

## CHAPTER 12. RECONNAISSANCE PATROLS

The commander needs accurate, timely information about the enemy and the terrain the enemy controls to assist in making tactical decisions. Reconnaissance patrols are one of the most reliable means for obtaining this information. These patrols engage the enemy only when necessary to accomplish their mission or for protection. They generally avoid combat, accomplish the mission by stealth, and do not maintain contact with the unit that sent them out. A reconnaissance patrol is capable of carrying the search for information into the area occupied by enemy forces—usually beyond the range of vision of friendly ground observation posts—and examining objects and events at close range.

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### 12001. GENERAL MISSIONS

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General missions for reconnaissance patrols include gathering information about location and characteristics of friendly or hostile positions and installations, terrain (routes, stream crossings), and obstacles.

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### 12002. SPECIFIC MISSIONS

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#### Locate the Enemy

Reconnaissance patrols try to determine the—

- | Location of enemy forces, installations, and equipment.
- | Identification of enemy units and equipment.
- | Strength of enemy forces.
- | Disposition of enemy forces.
- | Movement of enemy personnel and equipment.
- | New or special types of weapons.
- | Presence of mechanized units.
- | Unusual enemy activity.
- | Presence of NBC equipment.

#### Reconnaissance of Enemy Wire Obstacles

A patrol with the mission of investigating enemy-emplaced wire obstacles employs a formation providing for all-around security and takes precautions against being observed by the enemy. The patrol leader and one Marine inspect each gap and establish its location by means of compass bearings to prominent objects in the rear of enemy or friendly positions

or through the use of global positioning satellite receivers.

#### Reconnaissance of Contaminated Areas

A patrol with the mission of investigating a contaminated area reconnoiters and marks the area's boundaries. Patrol members wear protective clothing and field protective masks. The patrol leader reports the extent of the area, the type of agent used, the terrain and vegetation and the method of marking the contaminated area. A sketch of the contaminated area, prepared by the patrol leader, should be included in the patrol report.

#### Reconnaissance of Enemy Minefields

Patrols assigned to reconnoiter enemy minefields are often composed of specially trained personnel. The type of mine is identified and the possibility of bypassing the area determined.

#### Reconnaissance of Terrain

The reconnaissance patrol is particularly suited for gathering information about the terrain within their area of operations. (Refer to MCRP 2-15.3B, *Reconnaissance Reports Guide*.) Commanders must know the location and condition of bridges, streams, and roads in order to make proper plans for the movement of troops. The following information should be obtained by a reconnaissance patrol assigned such missions:

- | Bridges:
  - Maximum load capacity.
  - Material used in construction (wood, stone, concrete or steel).

- Material used for abutments (dirt, wood, masonry, concrete).
  - Type and number of supporting members of the bridge.
  - Condition and dimensions of bridge flooring.
  - Presence or absence of mines and demolition charges on the bridge and at entrances/exits.
  - Terrain crossed (ravine, stream, road).
  - Primary use (rail, auto, foot).
  - Location and type of an alternate crossing if bridge is unusable.
- Streams and fords:
  - Width and depth of stream.
  - Composition of the bottom (mud, sand, gravel, rock).
  - Speed of current in miles per hour.
  - Composition and gradient of banks.
  - Surrounding terrain and vegetation cover.
- Roads:
  - Width.
  - Composition of surface.
  - Condition.
  - Road blocks.
  - Gradient/degrees of slopes.
  - Curves (location and length).
  - Pitch and culvert locations.
  - Primary use and frequency of use.

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## 12003. TYPES OF RECONNAISSANCE

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### Route

Route reconnaissance is a directed effort to obtain detailed information of a specified route and all terrain from which the enemy could influence movement along that route. (Refer to MCRP 5-12C.) It is also described as a form of reconnaissance focused along a specific line of communications—such as a road, railway, or waterway—to provide new or updated information on route conditions and activities along the route. (Refer to MCRP 5-12A, *Operational Terms and Graphics*.)

A route reconnaissance normally precedes the movement of forces. It provides detailed information about a specific route and the surrounding terrain that could be used to influence movement along that route. Considerations include trafficability, danger areas,

critical points, vehicle weight and size limitations, and locations for friendly obstacle emplacement.

The objective area is normally defined by a line of departure, a route, and a limit of advance.

### Area

An area reconnaissance is a directed effort to obtain detailed information concerning the terrain or enemy activity within a prescribed area such as a town, ridge line woods or other features critical to operations. (Refer to MCRP 5-12C.) An area reconnaissance could also be made of a single point, such as a bridge or installation. (Refer to MCRP 5-12A.)

Emphasis is placed on reaching the area without being detected. Enemy situations encountered en route are developed only enough to allow the reconnoitering unit to report and bypass.

### Zone

A zone reconnaissance is a directed effort to obtain detailed information concerning all routes, obstacles (to include chemical or radiological contamination), terrain, and enemy forces within a zone defined by boundaries. A zone reconnaissance is normally assigned when the enemy situation is vague or when information concerning cross-country trafficability is desired. (Refer to MCRP 5-12C.)

