

1917 Military Excellence-in-Competition Matches¹ ©2002

By Dick Culver

After the shooting season of 1913, the tempo of National Defense picked up due to several factors. First, the war clouds began to loom over Europe, and suspicions were rife in Washington that Germany might make it worthwhile for Mexico to create mischief on our mutual border to keep the United States from becoming too interested in participating in any European Wars. Among other things, Germany was exceedingly interested in Mexico's oil reserves. If the U.S. *did* get involved in the European War, being embroiled in a war on our own continent would largely nullify any meaningful troop or material contribution to the Allies. A defeated United States would be required to cede Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and Southern California to Germany who would then cede them to Mexico for their assistance. This of course would virtually guarantee Germany's access to Mexico's oil.

The Spring of 1914 brought about a small dust up with Mexico concerning several Navy Pay personnel being incarcerated in the town of Vera Cruz. Following their release, the United States demanded a 21 Gun Salute to the American Fleet from the Mexican Naval Forces in Vera Cruz, the salute was not immediately forthcoming due to a screw-up in diplomatic communications. The U.S. used this excuse to land a large party of Marines and Sailors to occupy the town and reduce the Mexican Naval Academy to rubble. Actually, it seems that there was a German Ship laying off shore loaded with rifles and ammunition, and the slight "misunderstanding" gave Washington a perfect excuse to make their point in spades. The rifles of course, were destined to be delivered to forces that would cause political upheaval and act as a destabilizing influence to a shaky Mexican Government, something we wished to avoid.

By 1916, Poncho Villa conducted his infamous raid into Columbus, New Mexico, killing a number of American Citizens. President Wilson almost immediately launched his "Punitive Expedition" under General John J. Pershing to chase down Villa and punish him for his hostile acts. Again, with war now in full swing in France, it became a strong probability that the United States would soon be involved in the fracas on European soil. While Villa evaded capture, the expedition did several things that would work to our advantage. It gave us a chance to test our latest weaponry and tactics (aircraft, new machine guns and armored cars), and it placed a number of people under arms that would be sorely needed in the near future. However, it also kept our rather small Army of the time occupied and unable to participate in such mundane activities as rifle matches.

Unlike the 1909 regulations, only two competitions are listed in the 1913/1917 Manual, again to be held every "alternate" year or when directed by the Secretary of War:

1. The Department rifle competitions.
2. The Department pistol competitions.

No mention is made of the "Army" competition, but the competitions were to be held at such places and times as designated by the respective department commanders. One new change in the "corrected" 1913 Manual called for a department rifle competition for the Philippine Scouts beginning in 1916.

In 1914, it was decided to split the Nationals into four (4) locations to cut down on travel and encourage local competition. The four locations for the matches of 1914 were at Sea

Girt, New Jersey, a state military camp near Jacksonville, Florida, at Fort Riley, Kansas and a range near Portland, Oregon. Camp Perry would not see the Nationals again until 1918.

In 1915 and 1916, the Nationals were again held near Jacksonville, Florida, but by 1917, preparation for the "Great War" caused the cancellation of the Nationals. Either from a sense of our coming victory or perceived as training vehicle for potential soldiers and rifle coaches if the war continued, the National Matches returned to Camp Perry in 1918 along with the very first conduct of the newly formed Small Arms Firing School. It may well be that the new School was being tested as a training vehicle to be used in the future to promote preparedness and proficiency with the service rifle, or perhaps as a hedge if the war continued to drag on. The Armistice in November 1918 brought an end to the hostilities, but the 1919 Nationals were held at the new Navy Rifle Range at Caldwell, New Jersey, but returned to Camp Perry in 1920, where they were to remain until 1940.

The Small Arms Firing Manual for 1913 (as corrected to 1917) prescribed use of the following course of fire:

Regulations for the Rifle Leg Matches (1913/1917)

Course of Fire for the Department Rifle Competition					
Range in Yards	Target	Type of Fire	# of Rounds	Position	Time Limit
200	D	Rapid	10 with reload from stripper clip	Kneeling or Sitting <i>from</i> Standing	1 minute
300	A	Slow	10	Sitting <i>or</i> Kneeling	No time limit specified
300	D	Rapid	10 with reload from stripper clip	Prone <i>from</i> Standing	70 seconds
500	B	Slow	10	Prone	No time limit specified
500	D	Rapid	10 with reload from stripper clip	Prone assumed <i>before</i> string of fire	80 seconds
600	B	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone w/sandbag rest	No time limit specified
1000	C	Slow	2 sighting shots plus 10 rounds	Prone w/sandbag rest	No time limit specified
<p>This course of fire was to be fired twice, on two separate days for the total aggregate score to determine the medal (leg) winners. The entire course (both days) took a total of 140 shots.</p> <p>Unlike former competitions, the peep sight was legal for use in rapid fire, although either the peep or battle sight could be used at the option of the competitor.</p> <p>When using the sandbag rest, either the rifle or the back of the hand had to touch the sandbag.</p>					

