

101ST INVADES DILLON

By Barrett Tillman

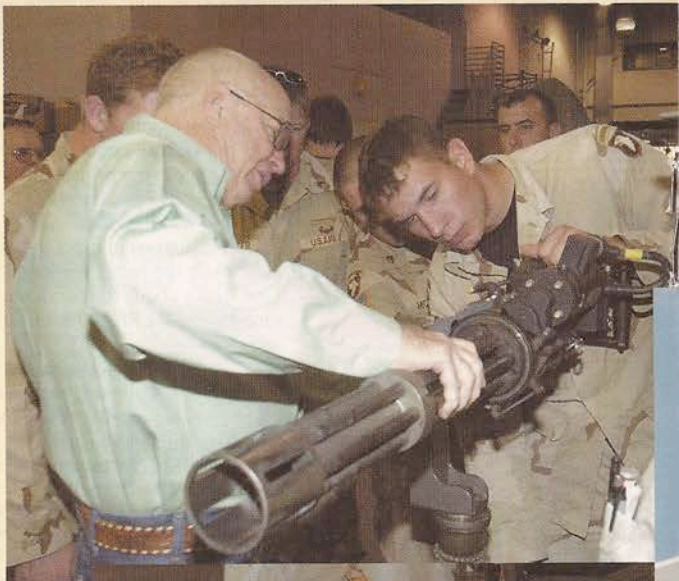
It was bound to happen. Dillon Aero, which provides 21st century firepower to the U.S. armed forces, was the recipient of an "invasion" by the air assault professionals of the 101st Airmobile Division.

In September, six members of the Screaming Eagles arrived (on foot) for an 11-day session with McMillan Rifles' Sniper School before proceeding to Afghanistan. Part of the class work was conducted at Dillon Precision's Scottsdale facility, where Mike and Chris provided classroom space and access to the roof for surveillance practice.

The Army has turned to civilian sources for additional training because existing military schools cannot produce the number of snipers currently required. Director of McMillan's training is William Graves, who provided the program with instructors Rick Furr and Harley Kruger. Most of the evolution was conducted at the Cowtown shooting facility northwest of Phoenix, site of the McMillan sniper match earlier this year (see *The Blue Press*, August 2004). However, Graves' curriculum includes urban training as well as open terrain, and Mike Dillon opened his plant to the Screaming Eagles. None had previously been to the facility, and all were suitably impressed with what they saw.

Detachment leader SSGT Chris McGraw explained that all his soldiers had previously completed one of the army sniper schools, and all were veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, with deployment to Afghanistan expected in a few months, the battalion commander wanted his shooters to obtain updated training, and McMillan offered the only option within that period.

But first things first. Upon arrival that Saturday, the soldiers were treated to a tour of the facility including an obligatory look at the Dillon "toy box." (Mike's gun vault is the Big Rock Candy Mountain of Dillon Precision.) The 101st troopers were invited to fondle hardware far older than any of them, from a .45-70 Sharps to Soviet PPsH submachine gun and beyond. When one of the shooters picked up a British SMLE, photographer Nyle Leatham explained to the youngster that the Lee-Enfield family had been in constant use with Her/His Majesty's forces from 1895 to 1956. Another participant observed, "You can beat the Evil Empire with a belt action rifle, and a bunch of Stingers."



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Not surprisingly, the Dillon Aero Minigun caught the visitors' attention. Mike placed an M134D on the factory pedestal mount and explained the operating features, describing the differences between his M134D and the original design. Dillon Aero has conducted empirical tests to determine the difference between conventional single-barrel MGs and the six-barrel Minigun, and Mike had the numbers down pat. "We fired on a four by eight steel target from a helicopter at 300 yards," he explained. "We used an M-240 and a Minigun, both firing a ten-second burst. In that time the 240 fired about 130

rounds and the Minigun about 500. The M-240 scored 12 hits. The Minigun got 104. The Minigun fired four times as many rounds as the M-240, but scored nine times as many hits."

The question of volume of fire versus accuracy was of professional interest to the snipers, who live by the credo, "One shot, one kill." However, some of them said they would like it both ways. (One shooter asked if Jesse Ventura really had fired a hand-held Minigun in "Predator," and Mike explained that the future Minnesota governor had tripped off only 150 blanks from a 1,000-round pack while the battery cable was disguised behind Jesse's tree-trunk legs.) Dillonites with ample 134 trigger time noted that the Minigun delivers a volume of accurate fire first time, every time.

As always at Dillon Precision, there's something for everybody. Each trooper got acquainted with Bo the Doberman, who'll lick your ears if you let him, and can tolerate anything but being ignored. Some of the troops were seen licking their lips in the *Blue Press* editorial spaces, where past and present cover girls adorn the walls, but regrettably neither Jennifer nor Sara nor Kerryn were on hand.

Bill Graves took advantage of Mike's lunch room offer to deliver a PowerPoint

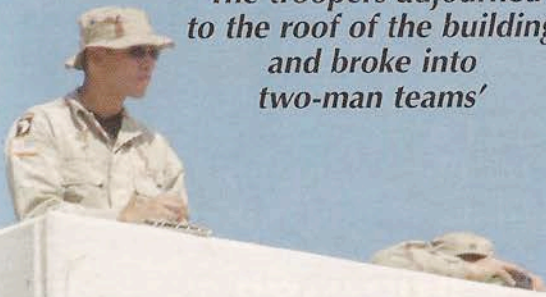
presentation on urban ops, including detailed evaluation of glass penetration. The session was interrupted by Chris' delivery of pizza, proving again that versatility remains a hallmark of Dillon Precision.

Afterward, the troopers adjourned to the roof of the building with the bright blue stripe and broke into two-man teams. Each was assigned a sector of Scottsdale Air Park to survey and produce range cards. Previously they'd been tested on "eyeball" methods of range estimation including mil dots, but now they were allowed to use their laser rangefinders. Said one trooper, "This Leica is awesome, man. There's no comparison with what we used before." (He mentioned Brand X but we'll remain discrete on that point.)

Some practical considerations entered into the equation. People who habituate Scottsdale Airport are accustomed to some esoteric sights and sounds on the Dillon ramp, and reports of camouflaged men with scopes and rifles would draw a shrug from the federals: "Oh, that's Dillon again." But Graves and Furr took pains to notify the FAA and Scottsdale PD to obviate any citizen complaints.

McMillan, Dillon, and other private firms are doing whatever possible to support the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. With military budgets and facilities maxed out, the civilian sector is increasingly important, and will continue supporting the troops fighting the global war on terrorism.

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Photos by Nyle Leatham