The commander specifies specific routes or areas of interest within the zone. The zone to be reconnoitered usually is defined by a line of departure, lateral boundaries, and a limit of advance.

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## 12004. TASK ORGANIZATION

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A reconnaissance patrol is organized around the current structure of the Marine rifle squad with one or more of the squad's fire teams assigned as the reconnaissance element to reconnoiter or maintain surveillance over the objective. At least one fire team acts as a security element whose functions are to—

- Secure the objective rally point (see para. 11003).
- Give early warning of enemy approach.
- Protect the reconnaissance unit.

Reinforcing the squad is based on METT-T. If two squads are required, then the mission should be assigned to a platoon.

A company may send a reconnaissance patrol to specifically reconnoiter a given area (a riverbed or a bridge), or to maintain surveillance on a particular streambed for the next four nights. Reconnaissance patrols perform three basic functions en route to and from the objective:

- 1 Provide control.
- 1 Provide security while moving and in the objective area.
- 1 Conduct reconnaissance or surveillance.

Depending on the size of the reconnaissance patrol, an element must be tasked to reconnoiter the area or zone. In the case of a surveillance mission, two teams are recommended to share the same task (so one could lay up and rest, while the other lays low and hides to maintain strict silence and no movement while surveillance is being maintained on the objective). Whatever the case, each unit that has a surveillance mission or reconnaissance mission must be thoroughly briefed as to what essential elements of information are to be collected as well as their location in the objective area.

The patrol should be organized with one or two fire teams to actually conduct the reconnaissance mission and the remaining fire team to provide security. Each fire team should be prepared to assume either mission. A small area reconnaissance patrol needs only one fire team for the assigned mission. A patrol with a wider area reconnaissance mission should use two fire teams to physically conduct the mission and one fire team for cover and/or security.

The security element for a reconnaissance patrol should be organized to cover the likely avenue of approach into the objective area, to protect the units conducting the reconnaissance, and to cover the objective rally point.

The variations of the special organization for reconnaissance patrols illustrate the patrol leader's flexibility in organizing the patrol to meet mission requirements. The patrol leader is not limited to the variations reflected herein but can choose any special organization as long as that task organization accommodates the requirement for command and control, reconnaissance, and security.

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## **12005. SIZE OF RECONNAISSANCE PATROLS**

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A reconnaissance patrol should be kept to the minimum number of personnel required to accomplish the mission. A mission requiring a patrol to remain away from its unit for a considerable period of time, or one requiring a patrol to send back information by messenger, increases the size of the patrol. Reconnaissance patrols seldom exceed a squad in strength. Unit integrity should be preserved whenever possible. Intelligence personnel, interpreters, and other specialists, such as radio operators or engineers, are assigned to a patrol if the particular mission requires.

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## **12006. RECONNAISSANCE EQUIPMENT**

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Patrol members are armed and equipped as necessary for accomplishing the mission. The automatic rifle in each fire team provides a degree of sustained firepower in case of enemy contact. The patrol should have at least two: pairs of binoculars, pairs of wire cutters, maps, compasses, and watches. Night observation equipment may be used. Pencils and small notebooks are carried so notes and sketches can be made. A message book with message blanks and overlay paper is mandatory.

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## **12007. RECONNAISSANCE PATROL ACTIONS AT THE OBJECTIVE AREA**

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### **Route**

The patrol leader halts and conceals the patrol near the objective area in the final preparation position. The patrol leader then conducts leader's reconnaissance to confirm the plan for positioning the security teams and employing units assigned to the reconnaissance mission. The patrol leader returns to the patrol and positions the security to provide early warning of enemy approach and secure the objective rally point. The reconnaissance unit(s) then reconnoiters the objective area (route). The reconnaissance unit may move to several positions, along or adjacent to the specific route, in order to conduct a thorough reconnaissance. After completing the reconnaissance, each

reconnaissance team moves to the objective rally point and reports to the patrol leader. The patrol then returns to friendly lines and the leader makes a full report.

### **Area**

The patrol leader halts and conceals the patrol near the objective area in the final preparation position. The patrol leader then conducts leader's reconnaissance to pinpoint the objective and confirm the plan for positioning the security teams and employing units assigned the reconnaissance mission. The patrol leader returns to the patrol and positions security to provide early warning of enemy approach and secure the objective rally point. The reconnaissance unit(s) then reconnoiters the objective area. The reconnaissance unit may move to several positions, perhaps making a circle around the objective area, in order to conduct a

thorough reconnaissance. When the reconnaissance is completed, the patrol leader assembles the patrol and tells members what has been observed and heard. Other patrol members contribute observations. The patrol then returns to friendly lines and the patrol leader makes a full report.

### **Zone**

The patrol leader halts the patrol at the final preparation position, confirms the plan, and conducts leader's reconnaissance. The patrol leader positions the security team and sends out the reconnaissance team. When the entire patrol is used to reconnoiter the zone, it provides its own security. After completing the reconnaissance, each reconnaissance team moves to the objective rally point and reports to the patrol leader. The patrol then returns to friendly lines.