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marksmanship. In a battle the only bullets that count are those that hit." As president, he remarked in his annual message to Congress of 1906, "if a soldier has the fighting edge, and ability to care for himself in the open, his efficiency on the line of battle is almost directly proportionate to excellence in marksmanship."

We cannot know for sure how good a shot Roosevelt was himself but he was often called a fine shot in spite of his poor vision. When asked if he was a good marksman, according to his grandson, Tweed, Theodore Roosevelt would reply, "I don't shoot well, but I shoot often."

The naturalist Alden Loring, who accompanied Roosevelt on safari in Africa reported, "...the Colonel is a good marksman...In hunting dangerous game, such as buffaloes, elephants, rhinoceroses, and lions he exhibited the courage of a veteran big-game hunter, and the quickness with which he mastered the situation when in dangerous places, and the accuracy of his shooting, showed that he never got excited." Loring surmised that 10 times the amount of game taken could have been killed if the expedition had not been scientific in nature.

As president, Roosevelt was concerned about the marksmanship abilities of both American troops and the civilian population: "... it is unfortunately true that the great body of our citizens shoot less and less as time goes on. To meet this we should encourage rifle practice

among schoolboys, and indeed among all classes, as well as in the military services, by every means in our power. Thus, and not otherwise, may we be able to assist in preserving the peace of the world. Fit to hold our own against the strong nations of the earth, our voice for peace will carry to the ends of the earth. Unprepared, and therefore unfit, we must sit dumb and helpless to defend ourselves, protect others, or preserve peace. The first step in the direction of preparation to avert war if possible, and to be fit for war if it should come is to teach our men to shoot."

As president, "The Colonel" took steps to make sure Americans had the ability to remain free through practice with the rifle and the development of marksmanship skills. In his first term, he established the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice. An annual national marksmanship competition was created and Roosevelt instituted the long standing presidential tradition of writing a congratulatory letter to the winner. Roosevelt also said the Congress should "encourage the formation of rifle clubs throughout all parts of the land." The national board evolved into the federally chartered, non-profit Civilian Marksmanship Program. Today, American civilians can purchase surplus military rifles and ammunition from the Civilian Marksmanship Program through participation in marksmanship training with a rifle club. As Roosevelt once wrote, "The rifle is the free man's weapon."

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