

## **A.M.I.S. II: Stairwell problems**

This is the second instalment in the "Armed Movement in Structures" (A.M.I.S.) series, and the focus, by request, is on stairwells. If you have not already read the A.M.I.S. primer or the first instalment, please do so.

As has been previously stated, the focus of this series is on solo structure work for the armed citizen. The idea is not necessarily to take ground such as in a law enforcement or military context, but to allow a citizen to either make their way safely out of a structure or make their way to a loved one, who is in need of rescue.

I know I've said this before but let me reiterate this one piece of prima fascia fact:

**There is no "safe" way of doing this by yourself.**

This is about having no other option and understanding the dangers. I don't recommend doing it but I have on many occasions myself.

As with any other principle, the doctrine I adhere to is simple. We try and minimize multiple exposures to danger areas and move with a blend of incremental, surreptitious clearing and dynamic movement depending on what's required to solve a particular angle/exposure problem.

So lets take a look at stairs.

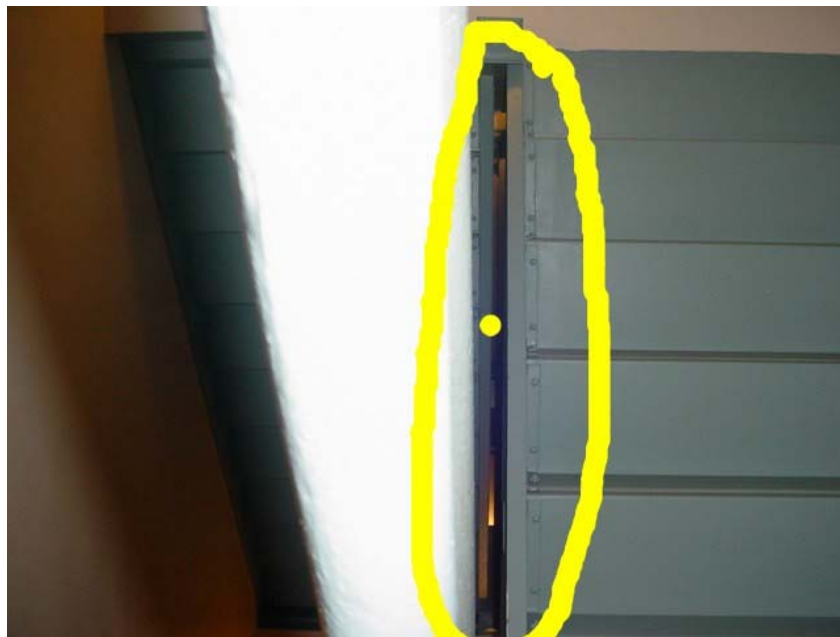
The problems inherent in stairwell movement are many. First we're essentially in a linear environment that doesn't allow a lot of leeway for lateral movement. Not a good thing if we have an exchange of gunfire. Secondly not only do we have our traditional vertical planes of concealment that we normally clear, such as with doorjambs and corners, but we also have horizontal planes of concealment created by landings and diagonal planes of concealment created by the stairs themselves. Combine that with the fact that all of these multiple planes of concealment are interacting with each other to create multiple exposures to danger areas, and we can quickly conclude that stairwell problems are some of the diciest structure issues that we will ever encounter.

So let's take a look at a sample stairwell.

In this photo we have what's called a closed ascending stairwell. We say that it's ascending because we're going to go up, and we say it's closed because there is no space between the stairs themselves that you or an adversary can see between.



