

Sniper's Spring XM2010s Unleashed in Afghanistan

By PEO Soldier



Many U.S. Army snipers had heard about efforts to upgrade the M24 Weapon System to the .300 Win Mag XM2010 Enhanced Sniper Rifle by the close of 2010, but few, if any, had actually pulled a trigger on one. Having completed the acquisition tasks of holding an industry competition, awarding a contract and getting the needed guns built in just a year's time, Army leaders knew that the next challenge was to get the upgraded guns into the hands of snipers operating in Afghanistan. This spring, Project Manager Soldier Weapons (PMSW), with help from the U.S. Army Sniper School instructors and Tank-automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) Total Package Fielding team, executed a plan that fielded and trained every Army sniper team operating in Afghanistan on their own XM2010 in time for the Taliban's anticipated spring offensive.

The new XM2010 was a key capabilities upgrade in the "ridgeline to ridgeline" fight in Afghanistan. At its heart is the M24's long-action receiver that had been designed long ago with the capability to upgrade from 7.62mm ammunition with a range of about 800 meters to .300 Winchester Magnum ammunition that can range 50 percent farther. Beyond the new chambering, the XM2010 upgrade incorporates the latest in weapons technology, including a five-round box magazine, a rail shrouded chassis and free floating barrel, folding and adjustable stock that includes comb and length-of-pull adjustments, a new 6.5-20 x 50 mm scope with

advanced scalable ranging and targeting reticle and a quick attach/detach suppressor. In September 2010, the Army signed a deal on a competitive contract award with Remington Arms Company and shortly thereafter placed its first order to have 250 M24s upgraded to the XM2010 configuration with the first shipment of guns being ready to go by March 2011.

The Plan

PMSW leaders LTC Chris Lehner and MAJ Chris Conley worked with U.S. Forces Afghanistan Command SGM Darrin Bohn to develop a strategy that would enable the team to field and train all Army snipers in theater as quickly as possible. The plan called for simultaneous new equipment training (NET) events at Bagram and Kandahar, with additional events at a few regional Forward Operating Bases. Once training began, the intent was to complete the task in less than 60 days.

The teams conducted close coordination for everything from transferring several hundred thousand rounds of .300 WIN MAG ammunition from Special Operations Command, to getting the right units in from the field at the right time to do the training and equipment handoff. Lehner oversaw NET and fielding at Bagram and Conley managed operations at Kandahar. U.S. Army Sniper School instructors delivered the actual training to all the sniper teams in theater.



Setting up ranges that allowed snipers to train on targets that were 1,200-1,500 meters away presented logistical challenges. Such large ranges were not available inside

the wire, which required security teams to conduct combat patrols to clear the area for the temporary ranges. This required coordination for MRAPS and M-ATVs escorts to transport the sniper classes to and from the range each day.

New Equipment Training

The NET consisted of one full day of classroom instruction followed by three days of shooting. Class time focused on weapon assembly, disassembly and maintenance, as well as how to employ the new Leupold Mark IV 6.5 x 20 mm variable power scope with a HORUS H58 reticle. The snipers attending NET training came with a range of experience, from newly designated snipers to seasoned sniper team members who had been working in the field for several years and were expert at calling winds, reading trace and more. Everyone arrived feeling pretty excited about getting a rifle with such enhanced capabilities.

One sniper instructor said the greatest part about the XM2010 is the fact that the Army has provided a sniper rifle designed by snipers for snipers, recognizing that one size doesn't fit all. The design truly takes into account the human dimension.

"The weapon system is probably the most user-adjustable system in the Army," the instructor said. "You can practically adjust everything on the gun to fit you as a person and how you like to set it up. It's a user comfort thing. The longer a sniper is doing the job, the more he knows what he wants."

The lion's share of the classroom training was spent on teaching snipers how to use the scope's new H58 reticle. Though the Marines use an older version of the reticle, the XM2010 fielding represents the first time the H58 has been fielded by the Army.

"You can range a target a lot faster with the new reticle than the traditional mil dot reticle," the instructor said. "It reduces the need to do time consuming mathematical calculations and allows for quicker target acquisition. I think the better scope and reticle combined

with increasing the gun's range increases your capability as a sniper."

The elevation and windage correction on the H58 are both in mils, thereby eliminating minute of angle (MOA) to mil conversions and facilitating integration with the advanced reticle pattern. The targeting stadia reticle also allows for simultaneous elevation and windage holds to reduce, or outright eliminate, the need to dial in the adjustments. The new reticle can also be used in conjunction with PDA/ballistic tables and wind meter information.

Most snipers were quick to recognize the value of the capability being placed into their hands. They picked up on the new weapon extremely fast because of its similarity with the M24 and were eager to complete the training in order to get back to their units to do their jobs.

"To the man, when they left, everybody was extremely impressed with the capabilities of the gun as well as the instruction they received to employ this weapon system," said Conley, who serves as an Assistant Product Manager for PMSW. "Within 60 days, we trained sniper teams across nine brigades, covering down on every big Army sniper team in the theater with at least 90 days left in the box."

