

Southern Guam, 1944

The Fan Technique of Zone Reconnaissance

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Scout platoons and other elements conducting zone reconnaissance at the Joint Readiness Training Center often disregard the techniques in ARTEP 7-92-MTP, *Mission Training Plan for the Infantry Scout Platoon/Squad and Sniper Team—the fan, converging routes, and successive sector techniques*. Many scouts seem to think these “by the book” methods are academic rather than practical solutions. The following example of a World War II zone reconnaissance should correct this misconception and illustrate the relevance of these methods to today’s missions.

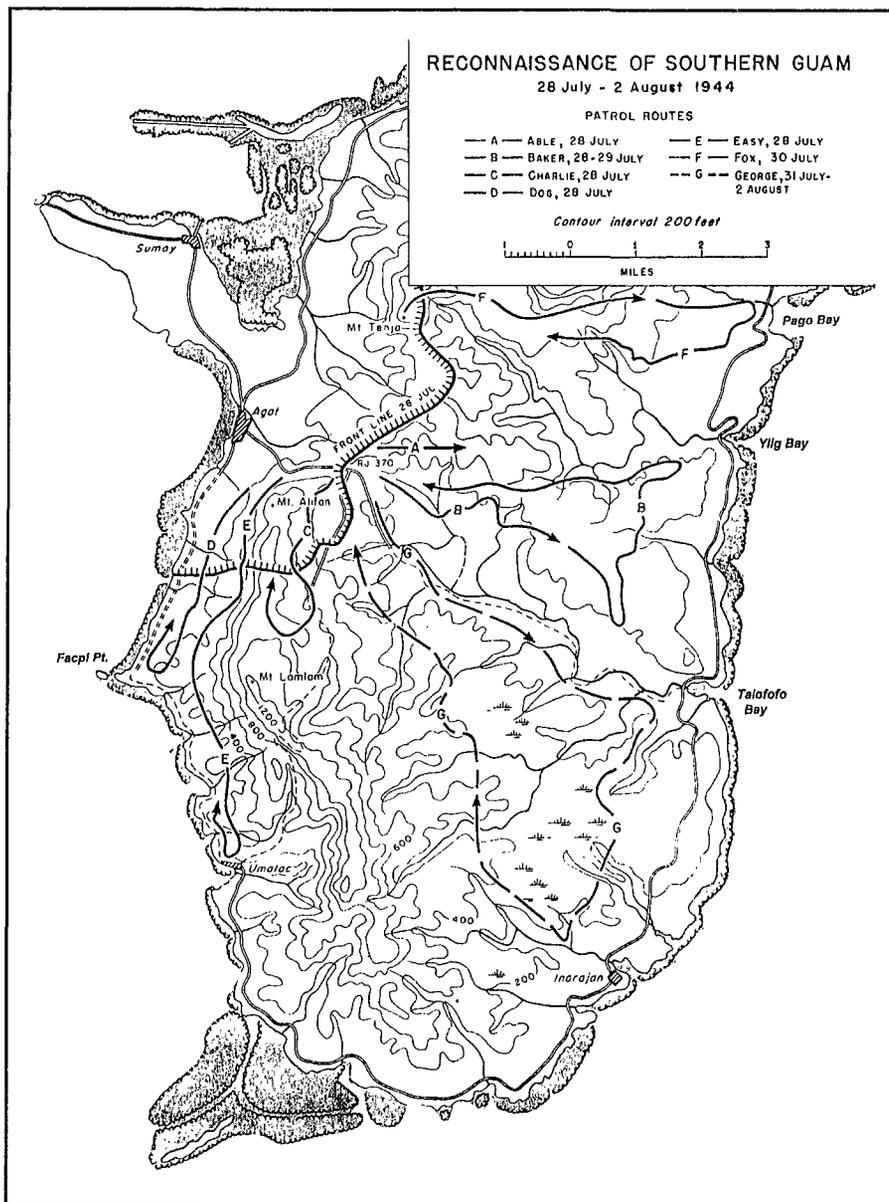
After the 21 July 1944 amphibious assault and subsequent capture of the Orote Peninsula by the III Amphibious Corps, the 77th Reconnaissance Troop used a basic version of the fan method to conduct a zone reconnaissance of the southern half of Guam.