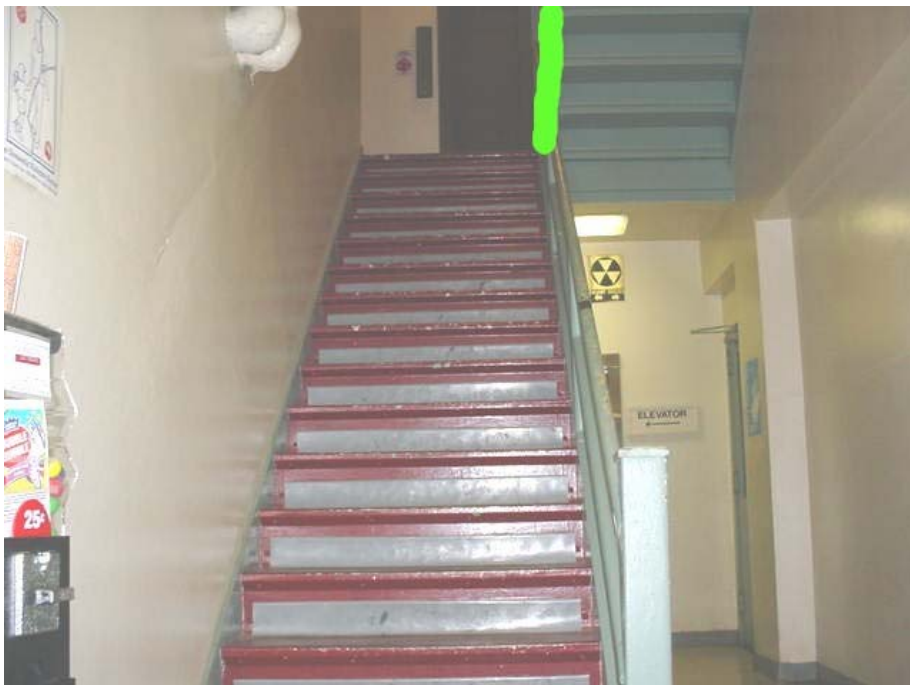
One thing that almost all stairwells have is a "hellhole". That's a little space between each flight of stairs that you can look either up or down and see all the way to the top or the bottom. You have to be aware of this and understand that if someone is waiting to fire down the center of the stairwell, it might behoove you to try and clear the hell hole before going up or down several flights of stairs and then stay out of it while you are working other planes of concealment, since we understand that the environment can change. The hellhole in this stairwell is outlined in yellow.



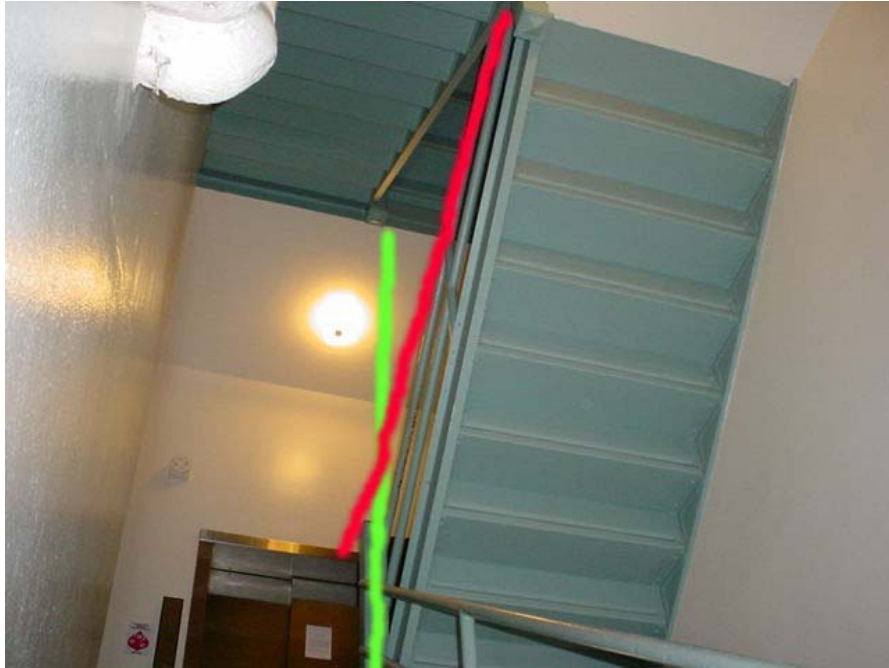
Here's another shot of the hellhole.



