

# Focus on the Fundamentals: *Proficiency Requires Repetition*

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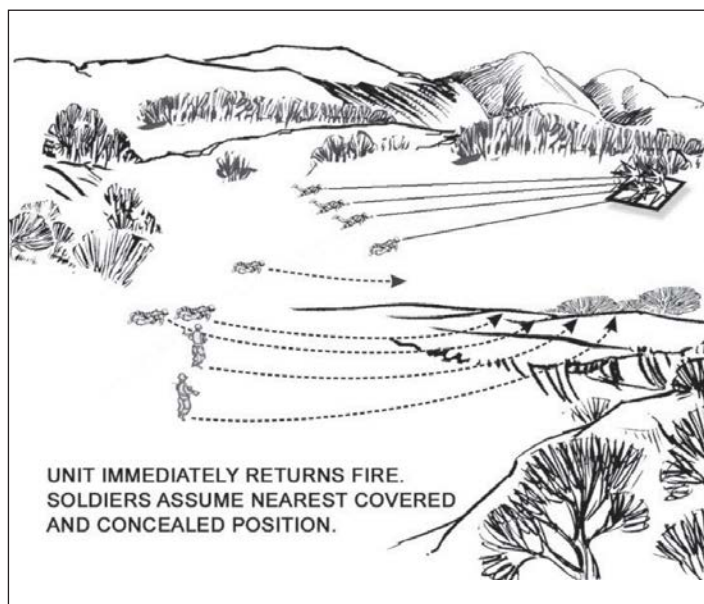
Leaders at all echelons tell us to focus on the fundamentals. Every echelon provides training guidance that focuses training plans on the few things brigades and battalions/squadrons deem absolutely necessary in order to be successful in executing wartime missions. Most units have a “Big 5” that looks something like: Physical Fitness, Shoot, Move, Communicate, and Medicate (combat lifesaver).

Collectively, we’ve been observer-coach-trainers (OCTs) at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA, for 48 months. We’ve observed and coached at both the battalion/squadron and company/troop levels. Most units come to NTC after completing a rigorous training cycle consisting of gunnery, live-fire exercises (LFXs) at echelon, battalion/squadron situational training exercise (STX), and brigade STX. However, units that come to NTC are commonly destroyed by the opposing force (OPFOR) despite the rigor of a seemingly complete training cycle. We’ve observed entire companies/troops decimated by the OPFOR, dismantling battalion/squadron and brigade plans. Units’ inability to conduct battle drills (BDs) leaves them vulnerable to a waiting enemy force.

BDs are listed and described in Appendix J of Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-21.8, *Infantry Platoon and Squad*. Though this particular ATP is focused on infantry tactics, BDs 1-4 and 8-11 should be rehearsed, known, and second nature to every formation in our Army. These BDs apply to armor and combat trains formations as much as infantry formations. BD 1, React to Direct Fire Contact, is the fundamental task formations need to focus on to be successful and survive both at NTC and during their wartime mission.



Army Soldiers assigned to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division provide security during Decisive Action Rotation 20-04 at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, CA, on 14 February 2020. (Photo by SGT Dacotah Lane)



**Assuming Nearest Covered Position (Army Techniques Publication 3-21.8)**

BD 1 builds the foundation upon which the remaining BDs are executed. Formations do not survive and leaders do not make informed decisions without a well-rehearsed and executed BD 1. Units that cannot read a situation and execute BDs instinctively hesitate on enemy contact and await orders from leaders who aren't present. During after action reviews (AARs), most Soldiers can describe the basics of BD 1 (seek cover, return fire, report). Sadly, what is articulated well is often poorly executed. Incompetent execution results in formations remaining in enemy engagement areas (EAs) and becoming decisively engaged at a time and location of the enemy's choosing. Soldiers and leaders know the mechanics of the BD but lack the reflexive proficiency born from a relentless training environment. Soldiers lack the ability to violently execute without orders from leadership. Waiting for direction results in hesitation or freezing while in direct-fire contact, costing lives as platoons, sections, and squads remain in enemy EAs.

Units need to focus on the fundamentals, but we believe the current paradigm of understanding that statement is not focused. BDs must be rehearsed to the point of being second nature for small units.

Basic BDs set the foundation for training the rest of our "Big 5." Our physical fitness will improve and be focused on mission accomplishment if we regularly and violently execute BDs. Our marksmanship will improve as Soldiers become more comfortable with their weapon systems and get more "trigger time." Communications skills will improve through the necessity to direct lower echelons and report to higher. Our skills in performing life-saving medical tasks will improve as we inject casualties in our BD training.

The most important potential gain in focusing our training on BDs, however, is our Soldiers and leaders will be more prepared to execute their wartime mission while in direct-fire contact with a lethal enemy. As BDs become second nature, more of our Soldiers and leaders will be prepared to execute at the next level.

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