

# ROYAL MARINES IN THE U.S.

Strategic Placement, Coordination with USMC  
Strengthen an Unparalleled Bond



By Sara W. Bock

One of British Royal Marine Major Tom White's initial interactions with U.S. Marines was an event that very well may have saved his life.

During his first deployment to Afghanistan in 2008, White, then a young lieutenant attached to a Royal Marine unit known as 42 Commando, was operating in Helmand Province. At the time, the presence of coalition forces in that area was limited at best, and, as White recalls, the environment was fairly kinetic. The battalion-size unit, part of the British amphibious entry force, 3 Commando Brigade, often called for close air support while battling enemy insurgents, and many times their request was met with the reliable and accurate firepower from a USMC aircraft.

White vividly recalls a specific instance in which a U.S. Marine AH-1W Super Cobra hovered overhead and took out the enemy during what he describes as a rather dire situation—one that otherwise, he said, likely would have had a very different outcome.

"If I could have substituted that USMC aviator for a British pilot, I probably wouldn't," White said, not because he views British helicopter pilots as inferior, but because for him, the experience solidified the level of trust and appreciation that he and his fellow commandos have for U.S. Marines. There's an undeniable bond between members of the two organizations that seems nearly impossible to replicate elsewhere.

"I know for a fact that the guy operating that aircraft has been a Marine, he's gone through certain training, he knows what it's like to have a pack on your back and have to do a 10K insertion ... I think that kind of common camaraderie is so important," said White.

The small, elite force of Royal Marine commandos, easily distinguishable by their green berets and the commando dagger insignia on their uniforms, is arguably the Marine Corps' closest ally and most venerable counterpart. They share a common identity as Marines that seems to transcend the differences between the two organizations, enabling them to combine forces to take on even the most formidable challenges with great success.

Particularly over the past 15 years, Royal Marines, who are the "amphibious arm" of the Royal Navy, have worked together closely with U.S. Marines during a multitude of campaigns and operations. As a result, the shared warfighting values between the two organizations have become even more evident than ever before,



**Above:** Gen James F. Amos, 35th Commandant of the Marine Corps, left, and the Commandant General Royal Marines, MajGen Buster Howes, right, present a trophy to a British Royal Marine rugby participant following a rugby match between U.S. and Royal Marines at MCB Quantico, Va., April 28, 2012. (Photo by Sgt Ben Flores, USMC)

**Opposite Page:** Maj Tom White, Royal Marines staff officer, left, and Col Neil Sutherland, Royal Marine attaché, right, stand outside the British ambassador's residence at the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., Dec. 15, 2016. As attaché, Sutherland oversees all interactions between the Royal Marines and U.S. Marines and helps coordinate training and exchanges. (Photo by Nancy S. Lichtman)

and the relationship even more deeply solidified, according to Lieutenant Colonel Eric Quehl, USMC, who heads the International Affairs Branch, Plans, Policies & Operations (PP&O), Headquarters Marine Corps.

Today, nearly a decade after that U.S. Marine Cobra crew supported him on the

ground in Afghanistan, Maj White is serving as the Royal Marines staff officer at the British Embassy in Washington, D.C. He works directly for Colonel Neil Sutherland, the Royal Marine attaché, who plays a key role in the relationship between the USMC and the Royal Marines.

Their function in Washington, D.C., is twofold: to act as the interface between the two organizations, as well as to manage the Royal Marine "footprint" within the United States.

That footprint—albeit small—is impressively strategic and made possible by the presence of Royal Marines in exchange billets throughout the USMC. By nature of the exchange, a U.S. Marine is sent to fill a similar role within the Royal Marines. Aside from the exchange Marines, liaison officers are assigned to the U.S. to represent the Royal Marines' best interests, coordinate the interactions between the two organizations and keep abreast of the USMC's most recent warfighting developments. By doing so, the liaison officers help determine how the Royal Marines can best complement the U.S. Marines, said Lieutenant Colonel Martin Twist, the Royal Marine liaison officer at Marine Corps Combat Development Command, MCB Quantico. Twist works to enhance and maximize interoperability between the Marines of Great Britain and the U.S., as well as help ensure that the



**LtCol Martin Twist, pictured here in Afghanistan as a major when he served as an exchange officer with 2d Marines, now serves as the Royal Marine liaison officer at MCCDC, MCB Quantico, Va. He is strategically positioned to help keep the Royal Marines informed and involved in the USMC's newest developments.**

COURTESY OF LT COL MARTIN TWIST, RM



Below: Royal Marine Commando Cpl “Britney” Piers Stacey, right, and U.S. Marine GySgt Jason M. Mills, left, run communications between British forces and U.S. Marines in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, during Operation Backstop, Dec. 11, 2008. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the two organizations of Marines had unprecedented opportunities to work together during many operations.



