
Two Acronyms:

Tools to Apply to Home-Station Training

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When I was a rifle company commander, I focused a lot of attention on my Marines' next live-fire event and all of the preparations for it. In the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), we believe that live fire is the final confirmation of a unit's proficiency in a specific skill. When opening a new chapter in the training continuum, I like to begin with a reading assignment that introduces and details the theme we are training for. While searching for reference material on the topic of suppression, I came across the excellent article, "The Art of Support by Fire," by SFCs Carter Conrad and Johnny Tinsley in the April-June 2014 issue of this fine periodical.¹ I was so impressed with this article that rather than assigning it to just my medium machine-gun section, I disseminated it to the whole company. My Marines agreed that it was an outstanding collection of observed tactics, techniques, and procedures; and more importantly, they took much away from it for their own purposes.

This piece resonated with me because much of what I read in it reflected many of my own observations as an Infantry Instructor, or "Coyote," with the Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group (TTECG) at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) in Twentynine Palms,

CA. TTECG is the Marine Corps' equivalent to the Army's 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA. TTECG facilitates the Corps' premier service-level training exercise, the Integrated Training Exercise (ITX), where multiple times a year Marines from all over the USMC test their skills in a highly dynamic live-fire training venue. The training and setting are quite similar to that of NTC. In fact, Twentynine Palms and Barstow are less than two hours apart.

"The Art of Support by Fire" was not the first article from *Infantry* that I shared with my Marines, nor will it be the last. Just as my company has benefited from institutional knowledge and experience from the Army, I realized that there may be Soldiers that would be interested in institutional knowledge and experience gained by Marines in similar circumstances. As such, I decided I would share some of my own observations on the performance of Infantry Marines during my time at TTECG from 2017 to 2020.

U.S. Marine Corps machine gunners assigned to Charlie Company, Battalion Landing Team 1/5, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, fire an M240B machine gun during training at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, CA, on 12 September 2023. (Photo by Cpl Aidan Hekker, USMC)



The Coyotes at TTECG are in a unique position to observe countless units train on some of the premier ranges in the Marine Corps. In a single year, they see Marines from every division; units from California, North Carolina, Hawaii, and the Reserves all come to train on the same ranges and events. This allows Coyotes to develop not only a personal mental database but an organizational collection of best practices that they use to teach, coach, and mentor Marines that come to ITX.

The Coyotes use debriefs to highlight both good and bad practices they observed in the conduct of a recently completed event to the exercise force, as well as provide recommendations on how to improve proficiency for future actions. To frame their debrief points, Coyotes often use easily memorable acronyms that highlight specific points, significant actions, or steps in a process. Viewing actions or processes through these acronyms can help Marines build on what they learned and perhaps improve their execution in an upcoming event. In the course of these debriefs, many Marines eagerly take notes and write down these acronyms and learning points so they can rehearse them on their own time. This has caused me to wonder if a unit preparing to go to ITX would want to know some of these acronyms beforehand? The purpose of this article is to offer a few of these acronyms to service members across the operating forces to give unit leaders tools to apply to their own home-station training. None of these acronyms are new or groundbreaking; in fact, they are already commonly known across the Marine Corps.

The first concept that Marines should understand is units of fire. Coyotes regard a unit of fire as a fire team or a medium machine gun. By quantifying units of fire as such, Marines can assess the relative combat power between them and the templated enemy force and focus their units of fire to overmatch the enemy with suppression. Effective suppression enables movement to close with an objective, so establishing

effective suppression is the foundation to almost everything Coyotes will discuss in their debrief.

When assessing suppression, the Coyotes use the acronym **DRAW** to concentrate the efforts of Marine units of fire to maximize their potential. This is the number one acronym we preach from the beginning to the end of ITX. It stands for:

Distribution of fires

Rates of fire

Accuracy

Weaponneering (appropriate weapon to target match)

In combination with clear, timely, and accurate ADDRACs (alert, direction, description, range, assignment, and control), DRAW gives individual Marines, team leaders, squad leaders, platoon commanders, or company commanders a lot of direction as well as workspace for subordinate leaders to operate within. Because so much of the training at ITX is live fire, Marines can actually see the effects of their fires. This is what makes DRAW a tangible tool.