Okay, looking from the bottom of the stairwell, the first thing in our vision is a vertical plane that's visually uncleaned such as we would normally have when operating in a flat environment. This is represented by the green line.



But, when we look *up* we see that we also have a diagonal plane of concealment that's also visually uncleared represented by the red line.



Now the object of the game here is to understand how they intersect and at what point I'm double exposed to what's **behind** me with the next ascending set of stairs.

So in this picture what I'm working is the green and red lines. I stay in the left part of the stairwell itself but not on the wall. I'm incrementally clearing both the vertical and diagonal planes simultaneously, one stair at a time, with attention given to my position in relationship to my exposure to the next set of ascending stairs.



Okay at about the seventh stair in the flight, while working both the diagonal and vertical planes I run into an exposure problem...





...and that would be created by an open door at the top of the landing...



...and the fact that I've reached the point in clearing the first stairwell where now I have to worry about the diagonal plane created by the second ascending stairwell and the uncleared depth that an adversary can hide in. This is represented by the red line.

So I've got problems.

Solution?



Well the first thing I'm going to do is hold on the stair that I'm on and move incrementally from my left to my right. This allows me to clear the portion of stairs represented by the green line. I still have to worry about the vertical plane shown by the purple line but by clearing just a bit of those last top stairs this way, it allows me to ascend and clear the doorway without double exposing myself. One thing I have to be cognizant of when I clear what's represented by the green line is not sticking my melon out into the hellhole, lest an adversary whose waiting from above or below pop a round off. The blue line is the plane that's blocking my vision, so that's why I have to move from left to right on the stair to clear the green line.



Once I clear those next ascending set of stairs above me I move back to my left and move up one stair. I shift my attention back to the open doorway at the top of the landing.



Okay from where I'm at I've cleared a pretty good section of the doorway except what's to the right of the vertical plane created by the jamb, which is indicated by the red line.





I'll stay in the left portion of the stairwell and continue to ascend, clearing the open doorway incrementally. I want to stay to the left as I ascend because though I cleared those last few steps of the next ascending set of stairs, I haven't cleared the depth of the landing that they lead up to, nor have I cleared the diagonal plane created by the next set of ascending stairs above those. This is represented by the green line, which was in a previous picture, a blue line. See how it constantly changes? Hairy eh?



Once at the top of the stairs and on the landing I'll take as much of the doorway as I can.



Point of view from the doorway on the other side.



Now normally I'd continue to work that doorway, taking incremental slivers of it as I stayed to the outside of that landing and worked the vertical plane. However...

If I do that I will expose myself to the diagonal plane created by the next set of ascending stairs shown by the green line



Solution?

Accept that I've cleared as much of the open doorway as I can without double exposing myself to the next ascending set of stairs. So the next move is to roll out and clear that diagonal plane, *without* taking any more depth on it. To do so would expose me to some more of the uncleared vertical plane created by the open door.



My next move is to step into the next ascending stairwell



Which gives me most of the remainder of the depth of the next landing.



But once again I have to concern myself with double exposure to the diagonal plane created by the next set of ascending stairs if I ascend another step. This is represented by the green line.



So I shift my attention upwards and back a bit. This requires stepping laterally or backwards while moving upwards and it's real easy to bust your ass so be careful.

As I clear, I spot...



A doorway. It appears to be closed but I want a little more information on it.



