

Snap Shooting in Close Combat

By Captain Stephen Stavers, USMCR

THE VALUE OF HIP-LEVEL snap shooting continues to be a matter of controversy, notwithstanding the amount of close-in combat firing in this war, especially in the Pacific theaters. Those opposed to snap shooting decry its relative inaccuracy and minimize its superiority in speed. Those who favor snap shooting emphasize its effectiveness in close combat where the first shots separate the quick from the dead.

The function of snap shooting is clear. It is intended for short range (twenty yards and under) combat firing where troops are moving quickly toward each other. In such situations it has been observed that almost every man's instinctive reaction is to fire quickly, without stopping to bring the weapon to his shoulder.

(The opinions or assertions contained in this article are the private ones of the author and are not to be construed as official or reflecting the views of the Navy Department or the naval service at large.)

Such hasty firing without benefit of previous practice is rarely accurate. A moving opponent five yards away can be missed entirely. Yet to align sights on him at that range is to anchor yourself in the position of a clay pigeon in a shooting gallery. Not only is the stationary shoulder-aimer very vulnerable in close-quarters combat—a bayonet-wielding enemy can readily parry his weapon barrel and run him through—but the original opponent may himself hit the slow aimer first with snap shots. The purpose of hip-level snap shooting is to canalize natural reactions and make first shots as quick and accurate as possible.

The principal elements in hip-level snap shooting are four: speed, mobility, reduced vulnerability, night effectiveness.

By snap shooting it is possible to get off initial shots in half a second, in contrast to the one and a half to two seconds it normally takes to get off the first shoulder-aimed shot. Troops in the field, after an hour of position practice, have averaged three shots snap shooting in the time it took them to get off one shot from the shoulder. Of their three shots, one and two were hits on silhouette targets at ten and twenty yards.

The mobility of the snap shooter enables him to approach his target rapidly without the necessity of stopping to fire. Besides increasing his tactical effectiveness, this reduces his vulnerability, for he presents a crouched moving target rather than an upright stationary target. His lower silhouette also reduces the chance of being hit.

Sighting in snap shooting is accomplished by holding



the piece level and pointing it toward the target. It is therefore effective at night when close-range targets can be detected only by shadow or sound.

The main argument usually made against snap shooting is that it lacks accuracy, the implication being that anything less than one hundred per cent accuracy at close range is deplorable. But this reasoning omits the vital time element. For even if a shoulder shooter could score one hundred per cent hits between the eyes by shoulder aiming that would do him no good if several enemy slugs had hit him while he was aiming.

Although the normal accuracy of snap shooting is about sixty per cent (with a general range of variation from thirty to ninety per cent), the volume and speed of fire is what produces the greater operational effect. Inasmuch as three shots can be fired by snap shooting in the time it takes to fire the first aimed shot, the snap shooter is likely to be the winner even if his score is only thirty-three and one-third per cent. For his one hit precludes the hundred per cent score of the aiming opponent.

Furthermore, the snap shooter's shots that miss are not wholly without effect. Firing practically in the face of the enemy soldier impairs his aiming or prevents it altogether. It is on this basis that hip-level snap shooting should be evaluated as a combat supplement to standard range methods of fire.

The basic principle of hip-level snap shooting is to hold the piece level at the side, clear of the hip, and pointed at the target. An hour of position practice and a few clips of firing will considerably enhance any soldier's close-combat firing effectiveness.

Snap shooting tactics are not intended to minimize the importance of cover and concealment, on which the range methods of fire depend, and which should be used to advantage as much as possible. But especially in an assault, when a fighter must advance short distances uncovered, snap shooting on the run may be his best "cover" as well as his best attack.

Battle Facts for Your Outfit

When his battalion was committed in the Italian Campaign, it was apparent to Lieutenant Voss that the problems of combat feeding in the Italian Campaign would be even more complicated than in Tunisia. In the mountainous terrain, the C ration delivered to the troops was often very cold and at times even partly frozen. The increasing exhaustion rate was due in great measure to the fact that the men were unable to eat this ration. Malnutrition thus aggravated the physical and mental condition of the already emotionally disturbed men.

By early December 1943, Lieutenant Voss had worked out a plan for supplementing the C ration and the K ration and he went to the Fifth Army Class I and Quartermaster officers. These officers, who also realized that the present combat ration left much to be desired, gave their approval for the experiment to run through the month of January 1944, with a complete report to be submitted at the end of that period.

