

Module - II

Structure and Role of the Forces



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SPECIAL FORCES

In this lesson you will learn more about the special tasks performed by these forces, the training required for it and the importance of this elite force.

Warfare involves myriad styles of engagement - on sea, in the air, on the ground, engaging in subversive activities by special forces deep within enemy territory without the enemy's knowledge. Special Forces emerged in the early 20th century, with a significant growth in the field during the Second World War, when every major army involved in the fighting created formations devoted to special operations behind enemy lines.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the history of special forces globally;
- explain the history of Indian Special Forces and
- describe the detailed structure of other special forces.

5.1 History of Special Forces Globally

Special Forces are military units trained to conduct special operations. Special operations as military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces, manned with selected personnel, using unconventional tactics, techniques, and modes of employment. Thus, Special Forces are not only elite and also special as they are used for specialised combat tasks, conducting missions that general-purpose forces either cannot perform or not with acceptable levels of risk and costs.

Often, Special Forces are confused with units that perform covert operations for intelligence organizations, operating under different authorities and employing different skill sets in order to keep the sponsorship of the units and their activities hidden. Sometimes elite military units are used to perform special operations, and sometimes Special Forces are loaned to intelligence organizations to perform covert operations.

**Note**

Special Forces have played an important role throughout the history of warfare, whenever the aim was to achieve disruption by "hit and run" and sabotage, rather than through more traditional conventional combat. Other significant roles lay in reconnaissance, providing essential intelligence about the enemy and increasingly in combating irregular forces, their infrastructure and activities.

The British Army deployed two Special Forces during their border wars: the Corps of Guides formed in 1846 and the Gurkha Scouts (a force that was formed in the 1890s and was first used as a detached unit during the 1897-1898 Tirah Campaign). During the Second Boer War (1899-1902) the British Army felt the need for more specialised units.

Scouting units such as the Lovat Scouts, a Scottish Highland regiment made up of exceptional woodsmen outfitted in ghillie suits and well practised in the arts of marksmanship, field craft, and military tactics filled this role. This unit was formed in 1900 by Lord Lovat and early on reported to an American, Major Frederick Russell Burnham, the Chief of Scouts under Lord Roberts. After the war, Lovat's Scouts went on to formally become the British Army's first sniper unit. Additionally, the Bushveldt Carbineers, formed in 1901, can be seen as an early unconventional warfare unit.

5.2 History of Indian Special Forces

The history of Indian Special Forces revolves around raising of Parachute battalions by the British Indian Army and subsequently formation of Parachute Regiment in 1952. The Regiment's successfully conducted of airborne operation's and commando raids across the borders. Indian Army had commando battalions. Later these units were designated as special forces and are tasked with specialised tasks behind the enemy positions.

During 1971 conflict, a need for Naval component of Special Forces was felt after experimenting with amphibious operations (Operation Jackpot) where an amphibious landing was planned at Cox Bazaar (then Pakistani Naval Base, now Bangladesh). Marine Commandos (MARCOS) who are patterned on the lines of SEALs of USA were raised after this experience.

After the assassination of the erstwhile Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi a decision to raise a force under Ministry of Home (MHA) was taken. Besides security of VVIPs it was envisaged that this newly raised force would also cater for element of CT, anti-hijacking and anti-kidnapping.

Consequently in 1984, National Security Guard was formed. NSG was carved out of Special Group and like its creator it too, was, and is, manned by troops of Indian Army (IA), essentially from infantry.

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Formed in 2004, GARUDs of the Indian Air Force (IAF) are quite similar to the Royal Air Force Regiment (RAFR) of UK which was raised as a response to 'Blitzkrieg' during Second World War. Like RAFR the GARUD's primary task is to carry operations in the enemy territory in support of the ground battles.

5.3 Structure of the other Special Forces

The structure of Special Forces consists of the newly created '*Armed Forces Special Forces Division (AFSFD)*', which will function under the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS). This set up brings together all the SF units of the Army, Navy and Air Force under one commander. Presently, the new Division (AFSFD) is headed by a Major General of the Army. A brief description of all the SF units of the Indian Armed Forces are described in the following sections.

5.3.1 Parachute Regiment

The Parachute Regiment consisting of PARA and PARA (SF) battalions is the bulwark of conducting Special Operations in the country. It is also the single biggest contributor to almost all specialist units like the NSG, SG, Commando Battalion of Rashtriya Rifles (RR). The Regiment has its own training center which gets recruits from the regional recruiting centers of the Indian Army.

The unit was created in 1966 by the Indian Army. During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, a small ad hoc force comprising volunteers from most infantry units from North India under Maj Megh Singh of the Brigade of the Guards, operated along and behind enemy lines. The performance of this force made the powers that be sit up and take notice of the contribution and necessitated the raising of unconventional forces.

Forming the nucleus of the new force from the volunteers of the then disbanded Meghdoot Force, a battalion was raised to be part of the Brigade of Guards. Since paratrooping is an integral part of commando tactics, the unit was transferred to the Parachute Regiment. Raised in July 1966, 9th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (Commando) was the first special operations unit. The list of PARA (SF) Battalions is:

- 1 PARA (SF) (raised 1961) converted to special forces.
- 2 PARA (SF) (ex-3 Maratha LI, converted to Special Forces)
- 3 PARA (SF) (ex-1st Kumaon, converted to Special Forces)
- 4 PARA (SF) (raised 1961, converted to Special Forces)
- 9 PARA (SF) (raised in 1966, the first dedicated Special Forces unit of the Indian Army)
- 10 PARA (SF) (raised 1967)

- 11 PARA (SF) (raised 2011)
- 21 PARA (SF) (raised 1996)

5.3.2 National Security Guard

The National Security Guard (NSG) is an Indian Special forces unit under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The NSG was established in the wake of 1984 Operation Blue Star. Since its raising the NSG has been used in the Punjab in 1986, and in Jammu and Kashmir. However it is not categorised under the uniform nomenclature of Central Armed Police Forces.

