MAKING MARKSMANSHIP EASY

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OVER THE YEARS some rather rigid training techniques have been developed for teaching people how to shoot. From time to time training programs have incorporated "improvements" but actually there is little difference between the methods used today and those used 40 years ago. Stance, breathing, trigger squeeze, and sight alignment are treated as separate areas and special methods have been developed to improve training in each. In effect, what has happened is that a relatively simple and straightforward training subject has been made into a very complex one.

Although the purpose of any marksmanship program is to familiarize the shooter with a weapon and to teach him to shoot it safely with some degree of accuracy, there are actually two distinctive types of shooting: competitive shooting and combat shooting. Competitive shooting is useful for men firing on bull's-eye targets, while combat shooting is concerned with survival and self-defense.

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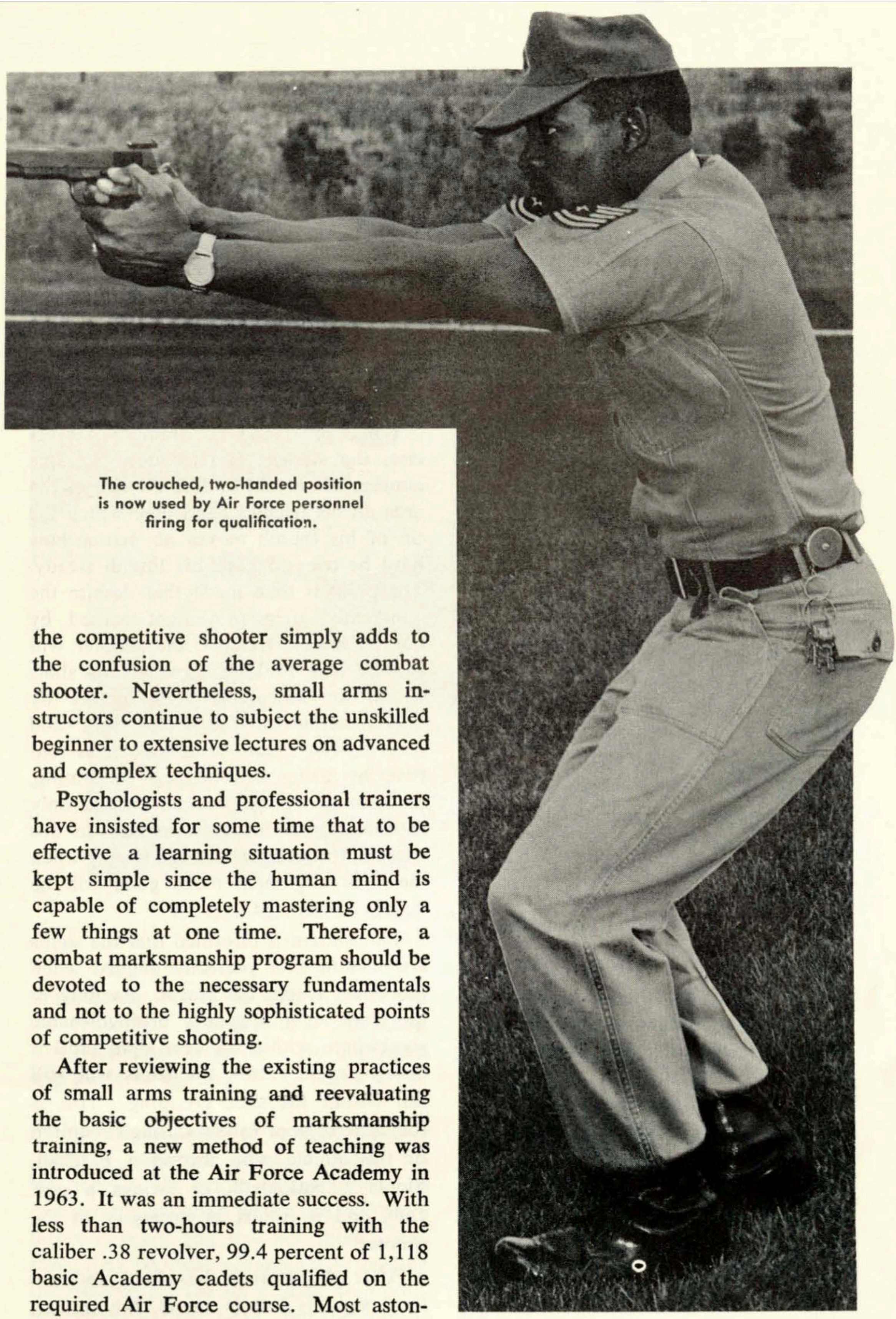
Complicated Training

Most training programs have been concerned with preparing a man to fire competitively even though his job requires that he use his weapon in self-defense. As a result, too much attention has been given to the fine points of shooting, and training has been overly complicated. Instruction in techniques useful only to



The crouched, two-handed position is now used by Air Force personnel firing for qualification.

the competitive shooter simply adds to the confusion of the average combat shooter. Nevertheless, small arms instructors continue to subject the unskilled beginner to extensive lectures on advanced and complex techniques.

Psychologists and professional trainers have insisted for some time that to be effective a learning situation must be kept simple since the human mind is capable of completely mastering only a few things at one time. Therefore, a combat marksmanship program should be devoted to the necessary fundamentals and not to the highly sophisticated points of competitive shooting.

After reviewing the existing practices of small arms training and reevaluating the basic objectives of marksmanship training, a new method of teaching was introduced at the Air Force Academy in 1963. It was an immediate success. With less than two-hours training with the caliber .38 revolver, 99.4 percent of 1,118 basic Academy cadets qualified on the required Air Force course. Most aston-

ishing about this statistic is the fact that 95 percent of the cadets had never fired a handgun before.

