As Edson searched for missions, his attention turned to Tasimboko, a Japanese supply base where native scouts reported several thousand Japanese reinforcements from Major General Kiyotaki Kawagucki's brigade. Gaining permission to use two transport destroyers and two converted tuna boats, the 1st Raiders would land beyond Tasimboko and raid the settlement from the rear.¹⁴⁶

Before dawn on September 8th, the first of three echelons from the 1st Raiders, augmented with native scouts, landed. The Marines observed hundreds of packs and unattended anti-tank guns, confirming the presence of a large Japanese force. Coincidentally, as the second echelon landed, a sizeable allied flotilla passed, presenting the illusion that the modest landings were a massive assault. With the second echelon on land, the Raiders' transports departed to load troops, shelling Tasimboko as they passed.

With P-400 airstrikes engaging Tasimboko, Edson launched a two-prong attack with two-thirds of his total force into stiff resistance. A platoon from Company B came under point-blank fire from a 75mm artillery piece before silencing the gun.¹⁴⁷ Using two

¹⁴⁴ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 108-109.

¹⁴⁶ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 13.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 121-127.

companies to fix the enemy, Company A moved to envelop around the defenders' left flank. Following prolonged contact, enemy resistance crumbled, and the Raiders entered Tasimboko, discovering stockpiles of weapons and material. The Raiders destroyed the supplies and collected documents before reembarking for the perimeter of Henderson Field. The 1st Raiders estimated their assault killed fifty enemy soldiers. The recovered documents proved the raid's most significant achievement.

1st Marine Division intelligence translated the captured documents, revealing that Kawaguchi's main body of 3,000 had departed Tasimboko to cut through the jungle toward Henderson Field. The 1st Raiders assault had dislocated a rearguard of 300 soldiers. Edson believed Kawaguchi would attack the southern portion of Henderson Field's perimeter and identified a prominent ridge near the airfield as a likely guiding feature for the approaching enemy. After gaining approval, the 1st Raiders, combined with the remnants of the 1st Parachute Battalion, occupied the ridge on September 10th.¹⁴⁸

Edson established a hasty defense with two Raider companies and a Parachute company forward. The remainder of the force echeloned rear. Enduring Japanese airstrikes on September 10th and 11th, the 1st Raiders built positions with limited defensive material. Coral outcrops and roots prevented proper entrenchment. The 11th Marine Regiment integrated artillery observers with the defenders and three howitzer

¹⁴⁸ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 13.

batteries positioned to support. On the night of September 12th, two battalions of the Japanese 124th Infantry, ahead of Kawaguchi's main body, attacked.¹⁴⁹

A Japanese cruiser and three escort destroyers opened fire at 2130, bombarding the ridge before illuminating the feature with searchlights. Japanese soldiers attacked into low-ground west of the ridge, forcing Company C to withdraw. The following morning, Edson ordered his reserve to counterattack but recalled them before moving the defense to subsequent positions. Just after dark on September 13th, the Japanese renewed their attack, collapsing Company B's right flank and massing for a frontal assault. As the Raiders echeloned artillery fire, the Japanese struck, unhinging the defenders. The Raiders regrouped around the northernmost crest of the ridge, combining artillery, automatic weapons, and hand grenades to repel multiple Japanese assaults. Before dawn, companies from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, the division reserve, joined the defense. The enemy's attack was over by first light. Kawaguchi ordered the remnants of his brigade to retreat that afternoon.

The Battle of Edson's Ridge resulted in 700 Japanese killed and 500 wounded. The defense cost the 1st Raiders, and the 1st Parachute Battalion 263 casualties, 59 of whom were killed or missing in action.¹⁵⁰ On September 18th, the 1st Parachute Battalion, having sustained a 55 percent casualty rate, departed Guadalcanal on a convoy delivering the 7th Marine Regiment. With the arrival of the 7th Marines, Vandergrift planned operations to disrupt Japanese positions across the Matanikau River, west of

¹⁴⁹ Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 136-142, 149.

¹⁵⁰ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 14-16.

Henderson Field.¹⁵¹ The Raiders would play a supporting role but without their commander. Edson took command of the 5th Marine Regiment on September 21st.

On September 23rd, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines under then Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller, departed the perimeter of Henderson Field to clear enemy units from the area surrounding the Matankiau. In route to the river, Puller’s battalion skirmished with a sizable enemy force. As Puller evacuated his wounded, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines reinforced, and both battalions reached the Matankiau on September 26th. Attempting to cross at a shallow sandbar and log bridge spanning the river, Japanese defenders halted the Marine advance. That afternoon, Vandergrift placed Edson in command and sent the 1st Raiders to reinforce. With 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines assaulting across the sandbar, and Puller’s battalion landing to the rear of the Japanese defenders, the Raiders moved upriver to cross the log bridge. The Japanese defense again halted the Marine advance, compelling the force to return to Henderson Field.¹⁵²

In early October, the 1st Marine Division made another attempt to cross the Matanikau, with two battalions from 5th Marines fixing the enemy at the sandbar while three battalions attempted to cross the river at the log bridge. Company A of the 1st Raiders augmented 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines at the sandbar, isolating a Japanese strongpoint and placing defensive wire at the friendly end of the sandbar. On the night of October 8th, the Japanese assaulted from the strongpoint. Fighting through the Raider’s position, some fifty-nine enemy soldiers attempted to cross the river, becoming entangled

¹⁵¹ Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 199-203.

¹⁵² Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 17.

in the wire. Raiders finished the force with automatic weapons fire. On October 13th, the 1st Raiders left Guadalcanal with just one-quarter of the battalion's original strength combat effective..¹⁵³

The night after the 1st Raiders' departure, Imperial Japan mounted a concerted counteroffensive. Japanese battleships and bombers ravaged Henderson Field, and the combined sea and air attacks enabled the enemy to swell their numbers to 20,000 soldiers on the island. On October 24th, President Roosevelt instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to reinforce Guadalcanal. This instruction would bring the 2nd Raiders, now in Espiritu Santo, onto the island.

In an effort to distribute forces along the northern coast of Guadalcanal to harass remaining enemy forces, a detachment from the 2nd Raiders would establish security at Aola Bay, forty miles east of the Lunga River, to enable the construction of an airfield. Army units would quickly relieve the Raiders, who would then return to Espiritu Santo. Companies C and E, along with Carlson's command group, landed at Aola Bay on November 4th. As soldiers from the 147th Infantry assumed beach security on November 5th, the Raiders received a new task..¹⁵⁴

Marine and Army elements were moving east from the perimeter of Henderson Field to attack a reinforced Japanese infantry regiment. The 2nd Raiders would march from Aola and harass the enemy from the rear. The Raiders, augmented with native scouts, moved inland on November 6th. Trekking west with four days of rations, the

¹⁵³ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 19; Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 218-222.

¹⁵⁴ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 130-133.

patrol's point element routed a Japanese ambush at Rekko before the formation established a camp at the settlement of Binu. There, Companies B, C, and F joined the Raiders' main body.¹⁵⁵

On November 11th, Carlson dispatched his companies on combat patrols to located enemy forces boxed in near the Metapona River. Just after 1000, Company C came under attack from a reinforced Japanese company. Moving to mass on the enemy, Company D encountered a separate enemy force, and Company E ambushed two Japanese companies crossing the Metapona river. After hours of furious contact, fighting concluded that night.¹⁵⁶ Over the following days, the Raiders continued to patrol, employing native scouts to find enemy units, artillery, and airstrikes to destroy exposed enemy forces, and small units to pursue enemy survivors. On November 15th, the 2nd Raiders relocated their base camp to Asamama, patrolling for two days before determining the enemy had departed.

Entering the Marine perimeter on November 17th, Vandergrift tasked the 2nd Raiders with patrolling south of Henderson Field. With Company A joining the battalion, the Raiders formed into three combat teams of two companies each and moved into the interior between the Tenaru and Lunga Rivers. On November 30th, the Raiders disabled two artillery pieces before assaulting a Japanese bivouac site, killing 75 soldiers. Four days later, Carlson sent half of the battalion back to the perimeter, leading the remainder to the top of Mount Austen. Atop the mountain, the Raiders encountered a Japanese

¹⁵⁵ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 137-142.

platoon, killing 25 soldiers during a two-hour engagement. The following day the Raiders returned to the perimeter.

The “Long Patrol” lasted nearly a month, resulting in 488 Japanese dead. The 2nd Raiders suffered 16 killed and 18 wounded in combat but experienced considerably more attrition due to exertion, disease, and privation. On December 15th, the 2nd Raiders left Guadalcanal.¹⁵⁷

Analysis of the Operations Characteristics of SOF

Relative Superiority

Both Marine Raider Battalions were large tactical formations compared to modern special operations units. Relative superiority describes a condition that exists when a small force gains a decisive advantage over a numerically superior enemy.¹⁵⁸

Conceptually, SOF achieves relative superiority through the application of other operational characteristics of SOF. While the Raider Battalions often operated with near numerical parity to their adversaries, the Japanese military’s prepared positions, combined arms formations, and use of restrictive terrain provided considerable advantages to the defenders. Given this context, the Raider achieved relative superiority on several occasions.

During the assault on Tulagi, the 800 Marines of the 1st Raiders attacked the primary Japanese defense consisting of between 350 and 450 elite troops from the

¹⁵⁷ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 22, 24.

¹⁵⁸ McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 4.

Japanese Special Naval Landing Force occupying fortified positions.¹⁵⁹ The Raiders pressed the defenders back to Hill 281 with a 2:1 force ratio, well below the recommended troop advantage for assaulting a prepared defense, before incorporating 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines into the assault.¹⁶⁰ During the Tasimboko Raid, only two of the three assault echelons were ashore as the attack commenced. Edson maneuvered a numerically comparable force against a heavily-armed defender, losing only two Raiders in the process. On Edson's Ridge, approximately 800 Raiders and parachutists repelled a committed assault from up to 3,000 Japanese soldiers, overcoming a nearly 4:1 force correlation.¹⁶¹

The "Long Patrol" provides the clearest example of relative superiority presented in this case. The 2nd Raiders, minus Company A until November 25th, targeted between 1,500 and 3,000 Japanese soldiers through a prolonged patrolling effort in the enemy's rear.¹⁶² The 2nd Raiders achieved a stunning comparative casualty ratio, killing 30 Japanese soldiers for each Raider killed. The 2nd Raiders also disabled critical Japanese artillery assets with the ability to range Henderson Field.

¹⁵⁹ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 10; Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 42.

¹⁶⁰ US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014), 9-22.

¹⁶¹ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 13.

¹⁶² Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 20-22; Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 137.

Certain Access

Certain access constituted a significant component of the Raiders' contribution to the Guadalcanal Campaign. Both the 1st and 2nd Raiders had considerable training with small unit amphibious landings, and prioritized physical fitness to enable mobility and endurance. Both considerations allowed the Raider Battalions to achieve effects on Guadalcanal.

Japanese air and sea capabilities challenged Allied amphibious operations. The Raiders were not able to base aboard ship, with amphibious operations primarily reserved for initial insertion. At Tulagi, the 1st Raiders assaulted over a shallow reef, exiting Higgins boats and crossing fifty yards of deep water, combat loaded, to reach the shore. During the Tasimboko Raid, the 1st Raiders were able to land at night, in challenging currents while under the threat of Japanese air attack.¹⁶³ Despite ensuing challenges, the 2nd Raiders overcame rough seas and compromised motors to insert from submarines for the Makin Raid.

Once on Guadalcanal, the ability to conduct prolonged operations ashore enabled the Raiders to persist in a challenging, contested environment. Both units prioritized physical fitness, training to cover long distances, under load, while negotiating rugged terrain. On Tulagi, the Raiders negotiated steep terrain and thick vegetation to reach the enemy. Endurance preparation allowed the 2nd Raiders to persist in the enemy's rear for

¹⁶³ Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 121.

nearly a month during the “Long Patrol,” fighting over long distances while subsisting mainly on rice, tea, raisins, and fatback.¹⁶⁴

Certain access allowed the Raiders to find and impact enemy forces in a variety of environments, creating moral or material advantages for the allied effort. The Makin Raid, while tactically a limited success, boosted domestic and military morale. Accessing and effecting Tasimboko disrupted Japanese supply, communications, and fire support. The 2nd Raiders’ effort to harass Japanese forces east of Henderson Field dealt moral and physical blows to enemy operations. The ability to access and persist in challenging environments enabled the Raiders to create effects at critical times.

