

# Service Rifle Qualification Courses

~ And Target Graphics ~

Graphics By Gloria Culver

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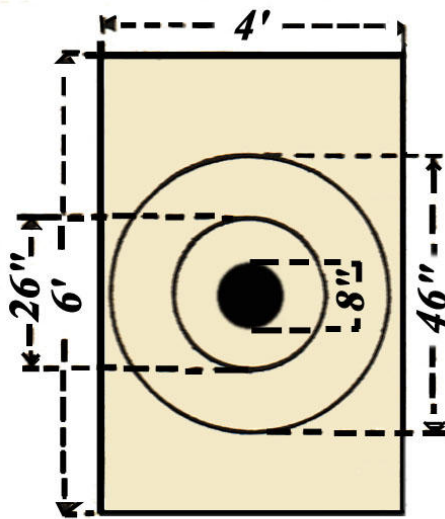
Original Distinguished  
Marksman's Badge  
Illustrating the "long  
oval" bullseye of 1885



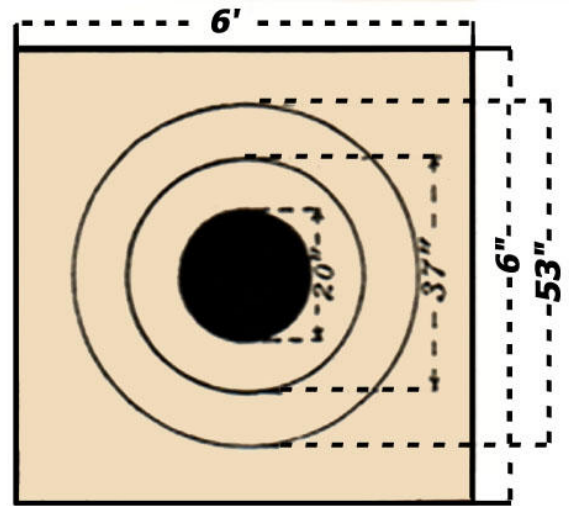
Culver

By Dick

**Qualification Targets for Military Rifle Qualification  
(from roughly; turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century until about 1922/'59/'82)**



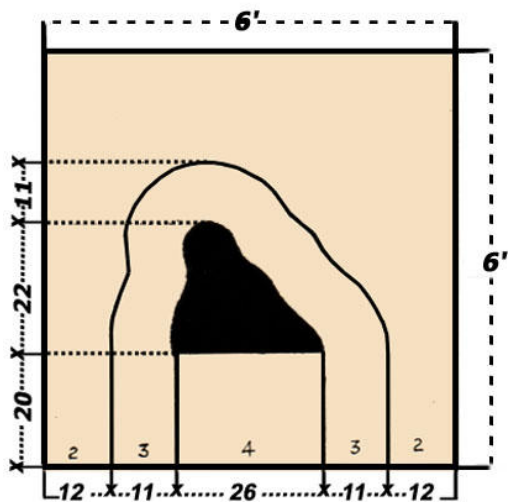
**TARGET A**



**TARGET B**

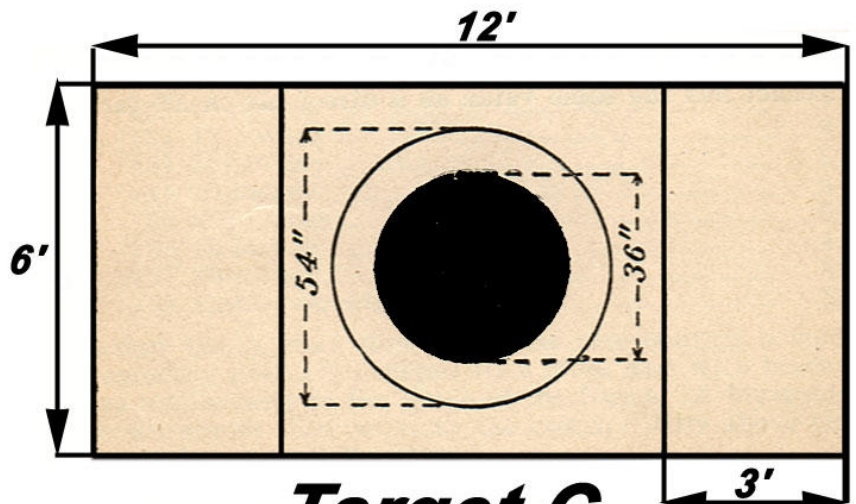
**Slow Fire Target**  
 Circa - 1903 to approximately 1920 the black remained 8" until 1920 when it was increased to 10". The diameter of the bullseye was increased to 12" with a 6" [tie-breaking] "V" Ring in 1960

