

*Annie Beagle,  
The Commandant  
~ and ~  
The Interservice Rifle Matches  
By Dick Culver*

It was the early Summer of 1977 and the United States Marine Corps Marksmanship Training Unit was scheduled to host the annual Interservice Rifle Matches at Quantico. Now this was a yearly event and the Marines had drawn the “short straw” on hosting the Interservice Rifle Matches, much as the All National Guard Team, located in Nashville, Tennessee had gotten the nod to host the yearly Interservice Pistol Matches. Hosting the yearly matches required a fair amount of preparation, and attracted the attention of the entire military shooting community. Even the Commandant of the Marine Corps took enough of an interest to look in on the festivities each year.

I had relieved Major Dave Willis of his job at MTU, and worked directly for Lt. Col. Charlie Reynolds, the Commanding Officer of Weapons Training Battalion. Now technically, Charlie was also the OIC of MTU and the OIC of the various national teams we fielded, but the dog work fell to watash. At the time, it seemed that each Major assigned to MTU came with a dog attached. Willis had Bruno, a macho German Shepherd, and I had Annie Beagle, an ace bunny hunter. The various canines became a sort of mascot for the Battalion, and everyone made sure that no onery individual took a shot at the Range pets.

I was having a pretty good year shooting, and was looking forward to shooting the Interservice Rifle Match as a way of reducing another rifle leg to my shooting credentials. A couple of days prior to the matches, Colonel Reynolds came by and told me to be sure to have my office shipshape in the off hand chance that the Commandant might drop in to view the various office spaces when he came down to check out the matches. Needless to say the office shown like a new dime, and in consonance with Colonel Charlie’s orders, I had Annie Beagle safely confined to, and locked in my office.

Jim Land held the Marksmanship Desk in the Training Branch at Headquarters Marine Corps, and as one of the former shining lights of MTU we could expect Jim to drop in, even if the Commandant got tied up refereeing some unexpected war that might suddenly take precedence.

Everything seemed to be in good order, so I took my shooting gear, and M14 down to the firing line to shoot on the 1<sup>st</sup> relay. Since all the loose ends seemed to be secure, I was in an excellent mood and prepared to see if I could acquit myself in a creditable manner in the rapidly approaching match. I have always been a fair offhand (standing) shooter, as most pistol shooters are, and managed to fire 98 in the 200-yard standing stage. Feeling better by the minute, I got down in position for the 200-yard sitting rapid stage and fired a perfect score. Hummm... Not bad, leaving the 200-yard line only 2 points down was a fair start. I moved my gear back to the 300-yard line in preparation for the prone rapid stage. Since there

were a large number of competitors, it took quite a while between stages. I looked back behind the firing line and Charlie Reynolds and Jim Land were standing there wildly gesturing for me to come back to the 600-yard line to join them. Since the looks on their faces did not indicate that all was well, I hastened to join them some 300-yards to the rear.

Both Charlie and Jim had frowns on their faces, I was wondering what if anything could have gone wrong with the conduct of the matches. Now I had known Jim Land since about 1959 and I had shot with Charlie Reynolds when we were both Lieutenants in the early 1960s. Neither one of them tended to “blow smoke” as the saying goes, but both were known for their evil senses of humor.

“Hey guys, what’s wrong?” I said.

“Culver, I thought I told you to have your area squared away in case the Commandant paid us a visit,” Charlie said!

Uh Oh... Now what?

“Well the Commandant just toured the area and when he stuck his head in your office he was absolutely astounded at how screwed up it was!,” said Charlie.

Area screwed up? How in ‘ell could that have happened? I had the office shining like a commercial hotel lobby! Now what?

“It’s that damned Beagle,” said Jim, “she’s got the office totally torn up!

“A Beagle has the office torn up? You’ve gotta’ be kidding!”

“Come with us and I’ll show you a horror story of your own making!” said Charlie.

We trudged dutifully back to my office only about 100-yards behind the 600. I broke out the key, opened the office only to find a mess that appeared to have been caused by a hand grenade! Egad! What could have caused this? The Venetian blinds were hanging loose and the couch was tipped over with all of my in and out baskets spilled off of my desk onto the deck! The place was in ruins! Only one little Beagle was cowering in the corner looking very cowed. I went over to the Beagle and attempted to pet her but all I could get out of her was a growl! Now Annie simply didn’t growl, and I began to smell a rat!

Looking around I found both Charlie and Jim Land in near hysterics with tears running down their faces. Hummm... It of course turns out that the Commandant had been much too busy to look into my small office space, but Charlie and Jim had seen an opportunity for a great joke on Culver! I was NOT amused, but on the other hand, I was totally relieved. Annie had seen this one coming and had let me know that she was innocent of any wrong doing. Seeing the humor of the situation, I made a mental note to come back at the completion of firing and square away my office. A total wash of relief came over me and I headed back to the 300-yard line to get ready for my prone rapid stage. Charlie and Jim were still in a state of mild hysterics of course and were have a great time at my expense! Having a rather warped sense of humor myself, I saw the humor in the situation, laughed and tried to calm myself down since I wouldn’t be going before the Commandant for non judicial punishment. My heart began to slow down a bit as I made my way down range.

I broke out my carbide lamp, re-blackened my front sight, and climbed into my sling and got myself a good prone position. I counted out my ammunition, made sure my magazines were loaded and checked my target through the scope. I was ready!

The commands were given and the targets appeared from the butts. I got down in a good prone position and concentrated on my front sight. Everything was going like clockwork. When the targets went down after 60-seconds I was sure I had gotten a good score. Sometimes a string of fire just feels good, and this was one of those times. When the targets finally reappeared, I had an absolutely beautiful knot of white spotter almost all touching each other, not in the center but alas in the 9-ring at 6-0'Clock out the bottom! Culver you idiot, you were so excited you did everything but put your 300-yard dope on your rifle. By now I was madder than a wet hen, but at myself since those jokers hadn't had a damned thing to do with my lack of attention to detail. Sometimes, the relief of not getting flayed on a wagon wheel, or broken on the rack by the Commandant personally, will unhinge a normally sane and careful individual and cause him to do particularly stupid things. This of course was one of those times.

Being down 12-points going back to the 600-yard line doomed my chances for placing up there with the heavy barrels. Sometimes you can be your own worse enemy, but then there was Charlie and Jim... Strangely enough I couldn't find either one of those two wharf rats! Seems they had seen my fist sized group in the 9-ring and departed for safer pastures.

I got Annie Beagle a nice "Big Mac" that night, as she had been totally innocent. Had I been in a position to offer a couple of Burgers to two other certain individuals, I might have laced theirs with arsenic! Grrrrrr...

I went home a much more humble individual that evening, and the next day I put up with the gentle kidding of the entire crew, as it was all good natured. ...And I had learned a hell of a lesson. Never trust your friends unless they stand 15" at the shoulder and have black, white and tan fur!

Semper Fi,

*Dick*