LCpl BRIAN JONES, USMC

Royal Marines remain “in step” with the USMC’s progress.

Twist is one of 12 international liaisons at MCCDC, and his chain of command is routed through the British Embassy—Col Sutherland—rather than through Lieutenant General Robert S. Walsh, MCCDC Commanding General and Deputy Commandant, Combat Development and Integration.

The number varies year to year, but at any given time there are approximately 15 Royal Marines assigned to the U.S. in a variety of capacities. Unlike the liaisons, the exchange Marines are placed within the USMC chain of command and report to the commander of the unit they are attached to—fully integrated into the Marine Corps—and the same goes for their U.S. counterparts who fill exchange slots in the U.K.

Exchange billets include a Royal Marine officer with Second Marine Regiment at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C and another officer at I MEF in Camp Pendleton, Calif. Royal Marine colour sergeants (E-8 equivalent) are assigned at USMC commands including as the physical training instructor (PTI) at Officer Candidate School, Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.; as a sniper instructor at Weapons Training Battalion Quantico; and as a mountain leader at Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, Bridgeport, Calif.

An exchange relationship also exists

within Training & Education Command, through which Royal Marines and U.S. Marines have the opportunity to attend the other’s schools—namely, Command & Staff College. In fact, the current Commandant General of the Royal Marines, Major General Robert Magowan, is a graduate of the USMC’s Command & Staff College.

Chances are that most U.S. Marines



Royal Marine Col Kevin Oliver, Commandant of the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines, observes the Confidence Course at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., July 9, 2015. Oliver visited Parris Island to discuss the role of women in combat with representatives from the Marine Corps Force Integration Office. (Photo by LCpl Vanessa Austin, USMC)

A British Royal Marine mountain leader explains to U.S. Marines with Black Sea Rotational Force how to set up their tents during cold weather training at Porsangmoen, Norway, Feb. 2, 2016. Cold weather training is an area of expertise for the Royal Marines, and the U.S. Marines often benefit from their instruction. (Photo by Cpl Immanuel Johnson, USMC)



have served alongside or at least interacted with a Royal Marine at some point during their career, either operationally or thanks to one of the exchanges.

"There's not a steep learning curve—we already know a lot about each other and it's just very seamless," said Quehl of the partnership, adding that he and his fellow U.S. Marines truly enjoy opportunities to spend time with Royal Marines. "They're just good to be around," he said.

Twist's current assignment as the liaison officer at MCCDC is not his first in the U.S. In 2007, while a major, he joined Second Marine Regiment as an exchange officer where he deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan. He considers the experience to be the highlight of his career. Upon his arrival at Camp Lejeune, he had only two weeks to prepare to join the regiment in Al Asad, Iraq. He was forced to "hit the ground running," he said, and quickly learn what the Marine Corps is about and how it conducts itself on operations.

"Two operational deployments with another nation. I feel hugely privileged to have had that experience. It was quite something, and what an amazing group of people," Twist said as he recalled his tour with 2d Marines.

During his tour with 2d Marines, Twist met an American woman working in Richmond, Va., and the two were married in 2010. They returned to Great Britain in 2010 and then came back to the U.S.—Quantico—in 2014, when Twist began his tour as the liaison officer. During this tour, his twin sons were born.

"I'm outnumbered in the household in terms of nationality," said Twist with a laugh. The opportunity to work closely with the Marine Corps and spend a significant amount of time in the U.S. has surely impacted his life positively, both professionally and personally.

For many, like Twist, the opportunity to build "equity" and relationships with the USMC affords them more opportunities to be invested in roles that strengthen

the relationship between the two organizations, said Sutherland, who added that it's considered a real strength to have an understanding of how the U.S. Marines work.

White views the opportunity to work at the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., and interact daily with U.S. Marines as an ideal way to broaden his horizons.

