feature

EMBARKATION

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The global mission of today's Army, combined with the Navy's amphibious capability, makes it imperative that our company and battery commanders learn some of the things they will have to do to become "soldiers of the sea."

Many of the Army's units, primarily infantry companies from Fort Bragg and Fort Campbell, are being taught each year in a one-week course at Little Creek, Virginia, the basic amphibious skills they will need. Marine and Army instructors at the Landing Force Training Command, Atlantic, provide training in amphibious raids and assaults, along with the peripheral skills needed to perform these operations.

During their week at Little Creek, the soldiers are also introduced to shipboard life, and usually find that it requires a few adjustments on their part. Without some insight into these changes in their lifestyle, the soldiers can have problems on board ship. But there are some things their units can do to help ease this transition.

As a first step, an advance party from the troop unit should go aboard a day or two ahead of the rest of the unit, especially if the ship is docked at a pier. (If the ship is anchored some way out, or if time does not permit the unit to send an advance party, then the first group of soldiers to go aboard should perform the same functions.)

The advance party should consist of at least one officer, one senior noncommissioned officer, and four to six soldiers. (This team is not the same as the ship's platoon, which is a detail assigned to help the Navy load vehicles, supplies, and equipment.)

The officer in the advance party should provide liaison with the ship's executive officer (XO) and with the ship's first lieutenant, a naval officer who shares many responsibilities in getting the troop unit aboard in a safe and orderly manner.

The advance party's first step should be to tour the particular areas of the ship that must be inspected before the unit arrives, such as the troop berthing (sleeping) spaces, the heads (latrines), the troop administrative office, and the messdeck (dining facility).

The party should check the berthing spaces for cleanliness and habitability; it should note any breakages; and it should conduct a complete inventory of all the materials (racks, mattresses, pillows) that the unit will use.

The inspection team should make sure that all the toilets, urinals, sinks, and showers are serviceable and that toilet paper and cleaning gear are available. The general cleanliness of the area is also important to note, as is any breakage.

Failing to perform these checks could lead to confusion, poor morale, and a bad working relationship between the soldiers and their Navy shipmates. Moreover, the unit might be presented with a bill when it departs for any breakage that the advance party failed to note.

The next task of the advance party is to find out in what ways (and in what numbers) the soldiers will be needed to augment the Navy personnel in certain daily functions. The advance party officer, for instance, should ask how many soldiers are needed to help during mealtime on the messdecks. (The rule of thumb calls for one messman per 20 troops.)

It is common, also, for the embarked unit to assign NCOs, on a rotating basis, to assist the Master-at-Arms force with any disciplinary matters that involve the troops.

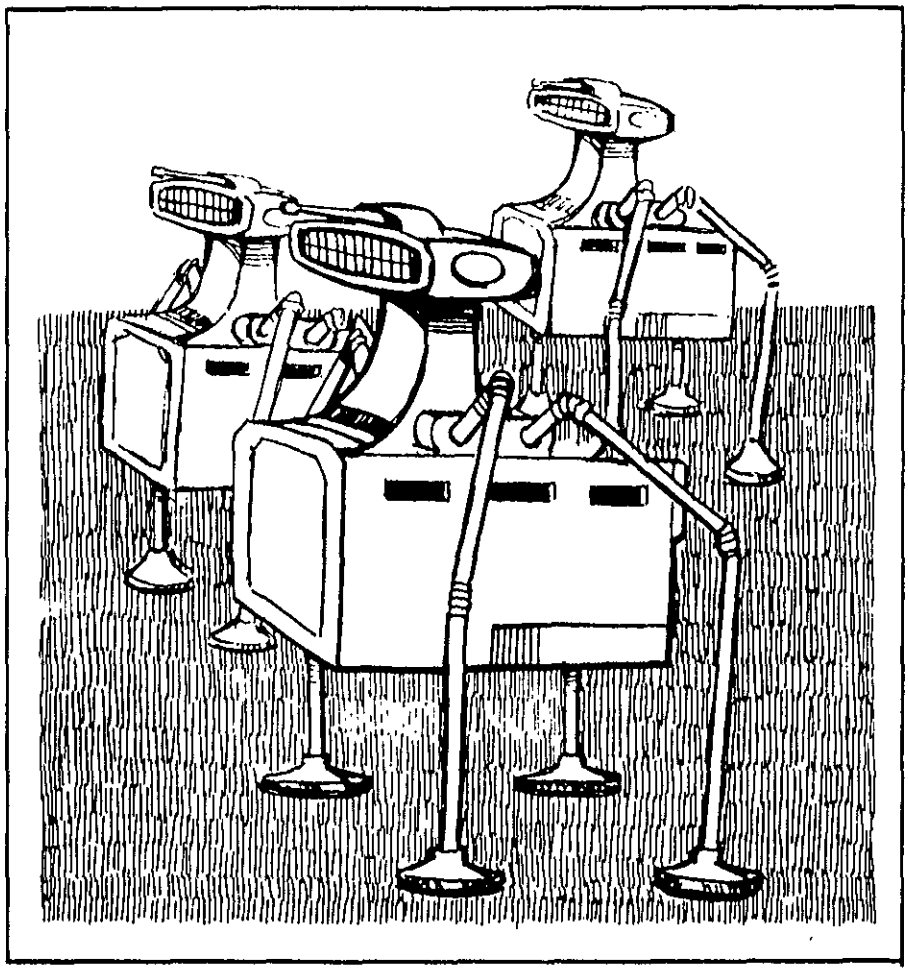
Other specific areas of interest for the advance party officer include:

