

Close quarters combat training: using the IDPA system

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After competing for several years within the Glock Sport Shooting Foundation (GSSF), the International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA), the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC) 3 gun, and numerous local plate, steel, and pin shooting competitions. I have concluded that infantrymen shoot poorly at close quarters combat (CQC) distances (i.e. 0 to 25 meters). There are plenty of civilian men and women who shoot as a hobby who can routinely outshoot infantrymen. I attribute this to the methodology that the practical/ tactical civilian shooting sports have developed, which creates shooters who can reflexively engage multiple targets quickly and accurately at CQC distances. The U.S. Army Infantry is 30 years behind these organizations in CQC weapons training and qualification. Recent U.S. Army publications such as FM 90-10-1--Change 1 (An Infantryman's Guide to Combat in Built Up Areas) and chapter 14 of the Ranger Handbook covering urban operations touch on the topics of shot placement and engagement time, but the Infantry has yet to develop an effective system to evaluate, improve, and sustain those individual CQC marksmanship skills. I propose that the Infantry adopt such a system. A CQC individual weapons training methodology that integrates IDPA, weapons currently assigned to infantrymen (M9, M4, and M249), and the imperatives published in chapter 14 of the Ranger Handbook and FM 90-10-1, C1.

IDPA

IDPA shooting matches place individual pistol shooters in multiple civilian "real world" scenarios/courses of fire (COF) where they are evaluated on shot placement, engagement time, and weapon-handling skills. It is a mini-individual live-fire exercise requiring use of cover and shooting on the move, with targets that require multiple hits and value head and chest hits highest.

How it works

There are commonly four to seven COFs during a one-day IDPA match. Each COF is constructed in a three-sided, earth-bermed bay. After a safety brief, shooters are broken down into squads. Squads then rotate through the COFs in a round robin fashion. At each COF, an informal scenario brief is read and explained to the squad. The squad safety officer (SO), a senior more experienced shooter, gives this brief. The SO also gives the range commands, handles the shot timer, and follows the shooter through the COF (Figure 1). The standard IDPA range commands are, "Load and make ready, shooter ready, standby, start signal (start signal can be verbal, audio buzzer, i.e. timer, or visual at the discretion of the range master/OIC), unload and show clear, holster/ sling, range sale." Each shooter moves up to the start position, receives the commands and negotiates the COF. Upon completion, the range is cleared by the SO, and the shooter's time is recorded. Each target is reviewed for shot placement score, and any observed penalties are assessed. The shooters score is then recorded on his score sheet. Those individuals not shooting help paste the target holes, reset reactive targets, or act as the scorer.

[FIGURE 1 OMITTED]

The structure of an IDPA match, with its round-robin rotation, safety briefs, organic shooting squad leadership, and range commands lends itself to easy understanding by platoon and company leadership. More importantly, it is a simple system that supercharges the learning process because it:

- * Allows an individual to watch more experienced shooters perform;
- * Gives shooters immediate shot placement feedback;
- * Allows a shooter to receive a "hot wash" on his performance from a senior leader; and
- * Gives shooters scores that will rank them against every shooter issued their weapon.

Shot placement (Target)

The current IDPA target (Figure 2) is similar in overall size to the 25-meter E-type silhouette that is used for firing the Alternate Pistol

Qualification Course (APQC), but has scoring areas that reward head and upper chest hits. Our infantrymen need a similar CQC target that rewards habitual head, upper chest, and pelvis shot placement. Center mass shot placement is not the CQC standard.

[FIGURE 2 OMITTED]

In CQC, enemy soldiers must be incapacitated immediately. Shots that merely wound or that are mortal but do not incapacitate the target instantaneously are only slightly better than clean misses. Members of a clearing team should concentrate on achieving solid, well-placed headshots. This shot placement is difficult for some soldiers to learn, having been taught previously to aim at center of mass.--FM 90-10-1, C1

Most close quarters engagements are won by who hits first and puts the enemy down. It is more important to knock a man down as soon as possible than it is to kill him.--Ranger Handbook

An Infantryman must be trained to know where to place a shot that will knock down and/or kill the threat. He must be able to reflexively place those shots on multiple threats, continuing to engage the threat(s) until he has knocked them down and/or killed them.

