

THE SPHINX TARGET

Marksmanship Training in Three Dimensions

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Editor's Note: *This article was first published in the January-April 1999 issue of Infantry Magazine.*

No matter what you think about the state of Army marksmanship training, certain items are absolutely essential to conducting worthwhile training. The most basic of these items are weapons, ammunition, ranges, and targets.

Regardless of the location or the element conducting the training, targets are almost always two-dimensional. While two-dimensional targets are effective for training Soldiers in basic rifle marksmanship, they stifle a Soldier's further development and the trainer's ability to simulate battlefield targets.

During my tenure as the NCO of the Special Operations Target Interdiction Course at Fort Bragg, one of the instructors, Sergeant First Class John Simpson, came to me with a training problem. He wanted a target that presented a three-dimensional profile of an enemy soldier and that also afforded a scoring method.

In other sniper courses, rag-filled dummies were used on field fire ranges where they were laid out to represent enemy soldiers lying prone on the ground. Some dummies are made to simulate the head and shoulders of a soldier observing from a fighting position. Scoring hits on these dummies is very difficult, and SFC Simpson wanted to make it easier to evaluate the number of hits.

After a few minutes

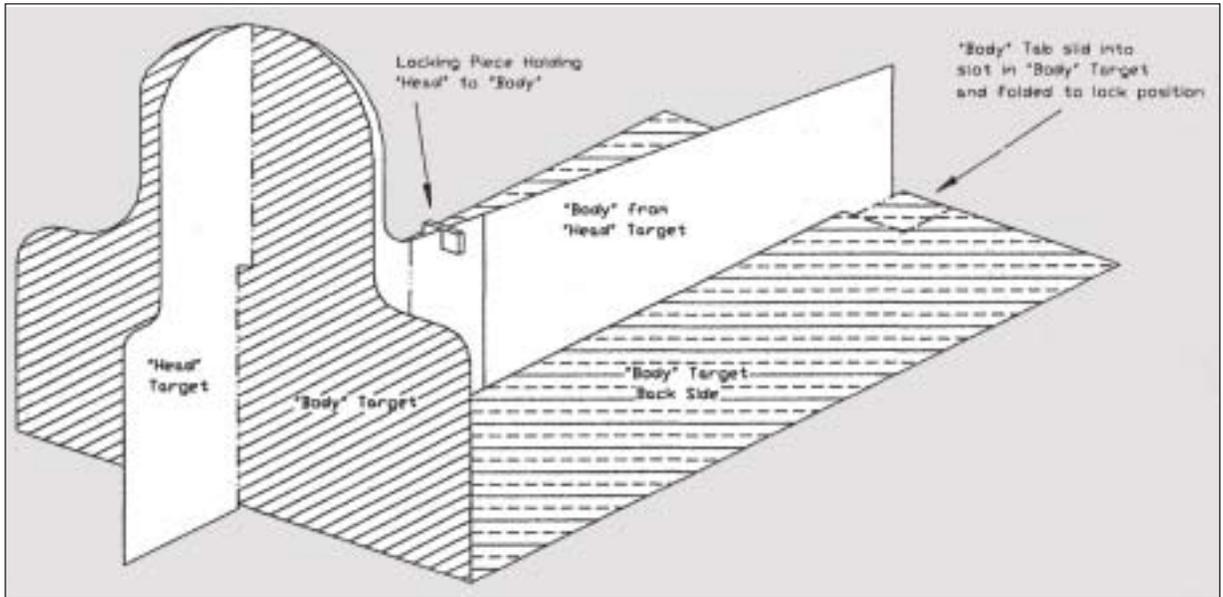
of discussion, we went to the target shed and grabbed two E-type silhouettes and came up with a target that we call the Sphinx:

Cut the first silhouette (head target) across the chest 19 inches below the top of the head. Then cut one entire shoulder away and cut a slit from the bottom of the target halfway up toward the head. Score a line on the second (base) target across the chest 19 inches below the head and then fold along this line. Cut a three- or four-inch slit upward from the center of the target bottom for the tab on the "body" strip. Also slit the base target from the top of the head downward to accommodate the head target. Then cut the body strip from the remainder of the first target nine inches wide and have a small tab at one end to engage the slit in the bottom of the base target. To lock everything together, cut a two-by-four-inch strip as a locking piece for the head and body sections.

