

flank or front and respond with fire and movement. According to our battalion gunner, there was a noticeable difference in the way the Kilo Marines reacted with violence and confidence. I believe that this was due to the numerous movement and approach and close entry drills that we completed in our martial arts training as well as a confidence and mutual trust that existed among Marines as a result of the program.

Unit cohesion is an intangible factor that has gained much attention in the Corps lately. Most readers would agree that shared hardship in pursuit of a goal is one of the time-tested ways to build cohesion in a unit. The Marine Martial Arts Program, in particular the close combat drills and the commando course, provide yet one more shared hardship that draws a unit together. One additional cohesion building factor is that

leaders participate equally in the program in a way that is not equaled in other training. All Marines carry the same load, and all must spar on an equal basis when they are just as tired. This tends to draw Marines and their leaders closer together and increases respect and trust both up and down the chain of command.

Finally, I believe that the Marine Martial Arts Program takes a large step toward building and sustaining the warrior culture that we all desire to have as a fighting organization. There is an intangible benefit to martial arts training in that it makes young Marines feel like warriors. Added to that is the soft skills training that, if done right, goes a long way toward providing an understanding of the often overlooked psychological aspects of the profession of arms, as well as a link to the warrior societies of the past.

In summary, Kilo Company had a tremendous opportunity and a very positive experience with the Marine Martial Arts Program. As with most everything else, leader involvement is key to the success of the program. By making a commitment to this worthwhile program, leaders can ensure that martial arts training becomes an integral part of our daily routine and culture. The Marine Martial Arts Program is not a panacea that will solve all of our problems, but it is a worthwhile initiative that will go a long way toward making our Marines better warriors and our units more combat ready.



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Squad Size Doesn't Matter

by Maj Brendan B. McBreen

'When that which is important is difficult to measure, we ascribe importance to that which is easy to measure.'

—Unknown Author

This past year, Marine Forces, Atlantic directed that a Camp Lejeune-based infantry battalion conduct a long-term experiment with a 10-man infantry squad organization. Thoughtful infantry officers throughout the Marine Corps asked questions:

- What new insight have we gained that casts doubt on our current organization?
- How will the experiment be conducted? What rigor will be placed on the evaluations?
- How much of this idea is driven by a desire to cut people vice a desire to improve the squad?

• If we really want to improve infantry capabilities, why are we not focusing on our much more basic, more important, *training* shortfalls? A brief look at the U.S. Army's experiences with squad experimentation may be helpful.

U.S. Army Squads

With very few changes, the Marine Corps has maintained a 13-man squad organization since 1944. Our combat experiences in World War II created and then validated our model squad—three four-man fire teams, each built around an automatic rifle.

The U.S. Army, by comparison, has never been satisfied with a single squad organization. Between 1920 and 1963, they tried 16 different squad organizations.¹ From Vietnam until today, the Army has continued to experiment with squad organizations, sometimes simultaneously, in different types of infantry units. Squad size has been tied either to platforms like the Bradley armored fighting vehicle or the Blackhawk helicopter, or to unit missions. The Army has experimented with all facets of the squad, from number of men, to internal organization, to rank of leaders, to mix of weapons.

Lessons Learned

Although Marines may look askance at this constant and harmful tinkering, there were benefits. The Army accumulated a tremendous amount of information on what worked and what did not. Each structure change since World War II was accompanied by rigorous tests and research. Army laboratories collected volumes of input from combat leaders and soldiers. A survey of these experiments, designed to identify the key lessons learned from a quarter century of data, reached an interesting conclusion: *squad size does not matter.*

Surveys of small unit combat actions in Vietnam . . . Korea and WWII, confirmed that squad size affected neither tactical success nor squad endurance.

Field tests . . . analyzed various sized squads . . . but found that there were no important differences among the tested organizations in ability to accomplish mission.²

If not size, what does matter? The Army studies suggested an answer:

Evidence accumulated from a broad range of studies and tests (showed) that rifle squad design . . . was far less significant in its battle performance than human factors, particularly training. . . .³

Armed with these findings, GEN William DePuy, the first commanding general of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TraDoc), came to believe that too much of the Army's preoccupation with squad organization had been misplaced. He directed TraDoc to "cease fine tuning the size and equipment of the rifle squad, and to concentrate on improving its combat performance."⁴ The Marine Corps' own HUNTER WARRIOR experiment in 1997 reached a similar conclusion. Initial ideas on reorganizing the infantry squad were discarded after the initial experiments. The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab (MCWL) concluded that infantry squads had tremendous combat potential but were commonly underchallenged and undertrained. The lab then instituted a series of initiatives to improve squad combat performance through focused *training.*⁵

What Is To Be Done?

