

The Inception:

Beach Jumpers were United States Navy tactical cover and deception units which were organized under Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, then Commander, Amphibious Forces, and all U.S. Naval Forces in Northwest African waters and the Western Mediterranean. The concept for Beach Jumpers came about as a result of then Lieutenant Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., the Hollywood actor turned naval officer during World War II having been detached from "Blue water" duty on the high seas and assigned to duty with British Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten Combined Operations (Commandos) in England.



Lieutenant Fairbanks assignment was to be one of those temporary duty officer exchange programs where American Officers would acquaint themselves with the training, planning, and execution of raiding parties, diversions, and deception operations. Lieutenant Fairbanks however did more than just observe the workings of these commandos. He trained with them at the aptly named H.M.S. *Tormentor* Advanced Training and Amphibious Operations Base, and at the Commando Training School at Ancharry Castle, Scotland. Subsequently, he participated in several cross channel harassment raids from the Isle of Wight which was the forward base for such activities. It was during these raids that Lieutenant Fairbanks gained

a true appreciation for the military art of deception.

Lieutenant Fairbanks was subsequently transferred to Virginia Beach where he came under the command of Admiral Hewitt who was supervising the training of U.S. Naval forces in preparation of their deployment to North Africa and the Mediterranean. It was here that the brash movie star now Naval Lieutenant pitched his idea for a similar unit of specialists trained to conduct tactical cover, diversionary and deception missions. Admiral Hewitt immediately saw the advantages of such a unit and agreed to support Fairbanks. All that was required now was to sell the Navy brass in Washington.

In Washington, Fairbanks was at his persuasive best. Inspired by the success of British Commandos in using sonic deception on raids against the Nazis and Fairbanks' concept of operations, Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Fleet, and Chief of Naval Operations issued a secret letter on 5 March 1943 charging the Vice Chief of Naval Operations with the recruitment of 180 officers and 300 enlisted men for the Beach Jumper program.

The recruiting effort identified four general requirements: (1) no seasickness, (2) experience in small boat handling, (3) enough electrical knowledge to fix a home radio, and (4) at least fundamental knowledge of celestial navigation. The announcement further stated that "*The Navy is requesting volunteers for prolonged, hazardous, distant duty for a secret project*".

On 16 March 1943, the volunteers reported to the Amphibious Training Base at Camp Bradford, Virginia and Beach Jumper Unit-1 was commissioned as a command. The basic mission of Beach Jumper Unit-1 was:

*"To assist and support the operating forces in the conduct
of Tactical Cover and Deception in Naval Warfare"*

Small boat handling, seamanship, ordnance, gunnery, demolitions, pyrotechnics, and meteorology were among the the courses taught. Beach Jumpers were also cross-trained to handle all crew positions. The Beach Jumpers were assigned Ten 63-foot Air-Sea Rescue Boats, (ASR). These ASRs were double hulled, plywood construction, powered by either twin Hall-Scott 750 UP or Packard engines, and operated with an Officer and a 6 man crew. The ASRs were equipped with twin 50 caliber machine guns and carried the unit's deception gear and equipment. The boats also had ten, five on the port and five on the starboard bow, 3.5 inch window rockets, smoke generators or smoke pots and floating, time delay explosive packs.

The unit's specialized deception equipment included: the multi-component heater consisting of a wire recorder; 5-phase amplifier; 1000 watt, 12 horn speaker; 3 UP Ohm generators for power and Naval balloons, ZKM and MK-6 models, to which strips of radar reflective window had been attached and could be towed behind the boats. Later, different models of jammer transmitters, such as the APT-2 (Carpet); APQ-2 (Rug); AN/APT-3 (Mandrel); AN/SPT-4; AM-14/APT; AM-18/APT; and AN/SPT-1 (DINA), were in operation.

Now there are several stories as to how the Beach Jumpers got there name. One story has it that it was due to their capability of quickly hitting the beach and causing confusion with the enemy due to their harassment and deception operations. Perhaps the best theory as to how they got their name came from Harold Burris-Meyer, Theater and Sound Research Director for the Stevens Institute of Technology. The Stevens Institute was working on a Navy contract to study the physiological and psychological effects of sound on men in warfare. During a high level conference, Mr. Burris-Meyer responded to a question concerning the purpose of their work by stating: *"To scare the be-jesus out of the enemy"*. His engineering team used the *"BJ"* factor thereafter in their planning which is said to have led to the inspiration for the cover name *Beach Jumpers*.

Unfortunately for Fairbanks, as a Lieutenant he did not have the rank to command such a unit. Anthony L. Rorschach, Captain, USN arrived at Camp Bedford on 15 May 1943 to take Command of the forming Beach Jumpers. However, Lieutenant Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. was given the assignment to develop, supervise, and coordinate all the plans with the British. Upon his return he was assigned as Special Operations Officer and Assistant Chief of Staff and Operations Officer to Captain Charles L. Andrews who had assumed the Command of all Beach Jumper activities. As Special Operations Officer Fairbanks was responsible for the supervision, training, supplying, and planning for all Beach Jumper activities: all raids, special assault landings, and special operations. As Assistant Chief of Staff and Operations Officer Fairbanks was granted a security clearance level which allowed him access to any information the Beach Jumpers might need.

