Is Shooting IDPA “Training” or Jus

By Col. Mark Lisi, US Army (Ret.)

The popularity of IDPA shooting in Washington State can be measured by the number of clubs now hosting weekly matches, and by the number of shooters turning out every weekend to shoot these matches. Five years ago, there was only one club hosting IDPA events in Washington and a 40-shooter match was a big day. Today, Washington has nine IDPA clubs and the original club will have over 80 shooters at every monthly match. This news is, of course, good!

There’s a thread running through the Washington State Defensive Shooters (http://www.nwppa-idpa.com) that has become a serious debate in the shooter ranks. It is that question that will be examined in the following paragraphs. There’s considerable merit to this examination given that the IDPA is currently conducting a “Top Down” examination of the organization and its rules.

The question: Is shooting IDPA “Training” or just another action-pistol game? This is a serious question and it bears examination in the harsh light of day. The IDPA shooter is pulled and pushed by the shooting industry, the “training” industry, the “law enforcement” industry and any number of other distractors that might be available on or around the gun clubs that host IDPA events. We are all empowered as defensive shooters, and (Dare I say it?) drawn to the door-kicking, carbine-brandishing operators pictured on the pages of every shooter-centric magazine we read. Inventory the shooters’ outerwear the next time you shoot and compare denim to tactical cotton.

Training is the act of imparting a skill or set of skills to a person to ensure that those skills are available when required. We all train our children to use the potty and that becomes a lifelong skill for them. Paratroopers are trained on the skill of leaping from a flying airplane safely. What these two vastly dissimilar events have in common is that they are executed in the same manner every time the participant conducts them. Sneak up behind an old paratrooper and screech “HIT IT” at him, and the paratrooper (regardless of age) will snap into a good tight body position, chin on chest, feet and knees together, bent at the waist with his arms and hands wrapped around his imaginary reserve parachute, and count loudly in thousands until told to recover. This will happen every time, the same way. The paratrooper has been well trained.

Do we, the shooters, find the same concrete same-ness during a pistol match? Or are we required to employ the literary trope, suspension of disbelief, to get through the match? Do IDPA shooters reinforce bad gunfighting habits based on range and safety constraints, stage set up, high round count, and whiz-bang targetry? The answer to this question is YES. Consideration is always given to safety and that act alone retards the training aspect of the stage. Safety consideration is an absolute and it does impact whatever training value might be found in the stage. We all like to shoot and every effort is made to design high-speed stages that require reloads and as much shooting as can be packed into the stage. The truth is that most, if not