

## LESSON 1: THE HISTORY OF MARKSMANSHIP

### PURPOSE

This lesson introduces you to the historic applications of marksmanship and its current application as a sport. It also gives you the three most important rules of gun safety.



*accuracy  
concentration  
control  
determination  
practice  
skill*

### INTRODUCTION

Among the many different sports of today, several are classified as marksmanship or target sports. In these sports, guns or bows, which originated as weapons of war but now are items of sports equipment, are used to aim and fire projectiles at targets. Today the warrior's bow and the soldier's gun have been adapted to the challenges of target sports where they are used with amazing precision to consistently hit distant, difficult targets.

In target shooting competitions, the objective is to see how close competitors can place their shots to the centers of their targets. These marksmanship tests are as old as human history. When stones were weapons, humans **practiced** throwing them at designated marks to improve their **accuracy** or enjoy games of skill. Eons later, humans engaged in marksmanship contests with slings and spears.

The development of the bow and arrow and later the crossbow and firearm made far greater



*From the time humans started throwing stones they have practiced their skills at using projectiles to hit targets. This sculpture of a primitive man throwing a stone is part of a statue on the Enrique Borbonnet Gomez shooting range near Havana, Cuba.*

### Marksmanship Sports in the Olympics

- **BIATHLON**, cross-country skiing and rifle shooting
- **PENTATHLON**, horse riding, fencing, swimming, running, and air pistol shooting
- **ARCHERY**, with bows and arrows
- **SHOOTING**, 17 events for rifles pistol and shotguns

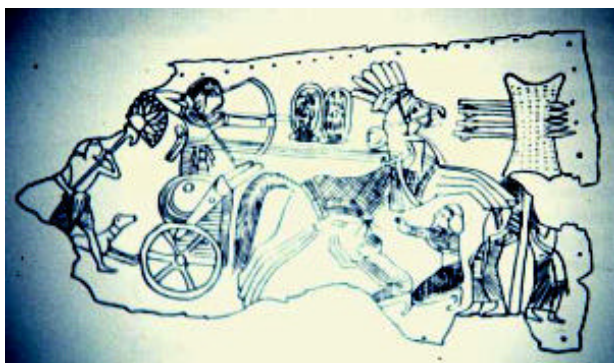
**accuracy** possible and led to the creation of today's precision target sports.

### A HISTORIC OVERVIEW

The evolution of target sports led to the development of four different sports that now are Olympic events. The winter sport of biathlon combines cross-country skiing and rifle shooting. Modern pentathlon, archery, and shooting all are summer Olympic sports. Archery involves shooting with bows and arrows. Pentathlon combines air pistol shooting with horse riding, fencing, swimming, and running. The sport of shooting is one of the largest and most popular of all Olympic

sports with 17 different men's and women's events for rifles, pistols, and shotguns.

From ancient warriors to modern Olympic gold medallists, persons who demonstrated great skill in marksmanship tests were celebrated as heroes. Several ancient Egyptian Pharaohs were acclaimed for their archery skills through the inscriptions in their tombs. The legendary tales of medieval heroes such as William Tell of Switzerland and Robin Hood of England celebrate their ability to hit especially difficult targets with a crossbow or bow. The development of America is highlighted by feats of marksmanship by the Minutemen of Concord and Lexington, frontiersmen such as Daniel Boone and military figures such as Berdan's Sharpshooters.



*The Egyptian Pharaoh, King Aye, was the successor to Tutankhamen, the famed King Tut. This drawing is copied from an inscribed gold leaf that shows the Pharaoh shooting his bow at a target that held by two prisoners while he rides by the target in his chariot.*

In the last 150 years, people who demonstrated exceptional skills while shooting at targets, from Annie Oakley to the gold medallists of the most recent Olympic Games, were raised to positions of honor. Target shooting is a sport that requires precise muscle **control**, intense **concentration**, mental and physical stamina, and unwavering emotional **control**. No matter when in human history great feats of marksmanship are performed, the

skilled marksman is respected, honored and celebrated.



