

## The Foot March as Physical Training

The U.S. contingent of the multi-national peace-keeping force included two U.S. Army infantry regiments, one cavalry regiment and battery of artillery. These forces were rounded out by a regiment of U.S. Marines. After assembling on the coast, the convoy set off inland.

“For the Marines...the march was a nightmare of heat, bad water, low rations, and little fighting... the Marine regiment wasted away... nearly half the original force remained behind as guards or as casualties from heat and illness. Of those Marine who marched on, one third fell out from heat prostration, a rate greater than the infantry regiments and much greater than that of the other nations’ forces...”

Moving into line...the Marines...lost 40 percent of one battalion to heat exhaustion. For the rest of the march...Marines guarded the wagon train and served with the rear guard...

When the column reached Peking, the Marine regiment was reduced to 24 officers and 267 men...”

*Semper Fidelis* by A.R. Millett  
New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1980

What happened? Was this a result of poor training? Can it be blamed on a lack of medical support or short supplies? The above story, describing the 1900 international relief expedition to Peking, China, shows that a regiment of Marines could not complete its mission because it could not arrive intact. For one reason or another, the unit could not march. Nineteenth century or twentieth century, horse, caisson, truck or helicopter, a prerequisite for any unit to complete its mission is its ability to travel. **Denied of any convenience, the unit has to be able to walk.**

In 1987, ARMY magazine ran an article on the lost art of the foot march. The author stated that after entry-level training, most soldiers of the U.S. Army do very little marching. The primary reason given was the mechanization of the modern force. With so many trucks and other vehicles around, who needs to walk?

Marines Corps units do not have as many vehicles as similar U.S. Army units. An argument can be made that Marine Corps units are in better shape and march well and often. Is this true?

Small unit leaders are responsible for physical training. Good fitness training however, is rarely discussed in the same breath as marching. Marching is considered by most units as tactical field training. In the Israeli Army, cross-country marching is done as physical training. Marching falls into two training categories: Physical Training and Operational Movement.

Many units run five times a week. Running is great aerobic exercise. It builds stamina which improves marching ability. No amount of running will prove how well a unit can march. In order to march well, a unit has practice marching. A 20-kilometer march should be done once a week.

General Gray’s warrior philosophy emphasizes the basics. Marching is basic. Marching is good training.

“Few physical fitness activities are as directly related to readiness for combat as foot marches under load.”

— FMFRP 0-1B Marine Physical Readiness for Combat

“Extended marching with loads is the most demanding physical requirement for infantry...”

— FM 21-18 Foot Marches

## Foot March Training Schedule

- TD 0 1400 PME: Operational Movement, Foot March OpOrder  
The Foot March as Physical Training  
Bn SOP: Control Measures  
Co SOP: Non-Tactical Foot March SOP, Para 3 SOP, Para 4 SOP, Para 5 SOP  
Guide and Road Guard SOP, Water SOP, Trash SOP, Logistics SOP  
Log Train SOP, Medical SOP, Personnel SOP, Order SOP  
Order I: Formation, Road Guards, Halt Procedures, Accountability  
*No Comm, No QP(RP), No Packs*
- TD 1 0600 FORMATION. Order of the Day. **Foot March I.**
- 1400 PME: AAR  
Co SOP: Combat Load SOP, Individual Equipment SOP  
Equipment Marking SOP  
Order II: Comm, 4-Day Pack  
*No QP/RP*
- TD 2 0600 FORMATION. Order of the Day. **Foot March II.**
- 1400 PME: AAR.  
Bn SOP: Route Marking  
Co SOP: Route Reconnaissance SOP. Quartering Party SOP.  
Bivouac SOP, Hygiene and Sanitation SOP, Refit Period SOP  
Order III: QP(RP), Marked Route, Bivouac, Refit Period, Equipment Marking  
Night Ops: road guard lights, vehicle guides.
- TD 3 1800 FORMATION. Order of the Day. **Foot March III (NIGHT).**
- 2400 BIVOUAC
- TD 4 0800 REFIT PERIOD
- 0800 PME: AAR.  
Co SOP: Transportation SOP, Helicopter SOP  
Order IV: Embark Order
- 1000 FORMATION. Order of the Day. Embark Ex. **Foot March IV.**
- 1400 PME: AAR  
Co SOP: Movement to Contact SOP  
Order V: Movement to Contact, Camouflage, Recon and Security
- TD 5 0600 Formation. Order of the Day. **Foot March V.** Movement to Contact Ex.
- 1200 PME: AAR  
1300 Unit Party

# Foot March Doctrine

*FM 21-18 Foot Marches*

## Mission

The mission is to relocate the unit. The basic standard is: Did the unit arrive on time, able to execute the follow-on mission?

