

Range Master:
**"The Line is hot.
Rifles ready.
You may load.
You may commence fire."**

By Nicole Meier



If you have ever been at a range these are common commands you will hear. So why an article on this, why now? Handing the baton to the next generation has never been more important. Upholding the 2nd Amendment has never been under such a full blown assault as it is now. Due to the horrible incidents involving public shootings, the government is running full steam ahead to take our Right to Bear Arms away. I felt it was my duty, as an American Citizen, a mother of three, who embraces the United States Constitution, whose two sons took an oath to uphold the US Constitution as US Marines, to spotlight an amazing club which celebrates its 11 years in existence. This Club is called Arlington International Airgun Club (AIAC), located in Arlington Heights, IL.

The AIAC Junior 3P (3 position) air rifle program began in February 2002. Jay Vergenz had a vision and a passion to pass on the skills and knowledge of pistol and rifle shooting. He was the president and founder of AIAC. The program attributes its successful launch in 2002 to the Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP) by the guidance and training provided by the CMP's Illinois State Junior Directors Raymond and Tina Odle. In its first year, they had begun to make their mark as a serious 3P Sporter-Class Competition Club; winning regional events and looking toward Nationals.

With a dedicated group of new coaches Peter Dorn, Don Weber and Ed Hewson, they were ready to rise and rise they did! Rifle Head Coach Peter Dorn is a retired United States Marine whose specialty is Riflery. Growing up as the son of a WWII Marine and Army Father he was shooting at the age of 6. He grew up loving the outdoors and continues today enjoying time in the woods during whitetail season. He is also an avid rock climber. He has been married for 28 years and has passed on his knowledge of riflery to his two daughters, whom are former Air-Rifle and Pistol competitors. His shooters have earned many National Titles. Head Pistol Coach Don Miller is a distinguished Pistol Coach. A Level 3 advanced certified pistol coach. There are less than 100 in the US. He has earned this distinguished title both in the NRA and USA Shooting standards. His knowledge and skills have been seen on the National Stage. Coach Ed Hewson has also been with AIAC since 2002. He has worn many hats from Coach to range officer. He has been very vital contributor to the club. In 2008, Karen Nowicki joined the team as the first woman coach of AIAC. She was a competitor Air Rifle Shooter in her youth.

As I interviewed the coaches, there was a reoccurring theme. They were all on the same page on their goals as coaches and mentors. This to me was a key ingredient to their success. A common goal they all firmly believe in. Teaching firearm safety was paramount and any minor violation was dealt with immediately

and firmly. No exceptions!! First timers learned ignorance was no excuse. Very rarely was there a second offense by the same shooter. Respecting the firearm and the responsibility of this knowledge should never be taken for granted. Legally these Air-Rifles are not firearms for they due not exceed the PPS rule. They are however treated as such. The Competitors RESPECT the authority present on this range. It is a respect I have never seen with any other sport. There is a time for socializing and having fun, but the moment the call to distribute the Air-Rifles begins, the tone changes and the serious business of shooting fills the room.

They teach the fine art of riflery and pistol shooting. It is an art, more like a dance, but truly an art form. You become one with the rifle/pistol. Breathing and shooting between heartbeats becomes second nature to you and your shot will rise or fall at the slightest flutter. The center of the bull's eye is the size of this period. The shot is taken at 10 meters, iron sights. Even though it has been said watching a competition is like watching paint dry, I find it exciting. When I watch them prepare for the shot, I too am trying to slow my breathing, to steady my heart rate as they prepare to take a shot.

Not only are they learning the skills of shooting they are being taught many life skills. Self-discipline, self-motivation, the importance of methodology, and the ability to block out your surroundings to focus on the task at hand were echoed by the coaches. Self-maturity, and respect for self and others are just a few more. They learn its okay to make a mistake as long as they learn from it and move on. The ability of real time analysis and to make adjustments accordingly is a life skill we all can understand.

I had chosen to attend the James Stack Memorial Tournament on Jan. 26, 2013 to watch the AIAC team compete. I not only came to watch the tournament but to interview their top shooter, Kelsy McHugh. Kelsy McHugh is a very talented individual whom I have had the privilege of knowing for 10 years. She is the sister of Grace, Hannah and Janelle McHugh, who were also Air-Rifle Competitors. Kelsy watched her older sisters' shoot and shoot they did. She had some big shoes to fill. She not only filled them but she grew out of them and blew their socks off. Kelsy began her shooting career at the age of 13 in 2007. In 2009, she earned a spot to compete at the Olympic Training Center, in Colorado Springs, Colorado as well as bringing home a bronze medal, in the Junior National Olympic Sporter Division. In the summer of 2011, at Camp Perry, she competed at the NRA National 3P and placed 6th overall. In December of 2011, for the third consecutive year she had earned and retained her title of the Illinois State Champion in Precision International (Standing).

She once again, for the third time secured her spot to compete at the Olympic Training Center.

Kelsy is very modest about her successes but you can tell she is very proud and proud she should be. She lights up when she talks about how much shooting means to her.

