

# Taking Aim At Something New

By Sarah Goodman

“Some people have a natural affinity for certain things and shooting is one of those things for Helen,” said MIT Physical Education Instructor in Pistol and Rifle and Rangemaster Mike Conti about former student Helen (Chang) Liu ’16.

After taking the Rifle PE course Liu decided to try shooting competitively with the MIT Varsity Rifle team. She is not alone; the team currently has four members that had their first shooting experience with MIT PE.

At the urging of one of her friends, Abra Shen ’16 also came to MIT with no prior rifle experience. “I thought, ‘Why not?’” Shen now says it is one of her favorite things to do at MIT. Kelly Mathesius ’17 joined on a whim as a novice. “It turned out that joining rifle was one of the most awesome decisions I made,” she said.

Both Liu and Mathesi recalled how foreign and difficult the sport was to them in the beginning, but the team and coaching dynamics kept them going. “Our team is so much fun, it really feels like a family when I’m with the team,” said Liu. “[Coach Mulloy-Mecozzi] helps to create a supportive environment for us to come to every day,” commented Mathesius.

Additionally, they found it satisfying to reap tangible rewards for their efforts. “Unlike some things at MIT where it seems as if no matter how hard I tried or how much I practiced, I would never understand it, rifle was a good break from that because I could see my improvement after practices”, said Liu. Shen believes that “...if you take [rifle] seriously and put in the effort to practice, it is possible to become fairly competitive...Attending practices and mentally taking a break from everything in my life was easy - and so focusing on shooting and getting better came along with that!”

Conti believes that many MIT students, possess an important tool to be a competitive shooter: “the ability to focus intently on a single objective while managing a number of variables.”

Varsity Rifle Head Coach Melissa Mulloy-Mecozzi shared similar sentiments. “I believe MIT students have an advantage over many other NCAA student athletes. MIT student-athletes are extremely focused and competitive when it comes to academics and their personal goals.” She added, “Many of them are also going to be scientists and adapt well to experimenting with trial and error which is a huge aspect of competitive rifle shooting.”

MIT Rifle student-athletes have taken their experience beyond the range, some with successful careers in the firearms industry. Students have even told Coach Mully-Mecozzi that on school breaks they have taken their mothers to a local range to teach them the skills of their new sport.

Coach Mulloy-Mecozzi has received positive feedback from her student-athletes about the value rifle adds to their lives both in college and beyond. “It serves as an escape from the academic stress of MIT. Being part of a team also serves as a support system for a variety of issues from

home, academics, internships, work opportunities etcetera,” she continued. “Shooting is considered to be a sport for life. We have had alumni who have grown children that they have introduced to the sport and have gone on to be part of an NCAA Championship team.”

“My greatest takeaway would probably be some reassurance that hard work indeed pays off and some tips on how to focus and avoid panicking,” said Liu.

Mathesius spoke of the team enthusiastically. “I love knowing that I’m a part of something bigger and cooler than just myself. It’s always a great experience to compete against other schools and show other teams that MIT excels at things beyond just academics.”