

Supporting Arms Coordination Exercise (SACEX)

An integral part of advanced level training is the Supporting Arms Coordination Exercise (SACEX). Usually conducted in conjunction with the Joint Task Force Exercise, the SACEX brings another dimension of combat to life for the Carrier Battle Group (CVBG), Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) as they use their combined firepower in support of a Marine amphibious assault.

The SACEX is conducted using a fictitious scenario that often pits the Marines against a well-equipped, well-entrenched and determined foe ashore. The ARG/MEU team must apply all its resources, training and ingenuity to neutralize enemy resistance, while at the same time protecting and defending allied units and positions.

It is a very dynamic and challenging battle problem that unfolds in three phases: pre-assault preparations, ship-to-shore movement and withdrawal.

During the pre-assault phase, as the Marines ready themselves and their equipment for landing, carrier aircraft conduct high and low altitude air strikes, designed to neutralize and destroy "enemy" targets. These strike missions are absolutely critical and require precise ordnance placement to effectively engage targets ashore.

During ship-to-shore movement - when amphibious forces are most vulnerable - the ARG/MEU team executes its landing plan, supported by air-to-ground strikes and naval surface fire support from ships offshore. Marines will land at pre-designated areas, establish a beachhead and prepare for inland assault. After the first assault waves have crossed the beach, command and control of fire support is passed from sea to shore. The Marines then work their way inland to overtake "enemy" positions and/or key objectives. Notably, the SACEX is the only opportunity in training for U.S. Marines to conduct a landing supported by ship-to-shore shelling.

At the conclusion of the exercise, the forces ashore conduct a retrograde of personnel and equipment, with aircraft likewise covering the withdrawal. This phase of the exercise replicates a critical, time-consuming aspect of amphibious operations.

The ability to land Marines safely in virtually any situation is still a vital skill, so successful completion of the SACEX becomes a key training objective. It is, therefore, essential to the process that allows the Fleet and Marine Force Commanders to certify the CVBG, ARG and MEU as fully prepared for deployment.