Unconventional Operations

During the Guadalcanal Campaign, the Raiders leveraged speed, firepower, and independence to alter the tension between threatening and avoiding destruction. The ability to move rapidly, under load, in challenging environments allowed the Raiders to maximize external fire support and establish tempo relative to the enemy. Additionally, increased individual skill in marksmanship and close combat, allowed the Raiders to conduct light infantry tactics faster than other infantry battalions. During the Tasimboko Raid, a single Marine dislocated an artillery crew firing on his patrol at point-blank range with three shots, enabling his platoon to advance.¹⁶⁵

The 2nd Raiders conducted independent operations on both the Makin Raid and the Long Patrol. On Makin, despite a challenging infiltration challenging the initial plan,

¹⁶⁴ Peatross, *Bless ‘em All*, 135.

¹⁶⁵ Alexander, *Edson’s Raiders*, 126-127.

a single boat team cleared the Japanese garrison headquarters, killing the garrison commander as the battalion's main body engaged the enemy defense. On Guadalcanal, the 2nd Raiders conducted mutually supporting independent patrols, disaggregating to locate enemy forces before massing to destroy them. The Raiders leverage native scouts as guides, intelligence collectors, and resupply porters, enhancing patrols and extending resilience.¹⁶⁶ Intensive training enabled the Raiders to concentrate on *what* they needed to achieve above *how* they were going to achieve it.

Integrated Operations

Both Raider Battalions functioned as responsive instruments of military power with the ability to orient on emerging tasks rapidly. This integration was often non-standard, with Edson routinely using Colonel Jerry Thomas, the 1st Marine Division's Operations Officer, to gain Vandergrift's approval for operations.¹⁶⁷ The Raiders' understanding of where best to operate garnered critical intelligence, prevented potential crises and relived pressure from other combat formations. Exploitation and analysis of material seized on the Tasimboko Raid clarified the Japanese offensive plan on Guadalcanal and informed mounting a defense on Edson's Ridge. The "Long Patrol" harassed the enemy's rear, relieving pressure from the east of Henderson Field, allowing the 1st Marine Division to concentrate on enemy forces to the west.

The Raiders also benefited from integrating air support, naval gunfire, and artillery. Airstrikes and naval guns enabled the landings at Tulagi and Tasimboko and

¹⁶⁶ Peatross, *Bless 'em All*, 133-142.

¹⁶⁷ Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 137, 141.

prevented enemy reinforcements on Makin. Artillery integration was critical in defending Edson's Ridge and enhanced the 2nd Raider's combat power during the "Long Patrol." However, directly integrating the 1st Raiders into regimental operations did not succeed on Guadalcanal, despite their Edson serving as the regimental commander. Both battles along the Matanikau suggest that failing to employ specialized units in line with their skills limits the advantages those formations offer.

Strategic Initiative

The Raiders contributed to achieving strategic initiative both directly and indirectly during the Guadalcanal Campaign. Directly, the Raiders gained the initiative in three ways. First, the Tasimboko Raid denied the Japanese use of their primary port of debarkation on Guadalcanal, destroyed a significant supply depot, and degraded the enemy's fire support capability. Second, intelligence from Tasimboko drove the Raiders to defend Edson's Ridge, preventing a massive assault on Henderson Field at a critical time when a significant component of the 1st Marine Division's combat power remained in transit.¹⁶⁸ Third, the "Long Patrol" enabled the 1st Marine Division to concentrate combat power away from their eastern front.

Indirectly, Raider operations boosted morale for the American public and within the 1st Marine Division. The Makin Raid, while representing somewhere between a limited tactical success and managed failure, signified the first US ground victory in World War II and received significant attention domestically.¹⁶⁹ On Guadalcanal, Raider

¹⁶⁸ Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 138.

¹⁶⁹ Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 9.

patrols following Edson's Ridge garnered admiration from newly arrived Marines for the 7th Marine Regiment.¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

The Marine Raiders provided essential contributions to the Guadalcanal Campaign. The operational characteristics of SOF were applied to this campaign and are displayed in table 3.

¹⁷⁰ Alexander, *Edson's Raiders*, 201.

Table 3. Guadalcanal: Rating the Operational Characteristics of SOF

1ST AND 2ND MARINE RAIDER BATTALIONS: GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN								
Action	Unit	Task	Enabling Effects	Relative Superiority	Certain Access	Unconventional Ops	Integrated Ops	Strategic Initiative
Assault Landing, Tulagi, Solomon Islands (7 Aug 42)	1st Raider Bn	-Seize ENY sea plane base	-Approx 450 EKIA -Limit effect of ENY aircraft on SLOCs	2	3	2	3	3
Makin Island Raid, Butaritari Island, Makin Atoll, Gilbert Islands (17-18 Aug 42)	2nd Raider Bn	-Destroy ENY garrison, clear little Makin -Destroy installations, take prisoners, gain intel, divert ENY resources	-Two ENY transport aircraft destroyed -2 enemy boats destroyed (by subs) -83 EKIA -Military facilities and supplies destroyed	2	3	3	3	3
Tasimboko Raid, Guadalcanal (8 Sep 42)	1st Raider Bn, 1st Parachute Bn	-Attack ENY SPOD and supply depot	-Estimate 50 EKIA -ENY supply depot destroyed -Intel recovered on ENY offensive plans	3	3	2	3	3
Battle of Edson's Ridge, Guadalcanal (12-14 Sep 42)	1st Raider Bn, 1st Parachute Bn	-Defend against ENY BDE attack (2,500)	-Prevented attack on Henderson Field -Approx 700 EKIA, 500 EWIA	3	3	3	3	3
1st Battle of Matanikau River, Guadalcanal (26-28 Sep 42)	1st Raider Bn	-Flank ENY forces to enable 2/5 and 1/7 attack	-Mission failure -Relatively low friendly casualties compared to 2/5, 1/7	2	2	2	2	1
2nd Battle of Matanikau River, Guadalcanal (8-10 Oct 42)	1st Raider Bn	-Route Japanese attacks -Defend 3/5 right flank	-59 EKIA -Severed ENY bridgehead	2	2	2	2	2
The Long Patrol, Guadalcanal (5 Nov - 4 Dec 42)	2nd Raider Bn	-Harass the ENY rear -Destroy ENY artillery effecting Henderson Field	-488 EKIA -False Front	3	3	3	3	3
AVERAGE ORDINAL SCORES				2.4	2.7	2.4	2.7	2.6

Source: Created by the author.

The campaign scored highest on “certain access” and “integrated operations.” This score reflects the reliance on amphibious assets to arrive at objective as well as supporting arms assets to generate relative superiority against prepared enemy defenses. “Strategic initiative” scored the next highest. Except for the battles along the Mantanikau, Raider operations occurred at critical points in the campaign, either preventing the defeat of the 1st Marine Division or enabling the division to mass forces against more significant threats.

“Unconventional operations” and “relative superiority” scored the same in aggregate. For “unconventional operations,” what differentiated the Raiders from the remainder of Marine infantry during this period was the experience of the individual Raider and the rigorous training both battalions received. This experience enabled the Raiders to concentrate on “what” to do rather than “how” to do it. Relative superiority’s rating reflects that the Raiders regularly engaged with enemy forces of similar size. Despite the lower aggregate scores, it is essential to note that SOF directly generates their effects through unconventional operations made achievable through relative superiority.

Guadalcanal highlights that in highly contested environments, where air and maritime superiority are unattainable, achieving “certain access” through “integrated operations” is challenged. High-risk vessels such as surface combatants have to maneuver to achieve survivability. This observation suggests that long-range, low-signature maritime insertion platforms from sea bases may be required to gain access during a peer contest. The importance of non-standard insertion mechanisms also appears valid in this environment. Figure 10 displays the aggregated ordinal scores for each characteristic plotted on a radar chart.

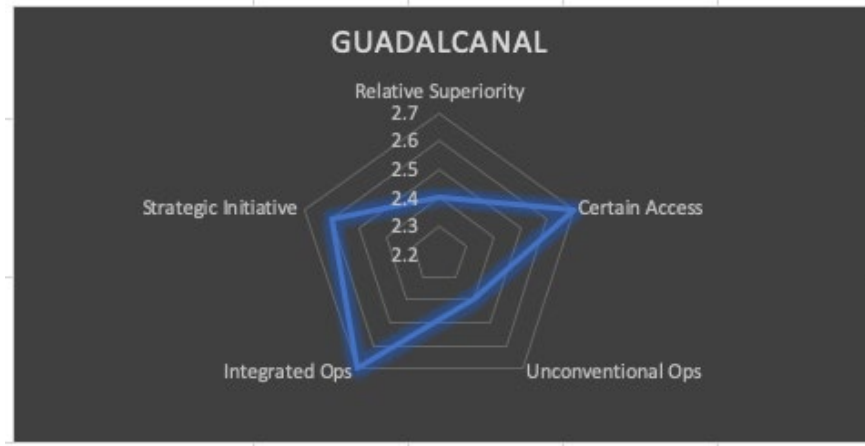


Figure 10. Guadalcanal Campaign Analysis

Source: Created by the author.

Guadalcanal demonstrates the importance of certain access and integrated operations as operational characteristics of SOF in a highly contested amphibious campaign. It also highlights that, when employed as designed, special operations contribute to achieving “strategic initiative.” “Relative superiority” and “unconventional operations” do not reflect as prominently as other characteristics in this case. Both characteristics represent the actual actions SOF perform to achieve effects, but suggests that they rely on the remaining characteristics to occur.

Case Study #2: Amphibious Special Operations Forces, Operation Chromite, 1950

This case examines a combined western military force, partnered with an experienced host nation military, rapidly converging to fight a determined enemy. The conflict surprised the US and United Nations (UN), challenging the ability to project force, assemble combat power, and gain the initiative. The UN force had to balance a

tenuous defense against an advancing enemy while generating combat adequate combat power to regain the initiative. These considerations create a useful scenario to analyze the operational characteristics of SOF.

Background

Before dawn on June 25, 1950, over 135,000 soldiers from the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) crossed the 38th Parallel, invading the Republic of Korea (ROK). Within hours, President Harry Truman authorized General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief Far East, to employ air and sea forces to halt the advancing communist army. On June 29th, MacArthur arrived in Korea to personally assess the scene, quickly informing the Joint Chiefs of Staff that only the major commitment of ground troops could stop the invasion. Truman approved MacArthur's request the following day.

American military power available in the Far East was lacking. Army forces consisted of four understrength divisions. Far East Air Forces, designed to defend Japan, favored jet interceptors while lacking reconnaissance, transportation, and ground-attack capacity. Naval Forces Far East consisted of one cruiser and four destroyers. MacArthur would need to buy time to mass adequate force to face the NKPA.¹⁷¹

In rapid succession, Truman placed the US Seventh Fleet under MacArthur's control, the UN passed a resolution calling on member countries to provide military assistance to the ROK, and British Commonwealth nations contributed naval units

¹⁷¹ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Military Operations Historical Collection* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), II-1 – II-4.

already in theater. Naval forces emplaced a blockade on Korea and, as troops and supplies converged on the Korean coast, the Far East Air Forces began airstrikes targeting NKPA aviation, supplies, and combat formations.¹⁷² Despite mounting UN efforts, the enemy continued to advance.

On July 4th, lead elements of the US Army's 24th Infantry Division, Task Force Smith, landed at Pusan and rapidly moved to engage in a rear-guard action near Osan. The following day, the NKPA overran the Task Force and continued multi-pronged, spearhead advances southward. As the NKPA continued driving UN forces toward the Nakong River, MacArthur focused on regaining the initiative.¹⁷³ Seeking to capitalize on UN sea and air superiority, MacArthur conceived of an amphibious landing to sever the enemy lines of communication.