*An advertising poster for Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show of the late 1800s promotes the marksmanship skills of one of America's first great target shooters, Annie Oakley.*

## OLYMPIC COMPETITORS

Some of the greatest Olympic competitors are rifle shooters from the United States who were trained by the U. S. Army Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning, Georgia. Two of those shooters, Gary Anderson (1964, 1968) and Lones Wigger (1964, 1972) are among an elite group of Olympic medallists who have won two individual Olympic gold medals. No shooter from any nation has yet won more than two individual gold medals. One other U. S. rifle shooter, Morris Fisher (1920, 1924), who was a member of the Marine Corps, also won two individual Olympic gold medals.

Since 1948, six other U.S. rifle shooters have won Olympic gold medals. They are Arthur Cook (1948), John Writer (1972), Lanny Bassham (1976), Edward Etzel (1984), Pat Spurgin (1984), Launi Meili (1992), and Nancy Napolski-Johnson (2000). Another important milestone in the history of marksmanship occurred in 1976 when Margaret

Thompson-Murdock of the U.S. won a silver medal to become the first woman to ever win an Olympic medal in shooting. The U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit trained Murdock, Writer, Bassham, and Etzel.



*U. S. Army rifle shooter Lones Wigger is one of the all-time greats. He won two Olympic gold medals, two World Championships and dozens of other international medals.*



*Margaret Murdock-Thompson, USA, stands on the victory podium at the 1976 Olympics with gold medallist Lanny Bassham, USA. Her silver medal made her the first woman ever to win an Olympic medal in shooting.*

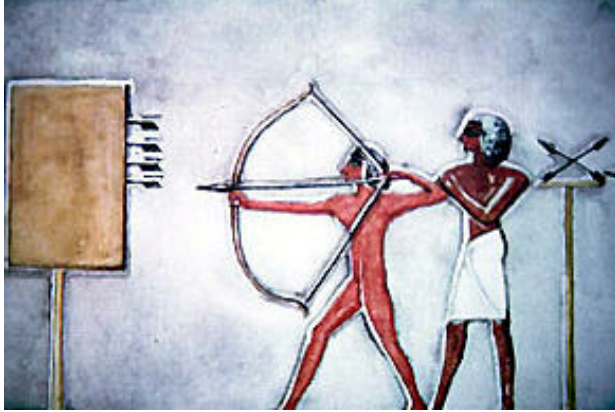
The current Olympic program includes five different rifle events, two for women and three for men. The chart (below) provides additional information about these Olympic target-shooting events.

Event	Type of Gun	Distance	Shooting Position	No. of Shots
Air Rifle Women	Air rifle	10 meters	Standing	40 shots, plus 10 shots in final
Air Rifle Men	Air rifle	10 meters	Standing	60 shots, plus 10 shots in final
Three Position Rifle Women	.22 caliber rim fire	50 meters	Prone, standing and kneeling	60 shots (20 in each position) plus 10 shots in final
Three Position Rifle Men	.22 caliber rim fire	50 meters	Prone, standing and kneeling	120 shots (40 in each position) plus 10 shots in final
Prone Rifle Men	.22 caliber rim fire	50 meters	Prone	60 shots, plus 10 shots in final

## TARGET SHOOTING

The targets used throughout the history of marksmanship are graphic evidence of how the sport of target shooting developed. The earliest targets were cylinders or boxes with central marks that were used by archers. Live, and later artificial, pigeons were once placed on top of poles and used as targets. The earliest rifle targets were large wooden disks. Large steel plates were used for early rifle targets and gave audible signals when hit. Paper targets came into use in the late nineteenth century and continue to be used in most ranges today. The most modern targets are electronic targets such as those used in the Olympic Games. Electronic targets have acoustical sensing systems that pinpoint and score the exact location of each shot and computer systems to calculate the scores and display instant results on electronic scoreboards.





