

ANALYSIS OF THE HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOOTING SPORT IN THE ARMIES OF GERMANY, FRANCE AND ITALY

(Professional paper)

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Abstract

The shooting sport, commonly known as sport shooting, is one of the sports included in the First Modern Olympics in Athens, 1896. The reasons – it is extremely popular worldwide and until now it is the most military-applicable sport in the Olympic Programme. The aim of this study is to characterize the similarities and differences in the shooting training systems in three of the leading European NATO member armies of – these of Germany, France and Italy. Thus would be presented the opportunities for applying the positive experience to the shooting training systems of other armies, including that of Bulgaria and the FYR of Macedonia. Based on the analyses made in this paper, it was found that the development of the shooting sport for high performance in the armies of Germany, France and Italy is mutually beneficial to the competing athletes, the national team and the army of the respective country.

Keywords: *shooting - competitors, sport shooting, training for elite athletes, shooting tactics, shooting training systems, army systems, analysis of documents, theoretical analysis, beneficial for the shooting athletes.*

INTRODUCTION

The shooting sport, commonly known as sport shooting, is one of the sports included in the Programme of the First Modern Olympics in Athens, 1896. The reasons - it is extremely popular worldwide and until now it is the most military-applicable sport in the Olympic Programme.

Sport shooting has always been sport No. 1 in the armies around the world and it has been paid exceptional attention as the basic training of military personnel for quality implementation of the professional tasks set to them.

Over time it has been integrated into the preparation of elite athletes. The process has developed differently in different armies but generally it has led to the establishment of the centres of sports excellence. These centres combine in an individual way the provision of appropriate training conditions for elite athletes and the use of their experience for the needs of the army. High class athletes are used as instructors in shooting preparation and by their reputation of the world and Olympics medallists they manage much more easily to transfer their knowledge and skills to the military trainees. This is made possible as the elements of sport shooting - breath control, sight alignment, trigger control, position – prone, standing and kneeling, as well as a major

part of the shooting tactics and psychological preparedness in shooting, are very similar to those in the army, sometimes entirely identical. The study of the existing experience in the world will unquestionably allow its adaptation to any given national shooting training system in the military.

The aim of this study is to characterize the similarities and differences in the shooting training systems in three of the leading European NATO member armies of Germany, France and Italy. Thus the opportunities to apply the positive experience to the shooting training systems of other armies, including that of Bulgaria and the FYR of Macedonia, will be presented.

The methods used in this theoretical research were: *desk research* of websites, specialised literature, scientific publications; *analysis of documents* – orders, instructions, ordinances; *theoretical analysis* for partial organisation of specialised information; *comparative analysis and synthesis* – methods of comparison of the characteristics, similarities and differences in shooting training in each of the three army systems; summarising and conclusive analysis.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The first group of findings is related to the description of the shooting training system of each country.

In Germany the training of elite shooters is conducted at the Sports School of the German Armed Forces in Warendorf. Most of them are active service professionals in the German Federal Army Forces – the Bundeswehr.

The school has the status of a separate agency in the army system and trains sport instructors for it. It was open on 05.02.1957 in Sonthofen and in 1978 moved to Warendorf. It was built on the top of former military buildings and has one of the most modern sports facilities for 38 different types of sports, among which special attention is paid to sport shooting. A number of international competitions at the highest school level have taken place in the area of the school.

Elite German athletes and shooters, active service professionals, receive their ranks depending on their educational degree and sport achievements. They have a prestigious career development prospects which stimulates them to improve constantly their sport and technical results. After finishing their sport career, they continue their work in the army as sport instructors in the army divisions, thus transferring their rich experience to their colleagues.

There are numerous examples of the above mentioned. Ralph Schumann and Sonja Pfeilschifter – the Olympic champions in pistol and rifle, respectively and in the 2012 Olympics in London almost the whole German sport shooting team consisted of the military officers from the Bundeswehr. The names of Claudia Krause – pistol, Barbara Engleder – rifle, Sonja Pfeilschifter – rifle, Beate Gauss – rifle, Christine Wenzel – skeet, Ralph Butheim – skeet, Karsten Bindrich – trap are very popular and respected.

France is one of the leaders in using the army for the best athletes training. Thanks to its policy, the French Ministry of Defence is the main partner of the projected Olympic teams with special policy on attracting the best young athletes. Currently, 160 of them are under contracts with the French army structures.

They represent their country in the civilian and military championships; and 39 French military officers participated in the last Olympics in London, 10 of which won medals in different sports. Among them were four athletes in sports shooting – Cédric Fèvre-Chevalier – rifle, Cyril Graff – rifle, Jeremie Muanier – rifle, Anthony Terra – trap.

The training process of the French military athletes is organized in the National Sports Center of the Defense (Centre national des sports de la Défense), established in 1967 and located in Fontainebleau near Paris.

Its primary task is to prepare sports professionals for the needs of the French army and police forces. It is subordinated to the general Staff of the French Army. There are almost seven hundred athletes who are trained and educated at the Centre in 35 sports. There are 40 highly qualified lecturers in different sports. The Centre organizes all national military championships in France, the international championships, hosted by the French Army, and represents the country in the international

events organized by the International Military Sports Council (CISM). The area of the centre includes 52 hectares, where all the necessary facilities for practicing the main sports, including a shooting complex for shooting from 10, 25 and 50 meters are situated.