"It's just a fascinating place to be ... it's a great job, one that I've thoroughly enjoyed," said White. In general, the experiences of the Royal Marines in the U.S. seem to be overwhelmingly positive—so much so, that many are vying for the billets when they become available.

The underlying concept behind the exchange program is not only to expose Marines to differing perspectives and experiences, but also to highlight the areas in which each organization complements the other. The Royal Marines, adept at cold weather training and in the science of physical training, place colour sergeants who are subject matter experts in those



fields into vital roles in the USMC—namely, the PTI at OCS and the mountain leader at MCMWTC in Bridgeport. Likewise, a U.S. Marine gunnery sergeant is placed at the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines Lympstone in Devon, England, to share expertise in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program.

The more exposure the two groups of Marines have with each other, the better—and the payoff comes when they are called to serve shoulder to shoulder in the line of duty.

“If you put two Marines—a U.S. Marine and a Royal Marine—side by side in a fire trench, they are going to deliver. And it is absolutely critical that we provide them the opportunities to do that, because talking about working side by side and interoperability is all very good—but the bottom line is the guys need to train and operate together, and I think that’s something we do very well,” said White, adding that exposing young U.S. and Royal Marines to each other early and in difficult, tough training environments helps engender the trust that’s so important to maintaining the partnership.

From the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., all interactions are carefully coordinated with the Pentagon through

HQMC PP&O. As the Royal Marine attaché, Sutherland’s efforts deal exclusively with the U.S. Marine Corps. While officers from any of the U.K. armed forces can hold attaché positions in other British embassies, the position is the only dedicated Royal Marine attaché in the world. It’s a testament to the value both the U.S. and U.K. place on their “Marine to Marine” relationship.

The relationship is reciprocated in the U.K., as the USMC attaché in London gets exactly the same sort of direct access into the Royal Marines and wider Royal Navy, said Sutherland.

“We are the interface between the Royal Marines and the U.S. Marine Corps. So anything the Royal Marines want to do or any engagements with the USMC, effectively we act as the bridge,” said Sutherland of the role that he and White play as they operate out of the embassy. “Similarly, anything that the USMC is looking to do with the Royal Marines, we will again act as that bridge going back across the Atlantic.”

In many ways different from the U.S. Marines, Royal Marine commandos are a small, elite force of around 7,000 from which roughly 43 percent of U.K. Tier 1 Special Forces is drawn. While their

function is difficult to translate into USMC terms, said Sutherland, as the amphibious arm of the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines could be viewed as force reconnaissance, or an agile, scalable high-end infantry regiment with numerous niche and specialist skills. And as a much smaller organization, in terms of size, the Royal Marines are what Sutherland affectionately calls a “little brother” to the U.S. Marine Corps.

“We seek to be complementary, not provide more of the same,” Sutherland said. “I think we can enhance rather than just provide another brigade or another battalion.”

Focusing on these differences and recognizing the unique strengths that each organization brings to the table are the keys to sustaining the close alliance the Royal Marines and U.S. Marines share, and those differences and strengths are likely more evident than ever in a true operational environment.

Perhaps the most noteworthy example of interoperability between the two occurred during the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit was subordinated under the British 3 Commando Brigade at Al Faw and Umm Qasr.

**U.S. Marines with 2d ANGLICO train with Royal Marine commandos in preparation for Exercise Joint Warrior on Cape Wrath, Scotland, Oct. 8, 2016. Each year, Royal Marines and U.S. Marines work together on a variety of exercises, all with the common goal of enhancing interoperability so that they can be prepared for the next fight in which they will serve together. (Photo by Sgt Rebecca Floto, USMC)**



**Right: U.S. and Royal Marines, along with their Navy counterparts, conduct a live-fire range near Inverness, Scotland, during Exercise Tartan Eagle, Sept. 16, 2014. The three-week exercise put each nation side by side in close quarter battle exercises, live-fire competition, room clearing and a vertical assault course.**

"It was a textbook example of how we would and do operate with the Royal Marines," said Quehl of the successful partnership during those early battles of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

But in order to fight together, it's important that they train together too. Annual exercises like Bold Alligator on the East Coast of the U.S., spearheaded by 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, in which nearly 1,000 Royal Marines participate, as well as large scale exercises with Second Marine Division and interactions with the USMC's Black Sea Rotational Force in Europe require a great deal of planning and preparatory work. Joint training is yet another area in which Sutherland and White play a role from the embassy, carefully coordinating the interactions between the Royal Marines and the U.S. Marines.