MacArthur believed that a landing at Inchon Harbor, followed by the seizure of the Korean capital of Seoul through a simultaneous attack by the landing force and the Eighth Army at the Pusan Perimeter, provided the best option for a decisive outcome. Two issues complicated this plan. First, the severe hydrography around Inchon limited an amphibious landing to spring tides, occurring for three days each month. Second, despite five reconstituted ROK battalions, four US Army Divisions, and a Marine Brigade formed in Korea, the NKPA retained the initiative. MacArthur required the 1st Marine Division, transiting from the US, to form the core of the assault force for Inchon.

¹⁷² James A. Field and Ernest M. Eller, *A History of United States Naval Operations: Korea* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962), 55-59.

¹⁷³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Military Operations Historical Collection*, II-4 – II-5.

Aligning tides and the Marines' arrival required holding the forming Pusan Perimeter for six weeks until mid-September. The plan for the Inchon landing and seizure of Seoul was dubbed Operation Chromite.¹⁷⁴

United Nations Amphibious Special Operations Forces

On July 27th, Vice Admiral James Doyle, the commander of Amphibious Group One, established a naval special operations force from a detachment from the US Navy's Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) 3 and the Marines' Mobile Training Team Able. A week later, UDT-1 and an advanced element of the 1st Marine Division Reconnaissance Company arrived. Doyle combined the new arrivals with the detachment from UDT-3 and two APDs, forming the ad hoc Navy Special Operations Group (SOG).

Concurrently, the General Headquarters (GHQ), Far East Command, began organizing a Provisional Raider Company. Selecting 125 out of 700 applicants from within the command, the GHQ Raiders moved to Camp McGill, forty miles south of Tokyo, on August 9th. Mobile Training Team Able trained the formation in amphibious reconnaissance, demolitions, and conditioning.

The United Kingdom provided two maritime special operations units to the UN effort. A 200-man detachment of the Royal Marines dubbed the 41 Independent Commando, deployed from Britain to Camp McGill in early August. Concurrently, a group of volunteers from shipboard detachments of the British Far East Fleet joined the combined special operations force. Dubbed the "Pounds Force" for the commander,

¹⁷⁴ Field and Eller, *A History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, 131-132; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Military Operations Historical Collection*, II-5 – II-6.

Lieutenant Derek Pounds, the group of ten Sailors and six Marines split between the GHQ Raiders and 41 Independent Commando.¹⁷⁵

Far East Command Joint Special Operations formed a small reconnaissance team just ahead of Operation Chromite. US Navy Lieutenant Eugene Clark, then serving in the geographic branch of MacArthur's staff, would join with ROK Navy Lieutenant Youn Joung and former counterintelligence officer Colonel Ke In-Ju to assess Inchon Harbor. Clark, a prior-enlisted sailor during World War II and subsequently an amphibious warfare officer, was qualified to evaluate the feasibility of the landing.¹⁷⁶

Objectives of the Operation

Special operations tasking mirrored the requirement for UN forces to defend the Pusan Perimeter before transitioning to offensive action to regain the initiative.¹⁷⁷ The Navy SOG's initial focus would be conducting harassing attacks, demolitions, and raids against targets on Korea's east coast.¹⁷⁸ North Korea's eastern shoreline consists of steep mountains rising from the sea, compelling a rail line to parallel the sea for a forty-mile stretch. This vulnerable stretch fell within reach of naval gunfire and landing parties. Despite striking rail infrastructure, air and naval assets were heavily taxed, and the effects

¹⁷⁵ Donald W. Boose Jr., *Over the Beach: US Army Amphibious Operations in the Korean War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 141-144.

¹⁷⁶ Eugene Franklin Clark and Introduction and Epilogue Thomas Fleming, *The Secrets of Inchon: The Untold Story of the Most Daring Covert Mission of the Korean War* (New York: Penguin/Putnam, 2002), 5-8; Boose, *Over the Beach*, 174.

¹⁷⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Military Operations Historical Collection*, II-5.

¹⁷⁸ Boose, *Over the Beach*, 141-142.

of standoff weapons were inconsistent.¹⁷⁹ There also was a developing precedent for amphibious raiding parties in Korea.

On the evening of July 11th, four Marines and four Sailors embarked on the US antiaircraft cruiser *Juneau* transferred to the US destroyer *Mansfield*, landed ashore, and planted two sixty-pound bombs in a railway tunnel between Seongking and Dancheon. On August 5th, frogmen from UDT-3 launched from the *Diachenko* (APD-123) and attempted to demolish a railway bridge near Yeosu, southwest of Pusan. Shortly after coming ashore, North Korean soldiers riding a railroad handcar repelled the frogmen with small arms.¹⁸⁰ The SOG would continue the effort to disrupt the NKPA's coastal line of communication.

Reconnaissance constituted the second task for SOF. Inchon presented significant obstacles to an amphibious landing. Extreme tide cycles, canalized channels, broad mudflats, high seawalls, enemy resistance, and the fortified island of Wolmi-do challenged the operation. In planning, the Far East Command Headquarters developed alternative landing sites, including Gunsan (Kunsan), south of Inchon.¹⁸¹ Amphibious SOF would reconnoiter the beaches surrounding Gunsan and Asan Bay, assessing their suitability while also deceiving the NKPA to the primary landing site. Clark's team would conduct a detailed survey in and around Inchon.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Field and Eller, *A History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, 133-147.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 139-142.

¹⁸¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Military Operations Historical Collection*, II-5, II-8.

¹⁸² Boose, *Over the Beach*, 174.

Execution

By mid-August, as commando units formed at Camp McGill and the Eighth Army fought to retain the Pusan Perimeter, the combined effects of naval and air interdiction against NPKA supply lines began taking a toll on the enemy. The crucial defense sectors along the perimeter increasingly shifted north and east, underscoring the criticality of the east coast rail line to support NKPA actions.¹⁸³



Figure 11. Amphibious Special Operations, July–August 1950

Source: Donald W. Boose Jr., *Over the Beach: US Army Amphibious Operations in the Korean War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 140.

¹⁸³ Field and Eller, *A History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, 146.

On August 9th, SOG boarded the *Horace A. Bass* (APD 124) to conduct a series of demolition raids against railway targets along the northeast coast of Korea between Hamheung and Seongjin, 200 miles into North Korea. Between August 12th and 15th, the *Bass* struck rail lines during the day while the twenty-five Sailors from UDTs 1 and 3 and sixteen reconnaissance Marines came ashore for three nighttime raids. As the Marines provided security, the frogmen placed demolition charges in railway tunnels and on bridges.¹⁸⁴ The combined effect of the three raids destroyed two bridges and three tunnels, complimenting the remaining naval and air interdiction effort targeting NKPA supply lines.¹⁸⁵

As August progressed and Operation Chromite approached, the SOG moved to conduct beach reconnaissance on Korea's west coast, assessing alternate landing sites and supporting MacArthur's deception plan. On August 21st, the *Bass*, along with two destroyers for fire support, arrived off Korea's west coast. The SOG Raiders came ashore at a narrow by sixty miles south of Inchon during high tide. Despite having to operate under a full moon, the commandos successfully surveyed the beach, undetected, before

¹⁸⁴ Boose, *Over the Beach*, 142-143; Naval History and Heritage Command, "U.S. Navy Special Operations in the Korean War," Naval History and Heritage Command, August 27, 2015, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/u/usnavy-special-operations-korean-war.html#f>.

¹⁸⁵ Field and Eller, *A History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, 146-147.

returning to the *Bass* undetected.¹⁸⁶ On the night of August 23rd, the SOG scouted beaches near Asan Bay, thirty-eight miles south of Inchon.¹⁸⁷

On the night of August 24th, the SOG arrived off Gunsan to assess a beach adjoining an occupied airfield. While the Marines established security and the frogmen prepared to measure beach gradients and depths, an enemy patrol approached, prompting a Marine to sound the alarm. In the ensuing firefight, the SOG ordered an immediate withdrawal, swimming their rubber boats outside of small arms range. During the chaotic departure, the force left nine Marines and one frogman behind, prompting the *Bass* to launch a rescue party. Landing under fire, the rescue party extracted the remaining SOG Raiders.¹⁸⁸ At the end of August, SOG's reconnaissance Marines rejoined the 1st Marine Division in preparation for Operation Chromite, ending the US Marines' role in coastal raiding for the remainder of the conflict.¹⁸⁹

On September 1st, ROK Navy Commander Lee Sung Ho inserted Clark and his two Korean partners onto Yonghung-do (Yeongheungdo) Island, fourteen miles south of Inchon in the Flying Fish Channel. Upon landing, Clark and his party killed the five NKPA soldiers remaining on the island before establishing a base camp. Rapidly forming a maritime guerilla force from the local islanders, Clark mounted a series of raids and

¹⁸⁶ Charles H. Briscoe, "Born of Desperation: Early Special Operations in the Korean War," *Veritas* 6, no. 1 (2010): 17-18.

¹⁸⁷ Boose, *Over the Beach*, 173.

¹⁸⁸ Briscoe, "Born of Desperation," 17-18.

¹⁸⁹ Naval History and Heritage Command, *U.S. Navy Special Operations in the Korean War*.

reconnaissance missions, integrated with a concerted human intelligence effort, to develop the situation at Inchon and inform invasion planning.¹⁹⁰

Engaging local villagers, fishermen, and resistance groups, Clark established human networks on neighboring islands and in Inchon to report on communist troop activities.¹⁹¹ Clark's proxies, aboard a small fleet of local sailing junks and sampans armed with machine guns, captured passing boats, bringing the crew and passengers to Ke In-Ju (using the alias Kim Nam Sun) for interrogation.¹⁹² Commander Lee, supporting Clark's operations from his submarine chaser PC-703, coordinated mine patrols, provided support in defense of Yonghung-do, and established the ranges of NKPA coastal guns emplaced on Wolmi-do Island by patrolling within the enemy's engagement zone.¹⁹³

On September 5th, Clark led a raid force onto Taemuui-do (Daemuuido) Island to capture a North Korean political officer amidst a garrison of fifty soldiers. The ten-man force divided into three elements and attacked simultaneously, overrunning a prison facility, distracting the local garrison with grenades, and snatching their target. As the raid force withdrew, communist soldiers fired at close range, inadvertently killing the

¹⁹⁰ Clark and Fleming, *The Secrets of Inchon*, 36-80; Boose, *Over the Beach*, 174.