**Long Range Slow Fire Target**  
 Circa – Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the switch to the "Anti-Rodent Rifle as the official USMC Service Rifle in the early 1980s  
 Only change was the addition of a 12" [tie-breaking] "V" Ring in 1922



**Target D**

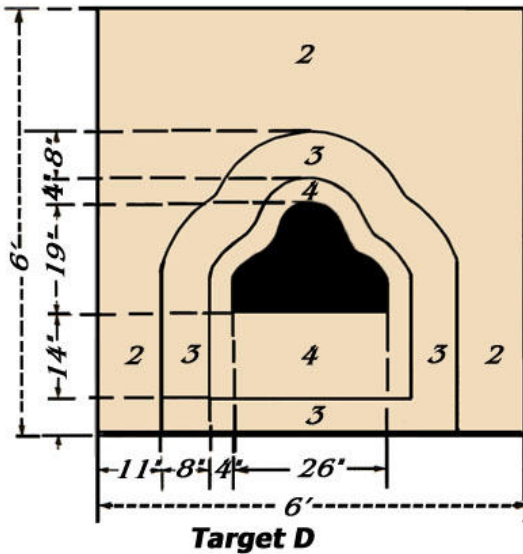
**Early "D" Target**  
 Used for Rapid Fire. Note the attempt to simulate a prone human form facing the shooter. This was eventually changed in 1913 to the more modern version to enable the shooter to get a "good" 6 o'clock hold when using the "battle sight"



**Target C.**

**Long Range Target**  
 Used for 800 and 1000-yard Shooting (Yep, the qualification course used to include 800 and 1000-yard shooting). My Dad said they (in the Marine Corps [and probably the Army]) were allowed to use a sandbag rest with the M1903 Springfield at 800-1000 yards. (a 20" [tie-breaking] V-Ring added in 1922)

## Target Changes as of 1913



This is the 200 and 300-yard Rapid Fire “D” Target most familiar to quasi-modern USMC (pre-“mouse gun”) Qualification Shooters.

Interesting reason for changing the shape of the target was that in the M1903 Springfield/RIA days, the shooters were required to use the “battle-sight” on the '03 for Rapid Fire (the little notch on top of the rear sight leaf, and the leaf had to be left down! and were not allowed to use the “leaf/peep sight” - this often required some pretty extreme “hold-offs” by each individual shooter. When the '03 first came out, it had a “battle sight “zero” of approximately 400-yards using the .30-'03 Cartridge. When the rifle caliber was changed to the .30-'06, the rear sight leaf was changed, but NOT the height of the little notch used for the “battle sight” - this left the .30-'06 version with a battle sight of approximately 547-yards (some sources say 530-yards, but either way, hardly practical). Still the regulations did not permit the use of the leaf for rapid fire until 1917. This meant that the average shooter had to hold “extremely” low to allow for his shots to be placed in the bullseye!

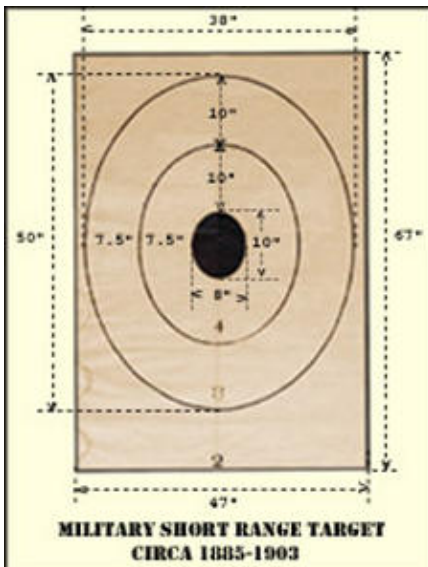
For you John W. Thomason fans who have read *“Fix Bayonets”* the Gunny is exhorting his Marines in the battle for Belleau Wood, *“OK you birds, “Battle Sight – Hold Low”!* – so now you know the rest of the story. The Gunny (and Thomason) knew their “Ought Threes”!

