

**Parrots or Professors:**  
Training Military Marksmanship Instructors  
Part One  
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The original two dozen or so shooter-instructors that comprised the United States Army Reserve Small Arms Training Team (SATT) through the early parts of 2000 were a unique crowd. Despite the tiny unit size SATT housed nearly every President Hundred recipient currently serving in the USAR and the bulk of the USAR shooting team. In addition to competitive events SATT provided marksmanship assistance on request throughout the force.

However, other than MPs going to Kosovo requests were ad-hoc on a by-unit basis. Several times SATT leadership was forced to justify the existence of a high level marksmanship team within the Army. The USAR has a force of nearly 200,000 Soldiers, all of them required to train with small arms, but budgeting for 30 true expert marksman-instructors with that equipment was questioned. Despite innumerable wins over the decades on the National and International level against some of the best military and civilian shooters on Earth, some non-shooters holding high positions considered shutting the unit down. During a reorganization effort, SATT leadership used the magic 'R' word and became the Small Arms Readiness Group.

The mass mobilizations beginning in 2003 proved what knowledgeable shooter-instructors could accomplish. As the conflicts in the Middle East heightened it became clear that skill with small arms was paramount and that the current system largely failed to deliver.

The prevailing theory was that any "experienced" NCO should be capable of conducting small arms training, especially if the NCO is, or was, a Drill Sergeant or held a combat arms MOS (Military Occupational Specialty). Many still believe that a "Drill Sergeant/Infantry NCO and an FM (Field Manual)" is the only requirement for quality marksmanship instruction. Documented experience proves the folly of this notion.

Before SARG instructors became involved first time qualification rates hovered around 40% when held to the written standard. Note this closely mirrors the Army Research Institute study. After SARG began directing training the qual rates on those same course rose to 80-90%. A calculated savings in ammunition of around \$50,000 per brigade was common.

Many of these examples occurred on active duty posts manned by active duty personnel prior to SARG instructor arrival. These units had training records claiming 80-90% qualification rates but were unable to achieve it without SARG assistance.

Army leadership began to feel the effects of their crumbling small arms programs. Weakened by a series of short-sighted cut backs, formal, organized shooting events were nearly eliminated. Known Distance ranges were dilapidated after civilian and military marksmen were forced off during down sizings and a Chicken Little response to September 11, 2001.

The lack of knowledge extended to even the basic qualifications, a fact known to experienced marksmen and formally exposed by an Army Research Institute study finding that only one third of soldiers were capable of qualifying on the first attempt when held to standard. Advanced instruction, such as Designated Marksmen, was highly valued but few in the Army could operate a KD range, much less provide the training.

SATT (now SARG) filled this much needed gap of knowledge. Because of their vast background these instructors rescued a number of mobilization platforms when small arms expertise was needed. As word of the success spread leadership directed the SARG to expand from around 40 instructors to 300.

The problem is, expand with whom? A majority of the small arms and marksmanship experts serving in the USAR already staffed the instructor slots. It is questioned whether 300 true small arms experts currently exist *anywhere* within the USAR. If they already were there then the obvious lack of domain knowledge would not be so wide spread.

If SARG expands too rapidly the unit is forced to take in non-experts and we've created a problem. New people can be trained, of course, but this takes time. How much training will be offered to new people filling the slots?

The question boils down to this: Do you want a Parrot or a Professor?

### Parrots

Some factions within the Army and personnel new to the SARG feel that an instructor doesn't need to be a shooter or have a formal marksmanship background. The theory is that a person providing Preliminary Marksmanship Instruction doesn't need to understand marksmanship. Instead, a soldier with no shooting background can be taught to recite a presentation prepared by someone else. As long as the original presentation and the recital was correct then training would occur.

In effect, their argument is that the SARG is adequately served with Parrots. African Greys are noted for the ability to closely mimic human speech, Budgies are good talkers and Parakeets have had some the longest vocabularies. With guidance a parrot can learn to repeat words and phrases, even if he doesn't understand what those words mean.



If we are forced to follow this line of reasoning our Small Arms Instructor Academy can provide an even better solution: Mass produced DVD-based instruction.

We have experienced instructors and nearly all the equipment needed to affect this. The current Task Force SARG course writer has some experience with videography. For production we can shoot on location at the Camp Bullis ranges. An experienced instructor provides instruction while being filmed. We have usable digital camcorders already and for a more professional result a decent prosumer "three chip" (3CCD) camcorder with a basic tripod can be had for about \$1000 (the Canon GL-2 can now be had for around \$800 and a Bogen/Manfrotto 3021N with fluid head is just over \$200).

Among the instructors we have two commercial NLE (Non-Linear Editing) suites for post production and can dedicate a desktop workstation with a DVD burner to render to disc.

In the same office sits a Microboards DX-1 CD/DVD Duplicator with HP color inkjet which can burn and print 100 DVDs automatically.

At the individual platforms the DVD instruction can be played on large screen television/ DVD player combos. The retail store Target sells a Westinghouse 32-inch HDTV/DVD Combo (SK-32H590D) for \$749. This is less than two weeks pay for one Private E-2. The DVD discs can be duplicated and printed for less than one dollar per copy.



The cost savings are enormous if we replace non-shooters with DVD/TVs. The units can work 24 hours a day, never needs breaks, S-1 attention or takes leave, and are paid for in less than two weeks. As a bonus the recital (PMI) is always the same and is of a known quality.