¹⁹¹ Clark and Fleming, *The Secrets of Inchon*, 59, 106, 121-124, 207-208, 261-276.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 125-128, 210-213.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 48, 111-115, 181-186.

political officer. The raiders rapidly reoriented and captured two soldiers on patrol, returning them to Yonghung-do for questioning.¹⁹⁴

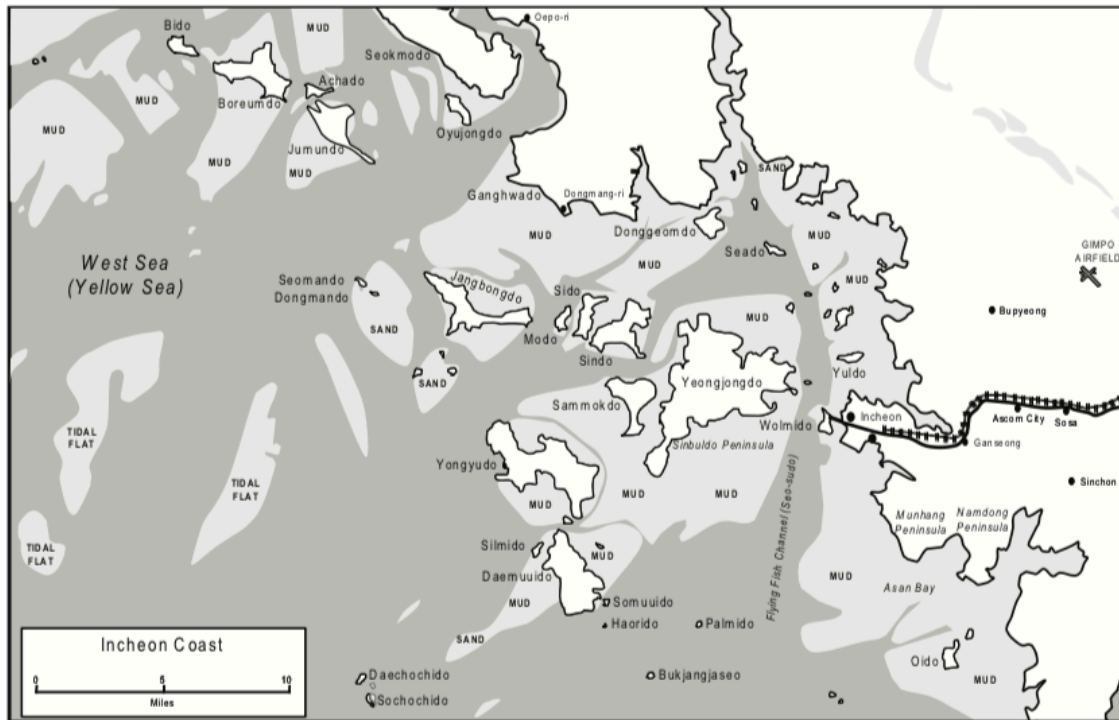


Figure 12. Incheon Coast

Source: Donald W. Boose Jr., *Over the Beach: US Army Amphibious Operations in the Korean War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 164.

On the night of September 8th, Clark conducted a reconnaissance of Wolmi-do and Sowolmido Islands at the mouth of Incheon Harbor. Once ashore, Clark divided his small force into two elements, noting the location of machinegun nests, the condition of the causeway connecting the two islands, the state of defensive obstacles, and the

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 140, 165-174.

feasibility of potential landing sites.¹⁹⁵ The following night, Clark returned to Inchon Harbor to assess additional landing sites, measure the height of the seawalls, and examine the consistency of the mudflats, critical information for the coming invasion.¹⁹⁶ On September 13th, UN cruisers and destroyers began preparatory fires around Inchon.¹⁹⁷

The same night, the GHQ Raider Company, combined with the UK Volunteer Force (Pounds Force), executed a final feint on the Korean west coast ahead of the Inchon landing. The 120-strong force embarked on the HMS *Whitesand Bay*, launched in rubber boats to scout beaches near Gunsan. The Raiders organized to assess four separate beach locations, three on the mainland and one on nearby Sokae-do Island.

While most elements landed unopposed, the GHQ Raiders' 3rd Platoon, the northernmost unit, came under heavy enemy fire upon landing. The barrage wounded a soldier on the beach, killing a corporal and injuring an officer across the channel on Sokae-do Island. Compromised, the Raiders ordered a withdrawal. Lightly armed and with no radio, 3rd Platoon's departure was chaotic. The element on Sokae-do, drawing enemy fire as they attempted to gain accountability off a roster, left their dead and wounded soldiers. The raiders aborted a rescue attempt later that night.¹⁹⁸

On the night of September 14th, Clark evacuated Yonghung-do in the face of a determined communist attack to reclaim the island. Arriving at Palmido Island, five miles

¹⁹⁵ Clark and Fleming, *The Secrets of Inchon*, 228-236.

¹⁹⁶ Clark and Fleming, *The Secrets of Inchon*, 249-260, 322-323.

¹⁹⁷ Boose, *Over the Beach*, 176.

¹⁹⁸ Briscoe, "Born of Desperation," 18-20.

southwest of Inchon, Clark ignited a disabled light oriented down Flying Fish Channel as a navigational guide to the approaching fleet. As dawn broke on September 15th, the 230 ships of the UN invasion fleet arrived off Inchon, bombarding targets informed by Clark's efforts.

At 0633, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment stormed Wolmi-do and Sowolmi-do, sustaining one Marine killed and seventeen wounded. At 1732, with the returning tide, two battalions from the 5th Marines assaulted Red Beach at downtown Inchon, while the 1st Marine Regiment landed at Blue Beach, located in a suburban area scouted by Clark days before. At both beaches, the Marines mounted the fifteen seawalls with scaling ladders fixed to their landing craft, rapidly coming ashore and continuing the attack inland. Within ten days, the 1st Marine Division had reached Seoul, while the Eighth Army, attacking from the Pusan Perimeter, disintegrated the NKPA in zone.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Clark and Fleming, *The Secrets of Inchon*, 319, 321-323; Boose, *Over the Beach*, 176-178.

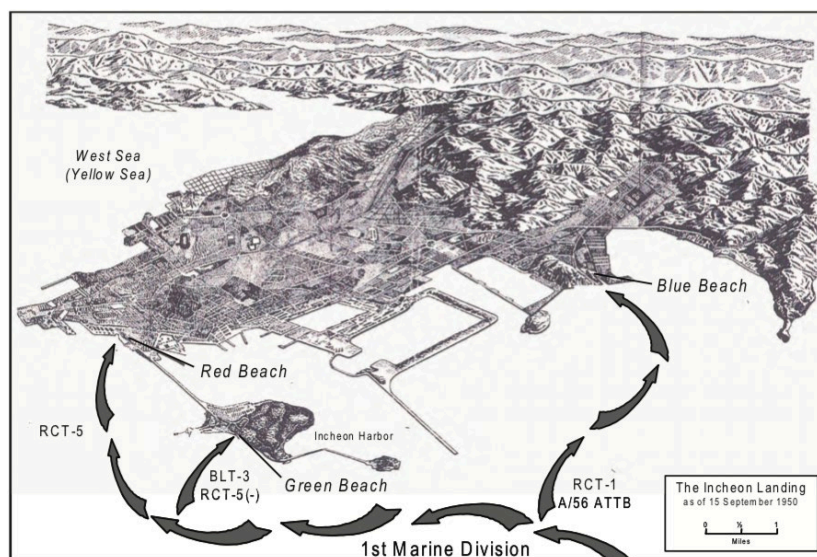


Figure 13. Inchon Landing Overview

Source: Donald W. Boose Jr., *Over the Beach: US Army Amphibious Operations in the Korean War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 165.

Following the success of Operation Chromite, MacArthur transitioned his focus to an offensive across the 38th Parallel. The plan, under development since summer, called for the Eighth Army to attack overland, while X Corps conducted an amphibious landing at Wonsan. ROK forces would attack up the east coast. MacArthur planned to issue a message demanding the NKPA's surrender on October 1st. If he did not receive a response, the attack would commence.²⁰⁰ In preparation, MacArthur approved the 41st Independent Commando to conduct coastal interdiction operations in North Korea. The force set sail aboard the USS *Perch*, a transport submarine, on September 25th.

The *Perch* arrived off Tachon (Dancheon) on the night of September 30th, intending to destroy a railway tunnel. As the commandos boarded rubber boats, the *Perch's* motor transport failed well offshore, radar detected a North Korean patrol boat,

²⁰⁰ Boose, *Over the Beach*, 217-218.

and lights began flickering near the target area. Presuming compromise, the commando's reembarked. The next morning, as ROK forces crossed the 38th Parallel on the offensive, the *Perch* rendezvoused with the two destroyers, the USS *Maddox* and the USS *Herbert J. Thomas* and developed an alternate plan. That night, the *Thomas* created a diversion at the original target while the sixty-seven commandos came ashore at a nearby rail culvert. The commandos landed unopposed, demolishing their target before withdrawing under fire.

Within several days, a separate detachment of the 41 Independent Commando, embarked aboard the *Bass* and the USS *Wantuck* (APD 125). On the night of October 5th, the commandos landed south of Chongjin, coming ashore to destroy a railway tunnel. The next night, the commandos landed again, this time demolishing a tunnel and a bridge. With the raids complete, the commandos returned to Camp McGill, reorganizing for a transition to sustained operations ashore as another reconnaissance company for the 1st Marine Division..²⁰¹

Analysis of the Operations Characteristics of SOF

Relative Superiority

Amphibious SOF in Korea mainly employed to achieve indirect, disruptive effects rather than to execute decisive actions. The “rail-busting” missions at the outbreak of the conflict and following the capture of Seoul were integrated parts of a combined naval and air interdiction effort aimed at disrupting the NKPA's lines of communications.

²⁰¹ Boose, *Over the Beach*, 219, 231-232; Leo J. Daugherty III, *Train Wreckers and Ghost Killers: Allied Marines in the Korean War* (Washington, DC: US Marine Corps Historical Center, 2003), 6-8.

However, these operations do reflect relatively small forces operating behind the lines of a numerically superior enemy to achieve effects. To balance their impact and resiliency, the SOG and the 41 Independent Commandos chose targets that avoided large troop concentrations, effected low-visibility insertions at night, and included supporting naval assets to increase security. The rail-busting operations represent a tactically direct but operationally indirect approach oriented on supporting the UN main force.

Clark's Taemuui-do Raid provides the best example of direct "relative superiority" in this case. One US sailor, one guerilla-trained ROK Navy officer, and eight local guerillas combined speed, surprise, and stealth to capture a political officer from the middle of a fifty-strong enemy garrison. By infiltrating undetected and attacking three locations simultaneously, the raid force disoriented the defenders. After realizing their target was dead during exfiltration, a portion of the raid force was able to reorient and capture two soldiers before extracting.

Clark's reconnaissance and human network operations constituted his principal contribution to Operation Chromite and enabled indirect relative superiority for the amphibious assault. Clark's assessment of beach landing sites, seawall heights, and mudflat consistency informed assault planning. Developing the enemy's defensive disposition enabled effective pre-assault fires that removed critical weapon systems and degraded the enemy's strength. The combined effect of Clark's efforts allowed two Marine regiments to rapidly seize Inchon in challenging littoral terrain that strongly favored the defender.

Certain Access

Certain access with foundational in amphibious SOF's contributions in Korea. The SOG, the GHQ Raider Company, the 41 Independent Commando, and Clark's detachment each had considerable maritime competency, with the ability to insert on a variety of craft and swim long distances if required. This case highlights the importance of lunar and tide cycles for amphibious SOF gaining access undetected.

Korea, particularly in the Yellow Sea, experiences extreme tidal shifts that easily negate the use of unpowered craft. The SOG, Raiders, and Commandos paddled rubber boats to shore, requiring favorable tides. Clark, in particular, timed his operations to maximize the camouflage afforded by lunar cycles while exploiting the tactical advantages of tides. Principally relying on sailing junks and sampans to navigate Flying Fish Channel, tides influenced the speed of Clark's operations leading up to Operation Chromite.²⁰²

This case also highlights the advantages that indigenous operations provide to achieving "certain access." While UN forces mostly enjoyed maritime superiority off of Korea, enemy vessels and even soviet aircraft contested the environment.²⁰³ Leveraging indigenous craft with local pilots enabled Clark and his guerillas to operate directly, blending in with the environment, selecting informed landing sites, and integrating with guides to arrive at their desired locations. Indirectly, the human network Clark employed,

²⁰² Clark and Fleming, *The Secrets of Inchon*, 167.

²⁰³ Ibid., 111-113, 213-231.

enabled by his integrated ROK counterintelligence officer, significantly increased the breadth and volume of reporting.

Unconventional Operations

Amphibious SOF in Korea leveraged surprise, deception, and independence to alter the tension between threatening and avoiding destruction. Rail-busting operations targeted tunnels and bridges offset from large troop concentrations or defensive locations, and mission compromise resulted in the missions being aborted. The Gunsan reconnaissance conducted by the SOG, followed by the GHQ Raider Company's later demonstration, served to deceive the enemy as to the pending location for Operation Chromite. These unilateral operations contrast to Clark's indigenous operations, combining to mutually support the deception effort.

