

### Military Slang Trivia

Attention! Incoming! Beware! It's no bogey; it's a military slang trivia quiz for veterans and military buffs. Enjoy these terms that are common to members of the United States armed forces.

1. What is an MRE?

**Answer:** Meal, ready to eat. MREs are vacuum-sealed meals for soldiers on deployment when no other food is available. Military personnel joke that these are “three lies in one.” A poetic soldier commented about a new MRE, “I believe it was the dinner meal that caused this (Chicken and Dumplings), but it sounded like a flatulence symphony in my tent all night.”



2. What does “check your six” mean?

**Answer:** It means to look behind you, as in the 6 o'clock position on a circular clock if you are facing the 12 o'clock direction. It can mean “to watch your back,” or it can mean “to look at something behind you.”

3. What does it mean if you are “back on the block” in your “civvies”?

**Answer:** It means you are on leave, back in the civilian world, wearing civilian clothes. Active duty military personnel receive 15 days of military leave each year.

4. What is a sniper check?

**Answer:** A sniper check means to salute an officer in the field. This is generally forbidden because it identifies the soldier as an officer, making them a target for snipers.

5. What is “voluntold”?

**Answer:** It is an abbreviation for “voluntarily told.” Example: An officer says to a soldier, “Wouldn't it look nice if the floor was buffed?” That soldier has just been voluntold to buff the floor. A more direct example is “Garcia and White, you are volunteering to buff the floors today.”

6. What is Zero Dark Thirty?

**Answer:** Military time is based on a 24-hour clock, so this means 00:30, or 12:30 a.m. (just after midnight). Loosely, it means really, really early. Sometimes Zero Stupid Thirty is used to mean something that is thought to have been scheduled unnecessarily early.

7. What is a Blue Falcon?

**Answer:** A Blue Falcon is also sometimes called a Bravo Foxtrot and is someone who messes things up for other members of their squad, either by causing drama or by betraying other members. It is not a complimentary term.

8. What does “Dress Right, Dress” mean?

**Answer:** It is a military drill command. It means to position oneself equidistant from soldiers to one’s right and left, and to look toward the squad leader. More generally, it means to ensure that things are tidy and orderly.

9. What does *Semper Gumby* mean?

**Answer:** It means “to be flexible.” It comes from the Marine motto *Semper Fidelis* or *Semper Fi*, which means “always faithful.” Gumby is a cartoon character who is physically very flexible. Example: “We need to backtrack several miles and make camp? *Semper Gumby!*”

10. What is rack time?

**Answer:** It’s not a punishment, despite its foreboding name. Rack time is allocated sleep time. A rack is a bed, especially aboard a ship. *To rack out* means “to go to sleep.”

11. What is a good idea fairy?

**Answer:** In every group, there is always at least one person who wants to offer helpful ideas that are not particularly helpful. In the military, a person who likes to offer (usually bad) suggestions is called a good idea fairy.

12. What does it mean to “tactically acquire” something?

**Answer:** Service members are taught early in their careers to keep close track of their gear. A common saying is, “Gear adrift is a gift.” When gear is left unattended, it is sometimes considered fair game for whoever comes along and claims it. Thus, to tactically acquire something is to take unattended gear, or sometimes, to sneakily acquire needed equipment from another company or unit. Of course, theft is officially forbidden in the military.

13. What does Tango Mike mean?

**Answer:** It means “thank you,” or specifically, “thanks much.” In 1955, many military organizations, including NATO and the U.S. military, adopted a phonetic alphabet to aid in correctly transmitting messages. Rather than spelling a word with letters, for example, the word *time*, radio communicators would say “Tango-India-Mike-Echo.” The full list of code words is *Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliet, Kilo, Lima, Mike, November, Oscar, Papa, Quebec, Romeo, Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee, Zulu.*

14. What does Oscar Mike mean?

**Answer:** As explained in the last question, it stands for the letters *O* and *M*, and it is slang for “on the move.”

15. What is an ID-10-T form?

**Answer:** Seasoned soldiers often play pranks on new recruits, and a common prank is to send the new soldier to obtain an ID-10-T form. This nonexistent form, when the letters and numbers are put together, spells *idiot*—ID10T.

16. What are the five fingers of death?

**Answer:** It's a nickname for a specific MRE (meal, ready to eat). MREs are not considered particularly palatable. One MRE that received many complaints contained five beef franks, which were generally thought to taste terrible. That MRE packet became known as the five fingers of death.

17. What is scuttlebutt?

**Answer:** Scuttlebutt is rumor or gossip. *Scuttlebutt* is a Navy term for a water fountain, from the word *scuttle*, which means "to put a hole in a ship, causing it to fill with water and sink," and *butt*, a cask. Sailors would exchange conversation, including gossip, while gathered around the scuttlebutt for a drink of water.

18. What is the Chair Force?

**Answer:** Chair Force is slang for those who "fly a desk." It's a term for those who have desk or office duties, as opposed to being in the field.

19. Is being called "squared away" a compliment or an insult?

**Answer:** It is a compliment. It means someone who has done something exemplary. Originally, it was a nautical term, meaning to change the sailing ship to that of the prevailing wind so that the ship sailed directly downwind.

20. What is a Devil Dog, a Squid, a Wing Nut, and a Joe?

**Answer:** These are slang terms for those who serve in different branches of the military. A Devil Dog is a Marine. Marines were named this by German soldiers in World War I because of their ferocious fighting. A Squid is a member of the Navy. A Wing Nut is a member of the Air Force, and a Joe is a member of the Army. Army members used to be called G.I. Joes, but the G.I. (from "general issue" or "government issue") has been dropped.

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