

COMBAT TECHNIQUES

No More Aiming Stakes

by Col Robert B. Neller

The author suggests a novel approach to establishing sectors of fire while in the defense.

Since I have been in the Corps, Marines have been taught at entry level training a single method to delineate their sector of fire within a fighting position. This technique, the placement of aiming stakes—usually made from tree branches found in the field—has always proved to be a training challenge for several reasons:

- It is inherently a very inaccurate method of designating a sector of fire.
- Stakes, unless prefabricated and carried, are seldom steady when emplaced.
- Stakes, of all types, are difficult to move after they have been positioned.
- Even if done properly, aiming stakes do not do a good job of delineating the elevation of the weapon.
- If made in the field, using field expedient means, their construction can cause environmental problems by causing Marines to cut trees/vegetation in order to manufacture them.
- Dependent on terrain (desert/urban), field expedient means are not always available.

To remedy these deficiencies, many units have tried to fabricate aiming stakes from lumber, by using tent stakes from general purpose tents, or even by using metal engineer stakes. Although an improvement over the use of stakes made from tree branches, such methods are costly, difficult to carry, and still have some of the same shortcomings of “natural” aiming stakes. Additionally, it always struck

me as ludicrous to watch Marines carry 6-foot-long metal engineer stakes to the field in order to pass a tactical evaluation in the defense. There is, however, a simple, cheap, and more effective alternative: the use of seven sandbags to designate sectors of fire from fighting positions.

By carrying seven sandbags in his butt pack or ruck, an individual Marine can do the following: clearly

“ . . . it always struck me as ludicrous to watch Marines carry 6-foot-long metal engineer stakes to the field in order to pass a tactical evaluation in the defense. ”

and accurately designate his sector of fire, both elevation and deflection, from his fighting position; improve the survivability of his position by compacting the spoil from his position in a sandbag; not have to rely on vegetation for aiming stakes; and finally, have implements to delineate his sector of fire that are accurate, easily emplaced, are modifiable and reusable, and enhance his survivability. The procedure is as follows:

- Carry seven empty sandbags in your butt pack or ruck.
- When given the order to entrench, fill all the sandbags with the initial spoil from your fighting position. If in an urban environment, find some dirt, sand, gravel, or any substance of similar consistency.
- Place the first three sandbags in front of your position with their long side perpendicular to the di-

rection of fire with the bags forming a triangle—two bags closer to the enemy, one bag on the friendly side. For squad automatic weapon (SAW) gunners, leave a 2-inch space between the two forward bags and the one closer bag for the bipod legs. See Figure 1 for an overhead view.

- With the remaining four sandbags, place them, two on each side, on top of the outer edge of the three-sandbag base, with the inner edge of the bags parallel to and along the sector of fire designated by the team or squad leader. This is best accomplished by placing each sandbag

down and positioning it along the Marine's sector of fire, while the Marine is in his defensive position, aiming in on his left and then right lateral limit. When completed, the weapon should be able to slide smoothly across the three-sandbag base on its hand guards until it rests solidly against the long inside edge of each sandbag along the designated sector of fire. See Figure 2 for more detail.

- For the SAW, place the bipod legs in the gap between the three-sandbag base, allowing enough room for the SAW to traverse through its complete sector of fire. Then place the other sandbags parallel to the designated sector of fire as with a rifle. With the SAW, since the pivot point for traversing the weapon is to the front, the angle of the sandbags will be inward vice outward as depicted in Figure 3.

To Order
LEATHERNECK
MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES

I wish to become a member of the Marine Corps Association and receive *LEATHERNECK* magazine.

MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY

Membership in the Marine Corps Association is open to all active-duty, Reserve, retired, and honorably discharged Marines or members of our sister services who are serving with or have served with Marine Corps units.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES*
 (Includes Membership Dues of \$4 per year)



Officers

- 1 year \$23
- 2 years \$42

Enlisted

- 1 year \$17
- 2 years \$30

I am not eligible for membership, but I wish to subscribe to *LEATHERNECK* magazine.

NON-MEMBER RATES*

- 1 year \$23
- 2 years \$42

*Add \$16 per year for foreign postage to all above rates (other than APO/FPO addresses).