Independent operations characterized Clark's reconnaissance efforts in Incheon Harbor. Clark and a small band of guerillas were able to enter the harbor, directly scout critical areas of interest, and return to Yonghung-do without requiring external support. Clark's actions demonstrate how employing a knowledgeable operator in an adequately prepared indigenous operation can yield enormous operational returns.

Integrated Operations

Amphibious SOF served both integrated and discrete functions in Korea. The SOG, GHQ Raider Company, and Commandos incorporated within the naval blockade effort, complementing naval gunfire and aviation interdiction operations with demolition raids. Intrinsically, ships transported SOF to their raid locations, provided fire support for activities ashore, and provided diversions adjacent to target locations to enable SOF units

to achieve surprise. Holistically, SOF demolition raids provided a complementary mechanism to disrupt NKPA lines of communication accessible from the shore.

Clark's advance force operations directly informed joint kinetic targeting in preparation for Operation Chromite. The Korean ship PC-703 provided security for Clark's base on Yonghung-do, enhancing security for the forward location from which Clark mounted clandestine operations into enemy territory. Notably, as UN cruisers commenced pre-assault fires at Inchon on September 13th, Clark was ashore with a guerilla element observing the bombardment. Clark did not have a radio with him to adjust impacts and recognized this oversight as a planning shortfall.²⁰⁴ This event suggests an imperative that advance force elements should prepare to receive main forces into the operational area to maximize integration.

Strategic Initiative

Amphibious SOF actions in Korea contributed to achieving strategic initiative in three ways. First, raids targeting lines of communication along North Korea's east coast integrated with broader joint interdiction efforts to slow the NKPA's advance, stalling their initiative and generating time to build combat power. While these operations alone did not produce strategic effects, they served as a complementary action to air and naval interdiction. Second, reconnaissance and demonstration actions on Korea's west coast deceived the enemy as to UN intentions ahead of Operation Chromite, reinforcing a perception that Inchon was unsuitable for amphibious operations. Finally, advance force

²⁰⁴ Clark and Fleming, *The Secrets of Inchon*, 288-289.

reconnaissance of Inchon Harbor directly enabled the amphibious force to reduce the enemy's defenses and rapidly gain the initiative.

Conclusion

Amphibious SOF provided important contributions to the joint warfighting effort in Korea by integration direct action into a multi-domain interdiction effort, deceiving the enemy, and answering vital information gaps through clandestine reconnaissance efforts. The operational characteristics of SOF were applied to this case. The results are displayed in table 4.

Table 4. Operation Chromite: Rating the Operational Characteristics of SOF

OPERATION CHROMITE								
Action	Unit	Task	Enabling Effects	Relative Superiority	Certain Access	Unconventional Ops	Integrated Ops	Strategic Initiative
Posung-Myong Raid (12-16 Aug 1950)	1st MARDIV Recon Company, UDT	-Destory railway infrastructure	-3 railway tunnels destroyed -3 railway bridges destroyed	2	3	2	3	3
Gunsan Reconnaissance (21-24 Aug 1950)	1st MARDIV Recon Company, UDT	-Identify alternate landings sites -Deceive NKPA	-Assessed beach landing sites -Deception	2	3	2	3	2
Taemuui-Do Raid (5 Sep 1950)	E.F. Clark detachment	-Capture NKPA political officer -Facilitate interrogation	-Removal of NKPA political officer -Capture of 2x NKPA soldiers	3	3	3	2	2
Wolmi-do and Sowolmi-do Reconnaissance (8 Sep 1950)	E.F. Clark detachment	-Assess ENY defense -Assess landing sites	-ID ENY machine gun bunkers -ID ENY defense obstacles	2	3	3	2	3
Inchon Harbor Reconnaissance (9 Sep 1950)	E.F. Clark detachment	-Assess landing sites -ID height of sea walls -Analyze mudflats	-Confirmed seawall height -Assessed landing feasibility BLUE and RED	2	3	3	2	3
OPN TRUDY JACKSON HUMINT Guerilla/HUMINT Opns (1-15 Sep 1950)	E.F. Clark detachment	-ID ENY defense and garrison locations	-Development of preassaul fire TGTs -Guerilla BDA -ID ENY coastal guns	2	3	3	3	3
Gunsan Demonstration (13 September 1950)	GHQ Raiders, Pounds Force	-Deceive NKPA about Inchon landing site	-ENY contact -Deception	2	2	2	3	3
Tachon Raid (30 Sep - 1 Oct 1950)	41 Independent CDO	-Deceive NKPA about Inchon landing site	-Railway culvert destroyed	2	3	3	3	2
Chongjin Raids (5-6 Oct 1950)	41 Independent CDO	-Control naval gunfire from British ships supporting the landing	-2 railway tunnels destroyed -1 bridge destroyed	3	3	2	3	2
AVERAGE ORDINAL SCORES				2.2	2.9	2.6	2.7	2.6

Source: Created by the author.

The operation scored highest on certain access. Except for the Gunsan demonstration conducted by the GHQ Raider Company, amphibious SOF reached their objective areas to execute their desired action. UN local air and maritime superiority enabled amphibious SOF to employ stealth and surprise against indirect targets to apply effects. Integrated operations scored the next highest. This score reflects that joint or ROK assets enabled special operations through transportation, basing, fire support, or

security. Additionally, the results achieved by special operations contributed to the overall joint warfighting effort either through complementing interdiction, supporting deception, or focusing kinetic effects.

“Unconventional operations” and “strategic initiative” achieved the same score. Amphibious SOF applied stealth and deception throughout this case study, and Clark’s Operation Trudy Jackson combined independent operations with an indigenous platform to achieve mission success. “Strategic initiative’s” score reflects that not every special mission in the operation significantly contributed to gaining the initiative. That said, special operations represented a distinct and complementary military instrument to achieve effects.

“Relative superiority” scored the lowest in this case. This score reflects that amphibious SOF mainly adopted indirect approaches, choosing to avoid enemy strengths to achieve a balance between creating effects and maintaining resiliency. “Relative superiority’s” rating does not reflect a lack of importance as an operational characteristic, because SOF’s ability to achieve “relative superiority” is a defining mechanism for how SOF’s value to integrated warfighting. This score suggests that balancing direct and indirect approaches to special operations is valuable in amphibious environments, balancing survivability with effects.

Figure 14 displays the aggregated ordinal scores for each characteristic plotted on a radar chart.

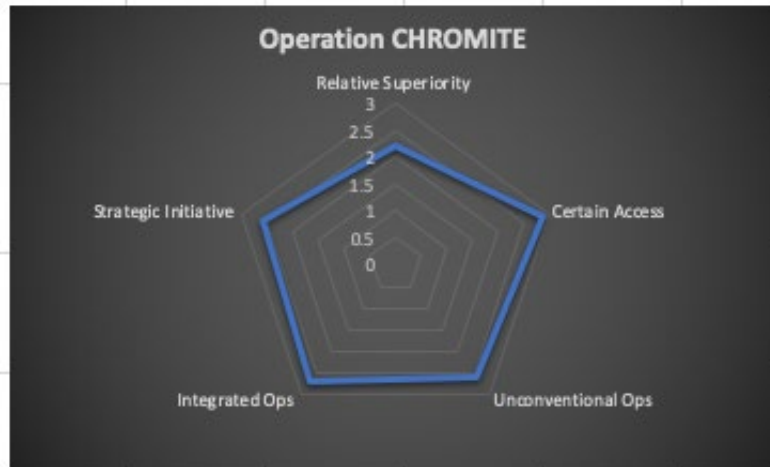


Figure 14. Operation Chromite Analysis

Source: Created by the author.

Amphibious special operations in Korea underscore the importance of “certain access” and “integrated operations” in contested amphibious environments. This case also highlights the value of “unconventional operations,” particularly indigenous operations supporting advance force reconnaissance to contribute to “strategic initiative.” Again, relative superiority reflects less prominently than the other characteristics due to SOF adopting indirect approaches to achieving effects. These comparable scores suggest relationships between the characteristics in this case. For Korea, “certain access,” enabled by “integrated operations,” allowed “unconventional operations” that contributed to “relative superiority,” achieving “strategic initiative.”

Case Study #3: United Kingdom Special Forces in the Falkland War

This case provides an example of a western military projecting power over 8,000 miles against a numerically superior, well-equipped enemy force prepared to contest

entry across domains. The conflict came as a surprise to both actors, straining the integration of joint military operations. British ground forces boasted elite light infantry units, including Royal Marine Commandos, proficient in amphibious small unit tactics. These considerations provide a useful setting to analyze the operational characteristics of SOF.

Background

The Falkland Islands and South Georgia Island lie in the south Atlantic off the eastern coast of Argentina. In the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, Britain established colonial administration over the islands despite objections from Argentina.²⁰⁵ In 1960, the United Nations passed U.N. Resolution 1514, urging colonial powers to divest of their colonies. Britain listed the Falklands as a colony, prompting Argentina to reassert sovereignty. The United Nations created a committee to negotiate these conflicting claims.

At the time, the Falkland Islands Company, a British-subsidized wool enterprise, constituted the primary source of income on the islands. By 1981, negotiations between Britain and Argentina progressed to a point where many believed that the British government would accept a sovereignty lease-back program with Argentina. This perception prompted the Falkland Islands Company to furiously lobby British Parliament, achieving the discontinuation of all sovereignty discussions. In response, both the British

²⁰⁵ Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (London, UK: W. W. Norton, 1983), 1-7.

and Argentine governments began updating military contingency plans for the Falklands.²⁰⁶

While sovereignty discussions deteriorated, several domestic factors, including labor riots and a plan to deactivate one-quarter of the Royal Navy's surface combatants pressured the British government to seek a unifying national cause. In South Georgia, procedural confusion over an Argentinian scrap metal operation led to a report that Argentine commandos had landed. On March 26, 1982, the British Broadcasting Corporation erroneously announced that two British nuclear submarines were underway to the Falklands.²⁰⁷

The British Broadcasting Corporation report prompted Argentina to invade. On April 2nd, 700 Argentine Marines and 100 commandos seized Port Stanley, the capital of the Falklands, and captured South Georgia the following day.²⁰⁸ Argentina rapidly established small garrisons, intending to conduct diplomatic negotiations from a position of strength-in-possession.²⁰⁹

Between April 5th and 6th, Britain deployed a naval Task Force consisting of aircraft carriers, assault ships, frigates, destroyers, and various support ships.²¹⁰ In

²⁰⁶ Harry D. Train II, "An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign," *Naval War College Review* 41, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 34-35.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

²⁰⁸ Cedrick Delves, *Across an Angry Sea: The SAS in the Falklands War* (London: Hurst, 2018), 28-29, 325.

²⁰⁹ Train, "An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign," 38.

²¹⁰ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 95.

response, Argentina rapidly reinforced the Falklands, swelling their numbers to over 10,000.²¹¹ The Task Force's land element consisted of approximately 3,500 troops. The Task Force included a sizeable detachment of British Special Forces.²¹²

United Kingdom Special Forces

The special forces detachment for the Falklands Task Force consisted of the 22nd Special Air Service (SAS) Regimental headquarters, D and G Squadrons of the SAS, and the 2nd, 3rd, and 6th Sections of the Special Boat Squadron (SBS).²¹³ The SAS initially formed in 1941 and served in North Africa through 1943, conducting raids against enemy airfields. For the remainder of World War II, the SAS served in Italy and France, conducting both raids and clandestine support to resistance movements.

The SBS formed from several different unit origins between 1940 and 1942. During the war, the SBS mainly operated in the Aegean, where it conducted raids on coastal airfields. The SBS raiding efforts forced Axis powers to allocate valuable resources to defend the region.²¹⁴

Britain initially disbanded its special forces units following World War II but reformed both groups to conduct counterterrorism operations.²¹⁵ In the lead-up to the

²¹¹ Train, "An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign," 38.

²¹² Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 90-91.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 352.

²¹⁴ Alastair Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 13, no. 3 (2002).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 79-81.

