

FEATURE

SL MARINES CAPABLE OF THWARTING ANY THREAT FROM THE SEAS



By
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The newly-formed Sri Lanka Navy Marine Battalion, which has mastered amphibious operations, is fully capable to counter any form of threat to Sri Lanka from the sea using the beach areas to their advantage.

The Sri Lanka Navy formed its first marine battalion comprising six officers and 158 sailors from the Naval Patrolmen Branch having specialised in amphibious warfare. The unit started training under the assistance of the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit of the United States Marine Corps in November last year. The passing out ceremony was held at the Naval Base SLNS Barana in Mullakulam on February 27 after successfully completing their training.

The tense situation, which prevailed in the early 1980s called for a group of Naval personnel who were capable of Land Operations. To accomplish this requirement a platoon of naval personnel chosen from the Seaman and Volunteer branches was formed. They were initially deployed for security duties in coastal and land areas. In a significant feat in SLN history, the first three Naval battalions namely - Vijayaba, Valagaraba and Gajaba were established in 1997. These battalions consisted of 49 officers

and 3,000 sailors. After an Army Battalion Training Course, the new combatants were dispatched to engage the enemy in Operation Jayasikura.

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Soon after the cessation of hostilities in 2009, a certain level of reorganization took place in the NPM Branch made up of more than 5,000 naval personnel, was called for in complying with the core functions and duties of the Sri Lanka Navy. As part of this initiative, the first amphibious Unit comprising 300 naval personnel were initiated into operations after giving them specialized training of 45 days, in the early part of 2016. Subsequently, it was decided to set up a Marine Battalion absorbing officers and sailors from the NPM Branch. The Marine battalion was established following a visionary concept of navy Commander Vice Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne adopting the United States Marine Corps as the model.



Marine corps trained to combat sea piracy : -COMMANDER INDIKA WIJAYARATNE

Commander Indika Wijayaratne, the first Commanding Officer of the newly formed Sri Lanka Navy Marine Battalion was educated at the Horana Vidyalayana University College.

Speaking about the launching of the programme, he said initially volunteers were recruited to the unit. “We received about 578 applications from which 177 were selected. The main thing we looked at was physical fitness of the applicants. However, only 164 of those chosen passed out,” he said. The applicants then underwent a training programme for four months on urban warfare, jungle warfare and later advanced training for three months. Amphibious training was an integral part of the training process.

The marine training includes endurance and water survival, urban warfare, jungle warfare, amphibious warfare, naval and land indirect fire support and marine tactical operation planning. The battalion has individuals who are trained in different fields, including doctors and engineers. “We are able to deploy the battalion in any emergency situation in Sri

Lanka or abroad,” Commander Wijayaratne said. “This Marine Corps possesses many distinct combatant capabilities and skills and they are perfectly trained to face any enemy attack from the sea and to attack any enemy targets by travelling through sea to land areas. They are highly skilled Marine Corps in urban, forest and river-related operations.”

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In addition to being trained to combat sea piracy, the battalion can also function as a peace-keeping team deployed on special missions. “There was a need for such a battalion during the war. However, it was the new commander who got us the necessary training to form the battalion. The US marines trained us a lot and were very supportive,” Commander Wijayaratne said.

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