The target can be assembled very rapidly. Lay the body of the base target flat on the ground with the head raised vertically, and slide the head target down into the head of the base target. Insert the tab on the body into the slit in the bottom of the base target and fold it over. Then cut a notch for the locking piece in the rear shoulder of the head target and the body strip to lock everything together. Once the target is assembled, it can be thrown around without coming apart. See the accompanying sketches for construction and assembly.



The options for using the Sphinx are almost limitless. Sphinx targets can be used on any terrain because they do not require stakes to emplace, are easily scored, can be patched with normal plasters, and afford lifelike positioning. The Sphinx target can be held in position during high winds by sandbags, dirt kicked onto the target, or a small piece of wood.

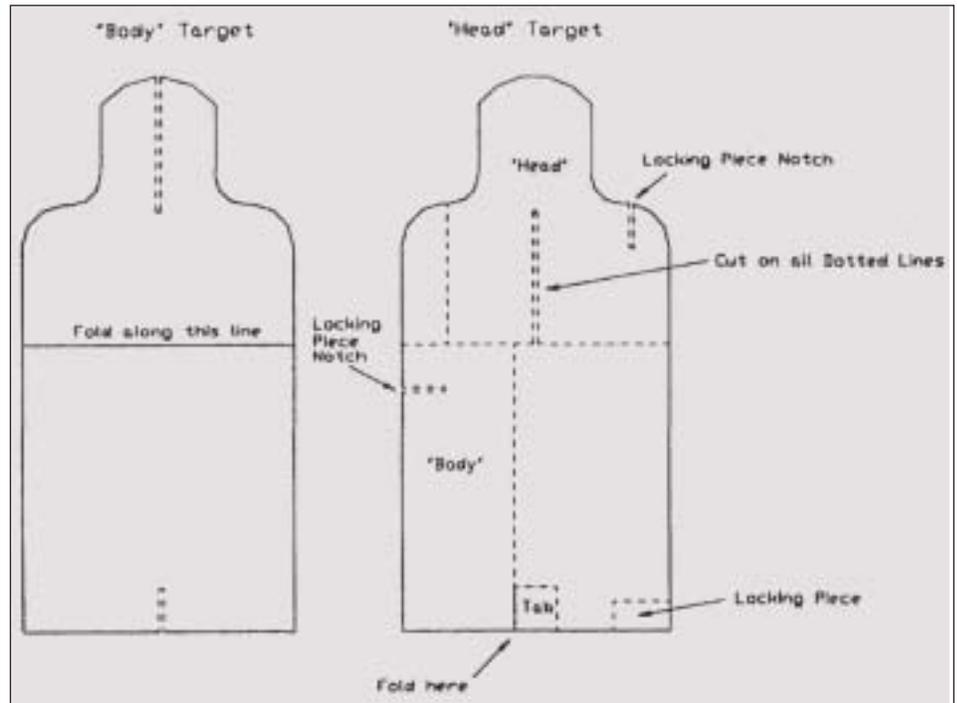


Sphinx targets can be used in structures during military operations on urban terrain (MOU) training without creating specialized target stands. Additionally, three-dimensional standing targets can be made from two full-size E-type silhouettes for MOU training:

Slit one target from the top of the head halfway down through the body and slit the other from the bottom halfway up toward the head. Then slide them together, forming the three-dimensional profile. These targets can be placed inside structures standing on the floor, tables, or boxes to create target height that simulate personnel in standing or kneeling positions. Furniture can be used to partially mask or completely hide the targets, and clothing can be draped over the shoulders of the Sphinx.

The Sphinx targets' greatest value is on an unknown distance range where they can be placed with varying levels of camouflage to challenge Soldiers to find and engage them within a specified period of time. The three-dimensional nature of a Sphinx gives it different appearances from different vantage points. The changing appearance causes Soldiers to observe the ground in front of them instead of simply looking for silhouettes. Of course, painting these targets in other colors or patterns contributes to the difficulty in finding and then engaging them, which adds still more to the training value.

The targets are easy to disassemble and



store for reuse later. The disassembled targets do not require a large amount of storage space because they can lie flat and occupy the same space as E-type silhouettes. Eliminating the requirement for wooden target stakes solves the problem of stake procurement, stake emplacement (hole digging), disposal of broken stakes and storage of serviceable stakes. Picks and shovels are not required, and range clean up is much faster.

The Sphinx is a training enhancement that any unit can use at virtually no cost. Give it a shot!

Master Sergeant Marc V. Palmer was assigned to Training Branch, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg when this article was originally published. He has served in Special Forces assignments since 1977, including assignments as an instructor, gunsmith and NCOIC of the Special Operations Target Interdiction Course.