

Marine Corps Infantry Marksmanship

Realistic challenging training

by MSgt Marc J. Chaplin

Marine Corps infantry constantly searches to find advantages over adversaries on today's battlefield in addition to potential threats that may be found on battlefields of the future. Some of these advantages are technological and equipment based, such as small unmanned aircraft system (sUAS), more accurate and longer ranging weapons such as the M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle, and the M3 Carl Gustaf Multi-role Anti-armor Anti-tank Weapon System, in addition to the integration of tablets for communication and navigation. Other advantages exist in the way Marines train in combined arms and maneuver through all levels of the MAGTF, from the team level all the way through the MEF level. All of these advantages are in an effort to gain or maintain overmatch in capabilities over the enemy. It is impossible to fully replicate a combat environment in training, but the Marine Corps exhausts all means to make training as realistic and challenging as possible. The infantry is focusing on building a more professional, lethal, thinking Marine as who can effectively operate as a member of a squad or small unit in complex, distributed environments. This is in keeping with the directives outlined by the 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Neller, in his White Letter *Seize the Initiative*:

I expect leaders to challenge Marines with realistic training under adverse conditions against thinking enemies. Combat is the supreme test. Our train-

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ing must reflect its uncertainty, stress, disorder, and violence. We will train as we fight—decentralized—relying on mission-type orders and the initiative of individuals.

A higher level of training is required to shoot, move, and communicate effectively for infantry units operating away from support in these type of environments.

Marine Corps marksmanship is governed by the Marine Corps Combat

Marksmanship Program, which encompasses Marines at all levels from across all MOSs. Entry-level training Marines learn marksmanship through a building block approach and Marines in the operating forces sustain marksmanship skills during Annual Rifle Training. There are currently no specific training or standards above the MCCMP that exist within the infantry community. The purpose of this article is to define how the Marine Corps conducts marksmanship training and introduce elements from civilian marksmanship and show how they have potential to benefit the infantry community by developing infantry-specific marksmanship training and standards.



Firearms manufacturers and law enforcement academies can provide sources for state-of-the-art marksmanship training. (Photo by author.)



Noteworthy civilian rifle combat marksmanship programs are supported by the National Rifle Association and Civilian Marksmanship Program competitions. (Photo by author.)

The Marine Corps trains marksmanship across the institution using a progressive method consisting of four tables. The MCCMP exist to progress the individual Marine from the fundamentals of marksmanship to advanced combat shooting by ensuring service standards are reviewed, practiced, and evaluated. The objective at the completion of training is the Marine's ability to competently and effectively employ the service rifle under varying conditions (*MCO 3574.2L*). Tables 1 and 1A are known as Fundamental Rifle Marksmanship (FRM). The purpose of tables 1 and 1A is to impart the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for safe and accurate firing of the rifle. This training will form the basis for all other training with the service rifle (*MCO 3574.2L*). Table 1 is where Marines learn fundamentals, effects of weather, firing positions, and qualify on the known-distance range. Table 2 begins the transition from the known-distance range to combat marksmanship; this is where Marines shoot incapacitating shots and multiple shots in rapid succession from the unsupported combat kneeling and standing positions. Tables 3 and 4 build from the basis of FRM and the basic combat shooting of table 2. These two tables are the Advanced Combat Rifle Marksmanship portion of

MCCMP, and it is intended for infantry and forward deployed Marines. Marines are taught how to incorporate natural and artificial support into their shooting positions for stability in addition to day, night, and unknown distance firing.

There are several components from civilian marksmanship that have the potential to be incorporated into developing infantry specific training and standards. Competitive shooting organizations like Three-Gun Nation, International Practical Shooting Confederation, the National Rifle Association, and Civilian Marksmanship Program competitions are areas where civilian marksmanship excels. The closest program that the Marine Corps has to rival these civilian competitive programs is the Competition in Arms Program (CIAP). The primary objective of the program CIAP is to stimulate interest and desire for self-improvement in marksmanship and to enhance proficiency within the Marine Corps in the use of individual small arms by refining precision marksmanship skills and combat marksmanship skills through advanced marksmanship training and competition (*MCBUL 359I*). Marines of all skill levels who participate in CIAP matches receive instruction and coaching from the Marine Corps Shooting Team members and are

afforded the opportunity to enhance their marksmanship skills by challenging themselves through competition. Marines then bring knowledge, interest, and enhanced marksmanship skills back to their respective units, which increases marksmanship proficiency across the Marine Corps. The CIAP is not mandatory for any individual or units to participate in, registration is all voluntary. Over the past decade, CIAP matches have altered their courses of fire from bullseye or National Rifle Association-style matches to action shooting, which is more of a combat style match in an effort to make the CIAP more appealing to combat arms MOSs. The most recent CIAP matches introduces Marines to dynamic and challenging stages of fire with the pistol, rifle, and shotgun. Shooters fire the courses of fire after receiving a stage brief detailing the specific stage rules. They will be penalized for things like for shooting on no-shoot targets or engaging targets out of sequence. Stages consist of shooting on moving and stationary steel, clay, and paper targets while running, finding cover, and advancing toward the threat. Individual stages are timed with the fastest time equating to the best score.