The only shot placement that guarantees immediate and total incapacitation is one roughly centered in the face, below the middle of the forehead, and above the upper lip. Shots to the side of the head above the horizontal line passing through the ear opening to just below the crown of the skull and from the cheekbones rearward to the occipital lobe are also effective. With practice, accurate shot placement can be achieved.--FM 90-10-1, C1

I propose the U.S. Army Infantry adopt a CQC target template similar to the current IDPA model. The head scoring panel is identical. The upper chest scoring panel is similar, with no change to the heart scoring panel and the lung panel being shortened. Additionally, a pelvis scoring area, 18-inch by 5 inch, is placed just underneath where the waistline would be (Figure 3).

[FIGURE 3 OMITTED]

Scoring shot placement on the proposed CQC target with point values/points down Vickers Count: head shots are 5 pts/-0 pts down, pelvis shots are 5 pts/-0 pts down, upper chest/heart are 3 pts/-1 pts down, and upper chest lung shots are 2 pts/-2 pts down. The remainder of the target area is scored as 1 point/-3. A target must have a minimum of 5 points scored or be penalized as a failure to neutralize the threat. All reactive or steel targets have a score of 5 points/-0. The points down or Vicker's Count scoring method is described in further depth below.

Scoring method

Scoring should be a component of shot placement, engagement time, and penalties. Currently, most infantry small arms refining and qualification is conducted on a PAR time basis.

This means each string of fire will have a preset time limit to shoot the required number of rounds. As long as all shots are fired within the time limit, points scored on the target/targets is all that counts.--IDPA Official Rule Book

As lawman and gun writer Bill Jordan observed, there is no second place winner in a gunfight. The shooter who can accurately place multiple shots on his opponent first, wins. The time difference between winning and losing may be .30 of a second. Smooth is not fast: fast is fast. Par time cannot be the CQC weapons training or qualification standard. I propose that the Infantry utilize an alternative time scoring method for individual CQC weapons training and qualification. This method requires what is commonly referred to as a shot timer to record engagement time.

A shot timer is a handheld computer that records the time it takes a shooter to initially engage a target, the time "splits" between shots and the total time from the start "tone" or first shot to last (i.e. a COF may begin with the first shot fired or the audible tone of the shot time). When using a shot timer, the Vickers Count scoring method should be used.

Vickers Count (for use when shooting speed shoots and scenarios) Vickers Count scoring is based on assessing the shooter a time penalty for every point they drop from the total possible point score (points down). To score Vickers Count simply take the time it took to complete the string of fire (raw time) and ADD five tenths (.50) of a second for each point down from the possible score. Add any applicable penalties and total for your final score. As many shots as desired may be fired but only the best hits as specified by the course

description will be scored (Example: If two hits per target are specified in the course description and you fired three shots, ONLY the two highest scoring hits will count for the score).--IDPA Official Rule Book

Vickers count scoring example #1: The COF required two hits on T1. Total point score is 7 (5 + 2 = 7), so no failure to neutralize penalty. Total points down is 2 (0 + 2 = 2).

Total time from shot timer is 1.25 seconds.

$2(.50) = 1 + 1.25 = 2.25$ /Points down x .50 + total time = score

* When utilizing Vicker's Count scoring, the low score is best.

Vicker's count scoring example #2: The COF requires 2 body hits per target. Total point score for T1 = 10, T2 = 5; no failure to neutralize. Points down T1 = 0, points down T2 = 3; total = 3. Total time from shot timer = 2.56 seconds.

$3(.50) = 1.5 + 2.56 = 4.06$ /Points down x .50 + total time = score

Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) and Penalties

The IDPA has developed TTPs into its scoring system. Most if not all of them were created to develop innate survival and weapon handling skills, which would benefit infantrymen.

Hits on a Non-threat Target: A single five-second penalty will be assessed per non-threat target hit. If you have more than one hit on a non-threat target, you will still ONLY be a single five-second penalty for that target. --IDPA Official Rule Book

This IDPA TTP focuses on improving what is referred to as target discrimination for infantrymen. C1, FM 90-10-1 describes this as a vital skill for our infantryman to acquire and sustain.

Target discrimination is the act of quickly distinguishing between combatant and noncombatant personnel and engaging only the combatants. U.S. forces engage in CQC in order to apply discriminating combat power and limit unnecessary casualties among noncombatants. Therefore, target discrimination is vital in CQC.--FM 90-10-1, C1

Cover, when available, should be utilized by infantrymen to minimize their exposure to enemy fire. Currently, the use of cover is not part of an individual infantryman's marksmanship training. The proper use of cover is an evaluated TTP during IDPA matches and should be included in every infantryman's CQC marksmanship training (Figure 4).