At the Centre the French elite athletes in sport shooting, who after the end of their sport careers remain in active service in the military are trained.

In Italy the armed forces also include the Financial Police (Guardia di Finanza). In 1911, the sports centre Yellow Flame was established to this purpose. Its actual activity starts in 1911 when it was assigned with the task of training the sport instructors for the needs of the Italian armed forces – army, police, financial police; and carabinieri.

The Centre is located at four sites in Italy. In Predazzo are Alpine sports. Water sports are in Sabaudia and Gaeta. The rest, among which sport shooting, are in Castel Porziano, near Rome.

At these four sites the military athletes can access the most modern sports facilities, which allows them to prepare and train during the whole year in any weather conditions. Apart from the sports facilities in the centres there are equipped saunas, physiotherapy, health service, dining unit, etc.

One of the first sports developed at the centre is sport shooting. The athletes train in the shooting centre – 10, 25 and 50 metres and a trap and skeet shooting complex. In addition, the team has a press officer, a technical director, two physicians and three physiotherapists – masseurs and two coaches.

The most famous Italian military athletes – shooters, are the Olympic champions Roberto Di Donna – pistol, and Niccolo Campriani – rifle.

In the 2012 Olympics in London, the Italian military shooters won 4 medals: 1 gold and 1 silver – Niccolo Campriani, rifle; silver medals – Luca Tesconi – pistol and Massimo Fabrizi – trap. Petra Zublasing – rifle, Francesco Bruno – pistol, Elania Nardelli – rifle, Marco De Nicolo – rifle, Luigi Agostino – skeet, and Giuseppe Giordano – pistol, took part at the Olympics, all of them also in the military service.

The second group of findings is based on the comparative analyses and synthesis of the data from the researched information sources.

It was established that the systems of shooting training in the armies of the three countries, the shooting sport for high performance, is organized in military sports centres. All conditions for the full preparation of the elite shooters, as the army system and its financing allow the use of the latest developments of sports science, are fulfilled – science research, control over the training process, medical and biological control, rational diets, modern methods of recovery, modern sports facilities and equipment, modern pharmacological products. The training conditions in the centres eliminate the unfavourable effect of the external irritating factors, since the most modern sports facilities – modern shooting grounds and halls for general physical preparedness are

available there and the possibility of modern and high quality treatment of injuries and traumas is provided.

Of great importance for the high performance in sport shooting is the stable psychological state of the athlete, which is influenced to a great extent by the social and financial security of the athlete. The military professionals have a high social status – they are highly paid, retire early, enjoy housing benefits, the children are provided with places at kindergartens or schools. Thus, the systems of shooting training in the armies of Germany, France and Italy support the achievement of high sports results by the military athletes directly and extremely effectively.

Based on the analysis made in this paper it was found that the development of the shooting sport for high performance in the armies of Germany, France and Italy is mutually beneficial for the shooting athletes, the national team and the army of the respective country and is expressed in the following:

- a) For the shooting athletes:
 - They acquire a new profession;
 - The military service profession has a high reputation and social status in society;
 - They have a sense of security in psychological terms;
 - They have the opportunity to train in the cutting edge equipped sports facilities;
 - They receive modern medical care;
 - They have the opportunity to use recovery physical therapy of high quality;
 - They receive high remunerations;
 - They have the option of early retirement;
 - Their training is fully provided for – training camps and participation in competitions;
 - They have the opportunity to work with high quality coaching staff;
 - They are prescribed healthy diets suitable for the requirements of the training period and the individual characteristics of the athlete.
- b) For the national team:
 - The athletes are provided with high quality training which is not financed from the budget of the respective national federation;
 - Costs for personnel, equipment, participation in training camps and competitions are saved;
- c) For the army:
 - The experience and the reputation of popular elite shooting athletes are both used in the shooting training process of the respective armed forces personnel;
 - The active service personnel of the armed forces is reinforced by the experienced, educated and disciplined individuals;
 - The methodology for the preparation of elite shooting athletes is used in the training of the personnel of the armed forces;
 - The respective forces are promoted and their importance for society is emphasized;
 - The performance of military national shooting teams in international competitions under the auspices

of the International Military Sports Council (CISM) is improved;

- The shooting athletes join the army as qualified shooters for whose training the army has not spent financial resources.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and the analyses, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. Sports shooting is the most military-applicable sport included in the modern Olympics;
2. Special attention is paid on the shooting training integrated with the preparation of highly qualified shooting athletes in the armed forces of three leading NATO countries – Germany, France and Italy;
3. The preparation of the elite shooters from the national teams and the methodology for shooting training used in the armies of Germany, France and Italy; are very similar in terms of organization and content.
4. The highly qualified shooting athletes in the three countries are recruited as military professionals, which provides them with excellent training conditions, competitions participation and social fulfilment in the future;
5. The numerous Olympic and world championship medals won by the military shooting athletes serve as an example how, due to the good organization of the sports system and the commitment of the army institutions, the success in the international sports arena is ensured, the military professionals acquire high qualification, and the citizens – a sense of security and national pride;
6. The development of the shooting sport for high performance in the armies of Germany, France and Italy is beneficial to all interested parties – competing athletes, the army and the state. It can also serve as a positive example for many other national armies, including those of Bulgaria and the FYR of Macedonia.

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