



### ***Secrets of Mental Marksmanship: How to Fire Perfect Shots***

**By Linda K. Miller and Keith Cunningham**

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Reviewed by SFC (Retired) John C. Simpson

A lot of ink gets spilled extolling the virtues of the importance of the Soldier's mind as a weapon. Despite this, the usual priority is acquiring more things that either go "bang" or require batteries in order to assure victory. Tools to do the job are essential, but it was General George S. Patton in his memoir, *War As I Knew It*, who attributed a quote to General Ulysses S. Grant that went as follows: "In every battle there comes a time when both sides consider themselves beaten, then he who continues the attack wins." So apart from kicking slogans back and forth at each other, how can we train the mental side of something like marksmanship? That brings us to the book at hand. Just for full disclosure before we go any further, I've known the authors for a number of years and contributed a section to their previous offering, *The Wind Book*. That said, although I didn't contribute anything to this latest book, they did a fantastic job addressing a tough subject.

Now one of my rules has always been to judge ideas on their merits rather than their pedigree. In this case, however, these writers are telling you how to succeed in shooting, and I think it would be useful to see how well these two have succeeded.

Keith Cunningham is a retired captain from the Canadian Defense Forces, having served with them and the U.S. Army in Vietnam. He has taught marksmanship courses at the Canadian Forces Infantry School and at several police forces in Ontario. He is an internationally certified shooting coach and has successfully coached teams to national and international excellence. Cunningham is also a renowned rifle and pistol competitor, having won honors at Bisley, the World Long Range Championships, and the Commonwealth Games. He is the 2008 and 2009 National Service Rifle and national 3-gun (pistol, service rifle, sniper rifle) champion.

Linda Miller has considerable experience in international smallbore target shooting as a member of Canada's Shooting Team. She won medals in the 1994 Commonwealth Games, 1995 Cuba World Cup, and 1993 Mexico World Cup. In 1999 she became the first woman to win the Ontario Lieutenant Governor's Medal for shooting. In 2002, she competed in F-Class and was the top female provincially, nationally, and at the world championships. Miller is the 2008 national sniper marksmanship champion

But you know what, my rule holds true because I've never cared what an instructor can do — it's always about what that instructor's students can do. The authors have coached 13 members of the military to a Queen's Medal, the top award for marksmanship within the Canadian Forces.

With the introductions out of the way, I want to discuss what you'll find in this book. First and foremost is the common thread through all of their work in the concept of "hits count," a famous abbreviation of the phrase "Only hits count, all else is burnt ammunition" that dates back to at least 1909. I emphasize this because this isn't just a book for snipers. The principles explained in this book also apply equally to Soldiers, competitive shooters, hunters, and law enforcement.

The text grew out of authors' six-hour mental marksmanship seminars that they conduct through their training company in Canada. The purpose of which is described as focusing "on the thought process for developing and maintaining a technical skill and applying it successfully under stress. It has been given to many organizations from Regional to Federal agencies, from Club to International competitors. This course is considered to have the mental 'secrets' needed for success."

While reading this book, I liked how the authors tell stories to make their point. In the right hands, this is a very powerful tool. I don't want to steal their thunder, but I have to tell you all that there is an example on page 144 entitled "Competition Story — Leo the Lion-Hearted" that is almost worth the price of the book. The book provides military, law enforcement, hunter, and competition examples in each chapter, and some of the examples are drawn from mistakes the authors have made.

Let me finish with a quote from Chapter 9: The Final Power – The Power of Perseverance: "The only unforgivable sin is to quit. We aren't talking about a tactical withdrawal. We're talking about bald-faced giving up. Whatever is happening to you on the firing point, in life, or on operations, always stay in the fight. The match, the hunt, or the mission is over only when the last shot is fired."

Many successful snipers, hunters, and competitors have used the principles in this book without being taught them or even having a name for them. Here in one package is a series of concrete examples drawn from experience that you can begin to apply to your life as a Soldier. Read this book; you'll be glad that you did.

One administrative note: This is the second edition of a book that was originally published by the now defunct Paladin Press. Don't confuse the current edition with the out-of-print first edition. Used copies of that book often go for exorbitant prices online, and some unscrupulous or confused booksellers may attempt to sell the current book at the same prices.