If we want to improve the combat readiness of our squads, we need to address the underlying issues that currently weaken our squads. There is no "quick-fix."

- *Invert the current training priorities.* U.S. ground forces, principally riflemen, have historically suffered nearly 80 percent of our wartime casualties. These same units, however, receive the least amount of our training focus. The squad has no priority for personnel, no formal leadership selection criteria, and is dead last in the allocation of training time, training money, and training equipment. The infantry training focus of the Marine Corps is based on an unhealthy enthusiasm for large exercises.

- *Large exercises are bad for small unit training.* The larger the exercise, the poorer the training value at the small unit level.⁶ Joint exercises, Marine expeditionary force and division exercises, Combined Arms Exercises, and Marine expeditionary unit training should be done *after* quality small unit training, not *instead of* quality small unit training. Our large-exercise focus trains commanders and staffs. We have many cathedral builders, but our bricks—the squads that are the basic tactical building block of our forces—are mostly sand. Unit commanders need to examine their training priorities and ask themselves, "How well are our squads trained for combat?"

- *Fence squad training time.* In 1920, Hans von Seeckt, chief of staff of the German Army, mandated 3 months training for infantry companies.⁷ Eighty years later, we do not even do this—and 80 years ago, single-weapon infantry units were far easier to train. Today, given the complexity of our equipment and the breadth of our expected missions, platoon commanders need 3 months to train their squads. Infantry units need to adopt a progressive quarterly schedule that steps from squad to platoon to company training over the course of 9 months.

- *Train leaders to train squads.* Lieutenants at The Basic School need to learn how to train squads. Non-commissioned officers (NCOs) at the squad leaders course need to learn how to train squads. The Marine Corps has no manual aimed specifically at small unit infantry training. A pamphlet, "How to Train Your Squad" is available at <<http://www.2ndbn5thmar.com>>.

- *Create quality training guidance.* Well-written collective training standards for infantry squads, coupled with force-on-force unit evaluations, would increase the combat capability of our squads. The new infantry *Training and Readiness Manual* is a step in the right direction, but the Army's Training and Evaluation Program publications are still better than anything we have.

- *Qualify squad leaders.* The squad leaders course at the schools of infantry should be mandatory for all squad leaders. Infantry NCO promotion should be tied to graduation. Other armies do this. The British Section Commanders Battle Course is a prerequisite for promotion. The NCO course in the Chilean Marine Corps is 1 year long. The model should be: **Billet Description = School Curriculum = Rank = Marine.** In the August 1999 *Marine Corps Gazette*, this author proposed a new 0368 military occupational specialty for infantry squad leaders to target attention and resources on this critical billet.⁸

- *Maintain squad cohesion.* Squads are our primary teams. They need to live together and train together for years, not weeks. Day one of the squad training quarter should be the day the privates arrive from the schools of infantry. The current cohesion plan is a great start. Unit leaders need to track the age of their squads and maximize the median length of service. Infantrymen should spend their entire first enlistment training and fighting with the same team.

- *Equip the squad with the best gear available.* This is being done. During the last 5 years the Marine Corps has done great things for squad equipment. The individual squad radios

are a tremendous combat multiplier. High-quality night vision equipment is fielded for almost every man. The infantry combat boot, Gore-Tex rain gear, and other protective gear is first class. Modular lightweight load-carrying equipment, including new deuce gear, is fielded and being improved. Now, the M249 squad automatic weapon needs to be replaced by a lightweight, dependable automatic rifle.⁹

Conclusion

Squad size is one of the least important aspects of squad capability. Focusing on squad size is trivially easy and correspondingly trivial in its effect. If the Marine Corps needs boat spaces, let's cut the organization and accept the price in retraining, modifications to doctrine, rewritten publications, and school adjustments. Twenty years, the length of a single career, is the usual gestation for such basic doctrinal modifications.

However, if the Marine Corps wants combat effective squads, let's not waste

our time and energies on peripheral issues. Let's focus on **training, quality leadership, and cohesion**. Our squads, and the squads of successful armies throughout history, have proven these issues to be the eternal predictors of success in combat.

Notes

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