

Lesson Learned from the Sandhurst Military Competition 2025: Advanced Training with Individual Weapon

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The recent participation in the Sandhurst Military Competition 2025 by a contingent of Officers attending the Army Officers School in Turin highlighted a crucial aspect in the preparation of the Italian armed forces and, in general, in modern military forces: **the need to train Officers intensively and professionally in the use of individual weapons in different operational environments**. The competition, held at the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, saw the participation of 48 teams from 16 Nations and was a testing ground for the physical, mental, and operational capabilities of the participants.



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The Context of the Sandhurst Military Competition

The **Sandhurst Military Competition** is one of the most prestigious and challenging competitions in the world, open to cadets and officers from military academies and training institutes of the United States' allied countries. In this edition, the competition took place over a 40 km course where teams were subjected to rigorous physical and mental challenges, including functional fitness courses, assembly and disassembly of weapons under stress, shooting with portable weapons, night navigation, first aid and casualty evacuation, and other tests requiring advanced technical skills and the ability to operate under pressure.

The Italian team, composed of officers selected and trained by the Course Department with the support of the 185th Paratroopers Reconnaissance and Target Acquisition Regiment (RRAO) of Livorno, stood out among the international teams, confirming the **high level of preparation that the Italian Armed Forces** are able to offer. However, during this intense competition, a fundamental lesson emerged for the future training of Italian Officers: **the need for an intensive dynamic shooting module with individual weapons for all Leaders.**



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The Importance of Advanced Dynamic Shooting

During the competition, one of the most critical aspects was the use of the individual weapon under stress conditions and in complex operational scenarios. Although officers from Military Academies are already trained in basic shooting techniques and weapon use, it is clear that standard training is not sufficient to ensure operational excellence. **Dynamic shooting**, which involves the ability to use the weapon in complex scenarios, such as those faced during real combat operations, is **an area that must be developed with greater intensity and specialization**.

Participation in Sandhurst revealed that Officers, to achieve excellent professional levels in weapon handling, need specific training capable of simulating its use in high-pressure situations, such as during the assembly and disassembly of weapons or executing shots under stress, which are frequent in real operational environments. These activities, fundamental for safety and operational effectiveness, require advanced training that cannot be obtained solely in traditional academic structures.

The Crucial Role of the 185th RRAO and Specialized Instructors

A clear lesson emerging from this experience is that advanced training with individual weapons cannot be entrusted exclusively to generic instructors. It is essential that the Italian Armed Forces, as already done with the **185th RRAO**, rely on **special forces instructors**, who possess skills and direct field experience in extremely complex combat environments. The

185th RRAO, with its experience in special operations, is able to offer highly specialized training aimed at developing the capabilities of officers in real operational contexts.

Alternatively, the Italian Armed Forces could also consider collaboration with **specialized external agencies** in dynamic shooting activities and advanced training, such as those operating in the private defense sector, to enrich the training offer and expand the skills of their Officers.



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A Targeted Approach to Leader Preparation

For Officers, especially those from academies, preparing to undertake leadership roles in complex operational contexts, the ability to handle the weapon effectively is only part of the necessary training. However, the experience gained in the Sandhurst Military Competition 2025 has highlighted the importance of improving this component of training to meet the demands of the modern warfare scenario, where individual skills, teamwork, and leadership under pressure are essential for success.

Advanced dynamic shooting must be an integral part of the training path to ensure that every officer, when called to conduct operations in high-risk environments, is able to react promptly and competently, preserving their operational capabilities to the maximum. This approach, combined with experience and direct exposure to high-intensity scenarios like those experienced in the Sandhurst competition, will ensure a significant qualitative leap in the preparation of Italian officers and, more generally, the armed forces.

Participation in the **Sandhurst Military Competition 2025** offered a concrete vision of the challenges our officers are called to face, but it also provided an important lesson: the need for advanced, specialized, and intensive training in the use of individual weapons, conducted by special forces instructors or specialized external agencies, is fundamental to ensuring a professional level of excellence. Only with this type of preparation, indeed, will it be possible to achieve the high standards required by international competitions and, above all, by field operations.