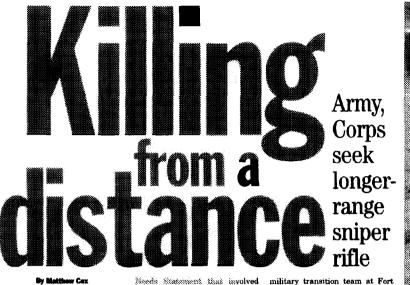
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Br Matthew Cov mcox@militarytimes.com

For decades, 7.62mm has been the sniper standard for long-range killing. But after more than six years of war, today's snipers also want a more potent caliber capable of killing enemy fighters well beyond 1.000 meters. Pacific The caliber upgrade for the M24

Both Army and Marine Corps is not a new concept. Special operweapons officials recently announced that they wanted a longations units such as the 75th range sniper rifle designed to kill Ranger Regiment have been shooting M24s chambered in .300 an enemy from as far out as 1,800 meters. The Marine Corps-led Win Mag since the late 1990s. program is aimed at selecting an anti-personnel sniper weapon to ally upgrade the M24 to .300 Win complement the standard 7.62mm Mag when the weapon was first sniper rifle, which is effective out adopted in 1989, Bowser said, to 800 meters. But there is also a lower-profile Army wasn't involved in a pro-

effort going on in the 25th Infantry Division to upgrade the venerable M24 sniper rifle from a 7.62mm NATO round to the more powerful .300 Winchester Magal Training Center," Bowser said, num, a change that would give referring to the Army installation snipers the ability to hit an enemy out to 1.200 meters. Late last year, the Army began

at Fort Irwin, Calif. Capt. Jason Lojka, who oversees Army Sniper School as commanreplacing the bolt-action M24 der of C Company, 2nd Battalion, with the M110 Semiautomatic 29th Infantry Regiment, at Fort Sniper System to give snipers a Benning, Ga., said he was not rapid-fire weapon for engaging aware of the 25th ID effort, but he multiple targets in urban areas. aukinowindgent that "there has Many in the sniper community been talk of changing the M24 to a were critical of the decision, argu-360 Win Mag."

tracted war as it is today.

And there were plans to eventu-

adding that that plan became a

"forgotten concept" because the

"We weren't fighting bad guys;

we were shooting ... at the Nation-

ing that the M23's simple helting-Capit. Roith Soil, Lojkes's predetion design has fewer moving sector at Super School, agreed. parts and is more service to than a We an oney fix that remares minimal changes to the M24 and This prompted 28th ID officials will result in a cruch greater capain Hawaii to write an Operational bility, he said. Bell is assigned to a

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more complex servicente design.

military transition team at Fort sending their existing Milds to the Riley, Kan.

"It's a whole lot easier to hit a gun's maker, Remington Arms Co. in Madison, N.C., to be retrofitted target between 800 and 1,200 meto .300 Win Mag instead of turnters with a .300 Win Mag," he ing them in to the Army, said Maj. said, describing the round's flat Chaz Bowser, logistics support eltrajectory and reduced resistance ement commander for U.S. Army to wind

Many snipers see the upgrade to .300 Win Mag as a way to hold on to the M24, a weapon they say they believe is more reliable and accurate than the M110.

The M110 relies on the same gas system as the M16 and M4 carbine. When the round is fired, it directs the gas created down a tube into the weapon's receiver, and cycles the weapon

The M24's action requires snipers to manually feed a round into the chamber after each shot with the subgraph ball.

un any restors reading the second sec right hand and a piece of metal' to cycle that we apon as opposed to a gas system, Bell said. "A gas gun is going to fail more often than a bolt gun. Period.

To date, the Army has fielded about 500 M110s. Although it's still early in the process, some snipers have criticized the durability of the Knight's Armament Co. weapon.

A sniper section leader, who asked to remain anonymous, recently told Army Times that his unit has had to ship his section's three M110s back to Knight's Armament to be repaired.

"They're all broke, all three of them," he said. "Two of them



started firing two- to three-round bursts," The third M110 won't fire at all, he said.

Army weapons officials said they are aware of these problems and one M110 at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, that suffers from the same problem of so-called "double firing" on a single trigger squeeze, said Rich Audette, deputy project manager for soldier weapons.

Several snipers have told Army Times that some special operations units have experienced the same problem with the MK11

MOD 0 rifle, an earlier version of the M110 that Navy SEALs have used since the late 1990s.