Civilian marksmanship schools, academies, and range training facilities are other areas where the civilian sector rivals military training. Sig Sauer Academy in Epping, NH, is a prime example of one of these civilian academies where law enforcement agencies and military units train. They host 77 different programs of instruction (POI) ranging from Handgun 101, to Advanced Precision Scoped Rifle, to High Risk Executive Protection Operations, to Mechanical and Shotgun Breaching Instructor Courses. They train various U.S., foreign, conventional, and special operations units, in addition to various local and federal law enforcement agencies. The three types of marksmanship training methods that Sig Sauer Academy focuses on are command to shot, search to shot and, decision to shot. The vast majority of marksmanship training for the novice level courses like Handgun and Rifle 101 is centered on command to shot. This is where shooters receive an audi-



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tory signal or visual cue, which is the indication to the shooter of when to engage the targets. They utilize this type of training for instructing at the novice level courses to teach and sustain fundamental skills in a similar way that the MCCMP uses FRM in Table 1.

The next step in training methodology is the search to shot method. Intermediate courses at the Sig Sauer Academy like the Master Rifle Instructor Course and courses specifically tailored toward law enforcement agencies are where this method is heavily featured. This is where the shooter assesses his or her environment and only engages pre-designated targets or targets that meet a certain criteria. This type of training exercises fundamental marksmanship skills while also training cognitive abilities, decision making, and discipline. One of the main reasons that law enforcement agencies train extensively in the search to shot method is because it reinforces positive identification before engaging the target. Some examples of pre-designated targets are targets with weapons, cell phones, radios, military uniforms, civilians, shapes, or certain colors. This method demands more from the shooter because it tests both decision making and marksmanship skills.

The decision to shot method is the next progression in marksmanship training used at Sig Sauer Academy's advanced level courses. Their advanced level courses are made up of programs of instruction like the Advanced SWAT Operator and the Active Shooter Response Instructor Course. These type of courses are where elite units like the FBI Hostage Rescue Team, Navy SEALs, and Army Green Berets train. Advanced marksmanship techniques are not the focus of these level of courses, they are still reinforced and trained to, but the focus is on training armed professionals to fight a living, thinking enemy complex environments. Decision to shot training puts the shooter in a position to make a decision on how and if to engage the target or targets. Some examples of how this is accomplished is through the use of robotic moving targets, force-on-force live fire training with sim-munitions, and training

at simulators like the Conflict Kinetics Gunfighter Gym. Utilizing the targets to initiate engagements, target feedback, and forcing shooters to make decisions in training are essential components to decision to shot training. This type of training is also in accordance with the Gen Neller's vision to "[g]et more 'reps and sets' by training in simulated environments and embrace experimentation to test and validate new concepts. We must leverage technology and ideas to make us faster, smarter, and more lethal." The primary reasons that Sig Sauer applies this method in their advanced-level courses is because it is the most realistic style of marksmanship training. It also empowers shooters to make decisions and mistakes in a safe environment and learn from those decisions while continuing to fight through the scenario.

A Marine Corps infantry squad has the capability to offer a massive amount of lethal firepower to any fight when properly trained, equipped, and employed. The potential firepower of an infantry squad with all members firing is conservatively estimated at 400 well-aimed rifle and automatic rifle shots and 15 rounds from the grenade launchers per minute (*MCWP 3-11*). The Marine Corps has an opportunity to expand the MCCMP or develop infantry specific training standards by building upon resources that already exist in the civilian sector. Taking full advantage of programs like the CIAP is another avenue toward improving marksmanship training within the infantry. As Gen Neller wrote regarding improving the way Marines train, "As we shape the Marine Corps for tomorrow, we must evaluate and aggressively experiment with new equipment and ideas." This validates the importance of improving marksmanship training within the infantry community and maximizing the lethality of squads and small units who will operate isolated and away from support at times. Marksmanship is one of the most basic and fundamental elements in preparing the infantry to fight and it deserves to be a priority in training.