I asked her what she has learned over the seven years of shooting, as she soon will turn 20. Once again, the skills of shooting were presumed and she talks about life skills. She has learned dedication, perseverance, patience and focus. She said focusing is her double-edged sword. She explained. In shooting, the tiniest movement matters and constant self correction is a necessity. This self correction overflows into her everyday life in pursuit of perfection on and off the range. This she says is her double edge sword. The perfect shot is attainable, perfection in life, not so much. "So why do you still shoot?" I asked. Without realizing it, shooting became a way of life for her even before she picked up a rifle. She watched her sisters shoot. "If there was one constant thing in my life it has been shooting. It keeps me steady. Life has a way of throwing you curve balls. I know when life gets shaky; "I can lift my rifle, center myself, and feel 'at home'. I can 'focus' block out life's noise." What is unique about your coaches? "They care about you as a person. They have been my coaches the moment I stepped on the range. They are part of my extended family. They can read my body language and get my head straight- put my 'game face on' because they have been coaching me for years. They are here because they love the sport; they stay because they genuinely care about you. When it is time for me to move on, I will carry them with me. They are part of me, like shooting. Both are in my heart to stay. The friendships I have made here are for life. We have laughed together and we have cried together."

Sadly, tragedy struck the AIAC family twice in less than a year. On November 10, 2012, former teammate, James Bray Stack was killed in Afghanistan. Lance Corporal James Bray Stack, a United States Marine, a friend, teammate and brother was lost but never forgotten -Always in our hearts. In the summer of 2011, Daniel Sojka's, another teammate, brother was killed in a tragic trucking accident. The AIAC family was there and is still there today to provide support and encouragement. My children have been involved in many sports and I have been involved as a team mom, assistant coach, etc... but no club has ever had the far-reaching love and compassion than AIAC.

Kelsy put it so beautifully. "PASSION-Do what you love and put your whole heart into it, whether it is shooting or something else. Always be passionate in what you do and do it well. Life is so precious and short, it would be a shame to live it any other way."



2009-2012

Kelsy McHugh - **State Champion Precision International**

- Competed three years in a row at Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO.

2008

Daniel Sojka - **NRA National Indoor Champion**

- He competed against 503 shooters, and he is currently shooting at the University of W. Virginia. West Virginia is ranked #1 in NCAA sport of USA International shooting.

USA Shooting Progressive Air Pistol National Championship

- AIAC Pistol Team wins the Gold
- Junior Team Members: James Stack, Lorraine Maligaya, and Luke Mattox.
- Earlier they won the Illinois State Progressive Air Pistol Championship. Team Captain James Stack took the individual Gold Medal at the Championship, and receives an appointment to the USA Shooting National Development Team in Colorado Springs, CO.

2007**AIAC Juniors club members**

- Won the 2007 Illinois Progressive Position Air-Pistol (PPP) Team and Individual State Championship, the 2007 Illinois Junior 3P Air Rifle Individual State Championship, the US Army Rifle Postal State Championship.

2005**National Junior Olympic 3P Championship - Silver Medal**

- Team members: Hannah McHugh, Kelly Zacharias, Nicholas Meier, Katrina Meier.
- Top AIAC shooter Hannah McHugh placed 11th out of 154 shooters.

Illinois Junior Olympic 3P State Championship - State Champions, Gold Medal

- Team members: Hannah McHugh (State Champion, Gold Medal), Kelly Zacharias, Nicholas Meier and Katrina Meier.

NRA Junior Indoor Rifle National Championship (Sectional) - Team Gold Medal

- Top AIAC Competitor Katrina Meier placed 14th out of 534.
- Individual Sporter Competitors.
- Katrina Meier, Nicholas Meier and Hannah McHugh placed in the top 100.
- Katrina Meier Establishes 3 NRA Records: 'Open Record', 'Women's Record', and 'Civilian Record'.

NRA National Junior Air Gun Team Championship

- Top AIAC Competitor Grace McHugh placed 9th overall of 90 Precision Competitors. Appointed to NRA National Junior Air Rifle Team.

Illinois Junior Olympic State Champions - Air Pistol - Gold Medal

- Pistol Team: James Stack, Katie Dorn and Gabe Thompson.
- Gold Medal Individual Air Pistol Competitor: James Stack.

Daisy/ USJCC Junior Open Air Gun Championship

- Top Male AIAC competitor James Stack placed 4th in Junior Men's Air Pistol.
- Top Female AIAC competitor Katie Dorn placed 5th in Junior Women's Air Pistol.

National Progressive Position Air Pistol Championship

- Top AIAC Competitor James Stack placed 10th overall.

National Guard Bureau Postal Tournament

- Top 10 team out of 83 teams.

2004**National Guard Tournament Postal Match**

- Sporter Team: Nicholas Meier, Katrina Meier, Matthew Kou, and Kelsy Dorn finished 26th out of 108 teams.
- Top AIAC shooter Nicholas Meier placed 59th out of 817 competitors.

NRA Sanctioned Sectional Air Rifle Championship

- Hannah McHugh placed 8th overall out of 698 competitors, 4th in her age category of 198 competitors.

Illinois Junior Olympic 3P State Championship - Gold Medal

- Team Members: Nicholas Meier, Katrina Meier, Matthew Kou, and Hannah McHugh.

National Junior Olympic 3P Air Rifle Championship

- Bronze Medal
- Team Members: Nicholas Meier, Katrina Meier, Matthew Kou, and Hannah McHugh.
- Top AIAC Scorer Katrina Meier placed 18th out of 151 competitors, 7th in her age category out of 51.

ISRA Air Pistol Team

- James Stack selected of AIAC to compete at NRA National Air Gun Team Championship.
- Top ISRA Air pistol scorer James Stack takes Gold for his age category, and places 12 overall of 36 competitors.

Safari Club International

ILLINOIS

Summer 2013

Pheasant Hunt To Remember

A WOMAN'S
PERSPECTIVE
OF AN
ELEPHANT
HUNT!

