

SHOTGUNS STILL A VALUABLE ASSET

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Introduced to military service during World War I as a tool for clearing trenches, shotguns have been in the Army's arms rooms for almost 100 years. Although shotguns are still as effective as ever in a limited close-quarters battle role, the utility of shotguns these days is generally restricted to breaching or non-lethal munitions delivery. However, as more units deploy for unit closure, as part of security force assistance teams (SFATs), or on other less kinetic missions in Afghanistan, shotguns are being left in a container express (CONEX) or back on the forward operating base (FOB). That is a waste of resources; a 12-gauge shotgun is a very versatile weapon that can be used effectively as a vehicle gunner's secondary weapon.

The most common types of shotguns issued to Soldiers are the pump action Mossberg M500 (identical to the civilian model 500) and its replacement, the straight pull bolt-action M26 Modular Accessory Shotgun System (MASS). The Mossberg 500 usually comes with a full butt stock or a pistol grip, an 18-inch barrel, and a five-round capacity magazine tube. The M26 MASS is based on the "master-key" concept, basically a secondary weapon slung underneath an M4 to allow the operator to switch between 5.56 and 12-gauge rounds quickly without taking his eyes off the target or his hands off of his rifle. It has a five-round magazine and the ability to be used as a stand-alone weapon with an M4-style collapsible buttstock. The barrel length of the M26 MASS

is only about eight inches with an integral breaching stand-off adapter. The design differences between the 500 and the M26 are significant, but the ways in which they are employed are identical.

Ballistic breaching, the most common shotgun task, is familiar and trained often by Infantry units. Too often, though, that training consists of merely pantomiming a breach. There's some, but not much, training value in pointing a shotgun in the air before beginning a glass-house drill and saying "bang." A better way to train ballistic breaching is to actually fire live rounds at some sort of training device. One way to construct a reusable ballistic breach trainer is simply to rig up a door in a frame of 2x4s and insert a wooden dowel through the 2x4 and into the area most manufactured doors have cut out for a doorknob. Another, even simpler way is to use a sheet of plywood and attach, or draw with a marker, a doorknob and shoot holes in the plywood. There are commercial training products available as well including one designed by Mike Gibson Manufacturing. It features plywood squares inserted into a slot on a frame, which you can approach from multiple angles and rotate after each shot for quick, variable training.

Delivery of non-lethal munitions can be an incredibly useful tool for small units. The Army supply system stocks an array of

A Soldier with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), fires the stand-alone version of the M26 Modular Accessory Shotgun System at Fort Campbell's Range 44b on 10 February 2012.

Photo by SGT Joe Padula



non-lethal 12-gauge ammunition including fin-stabilized rubber slugs, rubber buckshot, beanbags, and more exotic fare; Soldiers can be issued the perfect round for any situation. Fin-stabilized slugs out of a longer barrel like the M500's can be effective at mid-range distances; beanbag rounds can subdue targets up close; rubber buckshot is effective for crowds. Utilizing non-lethal ammunition has some specific training requirements though. One example is the 80-hour Non-Lethal Weapons Instructor Course that is listed in the Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS). Once a Soldier is certified as an instructor, he can train other Soldiers in his unit on the use of non-lethal weapons. Although it may seem like unnecessary red tape to certify Soldiers who are already carrying lethal ammunition on non-lethal, the purpose of the training is two-fold: familiarize Soldiers with ammunition capabilities and ensure proper employment.

Soldiers who are issued non-lethal ammunition have to understand that most types of non-lethal ammunition are still potentially deadly. The capabilities of each specific round are important because some types have minimum safe engagement distances or can hit hard enough to break bones. All of them can put out an eye or seriously injure a target if they are fired at the face or head. Proper employment is crucial to prevent overuse, a problem that is illustrated by civilian police use of Tasers. In poorly trained or undisciplined organizations, law enforcement officers use non-lethal force in situations that they would have previously handled without any force at all. The same thing can happen to Soldiers who might have tried diplomacy or simply ignored an uncooperative or belligerent civilian otherwise now fire at him with a rubber baton to "teach him a lesson." The other concern with utilizing non-lethal ammunition is that it can be seen as a required step in escalation of force (EOF). Soldiers need to know that, as with any step in EOF, in certain circumstances they can decide to immediately use deadly force. No leader wants a Soldier to respond to an enemy shooting an AK-47 at close range by firing a bean bag. For this reason, vignettes are a valuable tool in the rules of engagement (ROE)/EOF portion of a pre-mission brief, and dynamic ranges that require Soldiers to switch between weapons are a great drill if they can be safely executed.

A less common use for shotguns is as a secondary weapon for crew-served gunners on high mobility multi-wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) or mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs). The limitations of the shotgun as a long-distance weapon are what make this such a good choice for gunners to carry in the turret. Sporting shotguns usually have a choke screwed into the muzzle in order to constrict the spread of shot, which tightens the shotgun's pattern and extends its effective range. Military shotguns are not choked, also called a cylinder choke. This allows slugs or non-lethal ammunition to be fired immediately after regular shot shells, but it also means that at 37 meters the shot fired will spread out up to 1.5 meters apart. The lethality of buckshot at that range and that spread out is minimal, lighter shot even less so. Warning shots fired over, around, or even directly at targets are much less likely to incur collateral damage

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or to kill. Any bullet fired from a rifle will come to rest with enough speed to seriously hurt someone, but buckshot — because of its non-aerodynamic shape and small mass — will usually come to rest much less harmfully.

When my platoon in the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division was deployed to Basrah Province in southern

Iraq during Operation New Dawn, a tactic the enemy developed was to throw hand grenades and RKG-3 anti-tank grenades at passing convoys from over the walls of courtyards or down narrow alleys. Our response to this new tactic was complicated by the fact that young men, some as young as 12 or 13, sometimes threw rocks at our gunners or windshields. Because we would not be able to distinguish a grenade from a rock until it hit the vehicle, I began to brief my platoon that if they saw someone winding up to throw an unidentified object they could fire a warning shot in a safe direction. A burst from a 240 would not have been appropriate, however, and a rifle shot could ricochet or go past the target, so I gave pistol grip Mossberg 500 shotguns with buckshot to the second and fourth gunners. The next time someone stepped out from a side street with their hand cocked back to throw, the blast of a 12-gauge shotgun pointed somewhere near his feet caused him to duck and cover, dropping whatever he had been holding into the dirt. By using buckshot, we almost completely eliminated the possibility of killing someone in response to a thrown stone, as well as the possibility of a 5.56 bullet hitting a civilian near the end of its maximum range, while still cutting down on the incidence of grenade attacks during patrols inside Basrah.

As with any time shotguns are employed, the small amount of range time most Soldiers get with shotguns should be taken into account. The two gunners that I chose were relatively experienced, and so they were able to employ and switch between two different weapons. One of them was an avid hunter as well and familiar with pump-action shotguns. Both gunners demonstrated to their vehicle commanders that they could safely load and unload the weapons, and clearing them became a part of our routine when we returned from missions just like every other weapon system.

No matter what role you plan to employ your unit's shotguns, have a plan for them and integrate them into your other training events. Let Soldiers figure out during National Training Center (NTC) or Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotations how they will carry shotguns so that they can be readily employed when necessary either dismounted or in the turret. With a little forethought, shotgun practice — at least dry runs and assembly/disassembly classes — can be conducted concurrently during basic rifle marksmanship ranges.

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