The Beach Jumpers mission would be to conduct deception operations in which they would simulate amphibious landings with a very limited force. Utilizing their deception equipment the Beach Jumpers would lure the enemy into believing that theirs was the

location of the amphibious beach landing, when in fact the actual amphibious landing would be conducted at another location. Beach Jumper Unit-1 (BJU-1) did not have to wait long to be tested. Their first operation was to be "HUSKY", the assault on Sicily. On the night of 10 July 1943, Beach Jumper Unit-1 was ordered to conduct a diversion off Cape San Marco, 100 miles west of the HUSKY landing area. The first attempt was recalled due to hazardous seas. On D+1, the weather was better and the operation began at 2200 hours. At 3,000 yards off shore, three of the ASRs prepared their heaters, one ASR proceeded a thousand yards ahead and began to lay smoke. As the sound boats prepared to make their run parallel to the beach, a searchlight from Cape San Marco illuminated the area, accompanied by small arms and artillery fire. At 0230 the sound boats were ordered to secure their heaters and close the beach, which they did, firing guns and rockets. All boats retired on a course back to their home port at Pantelleria, Sicily at 0730 hours.

To keep the Germans' attention, Commander Robinson was ordered to conduct another operation on the night of 12 July 1943, using all available craft. This time the shore batteries were completely alerted. The Germans were convinced that a landing was about to take place. Salvos of six inch and smaller guns were thrown at the boats. The operation was a success and no casualties were sustained.

Operation HUSKY accomplished complete surprise due to the uncertainty created in the minds of some German Commanders by the BJU-1 diversions and strategic cover and deception operations. BJU-1 was responsible for an entire German Reserve Division being held in place, as the German Command was unsure where the actual landing would take place.

Beach Jumpers Unit-4 were assigned to assist Marshal Tito's forces as well as British Commandos operating in the Adriatic during the later part of 1944. They were also instrumental in the rescue of Airmen of the 15th Air Force who were forced to evacuate their aircraft on return to their bases in Italy from missions over the Poletti oil fields. In addition some of them took part in land combat missions on several Islands along the Dalmatian coastal area.

Beach Jumpers Units ONE, THREE, and FIVE continued to support naval operations with their deception interventions into the summer of 1944. Their exceptional diversionary efforts during Operation Bigot-Anvil earned them the Presidential Unit Citation. For his planning the diversion-deception operations and his part in the amphibious assault on Southern France, Lieutenant Commander Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., was awarded the U.S. Navy *Legion of Merit with bronze V* (for valor), The Italian *War Cross for Military Valor*, the French *Legion d'Honneur* and the *Croix de Guerre with Palm* and the *British Distinguished Service Cross*.



For most of the Beach Jumper Officers and men of Units 1, 3, 4, 5, who served in the Mediterranean Theater Operations, participation in their specialized brand of Naval

Warfare was over. For some, the future meant service in newly formed BJ Units which deployed to the Pacific Theater.

The Beach Jumpers had a rough time getting started in the Pacific. BJU-6 and 7, combined with other Naval Units to form TG 77.11. It sailed on 16 December 1944 for Mindoro in the Philippines aboard the USS Orestes.

On 30 December 1944 at 1655 Hours, a kamikaze struck the water at an angle and bounced off the surface and then into the starboard side of the USS Orestes, the planes unexploded bomb was thrown upward and detonated within the ship resulting in 20 killed and 93 wounded. Unfortunately for Beach Jumpers, most of TG77.11 top officers were among the killed or wounded. On 1 January 1945, bombs at the PT Base on Mangarin Bay killed 16 more men who had survived the kamikaze attack.

BJU-6 conducted their first diversion on 22-23 January 1945, by providing deception tactics in and around the coastal town of Unisan to the Tablas Strait. Beach Jumper communications deception followed a script which included a mix of ad-lib actual conditions at sea, radar and surface search information, orders, station keeping, references to putting boats into the water and the control of landing craft. They also broadcasted normal traffic.

The last Beach Jumper mission for WW II was their most ambitious to date. The effort featured a plan of maneuver and course changes during which rockets would be fired and smoke screens laid, with all activity ending by 0630 hours when all units were to rendezvous, change course a final time to 180 degree, reform, and return to base. During this deception Beach Jumpers operated a full array of equipment that included jammer transmitters, radar intercept receivers, and smoke generators. The diversions proved effective allowing the 34th Regimental Combat team, and the 38th and 11th Airborne Divisions to land with little or no opposition.

Lieutenant Fairbanks was working on deception schemes to support the scheduled British landings on Singapore when the war ended. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., retired as a Captain, USNR.

Shortly after the end of World War II, all Beach Jumper Units were deactivated.

"Navy Beach Jumpers, the inception", source:

"Seaborne Deception - The History of U.S. Navy Beach Jumpers" by John B. Dwyer

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