

TSRA Rifle Team Teaches Army Squad Designated Marksmen at Camp Bullis

By Robert Langham

In early March this year, a group of Texans gathered at a hotel in San Antonio. They included a John Deere employee, a Dallas Motorcycle Policeman, a TXU chemist, a retired Chief Warrant Officer, a photographer, the owner of an insurance company, and others. At the request of the US Army, these men had taken two weeks of unpaid vacation away from their jobs and families to teach the first-ever class of what would become known as Squad Designated Marksmen (SDM) in the US Army.

Since the terrorist attack of 9/11 it had become apparent to the US armed forces that there was a need for additional marksmanship training for US troops. In operations in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the need for higher skill levels and a larger caliber combat weapon became obvious. A Squad Designated Marksman would be a soldier who had received enhanced marksmanship training.

The men who gathered were an ordinary group in many ways. They looked like the guy down the street, or your neighbor, or the fellow at church. The Army sought them and selected them for a precise reason: they were all highly skilled and

accomplished NRA Highpower Rifle shooters. Most of the faculty for SDM were rated High Master or Master by the NRA. Most wore the Distinguished Rifleman's badge, an award issued to less than 1700 civilian shooters in the



Group photo of the designated marksmen students and faculty from the TSRA High Power Rifle Team. Photo by Robert Langham.

last 100 years. Some owned a Presidents 100 pin, being one of the 100 best shooters at the annual NRA National Matches. Many of them had won state championships, regional, or national awards. Almost all of them were on the TSRA National Match Service Rifle team that represents Texas and our organization at Camp Perry every year. In short, these ordinary guys from ordinary Texas towns were some of the best service rifle shooters in the country.

They came for all the reasons that Texans always come when duty calls. Rick Crawford, TSRA Secretary and Highpower Rifle director from Kilgore simply said, "I've got something they need." John Dunaway from Kilgore replied, "I don't know how I am going to swing this, but count me in." Richard Schultz from White Oak considered this his "contribution to the war on terrorism." CWO Roy Plumlee

commented, "I was looking for a faculty of the best shooters, the best teachers and folks who could work as a team and I considered these men to be that faculty."

In the weeks before they gathered, these men developed a curriculum for SDM. M14 rifles were pulled from the storage depot in Anniston, Alabama and shipped to Texas. Orders were issued designating the group Volunteer Military Instructors (VMI). Army personnel scheduled classroom space and range time, and located ammo. 80 troops from the First Cavalry at Ft Hood were split into two one-week schools. In February at Camp Bullis in San Antonio, for the first time since World War II a civilian teacher stood in front of Army troops and said, "Gentlemen, good morning and let me welcome you to the first class of Squad Designated Marksman School."

The troops were from the First Cavalry Division, based at Fort Hood. Though most of them were from artillery units, they were going to Iraq to deploy as foot soldiers for patrol and security duty. Among them were mortarmen, cooks, scouts, and tankers. A tank driver, who turned out to love rifle shooting, was the high man the first week. An innocent-looking, but lethal, cook was second place



Roy Plumlee speaks to the assembled students prior to firing. Photo by Robert Langham.



A soldier sights in on his target with his M14 rifle. Photo by Robert Langham.



Shooters and coaches on the firing line at Camp Bullis. Photo by Robert Langham.

overall. The TSRA team turned 'cannon cockers' of the First Cavalry into marksmen.

The faculty had to teach maintenance and operation of a rifle that was older than the soldiers. There were no spare parts. Since the M16 had replaced the .308 M14 in the mid sixties, there were no tools or expertise available from the Army. The civilian version of the M14, the M1A, was a beloved and revered rifle on NRA firing lines until the AR15 generally replaced it in the early 90s, so many of the VMI had an intimate knowledge of a rifle the army hadn't shot in 30 years. Rick Crawford ran a M14 gunsmith shop off the back gate of his truck. Most of the soldiers were Expert Rifleman, but few of them had experience beyond the standard Army 25 meter course or popup targets out to 300 meters. After a day of classroom the



school went to the rifle range at distances from 100 to 500 yards.

To qualify, the soldiers had to shoot 14 hits out of 20 shots with iron sights and scopes from the 100 yard line back to 500 on the army "E" silhouette. Most of them had never shot from position. None of them knew how to use a sling. Few of them had any concept of how a firearm works or basic principles of marksmanship. None of them could read environmental conditions and adjust. The teaching team, while rigorously enforcing basic NRA safety rules, took the group from novice to more expertise than the soldiers had ever imagined. Then the

TSRA High Power Rifle Team Instructors

- 1) Roy Plumlee - Mesquite
- 2) Robert Langham - Tyler
- 3) Robert Quinn - Dallas
- 4) Rick Crawford - Longview
- 5) Richard King - Ft Worth
- 6) Richard Schultz - White Oak
- 7) John Dunaway - Kilgore
- 8) David Wilson - Dallas
- 9) Stan Jarosz - Waco
- 10) Steve Urban - Ft. Worth

next week, they did it again.

On the line, the faculty drilled and explained and cajoled and taught and instructed and drilled some more. They taught sight alignment and trigger control. They stressed breathing and natural point of aim. They taught the use of a sling and how to shoot from position. They explained how to read the wind. They demonstrated how the M14 weapons system worked and was maintained, and how to use a rifle scope. They talked shooting. They talked tactics. They talked firearm maintenance and safety. They showed how to find a target.

The soldiers loved it. "This is more shooting than I have ever done in my whole Army career," said one First Cavalry trooper. "I want to learn more about shooting," said another. "I went through a sniper course and they didn't teach half of this stuff," one of the Cpls said. Several of the soldiers want to shoot highpower matches when they return.

By the end of the week most of the troops had qualified. A few failed and even those few said that they had learned more about shooting than they had ever imagined.

The salvation of our culture and our country depends on the skill of our armed forces. It depends no less on the will and character of the ordinary citizens who belong to organizations like the TSRA and the NRA.

This faculty was proud and privileged to be asked to assist the Army. They are proud and privileged to represent the Texas State Rifle Association and be a small part of the liberation of the Iraqi people and the War on Terror. The job they did may be added to the list of all the things we support with our TSRA dues and membership.



Instruction began in the classroom, with information not taught in Army Basic Marksmanship. Photo by Robert Langham.