This little “glitch” (compliments of Springfield Armory) was responsible for the Marine Corps (independently) developing what was called *“The Marine Corps Sight”* for the '03. The front sight (initially made by Lyman Gunsight) was considerably higher, and undercut to prevent glare from the sun, and wider to make it easier for the eye to pick up. The hole in rear sight “peep” was made larger to accommodate the wider front sight. The new “higher” front sight gave the shooter an approximate battle sight zero of 200-yards. The sight wasn't employed until about 1919, alas, not in time for “The Great War”!

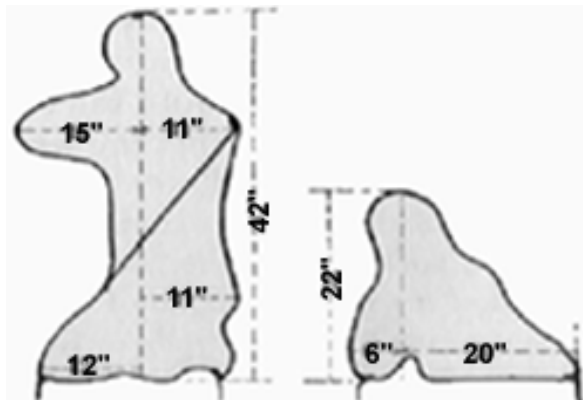
## Interesting Target Variations

A change in Army regulations in 1885 did away with the circular bullseye and went to an elliptical one to be used in Army rifle qualification. The rationale for the new bullseye was supposedly that the “beaten zone” on the target face (an incorrect but understandable description) produced by the Trapdoor Springfield shooting issue black-powder .45-70 cartridges was longer than it was wide. A long-range test conducted in 1879 confirmed that the mean windage at 1000 yards was roughly twice as long as it was wide. It held its windage well enough, but the quality control in the manufacture of the black powder cartridges gave a rather wide range of varying velocities resulting in vertical stringing of shots.

Rather than fix the ammunition problem, the typical military mind went about treating a brain tumor with an aspirin. Rather than work on tightening up the quality control on the ammunition, they simply rearranged the target shape to fit the shape of a typical group. The shooters (especially the National Guard shooters who were the vanguard of the precision target shooters of the time) protested loudly, but to no avail! The elliptical bullseye was to remain the standard Army target until 1903.



**Elliptical Bullseye Target, compliments of the collection of Col. Walter R. Walsh, early FBI Agent, OIC of the WWII USMC Sniper School and long time Marine Corps Marksmanship GURU**



### ***The Skirmish Targets***

**Utilized for the Skirmisher's Course and placed on top of the 600-yard Butts.**

**The kneeling Target was “nick-named” the “Squaw” and the prone target was called the “papoose”**

The Skirmish Course was fired as part of the normal qualification Course, and the score added to the known distance (KD) score. The Skirmish Course was fired through 1909, but eventually eliminated as it added considerably to the time necessary for qualification. The Skirmish Course continued to be fired in competition firing up through the 1913 Matches, although later (target) versions were placed on the target carriers. Notice the similarity in shape to the early versions of the “D” Rapid Fire Target.

Course was a rapid fire course, fired with all shooters on line, advancing down range abreast

# A Description of the Skirmish Course (and eventual evolutions)

## Original Version (Using the Krag Rifle)

Put into table form, the Skirmish Run would look like this:

Skirmisher's Course – total number of rounds fired = 20

Range	# of Rounds Fired	Time Limit	Position
600 yards	2	30 Seconds	Any
500 yards	2	30 Seconds	Any
400 yards	3	30 Seconds	Any
350 yards	3	30 Seconds	Any
300 yards	10 rounds to be used at the shooter's discretion	30 Seconds	Any
200 yards		20 Seconds	Any

### Summary of Skirmisher's Course Rules

- Both targets (“squaw” and “papoose”) were located on top of the butts at the 600 yard line.
- Movement of shooters between yard lines = ½ quick time, ½ double time
- All shooters move as a “skirmish line” down range on command at each yard line.

As a strategy, most competitors fired at the “squaw (kneeling) target” down to and including 350 yards. They then fired at the “papoose” target at 300 and 200 yards. Colonel Whelen recounted that he personally used the junction of the target and the ground as an aiming point, and set his sights to hit into the (wider) shoulder area of the kneeling target.