- Linen distribution and turn-in.
- Weapon stowage.
- Ammunition, pyrotechnic, and demolition stowage.
- Troop meal hours.
- Restricted areas.
- Smoking regulations.
- Entertainment for the troops (movies, library, and weight room.).
- Shipboard drills (abandon ship, man overboard, and general quarters) and liferaft serial assignments.
- Berthing for officers and senior NCOs.
- Special reports required by the ship.
- Hours for sick call and dental call.

Of special interest and concern for the advance party is the protocol involved in the billeting and messing arrangements for the officers and the senior NCOs.

The officers from the embarked unit will be billeted in "Officer's Country" and will take their meals in the wardroom, where certain rules of etiquette must be observed, especially those that involve the ship's captain.

The laws of the sea, by tradition and by Navy regulation, hold the captain responsible for the ship and for the actions of the crew: He is regard-



ed as master of all that happens within his realm. Accordingly, several customs honor his position.

When he enters the wardroom, for instance, all officers rise. The evening meal (and sometimes the noon meal) begins only when he arrives or sends his consent; all officers stand behind their chairs until the captain asks them to be seated. If an officer is late or must be excused from the table, he asks the captain for permission to join or leave the mess. The captain's seat at the table is left vacant in his absence. If a movie is to be shown in the wardroom after the evening meal, it starts at his direction. And on the bridge of the ship there are chairs on both sides reserved only for him.

Certain procedures also govern the accommodations for the noncommissioned officers. Senior NCOs berth and dine with the ship's chief petty officers (CPOs). The chiefs are part of a very distinct entity within the Navy's enlisted rank structure, a fact that is apparent in their shipboard lifestyle. Their mess is similar to the wardroom, and, like Officer's Country, it is considered off-limits to all others except for those on official business.

Having made these preparations, the advance party should be ready when other members of the unit board the ship.

First, the soldiers are guided to their compartments, which should have been assigned to maintain unit integrity as much as possible.

Weapons stowage has first priority. Rifles may be secured either in individual rifle racks, with locks, on each soldier's bunk, or in an armory to accommodate all weapons.

Crew-served weapons are always kept in an armory, while all ammunition, pyrotechnics, and demolitions are secured in a special locker provided by the ship's gunner's mate.

When the bunks have been made (with the linen distributed by the advance party) and when personal gear has been stowed in wall lockers, the troops are briefed on the particulars of their new home, and then they carry out the plan of the day.

The senior Army commander on board is normally designated the commanding officer (CO) of troops. He is responsible for the actions of all the troops aboard the ship, regardless of their unit. In this capacity, he answers to the captain of the ship in the same manner as does a naval officer assigned as a department head (engineering, deck, operation). The CO of troops is presented at meetings as deemed necessary by the ship's CO or XO. He also assigns additional duties to junior officers — such as the duties of laundry officer, mess officer, and billeting officer.

Once the unit is aboard, its training and the ship's work are carried out according to their respective schedules. Physical training, preventive maintenance, and essential military matters are carried out to keep the troops busy and to prepare them for the coming mission. Daily inspections of troop berthing areas and heads are conducted to make them as habitable as possible.

For the uninitiated, life aboard ship is a learning experience. The troops absorb nautical terminology quickly: Doors become hatches, stairways become ladders, and floors become decks. (Marines use these terms ashore as well as aboard ship.)

A cardinal rule for all sea-going soldiers is to treat the ship like what it is — the sailors' home. If they do, it will soon seem like their home, too, instead of merely a form of transportation. In a short time, all hands will look forward to the impending amphibious operation or the first liberty port.

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