Ignoring Shooting Myths

This new marksmanship training program eliminated all the extraneous traditional instruction which meant ignoring some ancient shooting myths. Ironically, some of the long-practiced training techniques are misleading. For example, students had been told that the perfect sight picture is the front sight squarely in the notch of the rear sight with the bull's-eye target sitting on top of the front sight. Yet rarely had he been told that the bull's-eye appears as a vague and fuzzy blur when he focused on the front sight. Consequently, in trying to duplicate the conventional sight-target picture, the unskilled shooter was attempting to do the impossible and was never quite sure where to look. His eye constantly shifted its focus as it moved from the front sight to the target and back again, and his shooting performance suffered accordingly. Similarly, detailed instruction in breath control, stance, and grip tended to confuse, rather than help, the beginner.

But the new method minimizes the detailed instruction in these areas and emphasizes the following techniques:

- Focusing on the front sight,
- Squeezing the trigger in a manner which causes minimum disturbance of sight alignment after the hammer falls, and
- Using a two-handed grip.

The two parts of the program which receive the most attention are proper eye focus and area aiming. Proper eye focus is taught with no training devices other than the student's thumb and the man next to him. The student is encouraged to learn to shoot with both eyes open so that he does not lose his peripheral vision, an asset in combat shooting. He is told to point his extended thumb at the palm of his fellow shooter's hand. When he focuses his eyes on his thumbnail, the student observes that the lines on his friend's hand become blurred and indistinct. This demonstrates rather effectively that the bull's-eye will be a blur when the shooter's eyes are properly focused on the front sight.

Area Aiming

While practicing the thumbnail exercise, the student is introduced to area aiming. He is told to note the size of the area on his friend's hand over which the tip of his thumb moves no matter how hard he tries to keep his thumb steady. The point is then made that despite the apparently great movement caused by normal muscle tremors, the shooter will still be able to keep most of his shots within an acceptable area merely by concentrating on the front sight and ignoring the shake. The shooter is told that, by using this method of aiming, his shot groupings will be limited only by the area of his arm wobble. In this way the tendency to jerk the trigger when the sight alignment looks good will be largely eliminated.

The student is informed that the sights are seldom ever perfectly aligned when the bullet leaves the barrel. As long as the front sight is clearly distinguishable somewhere within the rear sight until it disappears in recoil, the shots will still fall within his shot grouping. This is the same type of follow through required of the athlete who throws a baseball, shoots a basketball, or swings a golf club, and it is just as necessary to the shooter.

After the weapon has fired and the front sight is lost in recoil, the student

The two-handed grip enables the shooter to exert more positive control over his weapon.

immediately locates the front sight within the rear sight and fires the next shot. This technique helps maintain alignment and prevents shifting of eye focus to the target.

For the beginner or combat shooter there is only one place to point his weapon—at the center of the target. In competitive shooting where the bull's-eye target is used, and will not shoot back, there may be some advantages to zeroing the weapon for the six o'clock hold position below the bull's-eye. But the combat shooter is not allowed this luxury. The enemy will not be wearing a light jacket with a bull's-eye on it.

Trigger Squeeze

Another important part of shooting is proper trigger squeeze. This is achieved by applying positive pressure straight to the rear until the hammer falls. Students are taught not to anticipate a shot because they will unconsciously brace their body for the recoil. Body tenseness will result in reflex action of the whole hand

and cause the shot to be thrown out of the shot-group pattern. A smooth trigger squeeze is very important to the combat shooter because it allows him to fire accurately at a man-sized target without using his sights at distances of 10 to 25 yards. The ultimate goal of combat small arms training is to get off the perfect snap shot.

After learning how to apply the fundamentals of sight alignment and trigger squeeze, the beginner will place six out of every 10 shots within a 12-inch group on some portion of a silhouette target after only two hours of training. Such shooting will qualify the shooter as a satisfactory marksman and in combat would easily enable him to incapacitate an enemy.

Two-Handed Grip

A final technique, which has met much success, is the two-handed grip. Since combat marksmanship programs are designed to teach a man to shoot and hit something, it seems only natural that the more positive control which a shooter can exert over his weapon, the better his accuracy will be. As in driving an automobile, two hands are better than one. In addition to the added safety, the two-handed grip provides the shooter with better control of the weapon during firing. It is also more natural than one-handed shooting.

Although firing a pistol from a standing, two-handed position may not have the esthetic appeal of the conventional dueling stance, it is far more effective in bringing down an attacking enemy.

Improved Qualification Scores

It may be a little premature to judge the worth of this new method, but some of the results tabulated to date are rather startling. At Sandia Base, N.M., location of an Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) site, 17 Sandia Corporation security inspectors failed to qualify on their first trial during the 1965 qualifications. In 1966 the entire force of 139 men was trained in this method. During training each man fired the AEC qualification course designed for guard force personnel. Not one man failed to qualify on his first try. In addition, a vast majority of the men improved their average scores from 10 to 25 points.

As interesting as the improvement in the individual scores might be, the most significant result was observed in an attitude change on the part of many of the men. Before, many approached the use of small arms with reluctance and distaste because of their inability to use their weapon effectively. These same individuals now have confidence in themselves and in their weapon and are looking forward to future small arms training sessions with renewed enthusiasm.

The training method for teaching combat marksmanship discussed in this article has favorably impressed both military and civilian marksmanship instructors. Stressing only basic fundamentals and techniques, this method has proven to be effective in certain types of shooting programs, and the two-handed technique is now used by Air Force personnel qualifying with the revolver on most courses of fire.

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