When shooting live rounds, it's very easy to see the distribution of fires. Oftentimes, exercise force Marines play "whack-a-mole" with the targets. All of their impacts are on one bunker with nothing hitting the other. For example, when told they don't have effective suppression on the left bunker, they put all their fires on that one and neglect the right bunker. Then, when they are told they have nothing on the right bunker, they put everything on that one and so on, back and forth. This is easily correctable and can be fixed by team leaders and squad leaders who understand that acronym and know what effects they need to achieve.

Properly controlling rates of fire is often essential to the success of the unit. Increasing rates of fire to suppress an enemy to enable a unit to move is just as important as using fire discipline to conserve ammunition when a high expenditure is not necessary. In many cases, a unit will have a hard time seizing a final objective because its Marines burned

through too much ammunition earlier in the range. A unit acting as a support by fire is useless if it cannot support a maneuver unit with fires to achieve suppression. This happens quite often, and the maneuver element will be forced to seize its objective with its own combat power. Sometimes elements also run out of ammunition prematurely because they fired too much earlier in the attack. When this happens, units fail to secure their



Marines with the 2nd Marine Division provide suppressive fires while conducting platoon attacks during an integrated training exercise at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center on 19 July 2024. (Photo by Lance Cpl Enge You, USMC)

final objective. Thus, controlling rates of fire is very important to the execution of an attack.

What this actually looks like on the ground is very simple; Marines just need to make the targets continuously bob. Units establish fire superiority by immediately knocking down the targets. They maintain fire superiority by keeping the targets bobbing. The Ivan targets should not stand freely for any more than about five seconds — about the time it would take an enemy shooter to pop up, acquire a target, and fire. Really, a unit doesn't even need a high rate of fire to achieve this. Accurate shots from a squad firing at a low rate of fire work better than large volumes of fire that don't hit anything. A slow rate of fire just ensures there will still be ammunition for a later objective.

Accuracy is self-explanatory. As USMC LtGen Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller famously said, "You don't hurt 'em if you don't hit 'em." Still, it is amazing how often Marines fail to hit their targets. Unsurprisingly, this boils down to them ignoring the fundamentals of marksmanship and using bad practices with their weapons. These include not extending their buttstocks all the way, not using their bipods, or not using a stable firing position (like the prone); but perhaps the worst of them all is firing on fully automatic while committing the aforementioned bad practices. Marines with Infantry Automatic Rifles (IARs) are often tempted to fire on full auto, but if they don't use their bipods or a stable firing position, it's almost worthless. Firing using this setting can also become a serious safety issue as Marines may shoot the ground right in front of them and cause ricochets. This is especially troublesome when other Marines are maneuvering in the ricochet fan.

Weaponneering, or appropriate weapon-to-target match, can be best described by the desired effect on a target. Most weapon systems organic to the infantry battalion will only provide suppression, while only a few can achieve destruction. Hitting an enemy machine-gun bunker with a Shoulder-launched Multipurpose Assault Weapon (SMAW) will destroy it, while direct hits with a 40mm grenade can only suppress it. Likewise, a Javelin or Saber missile will destroy a tank, while heavy machine guns and mortars will not. Marines must know their best options for employing scarce resources in limited windows of time, so as not to waste them for no effect and lose opportunities.

Units of fire are a handy way of quantifying and stratifying relative combat power. The unit's leader should achieve overmatch on the enemy with units of fire. Marines usually use three to every one of the enemy's (if able), but this means nothing if it's not controlled (i.e., if it's not effectively distributed, if the rates of fire are insufficient, if it's not accurate, or if the wrong weapon is being used for the target). This is the whole point of DRAW — to focus the unit's effects. Though Marines always want to achieve fire superiority during initial contact (whether initiating or returning fire), it doesn't matter how much fire a unit opens up with if it's ineffective. Let DRAW be the guideline.