- Check/money order enclosed
- MasterCard VISA
- AmEx Discover

Bank Charge Card No. _____

Signature _____

Date Card Expires _____

Social Security Number _____

Rank/Title _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

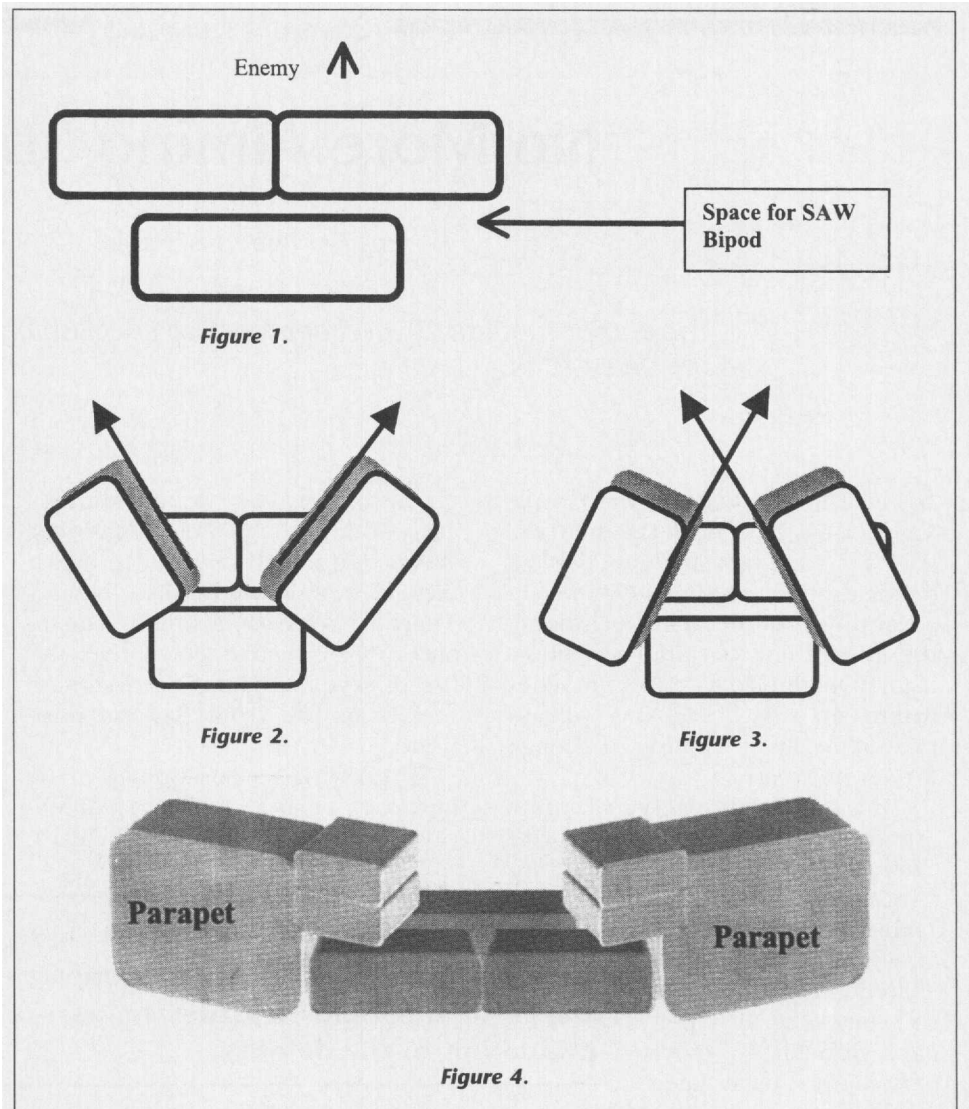
State _____ Zip Code _____

Mail to:

Marine Corps Association
 Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134
 or call **1-800-336-0291**
 website: www.mca-marines.org
 e-mail: subscribe@mca-marines.org

Send me an MCA brochure with details concerning membership and services to members.

NALO



• To designate a SAW principal direction of fire (PDF), some sort of marker will need to be emplaced on the friendly side of the sandbag base that will delineate the direction and elevation of the PDF. Placing a stick, bayonet, or K-Bar (handle up) so that it fits into the pistol grip of the SAW will probably accomplish this requirement.

Clearly, there is some engineering involved with the positioning of the sandbags. For example, the three-sandbag triangle that is the base of what essentially becomes your fighting position's aperture needs to be integrated as part of your fighting hole's parapet. The sandbags that delineate the sector of fire are then set on top of where the sandbag triangle and the parapet come together. This raises the sandbags delineating the sector of fire above the level of the sandbag

base allowing them to both mark the sector of fire and restrict the movement of the weapon. See Figure 4.

After years of trying to teach Marines of all ranks to use wooden aiming stakes, I have come to the conclusion that using sandbags is an easier, efficient, flexible, and more effective way to delineate a sector of fire in a variety of defensive situations. You can keep cutting aiming stakes from rotten trees or carry metal pipes on your pack if you wish, but if you want to accurately mark your sector of fire, provide yourself more protection, do so quickly, repeatedly, and easily—get yourself some sandbags.



>Col Neller is the CO, 6th Marines.