

Former Fort Knox Soldier, Indiana resident, now internationally recognized shooter

By KYLE HODGES
FORT KNOX PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Dwayne Draggoo's first shooting experience was with a .22 rifle with his grandfather on his great aunt and uncle's dairy farm in Prospect, Kentucky. He didn't know it then, but the experience would lead to him becoming an internationally-recognized competitive shooter.

"My brother, sister and I used to shoot a lot of .22s each weekend, which eventually led to an interest in target shooting and hunting. If it wasn't for those experiences, I probably wouldn't have gotten into competitive shooting," Draggoo said.

During his adolescence, Draggoo said he got involved with the wrong types of friends and activities and eventually ended up joining the Army to get his life back on track.

"I was not on the right path as a young man. Thankfully, my father recognized this and strongly encouraged me to join the Army," Draggoo said. "I didn't appreciate it then, but my time in the military ended up being a key building block in my life. The Army taught me discipline, drive and to dig a little deeper and push harder when you don't think you have anything left in the tank—to be persistent."

Draggoo's military career as a 68N aviation mechanic eventually landed him at Fort Knox where he spent about a year assigned to the installation's medivac unit. However, in 1993, he was medically discharged due to a back injury.

After his time in the military, Draggoo decided to join a local gun club near his home in Jeffersonville, Indiana—The Southern Indiana Rifle and Pistol Club.

"I just joined the club to be a better shooter and hunter. One day, a guy named George Eberhardt says, 'hey, you know we have these things called competitions?' I was hesitant at first, but George was persistent and I eventually came to the Garand, Springfield, Modern Military clinic and match hosted by the club," Draggoo said. "I was actually temporarily disabled at the time, but two club members—Kevin Powell, who works with disabled veterans, and Wayne McLeod were able to rig me a setup so I could complete the match and get my certificate. The pain was excruciating every time I pulled the trigger, but the smile on my face was still there."

Eventually, Eberhardt talked Draggoo into competing in a national competi-



Photos by Kyle Hodges/Fort Knox PAO

Draggoo participates in a F-Class match at Southern Indiana Rifle and Pistol Club's range in Borden, Indiana on May 13.

tion.

"Talk about nerves and blood pressure going up, but the thing about George is he doesn't take no for an answer. So off to the Nationals 14 of us went... and we came back with a pile of medals. I was hooked," Draggoo said.

Draggoo's eyesight soon took a turn for the worse.

"I noticed my eyesight deteriorating rapidly—it was early onset cataracts. So, 3 years ago I ended up going through a quite a few eye surgeries. This started to play havoc with shooting open sights. I would see 2 or 3 sights and multiple targets. You really can't adjust for something like that. I was still getting great groups, just in the wrong places," Draggoo said.

Instead of ending his run there, Draggoo soon learned about another form of competition that would not only offer a solution to his vision-related issues, but also end up being the focus of his professional shooting career.

"Our club match director at the time, Tony Whitfill, started hosting F-Class competitions. In F-Class, you could use a scope so I could finally see the target clearly again," said Draggoo.

Draggoo says F-Class is very similar to Benchrest shooting in that the shooter is engaging very small points of aim, often at extreme distances on the same types of targets. It's often referred to as Belly Benchrest because the primary difference is you're shooting from the

prone position as opposed to shooting from a bench.

"F-Class is pure accuracy mixed with wind reading. It's very challenging for me," said Draggoo.

Draggoo said there are several reasons for one to participate in F-Class shooting but one of the most enjoyable is the social aspects.

"The comradery in the shooting sports is one of the big reasons I enjoy it so much. It's a lot like the military because you feel like a part of a brotherhood," Draggoo said. "How many places can you go that if you have an issue with your equipment, people will always be ready to do what it takes to help you out? On many occasions, my fellow shooters and I have offered to loan our

rifles, ammo or parts from our rifles to people who drove along way to compete."

F-Class can also be a good competition shooting option for people with disabilities.

Draggoo said, "Depending on the type of disability and your local range access, almost anything can be overcome with some planning and determination. One of the current U.S. F-Class Target Rifle (F-TR) team members lost his legs and competes with the best in the world."

In addition to being an enjoyable pastime, Draggoo said he believes that shooting can improve one's quality of life.

"Shooting has taught me patience. I've always expected perfection from myself in everything and to achieve the very best

this sport you must have patience and determination," Draggoo said. "Shooting also maintains high levels of discipline and self-motivation. Additionally, it sharpens and speeds up mental processing and calculations due to all the wind and mirage reading you have to do on the fly."

To all of those considering getting into the sport, Draggoo has some advice.

"Don't try it unless you want to have a great time and be hooked for life! Don't be intimidated by the word match—it's a safe and fun way to learn how to be a better shooter," Draggoo said. "Compete against yourself—you can only do your best. Sometimes I win and I'm disappointed in how I performed, and sometimes I don't win and am very happy with how I performed. It's all about your attitude."

Each year in early spring, the Southern Indiana Rifle and Pistol Club hosts an F-Class Clinic and Match.

During the clinic, attendees learn about F-Class rules, equipment, scoring and techniques. For more information, visit <http://sirapc.com/>.

LIST OF DRAGGOO'S AWARDS BY YEAR:

2014

- Southern Indiana Rifle and Pistol Club F-Class F-TR Club Champion
- Indiana F-Class F-TR State Champion

2015

- Mid-West Mid-Range Championship High Overall Winner
- Indiana State Mid-Range High Overall and F-Open Champion
- Set National Record for 300,500,600 yards aggregate
- Tied National record for 500 yds
- 1st Place Indiana & Kentucky Long Range State Championship.
- High F-TR and Indiana State F-TR Champion.

2016

- 1st Place Sierra Challenge Canadian F-Class National Championship
- 3rd place Grand Aggregate Canadian F-Class National Championship
- 1st place Team Match Emerald Cup (Ireland)
- 2nd place 1200 yd Clay and egg shoot (Ireland)
- 3rd Place Emerald Cup Individuals (Ireland)

- 1st place Team Sinclair Fullbore Regionals
- Indiana F-Class F-Open Long Range State Champion
- 2nd Place CIHPRS F-Class Regional F-TR
- 2nd place AEDC Long Range
- SIRPC F-Class F-Open Club Champion
- Central Indiana Highpower Rifle Shooters F-Class Master Long Range Club Champion

2017

- 1st Place Berger Southwest Nationals Mid-Range (Pending National Record)
- First Place and Overall Winner CIHPRS Fullbore Regional



Interested in F-Class?

For a complete list of the F-Class competition rules and details, visit <http://compete.nra.org/documents/pdf/compete/RuleBooks/HPR/hpr-book.pdf>