Falklands War, SAS squadrons consisted of a headquarters and four troops, each troop specializing in an insert methodology: air, boat, mountain, and mobility. Operationally, the SAS rotated between North Atlantic Treaty Organization commitments, contingency response, counterterrorism, and training cycles.²¹⁶ The SBS principally focused on maritime counterterrorism.²¹⁷ In early 1982, the threat posed by the Soviet Union in Europe dominated Britain's strategic focus. War with Argentina came as a surprise.²¹⁸

Objectives of the Operation

Britain dubbed the effort to repossess its South Atlantic dependencies Operation Corporate.²¹⁹ In concept, the naval campaign would establish a 200-mile maritime exclusion zone, achieve air and sea superiority, conduct amphibious landings, and conclude with supporting the land war.²²⁰ The integrated land campaign consisted of three phases. First, Operation Paraquet would liberate South Georgia. Phase two would set conditions for amphibious landings. The final phase, Operation Sutton, would liberate the Falklands.²²¹

Geographic constraints challenged Britain's ability to prosecute Operation Corporate. Reaching the Falklands required projecting military power over 8,000

²¹⁶ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 4-5.

²¹⁷ United Kingdom National Army Museum, "Special Boat Service," National Army Museum, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/special-boat>.

²¹⁸ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 82.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Train, "An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign," 39.

²²¹ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 86.

miles.²²² Ascension Island, the nearest British airbase, was 4,000 miles from the Falklands, exceeding the range of Britain's aerial photo-reconnaissance platforms. The US, upon whom the British relied for satellite reconnaissance, did not provide it for the pending conflict. The classification surrounding signals intelligence rendered it useless to tactical commanders. Britain would conduct a long-range contested amphibious campaign with significant intelligence shortages.²²³

Argentina's military posed several threats to the British Task Force. In the maritime domain, Argentina possessed an aircraft carrier, two modern German 209 submarines, diesel-electric submarines, surface combatants equipped with modern ship-to-ship missiles, and amphibious craft equipped to emplace naval mines. Argentina's land-based aircraft included A-4 Skyhawks, Super Étendard fighters, Mirage fighters, and Pucará ground attack aircraft. On land, Argentina fielded several regiments of infantry supported by artillery and anti-aircraft units.²²⁴ The primary task for British Special Forces in the Falklands War was advance force reconnaissance to address the lack of intelligence regarding the enemy. The SAS would focus on discerning the disposition of Argentinian forces while the SBS would identify suitable landing sites. Special forces' second task was direct action where the enemy posed a threat to Britain's strategy.²²⁵

²²² Train, "An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign," 37.

²²³ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 82-83.

²²⁴ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 115, 124. Train, "An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign," 40, 178.

²²⁵ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 84-85.



Figure 15. Map of the British Power Projection in the Falklands War

Source: Department of History, United States Military Academy, “The Falklands (Malvinas) 1982,” United States Military Academy, accessed April 8, 2020, https://www.westpoint.edu/sites/default/files/inline-images/academics/academic_departments/history/Since%201958/falklands-map-a.gif.

Execution

Within the first days of Britain's response to the Falklands conflict, D Squadron, SAS, and a detachment of SBS embarked with the Task Force. The first action of the land campaign was Operation Paraquet, the effort to reclaim South Georgia, then occupied by 133 Argentinian troops. As the Task Force distributed to maintain the 200-mile maritime exclusion zone around the Falklands, Rear Admiral John Woodward, the Task Force commander, formed a Task Group for Operation Paraquet. D Squadron and No. 2 Section, SBS augmented M Company, 42 Commando to constitute the landing force.²²⁶

The concept of operations involved SBS patrols reconnoitering Grytviken, the territory's administrative center, while the SAS would focus Leith, an old whaling station. The SBS would receive M Company to assault Grytviken while the SAS would action Leith unilaterally.²²⁷ Despite this simple plan, the special operations contribution began with considerable friction.

On April 21st, 19 Troop, D Squadron's mountain troop, landed on the Fortuna Glacier. Moving through whiteout conditions in winds exceeding 100 miles per hour, 19 Troop covered a half a mile before sheltering and requesting an emergency extract the following day.²²⁸ Helicopters from the Task Group made multiple recovery attempts in extreme weather, ultimately succeeding but with two helicopters crashing.²²⁹

²²⁶ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 86-87.

²²⁷ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 33-34.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44-46.

²²⁹ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 88.

The SBS faced similar challenges during their attempt to reconnoiter Grytviken. On April 22nd and 23rd, patrols from the SBS inserted at Hound Bay and traversed the Sorling Valley intending to cross Cumberland Bay by boat. Their attempts to cross Cumberland Bay were frustrated by vast chunks of ice calving from the Nordenskjold Glacier, creating enormous waves and choking the southern reaches of the bay with brash. After repeated attempts to cross, the SBS requested extraction to the Task Group's ships.²³⁰

On the night of April 22nd, 17 Troop, D Squadron's boat troop, launched from the HMS *Antrim* to Grass Island overlooking Leith. Two of the five Gemini inflatable boats were swept away after experiencing engine failure, to be recovered later.²³¹ The remaining three boats landed on Grass Island before the troop crossed to the mainland and established observation on Leith. The patrol observed a garrison of 16 Argentinians in a poor defensive posture. 17 Troop assessed they could assault Leith with minimal reinforcement, allowing D Squadron to augment any pending action against Grytviken.²³²

With SAS patrols comprising the only reconnaissance elements ashore, the naval threat increased. On April 23rd, three Argentinian aircraft spotted ships from the Task Group, and HMS *Endurance* intercepted radio transmissions from an Argentinian submarine. The Task Group distributed its ships and transitioned priorities to anti-

²³⁰ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 63.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 60-63.

²³² *Ibid.*, 65-67.

submarine warfare. On the morning of April 25th, Royal Navy helicopters found and attacked the Argentinian submarine *Santa Fe*, disabling the vessel and forcing it to return to Grytviken. With the successful attack, the initiative shifted to the Task Group.²³³

Captain Brian Young, the Task Group Commander, ordered an attack by air, sea, and land for the afternoon of April 25th. With the bulk of the M Company assault force embarked on RFA *Tidespring*, 200 miles from Grytviken, the Task Group formed an ad hoc land force consisting of D Squadron's three remaining troops, the SBS section, and a contingent of Royal Marines and enablers. The 75-man assault force inserted by helicopter in daylight with support from naval gunfire and rapidly seized Brown Mountain overlooking Grytviken. As a D Squadron operator prepared to fire a MILAN anti-tank missile into the stricken *Santa Fe*, the garrison at Grytviken, over 100 troops, surrendered. The garrison at Leith surrendered the following day.²³⁴

Operation Paraquet's success served as a demonstration of Britain's will and garnered public approval at home. The Task Group departed South Georgia to rejoin the Task Force and orient exclusively on the Falklands. The embarked SAS and SBS would transition to reconnaissance on the Falklands.²³⁵

On May 1st, the war at sea began. Sailing into the now total maritime exclusion zone, the Task Force commenced airstrikes on the Falklands.²³⁶ While the British

²³³ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 69-71, 76-81.

²³⁴ Ibid., 94-102.

²³⁵ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 130.

²³⁶ Ibid., 142-143.

https://www.westpoint.edu/sites/default/files/inline-images/academics/academic_departments/history/Since%201958/falklands-b.jpg.

Ascertaining the disposition of enemy forces on the Falklands was vital for the British to execute amphibious landings and subsequent land operations. G Squadron inserted patrols focused on population centers on both East and West Falkland. Through prolonged reconnaissance, G Squadron identified a large Argentinian garrison at Darwin and Goose Green as well as enemy elements at Port Howard and Fox Bay on West Falkland. The principle Argentine defense was around Stanley. G Squadron also observed that though the Argentinian forces on the island were well equipped, the line infantry was apathetic in their military routines, only conducting sporadic foot or helicopter patrols between outposts.²³⁸

As G Squadron focused on the enemy on land, the SBS concentrated on landing sites. Recording gradients, surf conditions, and hostile force disposition at several potential locations, the SBS remained undetected while regularly inserting and extracting to lend input to the planning effort.²³⁹ By May 10th, strategic planners selected the anchorage at San Carlos for the landings due to its distance from Argentine artillery, protection from air attack, and relative lack of enemy forces. In surveying the site, the SBS observed no enemy activity except for Fanning Head, an Argentine outpost that overlooked the approach to San Carlos. The SBS would assault Fanning Head just before the landings.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 177-178.

²³⁹ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 89.

²⁴⁰ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 184.

As G Squadron and the SBS conducted reconnaissance, and the war at sea proceeded, D Squadron searched for targets on the Falklands that might levy a psychological or material impact on the enemy. With enemy aircraft and radar remaining concerns, the squadron turned its attention to Pebble Island, an isolated enemy detachment situated on an airstrip near the entrance to the Falkland Sound.²⁴¹

On May 11th, D Squadron landed a reconnaissance patrol by helicopter on the West Falkland mainland. The following night, the patrol crossed the Tamar Pass in Klepper canoes before moving to the airstrip and observing a garrison of 100 Argentinians with eleven aircraft. On May 14th, D Squadron landed a 45-strong assault force, augmented by a naval gunfire support team from the Royal Marines. Echeloning naval fires, SAS operators placed explosive charges on the enemy aircraft, exfiltrating under contact as their charges detonated. The raid destroyed eleven aircraft with no loss of British troops, bolstering the Task Force's morale.²⁴² Within one day, Argentina replaced four of six Pucará ground-attack aircraft destroyed in the raid. While not a crippling material blow, the Pebble Island Raid levied a clear moral impact.²⁴³

Several days later, a SAS team dealt a strategic blow to Argentina's defense. A key component to Argentina's defensive strategy for the Falklands was rapidly moving reinforcements by helicopter to defeat the British landing at its source. On May 20th, a team from G Squadron located the Argentinian helicopter park and coordinated an

²⁴¹ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 114-115.

²⁴² Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 186.

²⁴³ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 173.

airstrike, destroying two Chinook and two Puma helicopters. The loss of the helicopters removed Argentina's capacity for strategic mobility.²⁴⁴ The timing of the strike was decisive as Rear Admiral Woodward had ordered the landings to occur during the early hours of May 21st.²⁴⁵

On the night of May 20th, D Squadron inserted by helicopter and harassed multiple positions on the periphery of the enemy's reserve at Darwin, intent on deceiving the enemy into thinking they were a reconnaissance screen for a landing to the east.²⁴⁶ The same night, SBS operators, augmented by a SAS mortar team, landed at a six-mile offset and marched to a position of advantage over Fanning Head. The 32-strong assault force combined naval gunfire and machine guns to dislocate the enemy, forcing them to abandon recoilless rifle positions overlooking the approach into San Carlos. A separate SBS reception party, in place for days over the anchorage, met the troops of the 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment, and 40 Commando came ashore in the early morning of May 21st. Special forces activities had contributed to enabling a contested amphibious landing 8,000 miles from the home base.²⁴⁷

As the Task Force expanded the lodgment at San Carlos under regular attack from Argentinian aircraft, plans turned to the assault on Stanley. Lieutenant Colonel Mike Rose, the SAS Commander, identified Mount Kent as possible key terrain. Located east

²⁴⁴ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 89.

²⁴⁵ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 191.

²⁴⁶ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 195; Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 192.

²⁴⁷ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 195-199.

of Stanley, Mount Kent dominated the surrounding geography and controlled the land approaches to the capital. Reconnaissance teams from G Squadron, operating in the area for weeks, observed that the enemy did not control the terrain. Using special forces to secure Mount Kent in advance of the main British force presented an opportunity of campaign-level significance.²⁴⁸

On May 24th, D Squadron inserted a reconnaissance patrol on Mount Kent. By May 29th, the full squadron held the terrain. Elite soldiers from Argentina's 602 Commando Company mounted several unsuccessful attacks against D Squadron's positions.²⁴⁹ On the night of May 30th, D Squadron received Marines from K Company, 42 Commando, while under enemy contact. With D Squadron providing guides, K Company secured both Mount Kent and Mount Challenger and established a vital forward artillery position.²⁵⁰

After turning over Mount Kent to 42 Commando, D Squadron inserted several patrols onto West Falkland to assess if the Argentinians were reinforcing at Port Howard and Fox Bay or operating an observation post on Mount Rosalie to report of British ships. On June 10th, Argentinian soldiers discovered one of the patrols outside Port Howard, capturing one SAS operator and killing Captain Gavin Hamilton, Commander of 19

²⁴⁸ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 231-238.