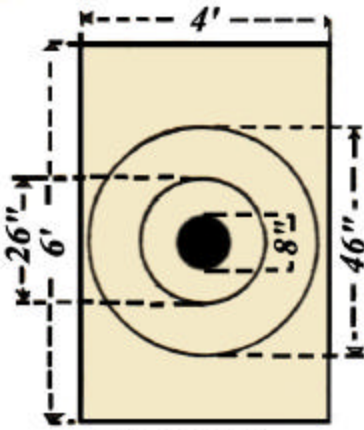
The competitors winning (leg) medals were said to have *made* the “Department Team”, and as in the 1909 matches, the medals were awarded on the basis of 20% of the non-Distinguished enlisted shooters, with fractions not included. When carefully worked out, it amounts to the currently familiar top 1/6th of the medal winners receiving gold medals, the next 1/3rd receiving silver medals and the final 1/2 of the medal winners garnering bronze medals. The chart included in the 1913/17 Manual is reproduced below:

Total Number of Enlisted Competitors	Team (this <u>actually</u> means the number of medal winners).	Number of Gold Medals Awarded	Number of Silver Medals Awarded	Number of Bronze Medals Awarded
30 or more	6	1	2	3
35	7	1	2	4
40	8	1	2	5
45	9	1	3	5
50	10	2	3	5
55	11	2	3	6
60	12	2	4	6
65	13	2	4	7
70	14	2	4	8
75	15	2	5	8
80	16	2	5	9
85	17	2	5	10
90	18	2	6	10
95	19	3	6	10
100	20	3	6	11
105	21	3	7	11
110	22	3	7	12
115	23	3	7	13
120	24	3	8	13
125	25	3	8	14
130	26	3	8	15
135	27	3	9	15
140	28	4	9	15
145	29	4	9	16
150	30	4	10	16
155	31	4	10	17
160	32	4	10	18
165	33	4	11	18
170	34	4	11	19
175	35	4	11	20
180	36	4	12	20

Additional competitors were figured at the same ratio as the above chart.

Non-Distinguished officer competitors did not compete directly with the enlisted shooters, but had to make a score equal to the “like medal” awarded to the enlisted men making the team. It was no longer necessary for the officers to make a score equal to the enlisted score plus an additional 5% to qualify for a leg medal.

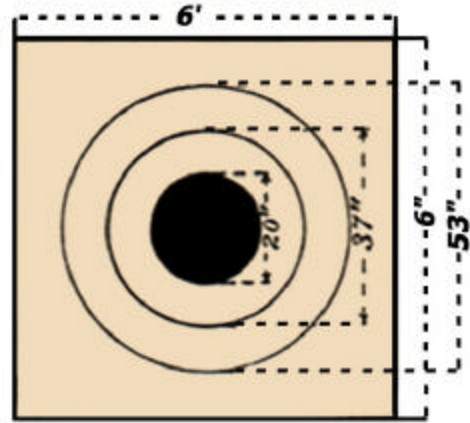
Targets Utilized in 1917



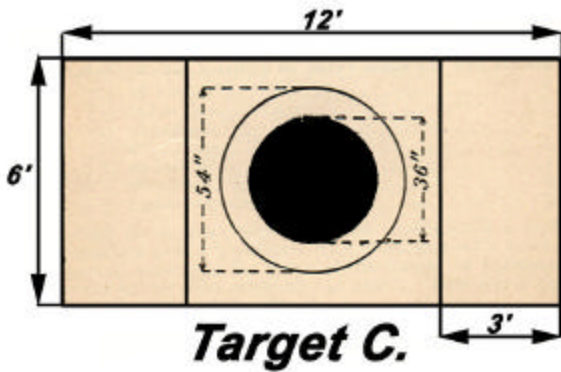
TARGET A

The 1917 version of the “A” Target remained unchanged from its original format. The course of fire specified for both the Requalification Course and the Excellence-in-Competition Course used the “A” Target for the 300-yard slow fire stage specifying sitting or kneeling at the competitor’s option. **No standing (offhand) firing was included in the course.**

The familiar “B” Target was utilized for 500 and 600-yard slow fire. The 600-yard stage specified 2 sighting shots and the remaining 20 rounds fired utilizing a sandbag rest. With the exception of the addition of the 12” “V-Ring” in 1922, this target remained unchanged until the adoption of the Decimal Target in 1967.



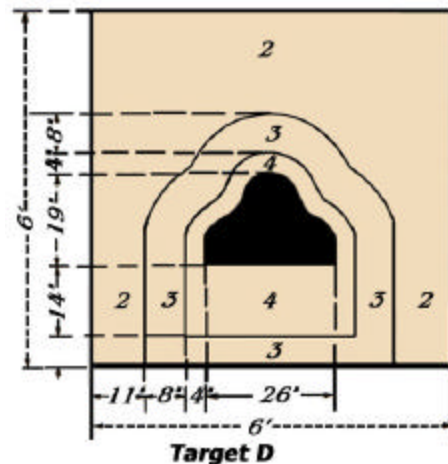
TARGET B



Target C.

The “C” Target was utilized for the 1000-yard stage of the Requalification Course and the Excellence-in-Competition Courses. Two sighting shots were allowed at the 1000-yard line prior to the 20 shots for record. **A sandbag rest was permitted**, specifying that either the back of the hand or the rifle had to rest on the sandbag.

The “D” Target was used for rapid fire at the 200, and 500-yard stages of fire. **For the first time (according to the 1917 update of the Small Arms Firing Regulations) it was no longer necessary to utilize the “battle-sight” during the rapid fire stages (although the battle-sight was allowed at the option of shooter).**



Target D

300
the

¹ Regulations Extracted From the Small Arms Firing Manual of 1913 – corrected to April 1917 –