Sutherland, a native of Scotland, previously served as commanding officer of 42 Commando and as the deputy commander of 3 Commando Brigade. While a company commander, his company 2IC—the equivalent of an executive officer in USMC terms—was a U.S. Marine exchange officer. Although Sutherland's assignment as attaché is his first in the U.S., he's spent a great deal of time throughout his career working alongside U.S. Marines. For him, it's a similar ethos and shared mission that bind the two organizations together.

"If you asked any Royal Marine, 'who would you trust fighting alongside you?' the answer would undoubtedly be, 'a U.S. Marine,'" said Sutherland, adding that the shared adversity the two have endured over the years by operating together in harsh environments is what strengthens the bonds of friendship and trust.

The assumption, however, that the U.S. and U.K. Marines are closely aligned because they are identical or interchangeable, is incorrect, said Sutherland. The differences are actually quite significant. In part, those differences have to do with the smaller size of the Royal Marines force—7,000 to the USMC's roughly 180,000—and also with the fact that the Royal Marines are an all-infantry force. While some may specialize down the road, initially all are trained as commandos and are in many ways more of a specialist force, relying on other assets of the British armed forces for specialized support.

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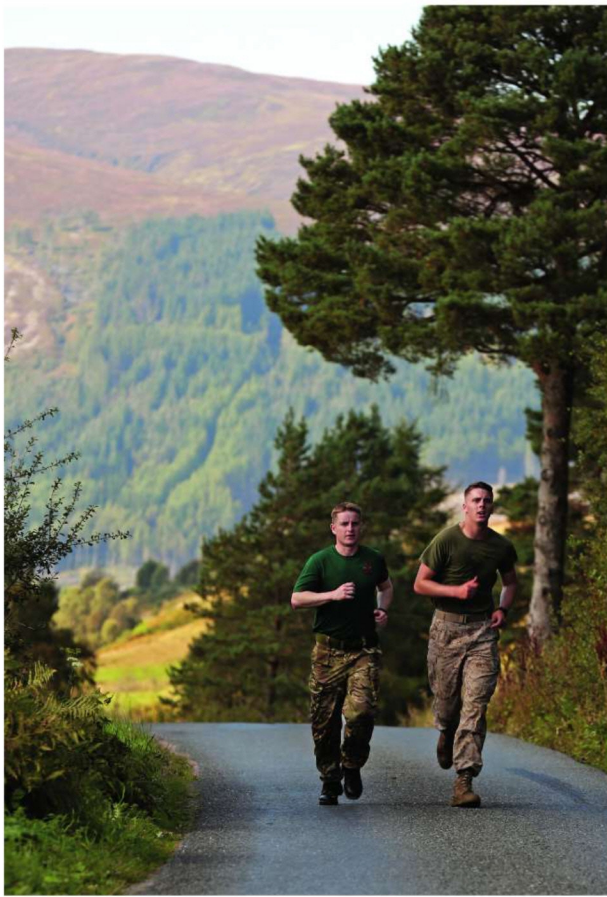
MSGT CHAD MOELEN, USMC



WOJTEK SANCHEZ, USMC

**A Royal Marine commando works alongside U.S. Marines during Exercise Bold Alligator 14, aboard MCB Camp Lejeune, N.C., Nov. 4, 2014. Bold Alligator, which takes place off the East Coast of the U.S. and is designed to train the full range of amphibious capabilities, is one of the largest exercises in which the U.S. Marines and Royal Marines partner.**





MSGT CHAD MCNEER USMC

Royal Marine commando David Kietly, left, and U.S. Marine LCpl Jacob Lambrecht, right, run the final stretch of a 7-mile commando speed march in the vicinity of Spean Bridge, Scotland, Sept. 17, 2014, during Exercise Tartan Eagle 14. The Marines worked to share knowledge and tactical procedures for the safeguarding of nuclear weapons.

Other branches of the British armed forces provide the artillery and engineer elements of the Royal Marines' core organization, 3 Commando Brigade, a rapidly deployable amphibious infantry force. Those members of other branches who operate with the Royal Marines generally attend a 13-week All Arms Commando Course at the Commando Training Centre and earn the Royal Marines' signature green beret.