²⁴⁹ Finlan, "British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982," 90.

²⁵⁰ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 256-259.

Troop. Patrols from 18 and 19 Troops continued operations on West Falkland as D Squadron shifted focus to the coming assault on Stanley.²⁵¹

As British land forces closed on Stanley, G Squadron, and SBS patrols, many having been in the field for a month, began directing precise artillery, naval gunfire, and airstrikes against the enemy.²⁵² The SAS conceived a deception operation, assaulting Cortley Hill to fix enemy forces, preventing them from responding to 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment's pending seizure of nearby Wireless Ridge. On the night of June 13th, approximately 60 men from D Squadron, G Squadron, and the SBS established firing positions on the north shore of Hearnden Water. 19 Troop and the SBS crossed the harbor on Royal Marine Rigid Raider boats to attack Cortley Hill. As the assault force hit the shore, Argentinian soldiers unleashed overwhelming small arms and anti-aircraft fire, damaging the boats and forcing the operators to conduct a fighting withdrawal. While the attack itself did not succeed, the action likely contributed to unhinging the enemy psychologically.²⁵³

On June 14th, the Argentine defenders at Stanley signaled a desire to negotiate. Communicating with the Argentinian garrison since June 8th over a citizens' band radio, Lieutenant Colonel Rose transitioned his negotiations toward facilitating a surrender. The

²⁵¹ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 273-287, 301.

²⁵² Ibid., 295.

²⁵³ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 304; Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 306-312.

same day, Major General Menendez surrendered the Argentinian forces under his command, ending the conflict.²⁵⁴

Analysis of the Operational Characteristics of SOF

Relative Superiority

British special forces employed several classic examples of “relative superiority” during the Falklands War. During the assault on Grytviken, special forces formed the core of the assault force, rapidly inserting 75 men to defeat an Argentinian garrison of over 100. For an attacking formation to overcome a prepared defense, doctrine prescribes a 3:1 force ratio. The Task Group fielded a quarter of that number at Grytviken.²⁵⁵ The Pebble Island Raid provides another example of relative superiority in action. D Squadron employed 45 operators against an Argentinian outpost of 100, achieving the destruction of eleven enemy aircraft without any loss of British life. The SBS action on Fanning Head saw 32 operators dislocate a key outpost with recoilless rifle positions capable of effecting the amphibious landings.

The reconnaissance effort, special forces’ principal contribution to the joint campaign, demonstrated both the indirect and direct application of relative superiority. Indirectly, the information reconnaissance patrols furnished informed campaign planning. Argentina enjoyed every numerical and geographical advantage, making the Falklands War an exercise in relative superiority for the British force at large. Special forces provided information that allowed leaders to weigh advantages in British favor. Directly,

²⁵⁴ Finlan, “British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982,” 90.

²⁵⁵ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 84.

G Squadron's identification and destruction of four Argentinian helicopters denied the enemy strategic mobility to contest British amphibious assaults from the land. As main forces occupied key terrain outside of Stanley, SAS and SBS teams integrated with conventional formations and enhanced the precision of joint firepower.

Certain Access

Certain access was central in special forces' contribution to the Falklands War. Each unit could conduct insertion via air, land, and sea. This flexibility in insertion mode was crucial for South Georgia and the Falklands with the South Atlantic winter and varied terrain posing considerable challenges on land, sea, and air. The Pebble Island Raid illustrates this flexibility in practice. The advance force reconnaissance patrol inserted by helicopter then crossed the Tamar Pass by canoe before completing the insertion on foot.

Helicopters proved vital to gaining initial access to South Georgia, Pebble Island, San Carlos, Mount Kent, and West Falkland.²⁵⁶ Launching helicopters before the landings, however, exposed the Task Force's ships to risk. Special Forces' ability to operate independently across domains following initial insertion mitigated this risk. G Squadron kept several patrols forward for weeks to reduce the number of helicopter sorties necessary to support the effort.²⁵⁷ This continuity of presence and ability to execute under privation enhanced the reconnaissance effort.

²⁵⁶ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 86, 333, 338.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

Certain access achieved by special forces provided the Task Force a complementary method to both sense and strike on the Falklands. Clandestine reconnaissance developed the enemy situation, assessed the feasibility of landing sites, informed planning, and simplified execution. Special forces, operating behind enemy lines, were also able to discern tactical opportunities before the introduction of the main British forces.

Methods of achieving certain access in contested environments involved accepting risk. D Squadron's attempt to cross the Fortuna Glacier cost the Task Group two helicopters. The rubber craft insert at Cumberland Bay failed, and the boat insert to Grass Island resulted in two vessels swept away. Argentinian soldiers discovered and rapidly overwhelmed the small 19 Troop reconnaissance patrol on West Falkland. These operational challenges redirected Task Force assets to extract survivors or insert quick reaction forces.

Certain access allowed special forces to gain information on the enemy, extend the capabilities of conventional troops and set conditions for the direct or indirect conduct of decisive action. In the Falklands, certain access was an essential element for special forces contributing to the campaign. For special forces to create campaign-level effects, they first had to get there.

Unconventional Operations

Special forces, like amphibious SOF in Korea, leveraged surprise, independence, and deception to alter the tension between threatening and avoiding destruction during the Falklands War. The Pebble Island Raid caught the enemy by surprise and prioritized targeting material above troops. Despite rapidly reconstituting the majority of their lost

aircraft, the raid communicated an apparent disregard for Argentinian soldiers, levying a moral impact on the enemy.²⁵⁸

Independent operations characterized G Squadron's reconnaissance efforts, providing continuous and focused ground sensors to develop the operational picture. The SBS provided detailed maritime reconnaissance on landing sites, informing campaign planners on the suitability of locations. D Squadron's operations to hold Mount Kent further demonstrate how rapidly employing an independent force provides decision space for leaders to introduce additional combat power.

The diversionary operations in Darwin preceding the landings led the enemy to believe the attacking SAS squadron was a battalion-sized force, preventing the enemy from committing a reserve to San Carlos. The Cortley Ridge attack, despite its ineffectiveness as a discrete operation, also served to form a 'false front,' making the enemy believe they were under attack from every direction.

Integrated Operations

Special forces in the Falklands War functioned as a discrete and complementary instrument of military power integrated into the campaign. Special forces answered critical intelligence gaps, furnished fast and flexible forces to seize opportunities, and set conditions though executing direct action. Naval forces provided basing, helicopter insertion vital to achieving "certain access," and naval gunfire that contributed to "relative superiority" at Grytviken, Pebble Island, and Fanning Head. Air forces and land-based artillery provided joint fire support.

²⁵⁸ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 174.

Professor Alastair Finlan notes that the utility of special forces during the Falklands War reduced upon the introduction of conventional troops.²⁵⁹ Lieutenant General Sir Cedric Delves, British Army (retired), then Commander of D Squadron, reflects “we were neither familiar nor practiced in the tactics of all-arms battle, let alone honed in the complexities of coordinating ourselves into such a crowded, joint battlespace.”²⁶⁰ Both reflections suggest that advanced force and deep area operations encompass an essential integrating function for SOF.

Strategic Initiative

Special forces actions in the Falklands contributed to achieving strategic initiative both directly and indirectly. Special forces gained the initiative in four ways. First, the assault on Grytviken established an early victory, bolstering political will and demonstrating tactical deficiencies in the Argentinian forces. Second, the Pebble Island Raid proved that British troops could organize operations to defeat a numerically superior defender. Third, the helicopter park strikes denied the enemy a key component of his defense, maintaining British initiative during and after the landings. Finally, both the Darwin diversions and Cortley Ridge kept enemy defenders in place, confusing the commitment of the reserve.

Indirectly, the information provided by special forces reconnaissance shaped campaign-level planning. Information on enemy force disposition along the coast contributed to selecting San Carlos for the landings. Understanding the enemy’s defense

²⁵⁹ Finlan, “British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982,” 92.

²⁶⁰ Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, 299.

at Stanley led to the seizure of Mount Kent while the San Carlos lodgment was expanding. Once conventional forces began to break out from their lodgment, the rapidly maintained the initiative through to the surrender.

Conclusion

Special forces provided significant contributions to the Falklands War by both answering information gaps through clandestine reconnaissance and seizing the initiative through direct action. The operational characteristics of SOF were applied to this campaign and are displayed in table 5.

Table 5. Falklands War: Rating the Operational Characteristics of SOF

OPERATION CORPORATE: RECAPTURE OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC DEPENDENCIES (5 APRIL - 14 JUNE 1982)								
Action	Unit	Task	Enabling Effects	Relative Superiority	Certain Access	Unconventional Ops	Integrated Ops	Strategic Initiative
OPERATION PARAQUET								
Leith/ Stromness Bay (21-25 April)	D SAS	-Reconnaissance	-Identified enemy disposition	2	2	2	2	2
Grytviken (25 April)	D SAS, SBS, Marines	-Direct Action Assault	-Surrender ENY garrison	3	3	3	3	3
OPERATION SUTTON								
Stanley, West Falkland, Darwin, Bluff Cove (30 Apr- 21 May)	G SAS	-Reconnaissance to identify enemy disposition	-Identified enemy disposition -Destroyed 4x ENY helicopter	3	3	3	2	3
Ajax Bay, San Carlos, Port San Carlos (30 April - 21 May)	SBS	-Maritime Reconnaissance -Assess suitability of landing sites	-Identified San Carlos as the principle landing site -Identified ENY disposition -RSOI landing	2	3	3	3	3
Pebble Island Raid (11-15 May)	D SAS	-Raid to destroy enemy aircraft and radar (assessed)	-11 Aircraft destroyed -ENY replaced 4x Pucara w/in 24 hours -Moral blow to ENY	3	3	2	3	3
Diversion IVO Darwin (20-21 May)	D SAS	-Mask the amphibious landing	-Prevented commitment of ENY reserve -1x Pucara destroyed	2	3	3	2	3
Fanning Head (20-21 May)	SBS	-Direct Action Raid	-Displacement ENY and recoilless rifles	3	3	2	3	3
Mt Kent (24 May - 3 June)	D/G SAS	-Secure key terrain -RSOI	-ID opportunity -Seized/RSOI	3	3	3	3	3
West Falkland (early June)	D SAS	-Reconnaissance -Ambush	-Possible moral impact	1	2	1	2	1
Cortley Ridge (13-15 June)	D/G SAS, SBS	-Diversion to enable 2PARA	-Possible diversion -Support cost	2	2	2	2	2
AVERAGE ORDINAL SCORES				2.4	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.6

Source: Created by the author.

The operation, as with the previous cases, scored highest on “certain access.” This score reflects that, beyond being an operational characteristic, certain access is a requirement for special operations. “Strategic initiative” scored the next highest. Not all missions contributed to gaining the initiative. Reconnaissance in a contested environment is not always precise or may not trigger action. “Integrated operations” came next. As an amphibious operation, naval integration furnished basing and movement. Royal Navy

helicopters provided crucial support to achieve *certain access*, and naval gunfire enabled relative superiority during direct action.

“Relative superiority” and “unconventional operations” achieved the same aggregated score. These ratings reflect that, at an operational level, both characteristics require “certain access” and “integrated operations.” Their score, in aggregate, does not reflect a relative lack of importance. Relative superiority and unconventional operations are the mechanisms by which SOF contribute to achieving strategic initiative. Both characteristics describe methods by which SOF creates effects, but require integration with other characteristics. Figure 17 displays the aggregated ordinal scores for each characteristic plotted on a radar chart.