## 1909 Version (Using the M1903 Rifle)

Note: All Rapid Fire (including the skirmish course) was conducted using the M1903 Battle Sight (not adjustable, but supposedly set for 547 yards). Appropriate “hold off” (Kentucky Elevation) was used at all ranges for rapid fire!

The signal for the targets to appear from the Pits for a string of Rapid Fire was a “trumpet”, “whistle”, or “telephone”.

The Infantry and Coast Artillery troops were required to fire the 200-yard Rapid Fire stage of the qualification course with fixed bayonets! Fixed bayonets were not required at 300 or 500 yard Rapid, however, fixed bayonets were **NOT** required at any range during the “Leg Match.”

### Skirmish Course of Fire for Competition

Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
600	D (see version on Page 1 as opposed to Squaw and Papoose)	Rapid	5	Choice of prone, kneeling, or sitting	30
500			5		30
400			5		30
350			5		30
300			5		30
200			5		20

Use of the Battle Sight was required at all ranges except for 600 yards where the peep sight was permitted.

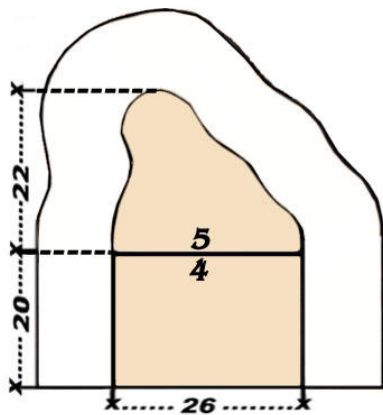
D Targets were mounted on “disappearing carriages (similar to modern day target carriers). Signal to the pits that the competitors were ready to proceed was a trumpet or telephone. Thirty seconds after receiving the signal from the firing line, the Pit Officer or NCO caused the targets to appear.

The competitors started just to the rear of the 600-yard line with the rifles loaded and locked. The competitors were “advanced” to the firing line and halted. Commands to fire the requisite five rounds were given. As soon as any portion of the target appeared, the competitor commenced firing. Firing continued as long as any portion of the target was still in sight or until all five rounds were fired. When the targets disappeared, the command or signal to cease-fire was given. The rifles were reloaded and locked and the advance immediately resumed. Movement between firing lines was conducted with the first half of the distance covered at quick time (120 steps per minute), with the second half covered at double time (180 steps per minute). While the instructions for firing the course are not specific on this point, it is assumed that the competitor was allowed to take the preferred firing position prior to the targets being raised. All reloading was accomplished from a full five round stripper clip.

For Those of You with a “Martial Bent” note that the **Infantry** and **Coast Artillery Troops** were required to fire 200-yard rapid fire with fixed bayonets!

My Dad who came in the Corps in 1918 did mention having to fire at 800 and 1000-yards for qualification, but never mentioned having to use a fixed bayonet! Apparently such insanity had been discarded due to wartime experiences, and the knowledge that hanging a bayonet on the end of a precision fowling piece without some necessity borders on insanity (I’ve run numerous test on this one at Quantico on the 300-yard machine rest and the results “ain’t” pretty! Even though the M1C (and Marine Corps version sometimes called the MC-1 or M1952) were issued with a flash hider, in practice they were never used (at least in the Corps).

### The (final) 1913 Version of the Skirmish Target as used at the National Matches in 1913



1913 Skirmish Target

No points were awarded unless they were in either the 4 or 5 scoring rings. Course of fire was slightly different than earlier versions, using fewer rounds

The Skirmish Course was fired for the final time in the National Matches in 1913 as an individual match, although a “team” version still exists today (based on the pre-WWII 8-Man Infantry Rifle Squad). The current version is known as the “**National Trophy, Infantry Trophy Match**” and is fired from the 600, 500, 300 and 200-yard lines with a one-minute time limit per yard line. Teams advance to each yard line in a skirmish line. Firing commences when the targets come out of the butts. Each team consists of two 3-man fire teams, using 8 E-Silhouette Targets (F-Target used at 200 and 300) per team. The Squad Leader and assistant Squad Leader act as coaches for the two fire teams. Each team is issued a “case” of ammunition to be distributed (and redistributed) as the Squad Leader sees fit. No alibis and points are added for fire distribution. **Prior to WWII, one man (even on civilian teams) was armed with a (full automatic) BAR.** The Match is aptly nick-named “**The Rattle Battle**”. The Marine Corps “C-Course” was taken from the Rattle Battle Concept.