

Small Arms Instructor Development
Beyond Qualification
By John M. Buol Jr.
<http://MilitaryMarksman.com>

If any marksmanship instructor or organization is to obtain and maintain true subject-matter expertise there needs to be a means to develop and test relevant skill sets. Nearly all marksmanship skill and knowledge was created via organized, competitive shooting. The US Army's first marksmanship manual was developed and written by competitive shooters, people who learned and developed their skills in competition shooting. Army Regulation 350-66 states that all organized competitions are classified as training, can serve as a substitute for unit annual training at the unit commander's discretion, and is an ideal vehicle for training small arms instructors.

Despite this pedigree, shooting events are too often undermined by the uninformed and are one of the first subjected to budget cuts. Thankfully, there are a few bastions of hope that invigorate programs and keep them alive. One such example is the All Army match.

The original concept of military matches was to offer venues to test the skills of shooters beyond the novice levels found in normal qualifications starting at the unit and post levels, through the MACOMS and culminating in a force-wide event, thus, All Army. Over the years knowledge waned and participation dwindled until the matches went away completely in the 1990's. Over a decade later, while under the command of LTC Liwanag the, Army Marksmanship Unit (AMU) reinstated the All Army matches in 2004. After a long absence it has again become an annual event. The need for such events is echoed by the leadership involved.

- LTG Anthony R. Jones noted that, "Being able to shoot, being a marksman is what being a Soldier is all about."
- LTG Benjamin C. Freakley, commander of U.S. Army Accessions Command, said "Today more than ever Soldiers need to be lethal and that's what this competition is all about. Marksmanship is a fundamental skill and a core competency that every Soldier needs to be lethal. I encourage all of you to go back to your units and encourage and teach marksmanship."
- SGM Vidal Ybarra - "All-Army is an advanced combat marksmanship training event and competition and is designed to raise the shooting proficiency of Soldiers and units across the Army by teaching advanced combat marksmanship techniques using issue rifles and pistols."

Shooting events like All Army offer a great opportunity to take the training advantages that formalized shooting competition offers and to expand small arms knowledge beyond the kindergarten levels of qualification. All the courses shot offer near perfect feedback and allow the Soldier-shooter to see the exact placement of every shot fired. Courses on a KD range mark the location of groups and individually fired rounds, hit or miss, and the opportunity to record the results for later study. Zero settings and marksmanship error is readily observable and more easily diagnosed.

Contrast this to the current Army norm of shooting on RETS "pop up" targets where this lack of critical feedback is simply not available and hinders the Soldier from improving skills.

Merely participating in events such as All Army offers superior training compared to the norm of current Army qualification ranges.

The courses run the gamut of individual small arms use. Events feature pistol and rifle shooting at 15 to 1000 yards with elements of short range, squad designated marksmanship and sniping. Even though some of the courses require quick shooting, the emphasis is on encouraging good marksmanship fundamentals.

The Small Arms Readiness Group (SARG) has taken advantage of this program having sent winning teams every year since 2005. The training benefit for small arms instructors is unparalleled and the only reasonable choice is for SARG to continue sending teams. Team composition requires at least half of the shooters to be new and common sense says that the old shooters and coaches should be the best available. Thus, our entire cadre can have the opportunity to not only participate in such an event but to glean the knowledge and experience from the best shooters in the unit, many of whom are ranked highly on the National level.

The AMU provides the ammo, targets and ranges and we only have to show up. It would be a difficult logistical challenge to duplicate this organically. Plus, the higher skilled participants tend to be better instructors and more capable of passing on good skills to other Soldiers.