

# What the Heck Is 'Small Craft Company' Anyway?

by Maj John R. Shafer

*The author takes a look inside one of the Marines' important units.*

Three-dimensional warfare, littorals, urban environment—all terms used to describe where the Navy-Marine Team would likely be deployed in support of contingency operations in the first years of the 21st century. Why? Our future battlefields will most likely be in or at least within close proximity to a major urban area. Seventy percent of these major population centers are based on or near a coastline or along a major river—the majority of these being located within underdeveloped countries dependent on those very rivers for transport of commerce and trade. In traditional military operations, these rivers have posed an obstacle for the commander and have influenced or even limited his courses of action. But today, these rivers serve as an al-

ternative avenue of approach for the commander to insert his combat forces into the area of operations. This capability is provided through the Small Craft Company (SCCo), Headquarters Battalion (HQBN), 2d Marine Division.

So, what the heck is SCCo anyway? In short, SCCo is a Marine Corps unit that owns, operates, and maintains a small fleet of riverine craft. When task organized to become an element of a Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF), the company or its detachments provide a limited riverine capability to the unit assigned (hereby referred to as a special purpose MAGTF or SP-MAGTF). The company can also support a multinational or joint task force (JTF). When employed as a

company at full strength, SCCo has the capability to transport and support the assault elements of an infantry battalion. Few know about this solitary unit, and many fall victim to the misconception that it exists solely to support counterdrug operations. Even less is known or understood throughout the Marine Corps about the unit's unique equipment, structure, and many capabilities.

Located in Camp Lejeune, SCCo is resident only within the 2d Marine Division of the II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF). The unit may be employed either in the supporting or supported role, to augment Marine forces worldwide. The company can also be utilized in conjunction with the other Services or Department of Defense agencies.

The mission of the company is to provide a conventional riverine capability to MAGTFs or the other Services, as directed, through the conduct of waterborne mobility, security, command and control, and assault/assault support operations in support of military operations in a riverine environment (MORE). The company also provides personnel, maintenance, and equipment support to the battalion landing teams (BLTs) of the Marine expeditionary units (special operations capable) (MEU(SOC)s) assigned to the Landing Force, Sixth Fleet (LF6F), and Marine forces during UNITAS.

SCCo is organized to integrate as the riverine combat element into any size MAGTF organization, with up to a battalion-size ground combat element (GCE). Smaller task organized detachments from the company can be formed in any composition to support the individual requirements of

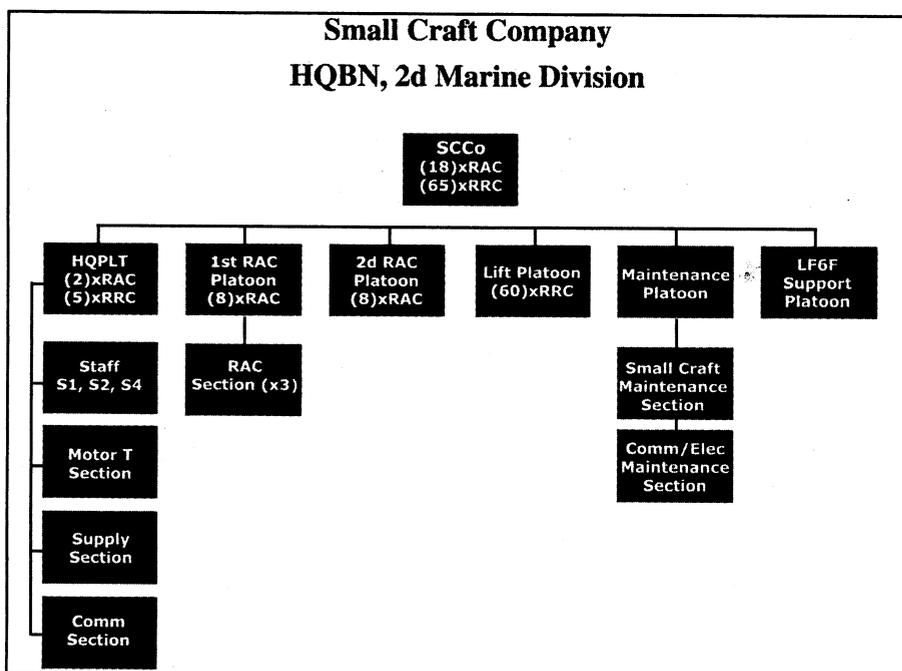


Figure 1.