[FIGURE 4 OMITTED]

Proper use of cover: If cover is available, the shooter must use it. More than 50 percent of the shooter's upper torso must be behind cover when engaging threat target and/or reloading. If in the opinion of the safety officer (SO) adequate cover is not being used (if the shooter does not have to move between target engagements, this is a strong indicator that adequate cover is NOT being used), the SO will yell COVER. If the competitor does NOT immediately move to adequate cover, a three-second procedural penalty will be assessed. All reloads must be executed behind cover if cover is available and must be completed before leaving cover. (Shooters may not move from one position of cover to another with an empty weapon.) Failure to reload behind cover or moving from cover with an empty weapon will result in a three-second procedural penalty per infraction.

--IDPA official Rule Book

Training

Utilizing this methodology, commanders should be given the opportunity to develop CQC marksmanship training COF that directly reflect mission requirements; for instance, several scenarios might depict a soldier conducting gate guard, a HMMWV patrol, a check point, moving down a hallway, an ambush in an alley, etc. Countless COFs are available to commanders on the Internet.

Several sites of interest are: www.idpa.com, www.tacticalshooters.com, and www.sportshooter.com.

Qualification

The IDPA qualification COF is composed of three stages fired at three targets, which are placed two yards apart at varying heights (Figure 4). It must be fired as one continuous COF. No breaks between strings. Shooters receive a score utilizing Vickers Count and are ranked with shooters firing similar weapons. I recommend the Infantry adopt a modification of the IDPA qualifier shown in figures 5, 6, and 7.

* Engagements begin with shot timer tone from prescribed start position.

* A 55-gallon barrel and a Bianchi-style barricade (a wall 24-inches wide by 6-feet tall) are needed to fire the qualifier.

* Body shot placement is shooter's choice.

FIGURE 5--M9/M4/MP5 CQC INDIVIDUAL WEAPONS QUALIFICATION

STAGE1	DISTANCE	START POSITION
String 1	4 meters	Low ready
String 2	4 meters	Low ready
String 3	4 meters	Low ready
String 4	4 meters	Low ready
String 5	4 meters	Low ready, weak hand (M4/MP5, weak shoulder)
String 6	4 meters	Back to target, low ready, 3 rounds in weapon, 1-3 round magazine in ammo pouch. At start, turn & engage T1-T3, 1 round ea., slide lock reload, engage T1-T3
String 7	4 meters	Low ready, strong hand (M4/MP5, weak shoulder)
STAGE2	DISTANCE	START POSITION
String 1	8 meters	Low ready, engage moving forward to 4 m fault line
String 2	4 meters	Low ready, engage moving backward
String 3	8 meters	Back to target, low ready, 6 rounds in weapon, 1-6 round magazine in ammo pouch. At start, turn & engage T1-T3, 2 rounds ea., slide lock reload, engage T1-T3
String 4	8 meters	Low ready, strong hand (M4/MP5, weak shoulder)
STAGE3	DISTANCE	START POSITION
String 1	15 meters	Low ready, drop to knee, engage T1-T3, 2 shots each from either side of 55-gal. barrel in tactical order, tactical reload, switch sides and enage T1-T3, 2 shots each in tactical order.
String 2	20 meters	Low ready, engage T1-T3, 2 shots each from either side of barricade, in tactical order, tactical reload, advance to 55-gal. barrel, drop to knee, engage T1-T3, either

String 3 15 meters side of 55-gal. barrel, in tactical order.
 Low ready, drop to knee, engage T1-T3,
 2 shots each from either side of 55-gal.
 barrel in tactical order.

STAGE1 SHOT PLACEMENT per Tgt

String 1 2 hits pelvis, 1 head
 String 2 2 hits pelvis, 1 head
 String 3 2 hits pelvis, 1 head
 String 4 2 hits head
 String 5 1 hit pelvis or head
 String 6 2 hits head
 String 7 2 hits pelvis, 1 head

STAGE2 SHOT PLACEMENT per Tgt

String 1 2 hits body
 String 2 2 hits body
 String 3 4 hits body
 String 4 2 hits body