The End of an Era – No More M24

Units that return from theater will need to have their XM2010s collected, inspected, reset and reissued to the next unit in line for deployment. Until such time that there are enough XM2010s in the inventory for units to maintain their weapons, the platforms will need to be reallocated to those units operating in Afghanistan. However, while the gun rotation represents a bit of a logistics juggle, Army leadership decisions will soon make the situation temporary.

Army leaders quickly recognized the capability and benefits



XM2010 Specifications

Caliber: .300 Winchester Magnum
 Weight:
 17.5 pounds (combat ready without suppressor)
 18.7 pounds (combat ready with suppressor)
 Length:
 44.7 inches (without suppressor)
 52.2 inches (with suppressor)

Magazine: 5 rounds
 Muzzle velocity: 2,985 feet per second
 Optics: Day: 6.5-20x50mm with Advanced Scalable Ranging and Targeting Reticle;
 Night: AN/PVS-29 Clip-on Sniper Night Sight
 Operation: Bolt Action
 MIL-STD-1913 Rail: allows easier mounting of weapon accessories

inherent in new XM2010. In May 2011, the Army decided to fund the conversion of the entire fleet of M24s into XM2010s with \$51.2 million to cover the weapons, night vision systems and ammunition. Shortly thereafter, a senior Army official at Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA) signed a memorandum that authorizes PMSW to upgrade all remaining 2,270 M24s to XM2010s and pursue Army efforts to qualify the weapon to an Army standardized M2010.

In order for the fleet conversion to take place, however, a special ingredient needs to be collected from the field.

“We need the old M24s turned in to move the conversion program forward,” said Bob Galeazzi, Chief, Precision Weapons Division, PMSW. “We know that the M24 turn in is going to be tough for the generations of snipers that learned their trade on a gun that has been part of the sniper tradition going back more than 20 years. The bottom line is that we need the M24 receivers, which are the heart of the new guns. Without an M24, you can’t make an XM2010.”

PMSW, in conjunction with TACOM and HQDA, is currently developing strategies on how to get units to turn in their M24s. Sooner or later, units should anticipate that the M24’s Line Item Number will be taken off of every unit’s Modified Table of

Organization and Equipment and the venerable M24 will take its place in the history books.

Arming the Future

PMSW will be working to achieve the necessary program acquisition milestones to allow production of the XM2010 beyond the original purchase of 250 guns. These milestones involve a series of technical and operational tests and administrative reviews to ensure the gun meets all the desired operational capabilities and requirements expected of it.

What’s important now is that the snipers operating in theater have a new capability to assist them in carrying out their missions. From the reaction of the snipers to their XM2010 training, it appears as though the Army has a win on its hands.

“As soon as most snipers opened the box and saw the gun’s fit, finish and detail, they recognized it was built with the sniper in mind,” said Lehner, former Product Manager Individual Weapons for PMSW. “In taking the gun back to their units they appreciated that they were the first ones with the best gun out there.”



Sniper Tales

Editor’s note: The following stories are from a sniper team currently operating in Afghanistan with an XM2010 Enhanced Sniper Rifle. Unit and Soldier names have been changed for purposes of operational security.

PKM Take Out

Our sniper team was attached to 4th platoon to provide overwatch for a key leader engagement [KLE]. As we were setting into our position, the platoon was ambushed by mortar and small arms fire. The enemy was firing a PKM [machine gun] suppressing the platoon. There was little to no wind on a clear afternoon. Our XM2010 shooter, Smith, dialed 2 and held 8 due to the fact that he was zoomed all the way at 20. We estimated the range to be between 800m to 900m. Smith shot once and I adjusted him and eliminated the target—KIA. After that target was destroyed, I spotted a flanking element to our 12 o’clock bounding towards us. At that point I suppressed the enemy’s movement with my weapon as Smith oriented himself to the enemy. He held 4 and was a first round hit eliminating the threat. After that the enemy pulled back completely, KLE was completed and we RTB [returned to base].

RPG Threat Eliminated

Our sniper team was attached to Fury Platoon HHC. During day one of the operation, we patrolled to a strong hold about 800m south from a COP. We set in on the rooftop to

provide overwatch as marijuana and opium fields were being cleared to make a road to the main objective. At about 1200 hours we were hit by RPG and small arms from the woodline to our east. I was behind the XM2010. I spotted the RPG shooter as he was trying to flank around to the north using the woodline. I held 2 and fired as he was crouching. Target was destroyed with one round.

IED Intercept

We were pushing further down beside the main objective where a COP was being built and set in to a stronghold. Smith spotted an enemy spotter in a grape hut 650m to the south. I climbed onto the roof and got behind the spotting scope and I saw someone wrapping mortar rounds in a white sheet. The only way to hit the enemy was to shoot through a 12” x 5” window. Smith held 4, it was blowing a full value wind at about 15 MPH so I had him hold point #6. He sent the first round and it hit about an inch high. His next round hit below the window about an inch. At that time the enemy became alert and right before he moved I blurted “go up like .2. Send it now!” Luckily the enemy was slow coming up and moving because that round went straight through the window and hit him. The platoon sent out a squad to confirm and recover the mortars and we found that there was at least a few more enemy in the compound. They took the mortars but we found HME [homemade explosives] and a pressure plate IED.