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# JSOM

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Indomitable Spirit  
and Sacrifices of  
the SOF Medic*

A Peer-Reviewed Journal that Brings Together the Global Interests of Special Operations' First Responders



# THE WORLD OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS MEDICINE

## *An Ongoing Series*

### **Fuzileiros Portugueses (Portuguese Marines)**

Bryan Ferreira, DDS, EMT-P



*Portuguese Fuzileiro shouts to a wounded teammate to take cover. Communication can save lives.*

#### **Corpo de Fuzileiros**

In the world of Special Operations medicine, the *Corpo de Fuzileiros* plays a unique role as Marines of the Portuguese Navy: they are its amphibious special forces.

The *Fuzileiros* are likely the oldest Special Operations unit in Portugal. They trace their history back to 1585, when specialized troops existed to provide riflemen in the Portuguese warships. At that time, they were already considered an elite unit, being responsible for protecting the king of Portugal. They also saw extensive service in the Colonial Wars in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, when they used their amphibious capabilities to execute very lethal operations against insurgents in the Portuguese colonies (Angola,

Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau) and against Portuguese enemies on the African continent. One of the most famous operations was the covert operation called *Mar Verde*, in which the *Fuzileiros* executed covert amphibious landings on the shores of Guinea-Bissau's neighbor, Guinea, to rescue 26 Portuguese (among them, some fighter pilots) who had been taken prisoner by the insurgents and moved to the capital city, Conakry, with the support of the local government.

Today, the *Fuzileiros* are located at the Portuguese base of Alfeite, near the capital, Lisbon. The unit is composed of two amphibious landing battalions (each formed by three companies) and two extra support companies. They are a





*While teammates move a casualty to a safer location, a Marine gives some cover fire.*

power projection unit that comes ashore as a part of the operational component of the Navy. The Marines can be used as regular Infantry, but as an elite special unit, they are responsible for specific missions. This requires permanent operational readiness, which is why the *Fuzileiros* have some of the most specialized and demanding missions in the Portuguese Armed Forces. In this century, the *Fuzileiros* participated in several international missions, including missions in Afghanistan.

### **Tactical Combat Casualty Care in the *Fuzileiros***

The Portuguese Marines take casualty care very seriously and train for the worst. In every combat training exercise, the Marines try to rehearse life-saving techniques. They receive the principles of Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) in training within a modern Navy facility. With the aid of dummy simulators and medical personnel from the Navy hospital, the level of knowledge is very current.

On the firing ranges, TCCC knowledge is put to the test. The Marines execute complex firing drills in which casualties must be taken care of effectively. A big emphasis is on fire superiority. No one focuses on the casualty until fire superiority is achieved. Soldiers have their own first aid kits, so teammates will direct the wounded Soldier to try to take cover and start his self-aid. The philosophy is that the enemy needs to be put on the defensive first; otherwise, the Marines will suffer more casualties.

With 60% of deaths caused by extremity hemorrhages, the Unit considers this subject one of its biggest concerns.

Improved explosive devices, mines, and gunshot wounds can take a life in just a few minutes; but with the advancements in body armor, such trauma typically affects the casualty's extremities. Therefore, these Marines always carry tourniquets; some of them carry more than one, and some carry tourniquets even in their rifle buttstock or sling, where they are very accessible. It is very common to see exercises where the instructors will drop some tomato ketchup on a soldier's leg as an arterial wound simulation starts. Soldiers are used to using the tourniquets by themselves, even one handed, if necessary. They know that the faster they apply the tourniquet to control arterial bleeding, the better chance they have of survival.

Of special relevance to the *Fuzileiros* are methods of extracting wounded soldiers. Portugal is a small nation



*Improvised explosive device and countermine training.*





*Using a combat rubber raiding craft to evacuate a casualty can be challenging, so this kind of training is constant in the Portuguese Marines.*



*While teammates provide cover fire, a wounded Marine self-applies a tourniquet to control arterial bleeding.*

without many of the luxuries of some other countries, so the Armed Services have to adapt to what is available. There are helicopters on the Portuguese frigates, but the *Fuzileiros* like stealth, so most insertions are made by combat rubber raiding craft. The *Fuzileiros* like to leave

as stealthily as they arrive, so much evacuation training is made in these small boats, unless there are critical wounds that need immediate evacuation by helicopter.

## Conclusion

Portuguese Marines give special relevance to casualty care, as do other Special Operation Forces worldwide. Saving lives is a priority, not only in war but also in peacetime. Tactical Combat Casualty Care is one more important skill in the demanding life of a *Fuzileiro*.

**KEYWORDS:** *Fuzileiros Portugueses; Portuguese Marines*

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