JTFs or the sister Services, as required. The company is composed of a headquarters platoon with a limited staff, two riverine assault craft (RAC) platoons, one lift platoon, and a maintenance platoon (see Figure 1).

Missions are accomplished through the training and mastery of various tasks broken down into mobility, security, command and control, and assault/assault support operations skills. These tasks are comprised of the following individual training standards/mission performance standards:

1. Waterborne mobility operations:

- Conduct surface insert/extract of forces (GCE and reconnaissance, intelligence, surveillance, and target acquisition assets) deployed for MORE.
- Provide lift for riverine logistical resupply.
- Provide riverine surface platform for medical evacuation.
- Provide surface lift for forces conducting military operations other than war/stability and support operations to include non-combatant evacuation operations, search and rescue, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief.
- Provide riverine surface platform for forward air control/forward operations in support of direct air support/close air support and indirect fire support operations.

2. Waterborne security operations:

- Secure designated waterways as lines of communications.
- Conduct waterborne security (with or without GCE embarked) and reconnaissance patrols.
- Provide security for waterborne movement of troops and logistics.
- Provide waterborne security at riverine landing site for insert/extract of ground forces or logistics.
- Provide armed high-value transit escort for waterborne vessels designated as high-value assets.

- Conduct limited board and search operations.

- Provide waterborne security to the flank, front, or rear of designated groundbased forces or operational areas.

- Provide waterborne security for river crossing operations.

3. Waterborne command and control operations:

- Provide limited command and control platform for waterborne movement and landing.

- Provide limited waterborne radio relay/retrans for forward deployed assets.

4. Waterborne assault/assault support operations:

- Conduct waterborne movement to contact.
- Conduct riverine ambushes (with or without GCE).
- Conduct combat patrols (with GCE).
- Provide limited direct fire support up to heavy machinegun (.50 cal/40mm).

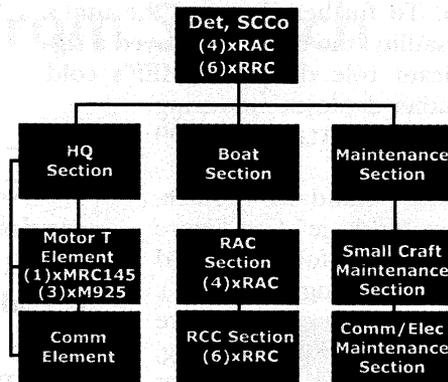
SCCo conducts supporting operations for the MEUs by providing a seven-man BLT detachment that forms the nucleus of small craft expertise for the designated boat company. Personnel include coxswains, maintenance management, rubber repair,

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and outboard engine repair specialists. A smaller detachment with similar capabilities is chopped from the company to support Marine forces during each UNITAS deployment.

With the assistance of a limited staff, the company commander analyzes the mission, develops courses of action, issues orders, and directs

**Detachment, Small Craft Company**



**Figure 2. Organization of the standard small craft detachment deployed for training in support of a reinforced rifle platoon GCE.**

and supervises the operations of the company. When serving as an independent element of a SPMAGTF or a JTF, the commanding officer, or the detachment officer-in-charge, will serve as the subject matter expert on riverine operations for the SPMAGTF commander or the commander of the JTF. Most commonly, standardized company detachments of 50 to 55 Marines are formed to provide riverine support for 2d Marine Division operations.