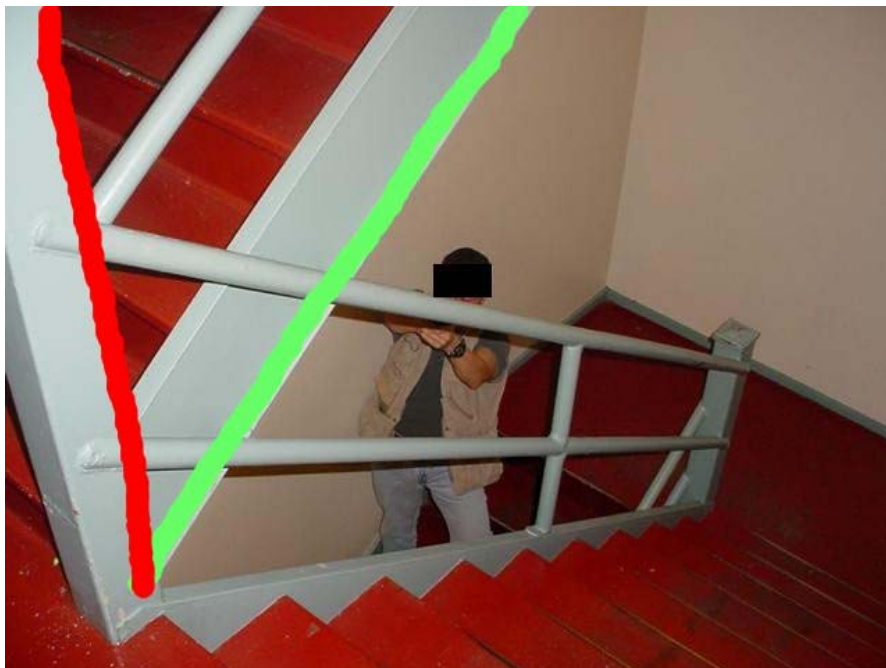
So I'll move a little further back on the stair that I'm on to get some more depth on that doorway, and then ascend one stair, which pops me over my diagonal plane. This is how I look from the far corner of the landing with the doorway in it. Looks good from my vantage point. I know it's there, it's closed, so I'll at least get an audible cue if someone opens it while I'm



working the remainder of the diagonal plane (represented by the green line) as I move to the next landing.



Of course not only do I have to worry about the diagonal plane but also the vertical plane indicated by the red line. So with a careful combination of angulation and ascension, I'll work upwards without exposing myself to either.



Until I've reached the landing. There I can minimize my exposure and just work one plane from flat ground until I begin to ascend again. Here's the view from the top of the next landing at the intersection of those previously drawn red and green lines.



Okay we're going to hop up one flight and ignore working the stairs with the door at the top since we've already done that in this progression. What we are going to do now is look at what happens when you don't have the cover and concealment offered by a set of ascending stairs directly above you.

Here we have a set of stairs that ascend up to a landing, with another ascending set that switch back to the right.



However, *now* I don't have another set of ascending stairs directly above me. I have an open landing which creates the problem of an upward **horizontal** plane that must be cleared. This is represented by red and the existing diagonal plane is highlighted in green.



So now if I enter the stairwell at all to clear the vertical and diagonal planes created by the next ascending stairwell, I'll expose my back to the uncleared horizontal plane created by the landing, one flight up. Very problematic.

Solution?

Take as much as you can on the upward horizontal plane created by the landing directly above you, without entering the stairs themselves first.



I'll take a little more of the landing directly overhead *without* exposing myself to the uncleared depth of the landing I'm moving to. This requires slow deliberate movement. One misstep=double exposure.



Slowly...keeping the landing I'm moving to in mind while avoiding exposing to much of myself to the landing directly above and behind me....





...while I'm working the diagonal plane of the next set of ascending stairs...





...until I've ascended safely upwards to my target landing while clearing both the left and right sides of the next landing enough to be able to ascertain that I've cleared enough depth that someone can't hide in.



That's it for this A.M.I.S. instalment. What I've shown you is a way, not the way.

Let me re-emphasize again.

**There's no "safe" way to do this by yourself.**

Typically, in law enforcement settings, stairwells are cleared by a team of three people, one each for vertical, horizontal, and diagonal planes. It's just about the hairiest structure problem that one can have. Keep that in mind if you are ever required to do this for real, and try at all costs to find another solution to the problem besides clearing the stairs even if that means perhaps going out of a window.

Enjoy!  
SN

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James Marwood