The plan consisted of supplementing the C and K rations with adequate portions of high-quality and high-calorie pastries, large appetizing sandwiches, and fruit juices. To prepare the pastries, a battalion bakery was established, staffed by the baker from each company kitchen. Equipment consisted of a field range borrowed from each kitchen and improvised baking implements. A large German tent was secured and as the battalion moved into positions to attack San Vittore, the bakery began operation.

The supplement was to be served only when C or K rations were to be served to the battalion. On these occasions when the mess convoy went out at night to feed the battalion, instead of three meals of C ration, there were but two of C with a supplement of two or three large sandwiches of ground beef, cheese, egg, or jam; pastry, either turnovers, cinnamon rolls, or raised doughnuts; and an ample allotment of fruit juices.

The effect of this ration on all front-line troops, a ration which they could eat, which was nutritious as well as tempting, and filling and palatable rather than cold, half-frozen C, was at once noticeable. Men who had formerly, after a gruelling day of combat, sought sleep, without bothering to eat or wait for the ration train, now eagerly awaited the evening meal. The spirits of tired men lifted. Exhaustion, previous to this time, a ranking producer of casualties, fell to the point where in the month, out of one hundred cases in the regiment, Lieutenant Voss' battalion had but seven. Throughout the month, the three battalions had an equal share of the fighting and hardships.

The problems which appeared through the month were many and varied. The plan had to be kept flexible to meet changing conditions. Packaging of the ration to guard against winter weather conditions and the necessarily rough handling over mountain trails, were successfully solved. A small, compact, water-proof box which permitted the packing for single platoons and outpost squads, was devised.

At the expiration of the experimental period, the plan was pronounced an outstanding success by the whole battalion. The entire experiment was observed by Fifth Army representatives, and was officially noted in a Fifth Army subject letter, which called it to the attention of the entire Fifth Army.

Patrol Into St. Lo

At the beginning of the battle of St. Lô, our regiment was picked for the job of driving straight into the city. It would be a stiff fight, but we thought we could do it. As it turned out it was tougher than we had expected, although we eventually got into St. Lô.

The I&R Platoon was ordered to pick four men and one officer to send a patrol to an old château in order to find out exactly what kind of opposition we were meeting and where each gun was located. I was one of the four men.

We proceeded through the 2d Battalion outpost and advanced to the château grounds. At the edge we were stopped by automatic-weapons fire. We couldn't tell how much, so we scouted around and finally saw four Jerries in a clump of brush. Right away we fired a rifle grenade into them, and they answered with machine-gun fire. We marked the place on the map and scouted for more positions. Because the Germans hadn't seen us, we felt secure in scouting for more. In all, we found five positions. Then we pulled back and the lieutenant called for 4.2-inch mortar fire on the five positions.

Throughout the night we lay on the ground and called for more fire on different positions as we picked them out. At about 0430 hours, when all was quiet again, we worked our way back down to the château grounds. We scouted until about 0900 hours and decided all was clear. Then we called back for a platoon from Company F to come up and hold the ground we had taken. After the platoon arrived and as we started to leave we decided to have a last look around, so we walked down a road behind the château and spotted a Jerry just ducking into the brush off the road. We decided to take him prisoner. Another fellow and I went over to get him. The man with me (I didn't know him, as he was from the rifle platoon that came up to hold for us) was to give me covering fire as I came back with the prisoner. The Kraut was sitting with his back to me as I walked up to him. I touched him with my tommy gun and told him to come with me. As he got up a machine gun about five yards to my left cut loose at me and missed with the whole belt. At first I thought I was shot, but my training stood me in good stead. I automatically killed the German I was trying to take prisoner, then turned my gun on the Jerry that fired at me and killed him, too. Another Jerry reached for the gun—it was about three feet from my stomach—but I shot him as he started firing, and knocked his aim off. The fellow with me killed two Germans.

Then a mortar coughed twice to my left front, and the lieutenant and two corporals who had come up opened fire at the mortar position and kept them from firing. Then German riflemen started firing at us with rifle grenades, which spilled liquid fire all over the place. I killed another machine gunner. My buddy killed another rifleman, and each of the others got two Jerries apiece.

It ended almost as quickly as it started. The smoke cleared away and we counted noses. All of us were still OK, not a scratch on any of us, and we had accounted for thirteen Germans, three machine guns, one mortar and the rifles and ammunition which we destroyed. We all agreed it was the closest shave we had had since D-day. I hope we never have a closer one.—Private Harold F. Clawson.