

# To Rush or Not to Rush: *Are We Teaching IMT Incorrectly?*

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The 3-5 second rush has been one of the three individual movement techniques (IMTs) taught to initial entry Soldiers since World War II. However, is this method still the most viable, survivable, relevant, and efficient method of IMT in the contemporary operating environment, especially in urban terrain?

While assigned as the operations officer for the Live-Fire Division at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), I observed 10 rotational units executing collective live-fire exercises (LFXs) at the company, battalion, and brigade level. Live-fire training is the culminating event of training for a unit at each echelon up to brigade level. During LFXs, units fire live ammunition at targets to simulate real combat. Anyone who has conducted a live fire at JRTC is familiar with Peason Ridge and Objective Grizzly, where LFXs are conducted. Objective Grizzly consists of three sub-objectives — Objectives Cougar, Bengals, and Bobcat. Objective Cougar is a battalion-sized objective with 26 buildings, Objective Bengals is designed for a platoon attack, and Objective Bobcat is designed for a company minus. On all three objectives, units must conduct combined arms breaches of mined and wired obstacles to access the village and destroy the enemy. Depending on how units approach the objective, they may need to negotiate up to 150 meters of terrain between the last covered or concealed position, the obstacle, and the nearest building. Live-fire observer-coach-trainers (OCTs) and I observed that units do not move through the breach onto the objective using the same IMT. Some units strictly adhered to the 3-5 second rush rule while others appeared to be less stringent, rushing up to eight seconds before getting back down into the prone, while other units just sprinted from point A to point B. Across all the units, the speed of Soldiers' movement varied. Why is there so much disparity between units?



A fire team with the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, assaults an objective at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, LA, on 27 October 2020. (Photo by SGT Thomas Calvert)

If you ask Soldiers which is the fastest of the three IMTs, they will respond with the 3-5 second rush. Ask them why we rush for 3-5 seconds, and the answers will vary. Historical references, such as Field Manual (FM) 7-5, *Organization and Tactics of Infantry: The Rifle Battalion*, mention the rush or squad rush.<sup>1</sup> Written during World War II, this publication represented the emergence of new tactics to counter advances in enemy doctrine and weapon technology. Referring to FM 7-5, Dr. Earl J. Catagnus Jr., an assistant professor of history and security studies at Valley Forge Military College, argued that “this field manual prescribed tactics, techniques, and procedures similar to those of the vaunted German army.”<sup>2</sup> Regardless of when the rush tactic or the 3-5 second time frame became the prevailing paradigm, there is little scientific evidence showing this method as being the most effective means of movement when the tactical situation requires it.

## Discussion

This article questions the validity of the 3-5 second rush and recommends solutions to determine the optimal method for crossing open areas under fire or when time is critical, asking:

1. Is the 3-5 second rush the most effective method of quickly covering large distances under fire?
2. Is there research, experience, or historical evidence that supports the affirmative?
3. How can the U.S. Army determine the most effective IMT method?

I could not find any documentation of any research or experiments that corroborated why the Army teaches 3-5 second rushes. I contacted the chief of the Infantry Brigade Combat Team Doctrine Branch, Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCOE); the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training, the U.S. Army Infantry branch historian; Dr. Catagnus; the U.S. Marine Corps Historical Reference Branch’s History Division; and conducted research with support from research librarians at the Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth, KS. The closest reference for why 3-5 seconds is preferred can be found in Training Circular (TC) 3-21.75, *The Warrior Ethos and Soldier Combat Skills*:

“The rush is the fastest way to move from one position to another... Each rush should last from 3 to 5 seconds. Rushes are kept short to prevent enemy machine gunners or riflemen from tracking you. However, do not stop and hit the ground in the open just because 5 seconds have passed. Always try to hit the ground behind some cover. Before moving, pick out your next covered and concealed position and the best route to it.”<sup>3</sup>

What should a Soldier do if there is no cover available between their current position and their intermediate objective, but they recognize that it would take longer than five seconds to traverse the entire distance?

*INFANTRY* Magazine’s April-July 2016 issue featured an article by MAJ Nick Barringer and Martin Rooney that focused specifically on the 3-5 second rush. While the article — titled “The Rush: How Speed Can Save Lives” — focused on the 3-5 second rush, it also advocated for lower body strength training to increase Soldier speed while conducting 3-5 second rushes. MAJ Barringer and Rooney assert loose connections between the 3-5 second time frame to historical doctrinal references for past physical fitness requirements but do not clearly define the reasoning behind the significance of the 3-5 seconds. The article highlights the historical significance of the rush dating back to 1940 and attributed the origin of the rush to German storm trooper tactics from World War I. They referenced that the mean engagement time is actually three seconds or less while focusing on the optimal distance covered.<sup>4</sup> A criticism of the article is the explanation of how the authors determined the optimal speed during a sprint. They briefly mentioned consulting marksmanship experts to determine the speed. They based their scoring system on the “assumption that a target moving at 15 miles per hour or 6.7 meters per second would be extremely difficult to accurately engage,” but they failed to address the variables of shooter skill, angle, distance from shooter to target, or a tangible definition of extremely difficult.<sup>5</sup> This is a serious oversight because the basis of the authors’ scoring system is subjective.