*Targets used in Ancient Egypt 4,000 years ago were simple boxes or cylinders.*



*Rifle targets in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe were large wooden disks that were fired at from distances of as much as 400 meters. The young boy was called a “Scheibentoni” or target marker.*

The targets used today have concentric scoring rings. Shots that touch the central or inner ring score ten points. Shots that hit the next ring score nine points. Successively poorer shots score values down to one or even zero.

All target shooting events trace their origins to survival or martial skills that

originally were intended to prepare men for battle. Target sports have a strong military heritage and target training is sometimes **practiced** as part of modern military or police training. Today, however, target rifle shooting is primarily **practiced** as a sport in the same way that basketball, swimming, running and skiing are sports. All sports have special qualities that make them unique. Target shooting participants need to know about some of its special qualities.



*The most common targets today are paper targets with scoring rings that have values from one to ten. Shots hitting the center ring score ten points, shots hitting the next ring score nine points, etc.*

Target shooting is a sport that can be practiced by everyone. Successful target shooters are tall and short, stocky or thin. They must have reasonable flexibility and coordination, but no other special physical attributes are required. Shooters need to be able to see well, but it does not matter if their good vision is achieved by wearing eyeglasses or contact lenses. Indeed, the most important prerequisite for successful target shooting is an interest in the sport and a motivation to practice and learn. Success in shooting is **determined** by how hard one works, not by how much ability someone has.

*Target shooting is a sport where women and men compete equally.* In shooting neither sex has an advantage. In high school and college rifle competitions where men and women compete together, men and women win awards in direct proportion to their numbers.

*Target shooting is a skill sport.* All sports test different combinations of speed, strength, endurance and skill. Running is a test of speed or endurance. Weightlifting is a test of strength and skill. Figure skating is a test of strength and skill. Target sports are tests of skill. The special thing about skill sports is that no one is born with those skills, they are developed through training.



*Electronic targets with acoustical-sensing systems that locate and score each shot are the most modern target system. With electronic targets, the shooter shoots into a target box that records the shot, displays its location and score on a monitor in front of the shooter and displays the score for spectators on a scoreboard above each shooter. The shooters in this photo are competing in the Georgia High School Rifle Championship on the range that was built to host the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.*

*Target shooting is a sport of control, discipline and concentration.* It is not possible to handle guns safely or to advance in target shooting without having a great deal of self-discipline and **control**. It is not possible to fire consistent, accurate shots without developing great **concentration** skills. Target shooting does an exceptionally good job of teaching these and many other vital life skills.

*Target shooting enjoys worldwide popularity.* In the most recent Olympic Games, shooting ranked number three in the number of nations that qualified participating athletes. Only athletics (track and field) and swimming had more. Over 140 nations have organized target-shooting programs and belong to the International Shooting Sports Federation. Target shooting has more than 150 million participants throughout the world and is one of the most popular participation sports.

*Target shooting is exciting and fun.* The sport of shooting appeals to so many people precisely because hitting the center of a target on a consistent basis is extremely challenging. Trying to hit the center of difficult targets is a great test of mind and body. The thrill of firing a great shot that strikes the center of a target is as exciting as the thrill of successfully performing a difficult skill in any sport.

The type of rifle marksmanship that is taught and **practiced** in the JROTC program is three-position rifle shooting that is primarily done with 4.5 mm (.177 cal.) air rifles with the targets placed at a distance of 10 meters. JROTC riflery was once done with .22 cal. rim fire rifles with the targets placed at a distance of 50 feet. A few programs still use .22 cal. rifles, but most JROTC cadets now practice and compete with sporter or precision class air rifles.



***JROTC cadets are shown firing at 10-meter targets in the standing position in a sporter class three-position air rifle competition.***

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## CONCLUSION

This student text for air rifle safety and marksmanship is designed to teach the basic skills you will need to practice the sport of target rifle shooting. The objectives of this marksmanship training program are to teach you how to handle guns safely, how to perform the basic skills of the sport of target shooting, and to give you the fundamental knowledge necessary to begin competing in three-position rifle competitions as a member of a JROTC or high school rifle team.