It has a Special Forces mandate, and its core operational capability is provided by the Special Action Group (SAG) which is drawn from the Indian Army. The Special Rangers Group (SRG), the police component of NSG, which also handles VIP security, is composed of personnel on deputation from other Central Armed Police Forces and State Police Forces. The NSG personnel are often referred to in the media as Black Cats because of the black dress and black cat insignia worn on their uniform.

5.3.3 Garuds

The Garud is an Indian Air Force unit which was unveiled in February 2004. It primarily protects Indian Air Force installations from terrorist attacks. Garud trainees undergo a 72-week probation training course, which is the longest among all the Indian Special Forces. The total duration of training before a trainee can qualify as a fully operational Garud is around three years. Garuds have diverse responsibilities.

Besides base protection force to protect airfields and key assets in hostile environments, some advanced Garud units are trained like Army Para Commandos and the Naval MARCOS to undertake missions deep behind enemy lines. During hostilities, Garuds undertake combat search and rescue, rescue of downed airmen and other forces from behind enemy lines, suppression of enemy air defence (SEAD), radar busting, missile and munitions guidance (lasing of targets) and other missions in support of air operations.

5.3.4 Marine Commandos

MARCOS (previously Marine Commando Force), is the special forces unit of the Indian Navy created for conducting special operations such as amphibious warfare, close quarter combat, counter-terrorism, direct action, special reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, hostage rescue, personnel recovery, combat search and rescue, asymmetric warfare, amphibious reconnaissance including hydrographic reconnaissance.

The MCF is specially organised, trained and equipped for the conduct of special operations in a maritime environment. MARCOS is short for Marine Commandos. The force has gradually acquired experience and a reputation for professionalism over

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the three decades it has been in existence.

The MARCOS are capable of undertaking operations in all types of terrain, but are specialised in maritime operations in Jammu and Kashmir through the Jhelum River and Wular Lake, a 65 square kilometre freshwater lake. Some MARCOS personnel are also attached with the Army Special Forces units conducting counter-terrorism operations in the area.

The first batch of marine commandos qualified in February 1987. The exclusivity of the unit lies in its competence to operate in all three mediums namely Sea, Air and Land. The MCF is specially organized, trained and equipped for the conduct of special operations in a maritime environment. Personnel from unit are deployed round the clock from Kashmir for CI/CT ops to Goa, Somalia for anti-piracy operations. The unit has always been at forefront in providing diving / civil assistance during times of natural disaster. The core tasking of MARCOS include:-

- conducting clandestine attack against enemy ships, offshore installations and other vital assets behind enemy lines;
- supporting amphibious operations including pre-assault operations;
- conducting unconventional warfare;
- conducting surveillance and recce missions in support of military operations;
- conducting clandestine diving operations;
- conducting hostage rescue operations in maritime environment;
- combating terrorism in a maritime environment.



Intext Questions

5.1

1. Explain the meaning of Special Forces.

2. Describe the different capabilities of Special Forces.

3. Name the first PARA (SF) special operations unit. When was it raised?

4. Who are the Black Cats? Why are they called so?

5. Describe the different responsibilities of Garuds.

- 6 Explain the roles of MARCOS.
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What You Have Learnt

- Besides the existence of regular armed forces divisions, a separate set of personnel trained for specific purposes are employed to conduct covert operations behind enemy lines. These are known as Special Forces.
- After the Second World War many countries raised and employed special forces. India has raised special forces battalions and a Parachute Regiment, an Air Force Special Forces unit known as GARUD as well as a marine operations unit called MARCOS.
- Each of these forces undergo rigorous and specialized training and are capable of performing a wide range of tasks designed to reduce enemy capabilities while also preventing them from launching attacks.



Terminal Exercises

1. Describe the history of Indian Special Forces.
2. Explain the structure of PARA (SF).

Answers to Intext Questions

5.1

1. Special Forces are military units trained to conduct special operations. These include military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces, manned with selected personnel, using unconventional tactics, techniques, and modes of employment.
2. Capabilities of Special Forces are :
 - a. Reconnaissance and surveillance in hostile environments
 - b. Offensive action
 - c. Support to counter-insurgency through population engagement and support
 - d. Counter-terrorism operations
 - e. Sabotage and demolition
 - f. Hostage rescue
3. The 9th Battalion, Parachute Regiment (Commando) was the first special operations unit. It was raised in July 1966.



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4. The National Security Guard (NSG) personnel are often referred to as Black Cats. This is because of the black dress and black cat insignia worn on their uniform.
5. GARUD primarily protects Indian Air Force installations from terrorist attacks including airfields and key assets in hostile environments by commando raids. They are also tasked to seal off weapons systems, fighter hangars and other major systems during intrusions and conflicts.
6. Conduct clandestine attack against enemy ships, offshore installations and other vital assets behind enemy lines.
 - To support amphibious operations including pre-assault ops.
 - To conduct unconventional warfare.
 - Conduct of surveillance and recce missions in support of military operations.
 - Conduct of clandestine diving operations.
 - To conduct hostage rescue operations in maritime environment.
 - Combating terrorism in a maritime environment.