Despite the fact that the island of Guam had been a U.S. possession for more than 40 years, the military had little intelligence on its terrain and road network, let alone the Japanese defensive positions. Southern Guam in particular was a mass of jungle and mountains with few if any roads suitable for military vehicles. For that reason, the III Amphibious Corps commander, Lieutenant General Roy Geiger, felt that the Japanese would con-

centrate their defenses in the north, but he could not be sure without a detailed ground reconnaissance of the south. Geiger assigned the mission to Major General Andrew Bruce’s 77th Infantry Divi-

sion, and Bruce passed it on to his 77th Reconnaissance Troop.

Early on 28 July, the troop departed friendly lines at Road Junction 370 (see map). It was organized into five small



AUTHOR'S NOTE: The discussion of the 77th Reconnaissance Troop's recon of the operation has been extracted from U.S. Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific: Campaign in the Marianas, by Philip A. Crowl, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1960, pages 326, 374-376. The map is from the same source.

patrols, each consisting of five men accompanied by a native guide. Patrols Able and Baker were to proceed directly east to the coast and return. Patrols Charlie, Dog, and Easy were to move directly south along the ridge below Mount Alifan with Charlie heading toward Mount Lamlam, Easy to Umatac, and Dog along the coast below Facpi Point. Each patrol was to send a radio report every two to three hours and call for artillery support if needed. Except for these general instructions, the patrols were to move according to their own discretion.

Patrol Able got less than halfway to Ylig Bay when two of its members and the guide came down with yellow fever and had to return. Patrol Baker then assumed responsibility for the entire area from Ylig Bay to Talofof Bay. The patrol spotted a few Japanese the first day but avoided contact. The next morning they moved north along the coast some four and one-half miles, where they met some Chamorros (native people of the Marianas) who told them that all Japanese of platoon size or larger had moved north. With this information, Patrol Baker returned to friendly lines.

Meanwhile, Patrols Charlie and Dog reached the slopes of Mount Lamlam but were turned back by rifle fire. Patrol Easy was able to slide between its flank patrols and reach Umatac on the west coast below Facpi Point. Patrol Easy found little evidence of enemy activity and returned along the coastal road without any of the contact Patrol Dog had experienced.

On 30 July, Bruce sent out Patrols Fox and George to recon Pago Bay and the southeast portion of the island. Patrol George penetrated more than seven miles toward Inarajan and did not return until 2 August. Neither patrol observed any enemy activity.

The information brought back by the 77th Recon Troop confirmed Geiger's assumption that there was no organized Japanese resistance in southern Guam. With this knowledge he could then concentrate his efforts to the north. The 77th Recon Troop had given their commander the information he needed.

Defining boundaries for the reconnaissance of southern Guam was easy enough since the end of the land marked an obvious limit of advance. The beachhead secured by the III Amphibious Corps served as the objective release point for the 77th Recon Troop and provided the patrols with security in case they had to break contact. When Patrols Charlie and Dog did not receive fire, it was easy for them to return to the safety of established friendly lines. Not all of the troop's patrols overlapped, and there was, in fact, a large gap between Umatac and Inarajan that was not patrolled. But Geiger was concerned only with an enemy large enough to threaten his corps, so he could afford to sacrifice total coverage for time. Where contact was made—as in Patrol Dog's area, for example—another patrol—in this case Easy—did overlap and found no organized resistance.

Because of the long, narrow shape of the island, the 77th Recon Troop did not have to worry about limiting themselves

to just a couple of adjacent patrols for fear of enemy contact in more than one direction. But they did have to be concerned with the enemy getting between the longer and shorter range patrols. Thus, the longer patrols, Fox and George, did not leave until the others had returned.

Although the 77th Recon Troop's zone reconnaissance of southern Guam may not be a textbook rendition of the fan method, the idea is the same. Perhaps more important, the operation shows how the factors of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time) can allow a commander to take some shortcuts in the interest of time. In this case, Geiger was looking for a target for his corps-size force. If he had been looking for scattered bands of guerrillas, he would have had to take a different approach.

Soldiers who are faced with zone reconnaissance missions at the JRTC and elsewhere will do well to consider this example. The 77th Recon Troop tailored a "by the book" technique to meet the specific METT-T situation. This is the proper application of doctrine. Scout platoon leaders, S-2s, and commanders can use this historical example as evidence that the ARTEP techniques are not just academic drills but combat-proven solutions to real problems.

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Using the Company Mortars

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Company mortars are often ineffective on the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) battlefield. Among the problems

are the lack of proper positioning and carrying of mortar ammunition, the suitability of an objective release point or

patrol base from which to fire mortars, and a failure to plan 60mm mortar fire for squad, platoon, and company mis-