Another acronym that Coyotes refer to in almost every

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event where Marines maneuver down range is the "Cycle of the Infantryman," also known by the acronym **SAMK**:

Suppress
Assess
Move
Kill

Suppression has been sufficiently addressed thus far; however, covering a sector can be just as important as suppression. The only difference between these acts is that during suppression Marines are actively firing their weapons, but when covering an area of potential contact, they only have their weapons oriented to a threat and are not firing. They are, however, ready to fire if the situation presents itself. Coyotes will often lower targets for a while and suddenly raise them again to see whether stationary Marines are alert or complacent while another element is moving. If those stationary Marines are paying attention, they will notice when the targets pop up and immediately suppress them without the movement of the other unit being disrupted. It's amazing how often these targets stand upright without being shot because nobody notices them until the maneuver element gets pinned down. There are times when the Cycle of the Infantryman is better abbreviated as CAMK — cover, assess, move, kill.

Assess refers to recognizing when conditions are set and exploiting them. Sometimes, exercise force Marines will apply DRAW correctly to achieve effective suppression and then just sit there and do nothing to exploit it. They need to know when conditions are set and rapidly exploit them. However, sometimes they don't take a few seconds to actually assess conditions before committing to the next action. For example, Marines move across a danger area as soon as the first mortars impact but then immediately get pinned down because they just assumed the mortars would be on target. Now they have to adjust them while being pinned down and taking cherry pickers (simulated casualties) when they should have observed effects before moving to begin with.

Another part of assessing involves choosing a route before moving. Marines leading a movement must assess where to move to, what the enemy can and cannot affect between the current and intended locations, and what route gives them the best chance of getting there unmolested. There is rarely a straight line between points A and B, but Marines often do not use the micro-terrain to their advantage and indeed move in a straight line. This can be deadly. A point man holds the lives of those following in his hands. Too often, a point man



A Marine in the Infantry Officer Course fires an M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle during a live-fire training exercise on Range 410A at the Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center on 9 June 2018. (Photo by Lance Cpl William Chockey, USMC)

charges out into the open, completely exposed, without any regard to using the micro terrain to find a covered approach, and his fellow Marines follow behind like a string of ducklings only to be made cherry pickers. Point men need to assess not only the effects of friendly fires but also the route to their objective. If need be, fire team leaders can make the assessment, pass instructions, and send their team when the time is right. This is something that Marines routinely fumble. If they have performed the first two parts correctly, they've observed effective suppression and have identified their route — then conditions are set for them to move. That maneuver element must now exploit the conditions to their fullest and move before suppression is lost lest the support-by-fire element runs out of ammo.

This brings the Marines to the final step, which is kill. The previous three steps are a team effort that enable Marines to close with and get into a position to eliminate the enemy. The final step may be an individual or buddy-team affair, which will probably be the most unnerving and personal action of all. Marines may have to use their rifle, grenades, bayonet, or their hands to eliminate that enemy. Since hand-to-hand combat is out of the purview of Coyotes, who focus mostly on combined arms, preparing Marines for the final 5 yards of combat is something that is best done at home station.

DRAW and SAMK are two simple acronyms that Coyotes use to analyze performance and unpack debrief points to share after an event. These are by no means the only two lenses we view exercise force actions through and speak to afterwards, but they are the most elementary and most

commonly referred to. One thing I've learned in countless discussions with Marines is that they do not often write down or retain everything said in a 20- or 30-minute debrief, but the things they do take with them are simple acronyms like DRAW and SAMK.

I do not know if these acronyms are common to the Army. If so, then hopefully this article will find use as a succinct statement on best practices that are already known. If not, then I offer them in the hope that they aid Army leaders to train their Soldiers to be more efficient, proficient, and ultimately more lethal in their next engagement. When that day comes, I hope we fight together. *Semper Fidelis!*

Notes

¹ SFC Carter Conrad and SFC Johnny Tinsley, "The Art of Support by Fire," *Infantry* (April-June 2014): 28-33, <https://www.moore.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2014/Apr-Jun/pdfs/ConradTinsley.pdf>.

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