STAGE3 SHOT PLACEMENT per Tgt

String 1 2 hits body
 String 2 2 hits body
 String 3 2 hits body

STAGE1 TARGET(S) RDS

String 1 T1 3
 String 2 T2 3
 String 3 T3 3
 String 4 T1-T3 6
 String 5 T1-T3 3
 String 6 T1-T3 6
 String 7 T1-T3 6

STAGE2 TARGET(S) RDS

String 1 T1-T3 6
 String 2 T1-T3 6
 String 3 T1-T3 12
 String 4 T1-T3 6

STAGE3 TARGET(S) RDS

String 1 T1-T3 12
 String 2 T1-T3 12
 String 3 T1-T3 6

FIGURE 6--M249 CQC INDIVIDUAL WEAPONS QUALIFICATION

STAGE1	DISTANCE	START POSITION
String 1	4 meters	Low ready
String 2	4 meters	Low ready
String 3	4 meters	Low ready
String 4	4 meters	Low ready
String 5	4 meters	Low ready, weak shoulder
String 6	4 meters	Back to target, low ready, 9 round belt in weapon, 1-9 round magazine in ammo pouch. At start, turn & engage T1-T3, 3 round burst each, 3 round mag. reload, engage T1-T3 burst each
String 7	4 meters	Low ready, weak shoulder
STAGE2	DISTANCE	START POSITION
String 1	8 meters	Low ready, engage moving forward to 4 m fault line
String 2	4 meters	Low ready, engage moving backward to 8 m fault line
String 3	8 meters	Back to target, low ready, 9 round belt in weapon, 1-9 round magazine in ammo pouch. At start, turn & engage T1-T3, 3 rd burst each, magazine reload, engage T1-T3 3 rd burst each
String 4	8 meters	Low ready, weak shoulder
STAGE3	DISTANCE	START POSITION
String 1	15 meters	Low ready, drop to knee, engage T1-T3, 3 round burst each from either side of 55-gal. barrel in tactical order, switch sides and engage T1-T3, 3 round burst each in tactical order.
String 2	20 meters	Low ready, drop to knee, engage T1-T3, 3rd burst each from either side of barricade, in tactical order, advance to 55-gal. barrel, drop to knee, engage T1-T3, 3 rd burst each either side of 55-gal. barrel, in tactical order.
String 3	15 meters	Low ready, drop to knee, engage T1-T3, 3 rd burst each from either side of 55-gal. barrel in tactical order.
STAGE1	SHOT PLACEMENT	per Tgt
String 1	3 hits	body

String 2 3 hits body
 String 3 3 hits body
 String 4 3 hits body
 String 5 3 hits body
 String 6 6 hits body
 String 7 3 hits body

STAGE2 SHOT PLACEMENT per Tgt

String 1 3 hits body
 String 2 3 hits body
 String 3 6 hits body
 String 4 3 hits body

STAGE3 SHOT PLACEMENT per Tgt

String 1 6 hits body
 String 2 6 hits body
 String 3 3 hits body

STAGE1 TARGET(S) RDS

String 1 T1 3
 String 2 T2 3
 String 3 T3 3
 String 4 T1-T3 9
 String 5 T1-T3 9
 String 6 T1-T3 18
 String 7 T1-T3 9

STAGE2 TARGET(S) RDS

String 1 T1-T3 9
 String 2 T1-T3 9
 String 3 T1-T3 18
 String 4 T1-T3 9

STAGE3 TARGET(S) RDS

String 1 T1-T3 18
 String 2 T1-T3 18
 String 3 T1-T3 9

FIGURE 7--CQC INDIVIDUAL SCORING CLASSIFICATIONS

	VICKERS COUNT SCORE	CLASSIFICATION
M4/MP5	80.41 OR LESS	MASTER
	80.42 - 99.57	EXPERT
	99.58 - 129.18	SHARPSHOOTER

129.19 - 181.00	MARKSMAN
181.01 OR MORE	NOVICE

VICKERS COUNT SCORE	CLASSIFICATION
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M9	98.82 OR LESS	MASTER
	88.83 - 120.00	EXPERT
	120.01 - 152.73	SHARPSHOOTER
	152.74 - 210.00	MARKSMAN
	210.01 OR MORE	NOVICE

VICKERS COUNT SCORE	CLASSIFICATION
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M249	91.76 OR LESS	MASTER
	91.77 - 111.43	EXPERT
	111.44 - 141.82	SHARPSHOOTER
	141.83 - 195.00	MARKSMAN
	195.01 OR MORE	NOVICE

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