

[The General Purpose Combat Rifle](#)

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Today we see a big emphasis on close quarters battle. Truly, it is what much of the fighting around the world, by US forces as well as other forces, is all about. I said much, but not all. There is a good bit of application in an area where CQB (close quarters battle) leaves off and long before the Sniper Application begins. A rifle chosen to cover this area should be capable of both close quarters battle (although not specifically designed for that) and sniping (although not specifically designed for that either). Such a rifle could be called a General Purpose Combat Rifle and must be, well, general purpose. It should do all things reasonably well.



Except for the “combat” part, this is the same notion that led to Cooper’s Scout Rifle. The Scout Rifle, however a sacred cow it may be, was never meant for fighting specifically but for hunting. Few Scout shooters ever kept up with even an adequate semi auto shooter. Specially if the shooting test was not specifically set up to favor the Scout. So what do we need for a GPCR?

1). It must be in a military caliber capable of reaching out to distant targets to about 750 yards. The cartridge must be capable of penetrating brush and light cover, and possess wind resistance. The caliber must be easily found everywhere. That means that it should be available in military surplus form, and at common retail outlets.



The concept needs will specifically exclude any assault rifle cartridges such as the 5.45x39, 7.62x39 and the 5.56x45. Sure...I know the DMR/SPR in 5.56 can achieve some fantastic accuracy but that is not the point. It needs to do something out there once it hits and the 5.56 is simply not capable of achieving what we need. Moreover, while the 6.5 Grendel, and the 6.8 SPS sound like fantastic calibers and could probably do well in this role, they are simply not available at the level that we need.

The suitable calibers that fit our needs are the 7.62x51, the 7.62x54R, and maybe the 30-06 (although finding a rifle suitable for our mission will be difficult as you will see).

2). The rifle itself should be usable both at 500 yards and at 50 yards. Suitability for borderline sniping as well as house to house MOUT is essential. That will require a robust system that has seen military service. It will also require a detachable high capacity magazine to be capable in the close quarters envelope.



This requirement immediately excludes bolt actions, or sporting style semi autos such as are found from Remington, and other built-for-civilian-hunters rifles.

They may be great for hunting, but are simply not strong enough, reliable enough, nor capable of sustained fire as required for close in fighting.

What is available today? Options include:

The FAL. A short Congo-style rifle with a folding stock and a 17-18" barrel would be perfect. You can get high dollar FALs from DS Arms, or Jim Fuller. And you can get lower grade FALs from Century and other makers.

Another very good option is the M1A. The M1A SOCOM, or any M1A style rifle with a shortened barrel will work great as long as they are not too Americanized with bells & whistles, but simply a basic rifle. One necessary addition here would be a pistol grip stock.

A G3 clone, or CETME, or HK-91 suitably modified would do as well. The big issue here will be triggers but there are many sources that can fix an overly heavy trigger on these weapons as on the FALs.

AR-10 style rifles will be great here as well as long as it has been built to be reliable and not just accurate. Many of the rifles I have seen in this weapons family seem more focused toward sniping and not so much to general purpose.



Although the magazines are an issue and less desirable at only ten rounds, the PSL can be made into this....see the AK54. Same can be said about the Saiga 308. That rifle suitably arranged, and in the hands of a capable shooter, can hit at 1000 yards. The problem with the Saiga is a lack of military-grade magazines.

3). Weight: At the warriortalk forum the issue of weight was brought up. While weight should be A consideration, it cannot be the only consideration. Any of the military rifles we have discussed will weigh in at about ten pounds if the heavy bull barrels and uber-adjustable stocks are left off the weapon. The scout people made a big deal out of what a rifle weighs, but I think we must not be driven by weight alone.

If the man cannot carry a ten pound rifle in the field then rather than do with a substandard weapon that is lighter, the better solution is to strengthen the man. I challenge the entire premise of weight. If a man cannot carry a proper combat rifle in the field then this is may not be the discipline for him. We will not dilute the concept because the physically undeveloped can't hang.

4). Optics: These rifles need some sort of Variable Power Optic. Part of the duties envisioned for this platform is use in close range combat out to 100 yards. Another part includes hitting the mid ranges between 100 yards and 300 yards. The final part, and where scoping has the most effects, are hitting targets beyond 300 yards. The goal is out to 500 yards...and maybe farther out.

Red dot sights so popular in CQB are not adequate for this mission, nor are the super powerful dedicated sniper optics. On my rejuvenated FAL I added a Burris 3-9 as I intend it for the Guerrilla Sniper role and expect that 200-600 should be no issue for it. On the GPCR I think a more "flexible" optic would be better. An ACOG would be fine, as would a Leupold Mark 4 1.5x5.

Scout scopes and extended eye relief scopes are fine for CQB but suck for everything else. The reason they are so popular on Garands and M1As is that scoping such a rifle that way is technically easier but you will not see any rifles set up for the mid to long range equipped with scout scopes.