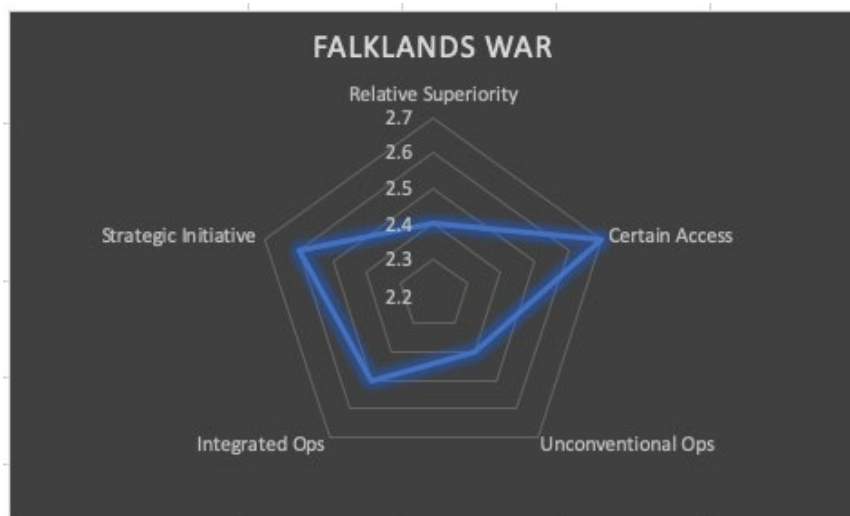


Figure 17. Falklands War Analysis

Source: Created by the author.

The Falklands War demonstrates the significance of certain access and strategic initiative as operational characteristics of SOF in joint amphibious warfare. It further highlights the importance of integrated operations. Relative superiority and unconventional operations provided valuable contributions to the campaign, but do not appear as prominent. This discrepancy in score reflects that “relative superiority” and “unconventional operations” rely on other characteristics, but does not diminish their importance. “Certain access” and “integrated operations” enabled “unconventional operations” to achieve “relative superiority,” resulting in “strategic initiative.”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research has been to determine the most important operational characteristics of SOF in support of contested amphibious operations within the context of great power competition. This study used qualitative methods beginning with a literature review to define the importance of the littoral environments within which amphibious operations occur, the strategic trends in adversary approaches to competition and conflict, and the capabilities SOF provides to amphibious operations. This study then conducted an analysis of three historical case studies involving western militaries in contested littoral environments. This chapter presents conclusions and recommendations resulting from this analysis, along with recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

In comparing three historical case studies, this research assigned ordinal ratings to each operational characteristic of SOF. Table 6 presents a cross-case comparison of each characteristic's score, derives an overall average, and displays a percentage rating.

Table 6. Cross-Case Comparison of the Operational Characteristics of SOF

Characteristic	Guadalcanal Campaign	Operation CHROMITE	Falklands War	Average Score	Percentage of 3 Point Scale
Relative Superiority	2.4	2.2	2.4	2.3	76%
Certain Access	2.7	2.9	2.7	2.8	90%
Unconventional Operations	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.5	83%
Integrated Operations	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.6	86%
Strategic Initiative	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	86%

Source: Created by the author. Chart organization inspired by Torbjorn G. Grimeland and Oscar van der Veen, “Maritime SOF in the Littorals: Theoretical Principles for Littoral Special Operations” (Master’s Thesis, US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2016), 105.

The analysis of the operational characteristics resulted in varied outcomes that suggest a hierarchy. Figure 18 presents a percentage rating of the characteristics.

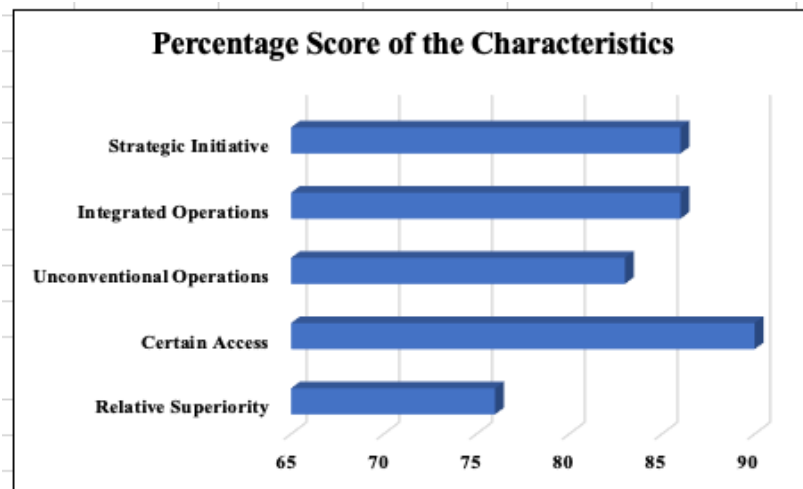


Figure 18. Percentage Scores for the Operational Characteristics of SOF

Source: Created by the author. Chart organization inspired by Torbjorn G. Grimeland and Oscar van der Veen, “Maritime SOF in the Littorals: Theoretical Principles for Littoral Special Operations” (Master’s Thesis, US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2016), 106.

The highest-rated operational characteristic of SOF for contested amphibious environments was certain access. In each historical case, the ability to gain initial access, infiltrate to an objective, or persist in a contested environment was central to SOF performing their missions. Achieving certain access did not occur through any uniform method across cases. Competency in small boats, surface connectors, vertical terrain, assault support varied to meet the threat and environmental considerations.

Integrated operations and strategic initiative both received the next highest rating. Integrated operations manifested in two primary ways throughout the cases. First, joint assets provided support to SOF in amphibious environments through basing, transportation, insertion, and fires. Second, in performing advance force operations, SOF reconnaissance informed joint preparation for decisive action. Strategic initiative represents the desired outcome for special operations. In the cases, SOF achieved strategic initiative directly through operations that imposed a moral or physical cost on the enemy. SOF also contributed to a campaign-level strategic initiative by enabling preparatory actions ahead of the introduction of main forces.

Unconventional operations achieved the next highest rating across cases. In every case, SOF demonstrated the ability to operate independently, deceive enemy forces, and rapidly adjust to emerging situations to seize opportunities. The cases also suggest that unconventional operations in an advance force capacity, yield significant contributions at the campaign level.

Relative superiority was consistently the lowest-rated characteristic across each historical case. However, special operations that directly gained the strategic initiative corresponded to direct actions. This trend suggests that during special operations across a

campaign, SOF can act in either a sensor or strike force. As a sensor, SOF contributes to main force superiority but does not have to achieve relative superiority itself. This operational characteristic remains an essential function SOF provides to joint warfighting through direct action as an alternate option to indirect approaches within a broader campaign setting.

Figure 19 presents the cross-case comparison scores overlaid on a radar chart.

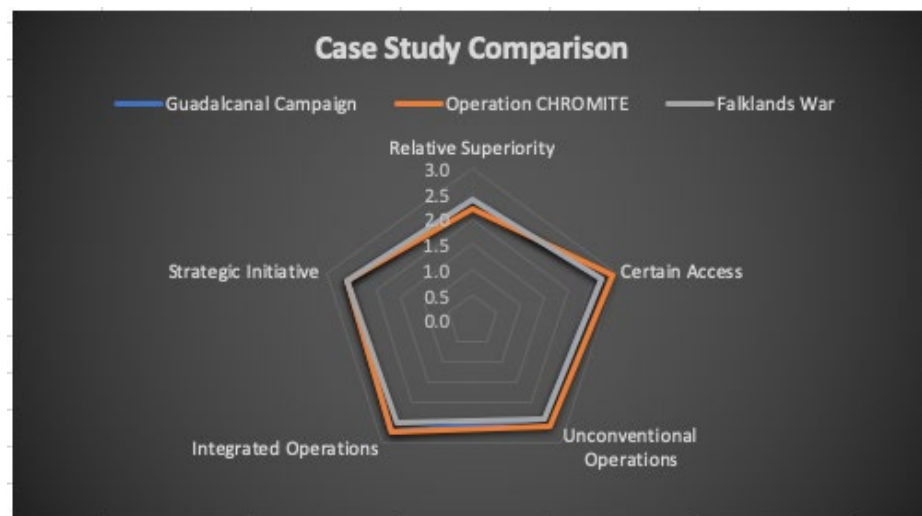


Figure 19. Case Study Comparison Radar Chart

Source: Created by the author.

Each case presents a relatively even distribution of the operational characteristics of SOF. This outcome suggests that, despite variations in each characteristics' rating, they are all vital tools SOF provides to campaigns. The cases, and their resultant scores, also suggest a relationship between the characteristics, relating to their rating. Certain

access, enabled by and informing integrated operations, allowing unconventional operations to establish relative superiority, achieving strategic initiative.

Recommendations

In the context of the current global security atmosphere, understanding the importance of the maritime environment, and ongoing efforts against violent extremism, MARSOF should be prepared to conduct special operations in contested littoral environments. In balancing the tension between preparing for current missions and innovating for future success, MARSOF should prioritize training events that stress certain access and integrated operations. The outcomes of this research, combined with the assumption that current operational tasking already highlights unconventional operations and relative superiority, inform this recommendation.

In training certain access, multi-mode insertion and infiltration, while facing an active opposing force in a multitude of settings, would serve to prepare MARSOF for many challenges present in contested littoral environments. This training would constitute experimentation to inform prudent changes in doctrine, organization, and material. Additionally, this research analyzed joint and multinational amphibious SOF. Continuing to grow relationships with US Naval Special Warfare or foreign amphibious special operations units, if feasible, would avoid duplicative experimentation while also ensuring integration.

Training integrated operations, particularly with naval forces, would complement certain access by enabling experimentation with basing, transportation, insertion, and support that mirrors themes present throughout the case studies. If feasible, conducting embarked amphibious operations would stress MARSOF across warfighting functions,

revealing challenges and spurring innovation. MARSOF continues to train to win in today's missions while preparing to transition to tomorrow's challenges.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research focused on western special operations units, integrated in contested amphibious campaigns, occurring during or after World War II. SOF integrated in amphibious campaigns focuses exclusively on the conflict-end of the competition continuum, and represents only a portion of potential amphibious SOF contributions in great power competition. Below are recommendations for further research that would complement this study.

Future studies should consider analyzing the role of amphibious SOF in competitive environments rather than ahead of or during forcible entry operations. This study did not explore the role of information operations, emerging warfighting domains like cyber, contested communications, or influence operations in emerging paradigms for SOF. Do prudent examples exist detailing SOF, or intelligence organization actions below the threshold for armed conflict? How do those considerations inform force design?

Certain access as an operational characteristic describes what SOF provides, but now how to achieve it. Examining the organization, training, and policy considerations relevant to expanding insertion specializations in MARSOF may complement this research. Should Marine Special Operations Companies adopt the air, boat, mountain, and mobility team models present in other SOF formations? If so, MARSOC design those formations to be internally sustaining, reducing the burden on formal school venues and minimum skills requirements?

Finally, applying the operational characteristics of SOF as a methodological framework to special operations outside of amphibious campaigns may provide a different perspective on the rating of each principle. Despite variation in the results of this study, each characteristic scored close together, resulting in an even spread represented on the cross-case radar chart. Adjusting the Likert scale ordinal criteria, and applying the framework to a greater breadth of special operations may offer more analytical precision.

Final Conclusion

Current global strategic trends are complex. While the challenges presented by extremism and trans-regional threats remain, great-power competition is driving strategic focus within the US military. The strategic importance of the littorals increases the likelihood of conflict in that diverse and dynamic environment. SOF provides several capabilities to joint warfighting, both in ongoing missions and in tomorrow's fight. Preparing for current operations is in tension with innovating to succeed tomorrow, taxing both focus and resources. Through a comparative analysis of three historical case studies, this research concludes that certain access and integrated operations constitute the most valuable operational characteristics of SOF for innovation in support of future amphibious concepts for MARSOE.

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