## Two Methods of Movement

*Tactical Movement* procedures are used when enemy contact is possible. *Non-Tactical* procedures are used when enemy contact is unlikely.

## Four Types of Foot Marches

- *Day March.*
- *Night March.* Limited visibility marches are slower and difficult to control. Vehicle lights are used when enemy threat is low. Blackout lights are used on order, since they INCREASE visibility problems. Road guards should always be used. Vehicle guides with flashlights guide vehicles when passing through the column. Unit color code lights assist in identifying and controlling units. Safety concerns are NOT peacetime only.
- *Forced March.* A march in excess of 32k in 24 hours is considered a Forced March. Marine Corps MCCRES standard, 40k in 8 hours, is a forced march. The commander decides to force march based on tactical necessity. Stragglers should be expected. The best way to execute a forced march is to march longer rather than faster. The maximum recommended distances are: 56k in 24 hours, 96k in 48 hours, and 128k in 72 hours.

A 55 kilometer forced march could be scheduled as follows:

0600-1100	5 hours @ 4 kph	20k	
1100-1300	Lunch		
1300-1800	5 hours @ 4 kph	20k	
1800-2400	Dinner and rest		
2400-0500	5 hours @ 3 kph	15k	Night March

- *Shuttle March.* A Shuttle March uses vehicles to move units part way to their destination.

## Terms

- The *column* is what HHQ sees. All the units of a single command on the same route. The four normal elements are Recon Party, Quartering Party, Main Body, and Trail Party.
- The *serial* is one group moving together at the same speed. As in amphibious operations, serials are numerically designated.
- The *march unit* is a subset of a serial under a single commander. March units maintain gaps between themselves and other units of the serial.

## Stragglers and Drops

- A *straggler* is a Marine who does not keep his appointed place in the march formation. The *straggler rate* is determined at the time the unit arrives at its destination.
- A *drop* is a Marine who does not finish the hike for any reason.

## Rate of March

- The standard rate of march is 4 kph.
- The standard rate of march for reduced visibility is 3.2 kph. March rate is slower across country, in bad weather, with reduced visibility, or at night

### **An Infantry Company with gear should march on unimproved roads...**

- 4 kilometers in an hour                      1 hour @ 4 kph = 4k
- 32 kilometers in 24 hours                      5 hours @ 4 kph = 20k
- 32 kilometers in 24 hours                      8 hours @ 4 kph = 32k
- 96 kilometers in 72 hours                      Day 1: 8 hours @ 4 kph = 32k  
Day 2: 8 hours @ 4 kph = 32k  
Day 3: 8 hours @ 4 kph = 32k  
Day 4: Rest. *See Refit Period SOP*  
This corresponds to a 4-day pack.  
*See Combat Load SOP*

OPORDER

Task Organization. **SOP**

1. Situation. Road is good, weather is clear. Nearest enemy is 58k away. Battalion is in billets at BIR EL GUBI.
2. Mission. At 0600 tomorrow, company conducts non-tactical foot march to BIR EL GUBI IOT rejoin the battalion.
3. Execution
  - a. Concept of Ops. Main body departs 0600. Follow Route CHARLIE for 32k (See strip map). Estimated arrival 1500.
  - b. Tasks.
    - (1) QP(RP): **SOP**
    - (2) Road Guard Det: **SOP**
    - (3) Co Log Train: **SOP**
  - c. Coordinating Instructions.
    - (1) Schedule:

Formation:	<b>SOP</b>
Time at SP:	0600
Time at RP:	1500
    - (2) Order of March: **SOP**
    - (4) Gear to be carried:
    - (5) Gear to be transported:
    - (6) Security Plan:

Security and Air Guards:	<b>SOP</b>
Actions on Enemy Contact:	<b>SOP</b>
    - (7) Halt Plan: **SOP**
    - (8) Rotation Plan: **SOP**
    - (9) Straggler and Drop Plan: **SOP**
    - (10) Rate of March: **SOP**
    - (11) Casualty Plan: **SOP**
    - (12) Quartering Plan: **SOP**
    - (13) Rear Party Plan:
4. Admin and Logs
  - a. Accountability Plan: **SOP**
  - b. Meal Plan:
  - c. Resupply Plan: **SOP**
  - d. Vehicles and Disabled Vehicles: **SOP**
5. Comm and Signals
  - a. Comm Plan: **SOP**
  - b. Location of CP: **SOP**
  - c. Assigned Company Serial: