

Chapter 2

Combat Mindset

The key to survival in combat is preparation. A Marine's ability to act under fire depends on his level of training and his confidence with his weapon. Any hesitation, doubt, confusion, or uncertainty can be life threatening. Proper mental conditioning is a critical factor in a Marine's ability to engage combat targets effectively.

This manual uses the term combat mindset to refer to a Marine's mental conditioning as it relates to combat engagement. Development of a combat mindset requires a Marine to understand the mission, the environment, and how he must respond in that environment. The mental and physical preparation required to establish combat mindset instills confidence and teaches a Marine to react appropriately under enemy fire.

2001. Stress

Any situation or action that inflicts physical or psychological demands on the human mind or body can cause stress. A Marine that is unprepared or untrained in dealing with a stressful situation may panic, become confused, or make poor decisions when responding to a threat. A Marine's tolerance for stress determines how effectively he responds in a combat environment.

For example, if a Marine is under great stress, his muscles can tense until they freeze or they cannot actively respond to a threat. Specifically, a Marine can lose dexterity in his fingers and knees, which adversely affects his ability to move and to aim and fire a weapon. Stress can increase the pulse rate and directly affect the stability of a Marine's aim.

To reduce the effects of stress, a Marine must be prepared to react confidently in a combat environment. If a Marine is confident in his ability to perform during combat, he can continuously evaluate his surroundings and rapidly de-

termine the appropriate firing techniques required to place hits on target.

2002. Mental and Physical Preparation

A Marine must mentally and physically prepare himself to act effectively if confronted with a target. To prepare for engagement, a Marine must be constantly aware of his surroundings, particularly terrain features that may provide the enemy with cover and concealment. A Marine's mental awareness must increase if he is in a danger area or areas that provide the enemy with cover and concealment. If operating in a combat environment and contact with the enemy is possible, a Marine must be mentally prepared to select a firing position that provides maximum cover and concealment and allows him to engage the target effectively. To be physically prepared for target engagement, a Marine must always maintain proper balance and control of the weapon so he can quickly assume a firing position and engage the target. Proper mental and physical preparation allows a Marine to respond decisively to a target in a combat environment.

Proper mental and physical conditioning is a very personal issue. The training concepts outlined in this manual provide guidelines for a Marine to develop an effective combat mindset. Each Marine must apply combat mindset fundamentals while practicing the skills taught during phase III in order to be mentally and physically prepared to engage real targets effectively during combat. A Marine must believe in his ability to engage targets accurately in any combat situation. In addition, a Marine must carry his weapon in a way that facilitates timely and effective presentation to the target.

2003. Responding to a Threat

The following subparagraphs define the level of threat and outline the appropriate weapon carry. Chapter 4 provides examples of the appropriate weapon carry based on the perceived threat level. The possibility of enemy contact determines the stage of mental and physical preparation required for engagement. The possibility of enemy contact also determines the level of threat. The possibility of enemy contact is classified as no immediate threat present, contact likely (probable), or contact imminent.

a. No Immediate Threat Present. If no immediate threat is present, a Marine assumes the tactical carry (see fig. 2-1). This is the lowest level of awareness for a Marine in a combat environment. He should be constantly alert and aware of any activity in his surrounding area. To be prepared for target engagement at this level, a Marine must—

- Keep the weapon oriented in the general direction of observation (eyes, muzzle, target).
- Be aware of likely areas of enemy contact.
- Be aware of the condition of his weapon and have a plan for putting the weapon into action.
- Establish a plan or course of action to present the weapon to the target if a target appears.
- Mentally review appropriate actions such as reloads, immediate action, and remedial action.

b. Contact Likely (Probable). If contact is likely (probable), a Marine assumes the alert carry (see fig. 2-2). This is the intermediate level of awareness for a Marine in a combat environment. He should focus on the area of likely targets and constantly search the target area. To prepare for target engagement at this level, a Marine must—

- Keep the weapon oriented in the general direction of observation (eyes, muzzle, target).

Figure 2-1. Tactical Carry.

Figure 2-2. Alert Carry.

- Expect enemy contact and be constantly prepared to present the weapon.
- Plan a course of action for immediate response to a target. Modify the course of action as the situation dictates.
- Maintain proper balance. Avoid self-induced physical fatigue. For example, do not grip the weapon so tightly that fingers, hands, and arms tire from carrying the weapon.
- Search the entire area for indications of enemy targets and for terrain features that offer cover and concealment. Avoid restricting the search to a single location because this prevents an awareness of the assigned sector of the battlefield and of likely enemy contact.

c. **Contact Imminent.** If contact is imminent, a Marine assumes the ready carry (see fig. 2-3). In this carry, a Marine should be at his highest level of awareness and should be constantly searching for and expecting a target. To fire well-aimed shots once a target is detected, a Marine must be at the peak of his mental preparation. All distractions must be eliminated. A Marine's entire focus must be on firing an accurate shot. To prepare for target engagement at this level, a Marine must—

- Keep the weapon oriented in the general direction of observation (eyes, muzzle, target).
- Maintain a clear field of view above the weapon sights until the target is detected.
- Be mentally and physically prepared to engage the target. The Marine must be ready to—
 - Assume a firing position.
 - Apply the fundamentals of marksmanship.
- Move only as fast as possible and still deliver well-aimed shots on target. Ensure speed of engagement does not exceed physical capabilities.

Figure 2-3. Ready Carry.

- Not allow focus to become so restrictive or narrow that other targets are overlooked. Avoid tunnel vision.

After each target engagement, a Marine must immediately search and assess the target area.

2004. Advantages of Combat Mindset

Proper training and combat mindset can help a Marine overcome the paralysis caused by surprise. The stress of combat will always have a psychological and physical impact on a Marine's ability to fire. A Marine should always attempt to reduce stress. A Marine can reduce the negative effects of stress by developing a proper combat mindset.