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Army Marksmanship

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Abstract

In the mid 1990s the Army cut back on funding and reduced the size of the Army Marksmanship Unit. This budget cut began the fall of marksmanship training in the Army. I feel that we waste valuable time and funding on other pursuits such as Golf outings, basketball and football tournaments. During The past few years we have made significant gains in combatives through out the army. I feel that it is time we make the same effort and direct it towards marksmanship training. Commanders and NCOs need to step in and get us back to the basics of shooting. In this paper I will address what I have seen over the past years of service and my experiences as a soldier trainer and competitor.

Army Marksmanship

The lack of emphasis on marksmanship training is the fundamental idea for my ethical problem facing the United States Army. Let me get things started by saying we have some of the best shooters in the country. The Army Marksmanship Unit (AMU) continues to be one of the top Service teams in the armed forces. Our Army snipers have won many of the military sniper competitions. My feelings along with other NCOs I have talked with feel that we need to do more to train the individual soldier. We are engaged in combat and everyone wants to complain about the lethality of the M-9 pistol and the M-4 rifle, what about the shooters shot placement?

My Qualifications on the topic

I have competed in the military at the company and battalion level in post competitions. I received training from the Army Marksmanship Unit as a competitor and have completed the unit marksmanship handgun instructor course. I currently compete in the U.S. Practical Shooting Association (IPSC) and in International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA) competitions. I completed the Bill Rodgers shooting school with a basic rating. I have competed on pistol leagues in IDPA and bowling pin club matches in the U.S. and in Asia. In the past I competed in National Rifle Association High power competition, which are long-range rifle matches. I am a graduate of two U.S. Army sniper schools and two Close Quarters Combat schools. I have taught several classes in these areas to U.S. and foreign soldiers for the past 16 years.

Training

The Army does not place the required emphasis, provide proper amount of funds or allocate the required time to adequately train the force. Training needs to be the corner stone of

our marksmanship program. Leaders need to look at their current level of marksmanship proficiency and get back to the basics of training. Training needs to be conducted monthly, even weekly and not just left to the semi-annual qualifications that are currently being conducted. Waiting until your predeployment train up to conduct marksmanship training is simply the wrong answer. Many units are now focused on close quarters battle but have left out the need for accuracy. The Department of Defense spends millions of dollars on our weapons, ammunition, sighting systems, ranges and maintenance for all of the above. Yet most Soldiers only shoot their weapons twice a year during the required semi-annual qualification. Many units require one to two sessions a week of combatives. A reasonable person would assume that weapons training should be just as important.

I feel we could enhance our survivability on the battlefield by initiating programs from the past. When I entered the military there were shooting competitions at Company, Battalion and Post level. The Army Marksmanship Unit (AMU) was larger and traveled unit to unit spreading their vast knowledge to the force. Due to budget cuts the AMU was reduced in size and competitions became fewer and fewer. I feel the Army should take the stand and set the priority just as was done with combatives and place the emphasis back on marksmanship. We should encourage our soldiers to be competitive and to engage in competitions at work and with civilians while off duty.

Competition

Most units only conduct the required qualification and scores are not posted. No one knows their standing in their unit. There is no reason to put forth the extra effort to be the best

other than the Marksmanship badge worn on the uniform. The marksmanship capability of a Soldier is one of the key fundamentals for survivability on the battlefield.

The greatest stress you can put a soldier under next to combat is competition. The Army teaches us that those who can control their emotions are more apt to maintain control when put in high stress situations. Let us use marksmanship training to improve marksmanship and to enhance their ability to deal with stress. Marksmanship also develops our Army values and esprit de corps.

Once again I am aware of what the AMU is doing today; the competitions being conducted through out the Army and other training opportunities. Our current level of training is not enough; this training needs to be conducted at every installation for all MOSs across the board. I think the US Army cut short the emphasis of marksmanship training just to save a buck. Now we are engaged in a long-term conflict and we have and are paying the price of a budget cut. We always say a Soldier must be able to shoot, move and communicate. Lets ensure they have the training to be successful and put the adversary down when it counts most and lives are at stake.

One thing we need to remember there is no second place in a gunfight

Past experience

I competed as a shooter in my Company and Battalion while assigned to the 82nd Airborne. I was a member of the pistol team. Prior to becoming a member of the team I like everyone else I suppose only qualified twice a year with my assigned weapon. Like most of us I was able to qualify expert. My assigned weapon was a standard 1911a1 pistol. Qualifying with the pistol was no great task while shooting on the knock down target range. When we began

suffered. Now it was no longer just a hit on target but a properly placed shot that counted. Our skills with the pistol finally began to develop. During these marksmanship drills both the shooter and the target are stationary. We must get our soldiers to shoot moving targets and to shoot while on the move. During most combat situations something will be moving.

Many times I would see a unit go to the range with their M-16. The units would zero their weapons at 25 meters and just change out targets and qualify at 25 meters when a known distance range was only miles away. This practice still takes place today, that is just laziness. Shooting your qualification at 25 meters does not provide you with the proper feedback to hit at 200 300 plus meters. Soldiers must learn what wind, humidity and other environmental factors due to their bullets. Soldiers have to understand slant range ballistics and understand how gravity affects their bullet. Most marksmanship classes I attended only focused how to adjust your sights to zero and qualify. There is more to shooting than just that.

My final thoughts

I know this paper only scratched the surface if even that, but I just want the Army to refocus on the average soldier being able to use his weapon to it fullest potential. A soldier needs to know a 50-meter shot can be made with his M-9. Soldiers need to know that a 500-meter shot to put down an adversary is possible and does not require a sniper with a 7.62 weapons system.

Shooting can be fun and just as good of away of brining a unit together as a football or basket ball game or a golf outing. Soldiers also need to know about excellence in competition (EIC). Individuals can win awards to be worn on their uniform that will set them apart as a true expert with their weapon. Finally a well-trained soldier is a safe soldier. A confident well-

trained soldier is less likely to have an accidental discharge. We owe it to all soldiers regardless of MOS the proper training to be proficient with their assigned weapon. Leaders need to step up and make marksmanship a priority no just a requirement.