



‘TEAM FISH HOOK’ LONG RANGE CARBINE MARKSMANSHIP TRAINING IN AFGHANISTAN

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This article describes what we called “Fish Hook” (from our call sign) long range carbine marksmanship training we executed in December 2007 at Spin Buldak, Afghanistan. We wrapped up a very successful austere-environment shooting training event after several months of planning, collecting information, and fabricating targets.

I was the senior infantry advisor for an 18-man Afghan Border Police mentor team. My team was made up of senior NCOs (sergeants first class and one master sergeant) and officers (captains and a major). We mentored an Afghan Border Police unit tasked with securing a sector responsible for 500 kilometers of border (no, that’s not a typo).

We lived in an old Special Forces firebase on the border with Pakistan from January 2007 through January 2008. Spin Buldak is Afghanistan’s second largest border crossing point. The (believe

me) not-so-friendly “Friendship Gate” takes in a very large portion of the country’s revenues through import taxes.

It seemed that with “The Big Dance” being in Iraq — those of us in Afghanistan were left to play second fiddle for resources and manpower. What we did was a result of each Soldier’s time and effort, especially the work of the highly professional NCOs that I had the privilege of working with on the project: SFC John Giles, SFC Lee Picket, SFC Brian Lamberton, and SFC Steve Steiger. I would have loved to have conducted the range earlier in our tour but training ammo was in short supply for most of our deployment.

We received help from several sources. Mark Mann is a “marksmanship guru” with the Kentucky State Rifle and Pistol Association and an adjunct instructor for the Civilian Marksmanship Program’s Squad Designated Marksman Military Rifle Instructor staff. He squared me away with the right data and a superb course

format. LTC Dave Liwanag, a former U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit (USAMU) commander, wrote an *Infantry Magazine* article with info on constructing a known distance range while deployed which was a great help. MAJ Dave Cloft of the U.S. Army Reserve Rifle Team sent us ballistic cards and other ballistic data. Fort Campbell Range Safety was extremely helpful in ensuring that we executed this training event safely and we were set up using proper safety danger zones and safety precautions. The Army Marksmanship Unit Designated Marksman Course curriculum is posted on AKO and allowed us to prepare excellent classroom instruction.

Training started with two hours of classroom instruction in which the NCOs gave their respective classes. To say the least, many of my peers had the thousand-meter stare at first as we delved into formulas on minutes-of-angle,



Photos courtesy of author

Captain Dan Celucci fires his M4 while a spotter watches impacts.



Above, SFC John Giles fills sandbags for firing positions. At right, SFC Steve Steiger cuts steel plate to make F and E-type silhouette targets in preparation for long range carbine marksmanship training.



zeroing, wind shift, and wind speed.

Our final range layout was a group of three targets at each given range. The 100-meter targets were MK19 ammo cans, painted red; the 200-meter targets were steel F-type silhouettes, and the 300, 400, and 500-meter targets were full-size steel E-type silhouettes.

Day 1 ended with a 200-meter field zero session in which, of the 15 Soldiers involved, only three had ever conducted and confirmed a field zero on their service rifle before.

Day 2 started with shooting from the standing position at the 100-meter line. Our target was MK19 ammo cans painted red and each shooter was paired with a spotter. The spotter and shooter took turns firing four separate 10-shot groups.

Shooter pairs continued to the 200-meter line and shot in the kneeling position. Next were the 300 and 400-meter lines shooting in the prone unsupported position, and we finished at the 500-meter line firing from prone supported.

We conducted range estimation and hold-off training next. The coaches were told the time engagement standards and gave their shooters five rounds to engage three targets at varying ranges. The shooter had to quickly estimate range, adjust his sights accordingly, assume shooting position, estimate wind speed, and transition from target to target within the

given time standards. An average iteration involved a shooter engaging a 600-meter target, 500-meter target, and 150-meter target in 56 seconds.

The culmination event was a shooting competition. We gave each shooter 10 rounds at each station with a time standard for each range. The firing positions and time standards were:

- 100 meters, standing (4 seconds x 10 for 40 seconds);
- 200 meters, kneeling (5 seconds x 10 for 50 seconds);
- 300 and 400 meters, prone unsupported (6 and 9 seconds, respectively, x 10 for 60 seconds and 90 seconds, respectively); and
- 500 meters, prone supported (10 seconds x 10 for 100 seconds).

After two hours of classroom instruction and 350 rounds per shooter, our high score was 33 of 50. This may not seem like much, but we spotted “hits” and “misses” with optics. Spotting 5.56mm target impacts at 400 and 500 meters can be difficult in sandy terrain so our scores may have been a few rounds short, but it was a great competition nonetheless. We had a lot more participation than expected and the course was a huge success.

As you can see by some of the photographs, Afghanistan’s terrain offers many more opportunities for long range engagements — this was a long overdue and

much-needed training event. When we conducted our handover with our relief force, we gave the firebase a range and the capability to conduct long-range training any day of the week with minimal assets. The course was so successful that we taught the techniques to a Canadian reconnaissance company the next week.

On behalf of my team I would like to thank those who supported us for their patience and perseverance while we put this all together. They gave us what every Soldier wants and that is confidence that he can do what is asked of him and be the very best at it. To quote Mark Mann, “There is no substitute for good marksmanship.”

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