To become a Royal Marine Commando, recruits attend the Commando Training Centre for nine months, and officers are there for 15 months. Both train in the same

facility—a benefit of the small size of their force—and all are held to the same physical standards, regardless of their career path. Earning their green beret is the pinnacle moment—much like earning the Eagle, Globe and Anchor is for U.S. Marine recruits. While the junior recruits' and junior officers' training is not integrated, their proximity to one another allows for interaction and crossover. White, who has done a tour as an instructor at the Commando Training Centre, sees this an asset.

"Whilst officers and enlisted recruits attend separate courses, there is a high

level of interaction and combined exercises throughout training. It's visible. That's really important because the recruits see the standard that is expected of young officers and vice versa," White said of the structure of commando training. At the 32-week mark, both junior recruits and junior officers take the commando tests, and the requirements and standards differ only slightly for officers and enlisted recruits.

"If you've been in the operating force for 12 months, you've achieved the same standard as the brigade commander who's been in for 22 years," said White. "So it's that commonality that we all share across the organization that's so important."

During the Royal Marines' 15-month officer training course, junior officers travel to Quantico to conduct a joint exercise with the USMC's Infantry Officers Course. That type of early exposure, said White, is key to the relationship between the U.S. and Royal Marines.

"I think what really makes it special is that we both ... really value our role as amphibious sea soldiers ... we're both proud of our heritage and have a common set of values and ethos ... there's almost a natural alignment of partnership as two very advanced, capable warfighting organizations," said White.

According to Sutherland, a recently signed interoperability pathway between the U.S. Marine Corps and the Royal Marines/Royal Navy formalized the future relationship between the services. The idea, he said, is not that bilateral activity will necessarily increase in the coming years, but that both organizations will better capitalize on the existing activity.

"It's all about enabling us to work better and closer together so that the next time we deploy on operations somewhere, we can start from a better position," Sutherland said.

In 2015, the British Royal Navy announced that the USMC will deploy its F-35B Lightning II strike fighters alongside their own F-35Bs on Britain's new *Queen Elizabeth* class aircraft carriers beginning around 2021. And while the aviation aspect doesn't particularly correlate directly with the Royal Marines, one thing is clear: the future U.S. relationship with Great Britain will be stronger than ever before.

This year, the Royal Marines also will send a PTI to assist in the growth of the USMC's newest military occupational specialty, Force Fitness Instructor (FFI). The FFI course returns its graduates to their units, where they are certified to physically train members of their commands, similar to the role of a Royal Marine PTI.



SARA W. BOCK

**Royal Marine PTI Colour Sergeant Leslie Barrow instructs U.S. Marine officer candidates at Brown Field, MCB Quantico, Va., Oct. 15, 2015. The colour sergeant's billet at OCS is part of a unique exchange program between the U.S. Marines and Royal Marines, strategically designed to allow each organization to benefit from the other's strengths.**

13-week All Arms Commando Course has been open to women from other branches of service, and several have successfully completed it. White and Sutherland look at the integration of women in combat roles as an opportunity, emphasizing that anyone who can meet the standards can be a Royal Marine.

If there's anything that can be learned by observing the relationship between the U.S. Marines and Royal Marines, it's that shared values and experiences are vital to close military partnerships. For two organizations so deeply rooted in their own heritage, so fervently committed to excellence on the battlefield and beyond, and so profoundly committed to interoperability, there's little doubt that they are greater together than they are alone.



"No doubt, with the experience and professionalism of the USMC, there will be many things that he will learn as well and he can then take back to the Commando Training Centre," said Sutherland of the PTI assigned to the course. Sutherland hopes that in the future, there will be an opportunity to have another exchange that will allow a USMC FFI to come to the

U.K.—and perhaps even a female.

"That would greatly assist us when we open the Royal Marines to females," said Sutherland. The U.K.'s Ministry of Defence recently announced that it would allow women into combat roles, and the Royal Marines are preparing for the change—although, Sutherland emphasized, for a number of years the

**Maj Martin Twist, RM, left, prepares for a patrol alongside LtCol Steve Wolf, USMC, the Regimental Combat Team-2 operations officer in Sangin, Afghanistan, in 2010. The opportunity to serve with 2d Marines as part of RCT-2 was an experience that Twist considers the highlight of his career as a Royal Marine officer. (Photo courtesy of LtCol Martin Twist, RM)**