## Recommendation

Because of the lack of tangible evidence and the importance of the IMT subject, the Army must consider the following courses of action to address the issue.

Course of Action (COA) 1 (Experiment): The Army can conduct a study, research, and experimentation to test and rate IMTs using Soldiers of varying fitness levels carrying various combat loads. Subjects must traverse varying types of terrain with enemy riflemen and machine gunners of varying skill level firing from different angles, elevations, and fighting positions. Researchers could use non-lethal training ammunition or laser and sensor systems (such as

the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System [MILES]) to conduct this experiment.

COA 2 (Simulation): The Army can conduct computer simulations to test and rate IMTs using Soldiers of varying fitness levels carrying different combat loads. Subjects traverse several types of terrain with enemy riflemen and machine gunners of varying skill level firing from different angles, elevations, and fighting positions.

I propose comparing the COAs against the below criteria:

Suitable: The solution directly addresses survivability in various tactical situations using a 3-5 second rush compared to other IMT options such as longer rushes or indefinite sprints until arriving at the intended cover, concealment, or intermediate objective.

Feasible: The solution can be conducted with Army funds, assets, or minimal additional funding if outside entities are required.

Acceptable: The solution can define the parameters of the study as well as address basic tactical variables such as distance covered, slope, covering fire, enemy location, skill, weapon system, speed of individual mover, load carried by an individual, and concealment available such as smoke or darkness.

Distinguishable: The solution is a deliberate effort to answer the research question regarding the 3-5 second rush.

Complete: The solution can confirm or deny the 3-5 second rush as the best method of IMT for covering larger distances with little to no cover or concealment. If the solution determines a more effective method of timing for the rush, then it also reveals the optimal method or the conditions which support optimal or different speeds/timings of rushes or sprints.

After screening against the criteria, the advantages of COA 1 are that it traditionally addresses the issue and will find alternate solutions or affirmations regarding the IMT. It can be conducted by any unit, organization, or outside agency. The disadvantages of COA 1 are that it is the most time and resource-intensive and it may require doctrine updates depending on the results. The advantages of COA 2 are that it does not require Soldiers, facilities, research area or space, and coordination to conduct. The disadvantages are that it may not be able to replicate conditions and other variables such as Soldier skill, speed, and physical fitness.

## **Conclusion**

The Army currently teaches the 3-5 second rush as the fastest of the three IMTs. TC 3-21.75 clearly states that 3-5 seconds is a guide to help Soldiers minimize their exposure to enemy combatants.<sup>6</sup> This method has been in Army publications since 1940. No one has researched or experimented to confirm that the 3-5 second rush is the most effective way for Soldiers to move across large open areas. Therefore to remain relevant in contemporary operating environments, Soldiers and leaders must know why they teach and direct their Soldiers to conduct certain IMTs. Research into this subject is low cost, requires minimal resources, and can cover a wide range of scenarios for tactical movement. Could sprinting directly from point A to point B given adequate and sustained supporting fire be a more effective method for Soldiers to move tactically with the added benefit of quicker maneuver time and conserved energy available to conduct the rest of the operation? I submit this argument because Soldiers conducting 3-5 second rushes take more time to get down in the prone, rise to continue their next rush, and ultimately expend more energy stopping and starting their sprint each rush. Experimentation and simulation will provide answers.

Given the relatively small scale of being able to conduct actual research in support of COA 1, COA 2 bears a slight advantage with substantially fewer resources required. While COA 2 does not require units, personnel, research space, or facilities (beyond that of the simulation center and personnel working there), COA 2 is less time-constrained. COA 2 can run more simulations and change parameters with relative ease compared to COA 1. COA 1 and COA 2 can be conducted independently of each other; sequentially or simultaneously. I recommend a hybrid course of action where COA 1 is conducted initially to further develop parameters and scenarios which will guide research in COA 2. Upon completion of the study, if data indicates more effective methods compared to 3-5 second rushes, the Army must adjust doctrine and IET curriculum. If not, current Army doctrine remains unchanged but validated with data to support the training methodology.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Field Manual (FM) 7-5, *Organization and Tactics of Infantry: The Rifle Battalion*, 1940, retrieved from <https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4013coll9/id/741/>.

<sup>2</sup> Earl J. Catagnus Jr., "Infantry Field Manual 7-5 Organization and Tactics of Infantry: The Rifle Battalion," *Journal of Military History* 77(2) (April 2013): 657-666.

<sup>3</sup> Training Circular (TC) 3-21.75, *The Warrior Ethos and Soldier Combat Skills*, 7-2. Accessed from [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/web/tc3\\_21x75.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/tc3_21x75.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> MAJ Nick Barringer and Martin Rooney, "The Rush: How Speed Can Save Lives," *INFANTRY Magazine*, 105(2) (April-July 2016): 9-12. Accessed from [https://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2016/APR-JUL/pdf/4\)%20Barringer\\_Rush.pdf](https://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2016/APR-JUL/pdf/4)%20Barringer_Rush.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> TC 3-21.75.

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