Trigger assembly

The problem may have to do with two special screws in the trigger assembly that are set at the factory, said Bob Galeazzi, product director for sniper systems under Product Manager Crew Served Weapons.

The Army experienced problems with the trigger screws moving during endurance testing on the M110's original design, said Reed

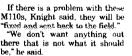


Soldiers fire a modified version M24 chambered for the .300 Winchester -----

Knight, owner of Knight's Armament. As a fix, the Titusville, Fla., company made the screws harder and changed the threading during testing in 2005. Knight said he was surprised

that this problem has surfaced in three M110s

"I am a bit disturbed, because we think we have solved the problem." he said. "We have gone through two 5,000-round tests.



Some snipers have said they want to be trained so they can fix their M110s themselves. Army officials maintain that snipers are trained to make small fixes such as replacing the firing pin or extractor, but any major fixes on the M110 have to be done at the unit armor level or at Knight's Armament, Audette said.

In addition to reliability and durability, Bell and other snipers said they believe the M24, because of its simpler design, is more accurate than the M110. "When you want to squeeze that

last bit of accuracy out of a

The 25th ID's upgrade effort involves sending the existing M24s to Remington, where they will be fitted with a new barrel, a new bolt face, a special folding stock and a more powerful optic. Each upgrade would cost about \$4,000, said Mike Haugen, director of international military and law enforcement sales for Remington. Standard M24s cost about \$6,700, he added.

The 25th ID's leadership has approved an operational needs statement, Bowser said, but it still will have to be approved by senior leaders at the Pentagon.

weapon, you want a bolt gun," Bell said. "It's not that the [M110] is a bad weapon; it just shouldn't be the only weapon."

Both the Marine Corps and the

Army have completed separate assessments that reached the same conclusion - snipers need to be able to take longer-range opments at Benning.

a lunger-range antipersonnel system," he said. "We haven't figured out how to solve that yet."

Corps use versions of a .50-caliber sniper rifle that is effective out to 2,000 meters, but the 30-pound weapon is mainly intended to destroy large nonhuman targets such as light-skinned vehicles.

anti-personnel shots, said Col. Robert Radcliffe, who heads up the Directorate of Combat Devel-"We agree we would like to have

A soldier with the 25th intentry Origins marthers while the \$23 weapons which

the Army began replacing but year with

of shorters like the relatelly and memory of the M24 compared in the

beyond 1.000 meters.

weapons they use now.

Greater distance

M110, had animers some a more noted caliber than the 7.62mm with reach

Small-arms officials at the

to give snipers a new longer-range

Both the Army and the Marine

The Army and the Corps want a

weapon comparable in weight to the Marine M40 series sniper weapon, the M110 and the M24. all of which weigh about 17 pounds.

Several sources have told Army Times that the Marine Corps has considered the .338 Lapua magnum, an extreme long-range round that is proving increasingly popular with special operations units. The .338 has an effective range of about 1,600 meters.

Marine Lt. Col. Tracy Tafolla, program manager for infantry weapons from the Marine Corps System Command at Marine Base Quantico, Va., acknowledged that the Marine Corps has looked at the .338 along with other heavier calibers, but he said "we are not dictating the caliber" for the longrange sniper rifle program. "It's performance-based.

The Marine program is leaving the door open for a weapon that could hit targets out to 1.800 meters, but Benning officials said they are looking at a requirement of 1,500 meters.

"After 1,500 meters, you are going to have problems identifying targets with the optics we have today," Bell said.

It will likely be about eight months before industry will see a request for proposal for this new system. Tafolla said.

In the meantime, Benning officials are considering a possible reversal of the decision on the M24 and to allow units to carry both it and the M110. For now, units will Infantry Center also are working continue to turn in their M24s sniper rifle in addition to the two when they receive the M110s.

Although it's still only in the idea phase. Radeliffe said, "what we are talking about, conceptually, is we want to retain the M24 in the sniper team."

Keeping the M24 would give sniper teams two precision weapons until it could eventually be replaced by the longer-range antipersonnel system, Benning officials said.

There is no timeline for when a decision might be made on the M24, but Radcliffe acknowledged the criticism from many snipers in the Army on the decision to phase out the M24

Part of the backlash is driven by emotion, Radcliffe said, but that doesn't make it any less important

"It's real, and it is important that we pay attention to that." Radcliffe said []