SCCo has been deployed extensively in support of numerous exercises and operations since the company’s inception in 1992. A detachment from the company was ordered to Panama in 1995 in order to provide armed escort for high-value transit shipping and U.S. nuclear powered submarines transiting the canal. The company maintained its presence in Panama through a detachment rotation schedule that continued until

the withdrawal of all U.S. forces in October 1999. Extensive subject matter expert exchange deployments and riverine deployments for training were conducted throughout South America, in countries to include Peru, Panama, Argentina, Paraguay, Honduras, Columbia, and Venezuela. The company has also

conducted bilateral training with forces in French Guiana and Curaçao. To further illustrate the unit's versatility, the company played a significant role during II MEF's cold weather deployment during exercise BATTLE GRIFFIN 99 in Norway.

The standard detachment "package" (see Figure 2) consists of four RACs and six rigid raiding craft (RRC). This detachment structure provides a self-supporting, task-organized detachment that is built around a reinforced rifle platoon as the GCE. When deployed, the detachment provides limited, high-speed expeditionary waterborne mobility, command and control, and firepower for MORE. Deployed in its entirety, conceptually the company can provide surface lift and support to the assault elements of an infantry battalion (540 combat equipped troops).

When deployed in its entirety, the company's over water range limitations when supporting an infantry battalion (approximately 540 Marines) or transporting its maximum of 108,000 pounds of cargo at 30 knots is approximately 50-70 nautical miles (based on range limitations of the RRC). The RAC has an operational planning range of 200 nautical miles. The introduction of the small unit riverine craft in fiscal year 2003 (replacement for the RRC) will increase the operational range for assault and logistics support up to 100 nautical miles. Design concepts for a future RAC/RAC variant (replacement for the current RAC) with an extended operational range are currently being considered by Marine Corps Systems Command.

Organizational-level maintenance is provided by the company's maintenance platoon. First echelon maintenance and second echelon repair are conducted within the company's facilities on RAC, RRC, combat rubber raiding craft (CRRCs), their trailers, and engines. Second echelon repairs are also conducted at the company level on the CRRC and the 35/55 horsepower pumpjet outboard en-

gine. All intermediate maintenance on small craft, trailers, and engines is provided by Small Craft Repair Platoon, 2d Maintenance Battalion, 2d Force Service Support Group.

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The company deploys its detachments with both small craft and motor transport second echelon and limited third echelon maintenance capabilities. Class IX blocks are built based on historical data for each given operational area and its conditions. These parts blocks are established to provide 30 days of parts sustainment for the standard detachment. In the case of SPMAGTFs and JTFs, the higher headquarters combat service support element provides any additional required maintenance support.

SCCo possesses limited organic motor transport assets and boat trailers providing short- to medium-range overland mobility. The company is capable of completing unsupported over land movement of all assets in a total of nine waves utilizing only its own organic motor transport assets. The company is primarily dependent on strategic airlift (StratAir) assets for intratheater mobility, but is also transportable by rail, amphibious, or black-bottom shipping. Future use of an LPD or similarly equivalent shallow draft amphibious ship would provide the required maintenance facilities, machine shop, and embarkation spaces required for conducting sustained operations in a riverine environment. Additionally, naval amphibious shipping would provide the detachment with an organic launch and recovery platform, a command and control facility, and a cost-effective method to deploy all mission essential and additional equipment.

Dollar for dollar, this may be a viable and cost-effective alternative to utilizing the multiple StratAir aircraft required for detachment deployment/redeployment in the future.

SCCo provides a viable choice to the list of options available to a SPMAGTF or JTF commander for mission accomplishment in a riverine area. SCCo and its detachments provide the commander with the equipment and forces trained to

exploit the unique characteristics of a riverine area allowing him to locate and destroy hostile forces, command and control friendly forces, or gain and maintain control of a riverine area. In an environment where rivers have predominantly been viewed as a barrier in past military operations, SCCo helps transform these waterway obstacles into high-speed avenues of approach. Naturally, successful MORE require the integration and successful synchronization of land, naval, and air forces that are tailored and suited to the specific nature of the riverine area in which operations are to be conducted.



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