In the end what we end up with is a concept of a rifle that will do everything well, albeit not as well as weapons specifically designed for the task. The rifle will perform well inside a house, although not as well as a purpose-designed submachinegun. It will also perform at typical CQB ranges, although maybe not as well as an assault rifle. And it will reach out there and smack the crap out of an adversary across the canyon, although not as well as a sniper-grade bolt action rifle. The pessimist might say the rifle does nothing well, but I would say this rifle concept will do everything good enough. And that concept has been proven time and time again throughout history to be more than sufficient.

The General Purpose Combat Rifle - Part 2



The general purpose combat rifle revisited. The original article has had the most comments of any other article in this blog. While many comments have been in agreement, other have vehemently disagreed, some telling me that I was totally wrong because I did not choose their pick as the most general purpose, etc., etc. Some of the link backs were hilarious to read. At one forum devoted to the AR-15 (probably populated by 13 year olds in their trap door p.j.s on their mom's computer) my character was assassinated because I did not think a good M4 was the choice of universal rifle. Others were from self-anointed "old guys" claiming that they could not possibly carry a ten pound rifle. It is almost as if the rifle was a religion and by bringing up a concept they disagreed with I was calling the prophet a phony. I don't necessarily mind any of this because few 13 year olds will ever attend one of my classes or buy a DVD, nor can my character be assassinated (so many have already tried), but I want a clarity of subject on the matter because it is an important matter.



The best explanation of "General Purpose" I have to say is Jeff Cooper's. While I think his choice of a bolt action rifle for combat use in our times is as anachronistic as choosing a horse over a Jeep, his description of the concept is still valid.

"A general-purpose rifle is a conveniently portable, individually operated firearm, capable of striking a single decisive blow, on a live target of up to 200 kilos in weight, at any distance at which the operator can shoot with the precision necessary to place a shot in a vital area of the target."

Let's analyze this further.

General Purpose means "everything possible", not everything probable. It is possible to need a rifle to fight in a house CQB style. It is possible to need to drop a bull with a rifle. It is possible to need to snipe someone 400 yards away. It is possible to need to shoot through a motor vehicle. All these things have been done by our staff at one time or another either in CONUS or overseas. That one of these things is not likely for a given person does not invalidate the requirement to be ABLE to do them with the rifle in question.



One commenter was adamant that his AR-15 was general purpose. Sorry, no assault rifle cartridge is sufficiently capable to do all of the things a rifle may be used for. Whether or not US Forces use it is totally irrelevant.

Conveniently portable – well that is up to interpretation. If a man is physically incapable of carrying a 10 pound rifle afield then clearly he must opt for something smaller and lighter. No question about it. But that does not mean that his choice is equal to another rifle because it is his choice. Life is not fair and physicality cannot be ignored. The 65 year old guy with a bad back that does Krav maga three times a week is not the physical match for Chuck Liddell in the UFC cage, and the barely walking octogenarian with the uber light M4 is not carrying a general purpose rifle. Life sucks sometimes.

Individually operated needs no further elaboration, but the next point is important. Capable of striking a decisive blow on a live target up to 200 kilos. I know a man in Africa that has taken down elephants with a 308 FAL. To date I am not aware of anyone having done this with an M4 or AK. Hitting the target is not sufficient. It is great fun to ding steel at long distances. At a recent class we had one gifted shooter dinging steel at 800 yards with a 7.62x39 RPK. Very nice but that will be having no more effects on target than dinging it with a 5.56. There is a reason why the SR25 has become so popular in the wars. One very big reason is that it is not in 5.56.



The final point is also important enough to examine in depth. “At any distance at which the operator can shoot with the precision necessary”. Now that covers not only the potential accuracy necessary, but also the ability to withstand wind and other atmospheric conditions, as well as the penetration of light cover and brush. If we are looking at calibers to do all of this, scientifically and not emotionally, we can immediately eliminate all commonly used assault rifle intermediate calibers (including 5.45x39, 5.56x45, and 7.62x39), leaving the obvious 7.62x51. You don’t have to like the choice, but it is what it is.



The general purpose combat rifle is reasonably sized, field portable, rifle, capable of fulfilling the mission of the battle rifle, assault rifle, designated marksman rifle, perhaps the submachinegun, and the sniper rifle. It must be capable of striking a single decisive blow, as well as repeated blows on a live adversary or adversaries, at any distance and under any conditions, at which the operator can shoot with the precision and terminal ballistics necessary to eliminate the target.

Whether that description fits an urban apartment dweller with no interests in sniping, or a man who lives on the Great Plains with no interest in CQB is not the point of the exercise. Identifying the rifle that can do all of these things, and working up a skill set for it is the point of the exercise. And that is typified by the short, semi auto, military style rifle with a detachable box magazine in a 308 or similar chambering. Existing rifles that fit that role are the FAL, the G3 and its clones, the AR-10 and its clones, the M1A and its clones, the Saiga 308 and the PSL.