

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

As I attended a Noncommissioned Officer Education System course at a different installation last month, I could hear tanks firing in the distance. So I did what any master gunner would do – I figured out who was running the range and stopped by to enjoy the sights and sounds of a tank battalion firing gunnery.

As I watched from the tower, the crews fired a pair of engagements from the first defensive positions. I could tell the commander in the left lane was experienced; he and his gunner quickly identified their targets and pulled up to engage near troops and a far mover in rapid succession. The platoon leader in the right lane took longer to acquire his target but likewise pulled up and had a solid first engagement.

Both tanks exited their battle positions and prepared to move down the lanes for the next engagement. “Two frontal tanks in the offense,” I was told.

I watched the first tank begin its movement, accelerating to 3 to 4 mph. As the targets locked downrange, the tank slowed to a halt and fired. The tank began to accelerate, pulling into the cloud of obscurity it had just created, finally identifying the second target and stopping again to engage it as the initial obscurity cleared several seconds later.

I turn to the right lane. The platoon leader and his crew take off, perhaps hitting 5 mph before stopping to engage both targets from a single halt.

“Is this their degraded engagement? A stabilization failure?” I asked.

“No, it’s full-up. These crews just aren’t confident firing on the move,” I was told.

At this point I was dumbfounded. I was on a premier Digital Multipurpose Range Complex, watching the latest

and most capable tanks in the Western world, M1A2SEPV3s, stop and shoot like they were the same tanks that patrolled the plains of Western Europe in the 1960s.

Tank development has been driven for more than 100 years by three critical design requirements: mobility, protection and firepower. The Armor Branch provides a unique combination of capabilities found nowhere else in the armed forces, and we are expected to provide those capabilities anywhere, anytime, bar none. Untold millions of dollars and years of research and development have been invested to ensure the tanks the United States puts on the battlefield will not have to stop to fire, making them easy targets for enemy tanks and anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) teams. The combination of speed and armor that the Abrams tank provides our crews creates a unique level of survivability on the battlefield.

Ranges have been built and modernized, and backstops and firing boxes designed, for crews to operate their vehicles at combat speed and still fire accurately on the move and hit their targets.

Firing on the move at realistic speeds provides several advantages. Driving with increased speed makes it more difficult for enemy gunners to track and engage your vehicle. Increasing your speed and staying in second or third gear begins to close the distance between your vehicle and the enemy, giving your gunner a larger target and a higher hit probability.

During gunnery, your distance-to-target is graded at the midpoint of the maneuver box, which some crews never reach. This means you are forcing yourself to fire a more difficult engagement and be graded more harshly by simply moving slow or stopping.

Driving at a faster speed helps your vehicle pass through obscurity quickly, allowing quicker identification and engagement of subsequent targets.

Chapter 4 of Training Circular 3-20.31, *Training and Qualification Crew*, states that crews are expected to travel at between 20-30 kph (12-20 mph) to provide a stable firing platform. Stopping your vehicle keeps you farther from your targets, and the time it takes to decelerate to a stop and fire takes longer than simply maintaining a stable speed and firing on the move.

It is no secret how vulnerable a tank can be on the modern battlefield. Unskilled forces sticking to simple movement techniques and lacking confidence and training on their platforms are easy targets for enemy ATGM teams, dug-in armor and precise indirect fires. Gunnery simulators are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at home station. If your unit is in the field, there should be no such thing as an administrative move. Every gunner should have their guns depressed and practice their tracking and manipulation of the fire-control system while on the move.

Tank crews that are trained, confident in the capabilities provided by their platforms and audacious enough to maintain their tempo and maneuver against their opponent can overcome these modern threats and destroy enemy forces, winning the day.

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ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

ATGM – anti-tank guided missile