

Navy Beach Jumpers, remembering the 1950's

by CWO4 Curtis Clark, BJU1, 1955-59



Reconstructed History of Beach Jumper Unit One 1952-1959

1952-1954:

Initial organization and development was based on the WW II BJU Operations. WW II techniques dictated the "operating mode" utilizing UDT training and high speed boat operations, using converted AVR's in lieu of PT's.

Initial outfitting allowances of electronic equipment were established in Radar, Communications and Electronic Countermeasure equipment's from "available" equipment inventories, which in most cases proved to be obsolete, too large for rapid mobile operations, or for adequate boat (AVR) installations.

Operations were conducted with/against both afloat operating forces and on amphibious landing exercises with the Marine Aggressor forces.

TD was practiced afloat utilizing RR type reflectors, large J4 type balloons and RCM/CCM. CCM was used ashore during all amphibious landing exercises with BJU teams working in conjunction with the BJB's afloat. [6- 63" AVRs and 1-104" AVR]

During this period BJU-1 was under the ADMIN of COMPHIBTRAPAC, with a limited budget for BJU, BJU-1 was considered a "holding" area for PHIBTRAPAC football team and the AVRs a good source for weekend fishing trips.

OPCON was delegated to various "FLEET COMMANDERS" as necessary for the "current operation". An unsuccessful attempt was made in 1953 to place BJU-1 directly under COMPHIBPAC for both ADMIN and OPCON.

1954-1956:

However with BJU-1 becoming more active, in fleet exercises, efforts were renewed to change ADMIN control of BJU-1 and in 1954, with CINCPAC approval based on recommendations by COMPHIBPAC and COMFIRSTFLT, BJU-1 was placed directly under the ADMIN of COMPHIBPAC with a more substantial budget.. Later in 1954 OPCON was passed to COMFIRSTFLT.

Under this new leadership the unit began to develop improved amphibious and fleet warfare methods.

In January 1955 the first of a series of Joint CNO, BUSHIPS, PHIBPAC, PHIBLANT and BJU conferences were set up and attended by the C.O. BJU-1 (LCDR Sears) and COMPHIBPAC Staff (CWO Clark). Allowance problems were discussed, requirements made known and CNO established a revised policy concerning the function of the BJU's.

In September 1955 BJU-1 made an evaluation of airborne ECM equipment and began replacing ECM equipment on the BJB's with airborne types.

Later in 1955 BJU-1 was authorized direct liaison with COMFIRSTFLT for the purpose of developing Fleet ECM exercises concurrent with STRIKEX operations.

In 1956 BJU-1 began providing technical assistance to the Fleet Staffs in the development of OpOrders for these exercises and in June 1956 BJU-1 placed a team aboard USS Bremerton (CL-130) for the first operation from a non-amphibious type ship.

[Note: LCDR Hazelwood was the communications officer on Bremerton at this time and subsequently requested duty as CO BJU-1)

1956 with the “upswing” of BJU operations disaster almost struck BJU-1 when the CO of BJU-2, because of a shortage of personnel, recommended that BJU-1 be disestablished and combined with BJU-2. This recommendation was forwarded “approved” by COMPHIBLANT via COMPHIBPAC, COM1stFLT, and CINCPACFLT. However through some “infighting” and a series of presentations to various staff groups by CWO Clark and LCDR Sears, PHIBPAC, 1stFLT and CINCPAC said NO and this fortunately did not come about.

In September 1956 the first break through in establishing “up-to-date” allowances for the BJU’s came in a Joint BJU/OPNAV/BUSHIPS conference, (attended by LCDR Sears and CWO Clark), when CAPT Nixdorff [OPNAV desk for BJU’s] directed BUSHIPS to provide the BJU’s with the allowances they requested and he would approve of them. He pointed out that although the basic allowances were similar, that “BUSHIPS should not hold up allowance approval and fulfillment of either BJU because of an agreement to quantity and type could not be reached by either unit. It was pointed out that there was a PACFLT and LANTFLT and that the operational requirements of each BJU differed because of geographical location and many other factors. Each BJU had their own unique requirements.

It was the result of this conference that the concept of the “mobile package” was conceived and developed and BUSHIPS provided BJU-1 with the first three basic units (3 Army shop van hulls) to be outfitted with “modern” electronic equipment provided by BUSHIPS.

The design and installation in these vans was entirely by BJU-1 personnel. The design was such that a quick ECM change over from amphibious to fleet operations could be accomplished in a few hours.

These vans were initially employed as “amphibious type” ECM vehicles during October-December 1956 and proved to be highly successful.

1957-1959:

In 1957 with OPCON under COMFIRSTFLT for all operations in EASTPAC and COM7thFLT for all BJU-1 Teams operating in WESTPAC BJU-1 participation in FLTEX’s increased.

In June 1957 the first Fleet exercise employment of the “Mobile Package” was successfully carried out with two vans being deployed aboard USS Curtiss AV4 in a FIRSTFLT STRIKEX. Subsequent FLTEX’s were engaged in with VAN teams deployed in USS Uhlmann DD627 (Dec 1957), USS Stoddard DD-566 (Jan 1958), USS Ingersol DD652 (May 1958) and USS Pledge MSO-492 (July 1958). All operations were conducted with excellent results and steady employment of the “Mobile Package” was assured by COMFIRSTFLT.

In July 1957 the CNO called the BJU’s and Surface and Airborne commands engaged in TD training to a conference in WASHDC. [Attended by LCDR Hazelwood and CWO Clark]. At this conference the CNO expressed his desire that every effort be made to increase the operational capability of the BJU’s.

Subsequent to this conference the roll of the BJU teams in WESTPAC 7th FLT exercises (Other than amphibious) began to increase and at the request of COMSEVENTHFLT BJU-1 detachments were rotated to WESTPAC for each major operation.