A couple of years ago I wrote a commentary on the role of the Special Purpose Rifle, which was originally a special operations project to make a more accurate carbine than what the M4 afforded, providing ground units with precision fire capability while keeping magazines and ammunition loadouts standard across the team. My buddy and student FlyBy wrote a piece about his own experience in building a short, quick handling carbine for his uses. The logic is very simple- make use of the extended range the .556 in its heavier loadings can provide, giving a decisive advantage when engaging an enemy that either is not previously aware of your presence or has supporting fires, especially indirect.

_The whole idea is to kill that bastard before he knows you’re there, using as few rounds as possible, and getting the hell out of there before his bastard friends kill you._

So getting back to the SPR, the Recce rifle has a similar history. Originally the SPR Mod 1 sported an 18in barrel, with the Mod-Holland (named after 5th Special Forces Group Sniper chief MSG Steve Holland) having a 16in barrel for better portability in CQB roles. To me, it made the most sense. The reality is that you don’t gain much for practical purposes with two extra inches of barrel, other than a little bit of velocity, so the 16 inch gun was more tactically sound. Naval Special Warfare had a similar train of thought. Shorter, more portable is better for a wider variety of roles. Thus they came up with the SEAL Recon Rifle, now known as the Recce Rifle. It ended up being a little lighter than the SPR and had a wide variety of optics, which was really more dependent on the guy running the rifle than a set standard at the end of the day.

Between the SPR and the Recce Rifle, small team operators had more precision fire at longer distances, thus giving a distinct advantage on the battlefield without having to carry additional weight in a loadout. It wasn’t a perfect solution in all cases, but with the heavier Mk 262 77gr OTM rounds, the effectiveness of the .556 was significantly improved over the M855 in all aspects. Its a concept that is still as relevant today as it was then, and maybe even more so. How many AR-15s are out there? And how can we make those more lethal?
Nowadays the meaning of both terms is pretty loose, basically applying to any accurized AR platform. Got a decent barrel with a 1/7 or 1/8 twist and free float handguard? Can you shoot 1 MOA groups in the prone? Well, roger that, you’ve got what they were after nearly twenty years ago. But that should also tell you just how far we’ve come in the AR department (and in weaponcraft in general) when a basic AR layout available just about everywhere can meet their accuracy goals from back then. Not a bad problem to have.

I’ve talked about my own SPR a few times. Nothing fancy, a BCM Recce 16, Geissele SOCOM Rail, Harris bipod and a Primary Arms 1-8x24 ACSS scope. It works, and as the guys in the Scout Course know, it works really well. Little bit on the heavy side for humping up and down the hills, but that’s mainly due to the weight of the Geissele. Solid as a rock but it weighs a ton on the gun.

Enter a lighter setup. One of my other accurized rifles is much lighter (nearly a pound) and is nearly as mission capable for all practical purposes while being faster in the hands. Its my own Recce setup- deadly to 500, light weight, and extremely reliable. I’m running a Palmetto State 14.7in FN chrome lined barrel AR-15, milspec trigger, magpul rail sling mount, VTAC sling, Tango Down grip, my trusty old bombproof TA-01 ACOG, and only the finest Krylon paint. Nothing fancy, not going to win any beauty contests or cool guy wannabe awards, but the gun is rugged, simple, runs like a Swiss watch and has all the accuracy you’ll need to be lethal at longer ranges than the other guy.

Like every tool, the Recce rifle has a place and a purpose. But with a basic 16 inch barreled AR, decent ammo, a decent optic, and most important, training in the fundamentals of marksmanship and the small unit context to get to that final firing position, a small team of riflemen can use those skills as major force multipliers. The nice thing is that today, unlike those formative years developing those setups, the options are damn near unlimited, and not overwhelmingly expensive. Taking into account the vast number of very basic, but very good, common off the shelf AR-15s that are out there, the only thing limiting you is your own level of training.