True, a DVD player and disc can't address issues or answer questions, but neither can a Parrot. After all, we (allegedly) don't need "instructors" that can shoot, just a PMI recital, and a DVD can recite better than a human.

#### Professor

pro-fes-sor /[pruh-fes-er]/ –noun  
4. an instructor in some art or skilled sport: a professor of shooting.

A professor is someone with a high level of knowledge and skill who provides instruction to others. Rather than regurgitating a script a professor can expound upon his area of expertise. With marksmanship, being expert includes demonstrated ability. It is one thing to repeat concepts and it is quite another to understand them. This understanding requires personal ability.



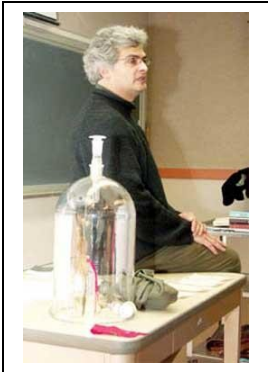
This is not opinion but a requirement printed in the FM. Quoting from FM 3-22.9ch4, Page 1-6, Section 1-6. BASIC PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION: "Knowledgeable instructors or cadre are the key to marksmanship performance. All commanders must be aware of maintaining expertise in marksmanship instruction/training."

"Instructor-Trainer Selection: Institutional and unit instructor-trainers are selected and assigned from the most highly qualified soldiers. These soldiers must have an impressive background in rifle marksmanship; be proficient in applying these fundamentals; know the importance of marksmanship training; and have a competent and professional attitude. The commander must ensure that selected instructor-trainers can effectively train other soldiers. Local instructor-trainer training courses and marksmanship certification programs must be established to ensure that instructor-trainer skills are developed."

The initial successes the SATT/SARG enjoyed was due to the fact that the bulk of the instructor body could be accurately defined as Shooting Professors. They didn't merely

recite PMI, they trained marksmanship. Many of them are National Champions and hold Classifications of Master/High Master in various National-level shooting disciplines.

While the bulk of the Professors have a competitive shooting background, competition shooting is not necessarily a requirement. There can be many paths of enlightenment and other formal shooting programs should be considered, however, competitive shooting tends to bring out the best shooter-instructors. There is strong precedent for this and it is dictated by Army Regulation.



### **Army Regulation 350-66**

Page 2, Section 2-1. Small arms marksmanship

“Participation in military and civilian-sponsored small arms marksmanship competitions offers soldiers the opportunity to refine their marksmanship skills, compete against other military and civilian marksmen, and earn superior marksmanship awards in addition to the Army basic marksmanship awards available through annual qualification standards.”

“Army personnel should be provided opportunities to prepare for and participate in small arms marksmanship competition. These preparations, which include those for international competitions, are **classified as training.**”

“Match programs should emphasize and encourage the following:

- (1) A variety of shooting styles, distances, and timing of firing with as many weapons and weapon systems as possible.
- (2) Training of experienced competitive marksmen.
- (3) **Development of shooter/instructors.**”

Competition builds superior skills and is directed by regulation. A superior marksman will tend to be a superior trainer. The phrase Subject Matter Expert implies a higher expertise within the subject matter. The FM requires this higher skill set and regulation provides tools to implement.

This seems so obvious that it is difficult to fathom why any sensible person would dare question the logic. Imagine a college university science department in need of physics professors. Would the faculty be satisfied in recruiting people off the street, handing them a script and shuffling the “instructor” in front a class?

The problem stems from not knowing what constitutes good shooting to begin with. This ignorance starts with the American populace. Ball sports are common but shooting sports are not. Even among gun owners marksmanship skill beyond the novice level is rare. From this pool of citizens we recruit personnel for the military.

This raw recruit is indoctrinated and taught a host of new subjects including an introduction to small arms. The problem is that small arms instruction in the Army is like a set of filters. As every knowledgeable marksman knows, the Army rarely conducts training with small arms, that is, shooting with the intention of elevating personal skill set beyond prescribed standards. Instead, nearly every range exercise is either a

qualification to validate that soldiers meet some standard or a quick preliminary step prior to shooting the qual. Soldiers step to the line, prepare, and attempt to shoot a course of fire. If the score is high enough no additional training or attention is deemed necessary or offered.

This isn't a condemnation; rather, it is an observance of reality. Given the massive numbers of soldiers, all of whom must qualify, instructors can only afford to assist those who really need the help. It is a sort of triage situation. Allow everyone an attempt to standard, filter out those who can't meet minimum standard and treat them.

Unfortunately, personnel selected for this instruction are commonly not marksmanship experts, e.g., drill sergeants. They were recruited from the same pool of citizens and managed to squeeze through the minimum filter to retain their job position. Qualification attempts to only filter out the worst performers, ensuring that everyone is "qualified" (at least that's what the training records claim.) "Qualified" can entail a whole range of skill levels. The goal is get everyone qualified and the standards are adjusted so that everyone can.

This is why any qualified instructor, a true shooting Professor, must be involved with some sort of formalized program beyond qualification. Competition, for example, attempts to filter out the best performers. Nobody in such an event cares what an adequate performance is because the goal of competition is to find what the best possible performance can be. The stress of qualification is to be good enough. The stress of competition is to be the best possible.

As we continue to recruit into the expanding SARG we must be mindful what skill sets and experience allowed the good successes we've enjoyed to date. We must also realize that most new personnel will NOT join us possessing that same high level skill and experience. If the SARG is to remain effective it is critical that the new guard be brought up to speed in order to be up to task.

Part Two of this report will be available at:  
<http://MilitaryMarksman.com>

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