Letter to the Editor:

In the summer of 1969, at the age of 18, I was going through the U.S. Infantry School at Fort Jackson, S.C.

As part of our infantry training, we received rudimentary training and firing of a variety of Vietnam-era weaponry such as the M-60 machine gun, the M-79 grenade launcher (thumper), the M-72 light anti-tank weapon and the M-16A1 assault weapon which is actually one of the prototypes of the civilian assault weapons we have today, like the Bushmaster used in the Newtown massacre of students.

The M-16 can shoot on fully automatic or semi-automatic with the flip of a small lever. It could cycle a 30-round clip in seconds (850 rounds per minute), but was usually fired in bursts of three or four rounds or semi.

The M-16 shot a smaller bullet (.223-caliber) than the M-14, the weapon it replaced. However, we were told the killing power of this cartridge was just as effective because of its high velocity (3,200 feet per second), internal fragmentation and internal ricochet. This gun was designed to be lightweight while maximizing firepower and casualties.

It was reported that all the victims of the Newtown massacre had at least three rounds in them, and the estimated timeframe of the incident was about 15 or 20 minutes.

After I moved north al-most 30 years ago, I purchased a 30-30 small lever-action carbine. I've harvested many deer with that gun and wounded only one. This gun is designed for hunting.

You could say I've been a hunting and gun enthusiast all my life. But the interesting thing is I never thought of my M-16 as in any way connected to hunting or sporting arms. As far as I was concerned, that weapon be-longed in a different place in my life — that weapon was built and designed with the latest technology to intimidate and kill people.

I believe weapons like the M-16 are weapons of war that belong on the battlefield, not a playground or under some young man's bed to play with on the week-ends.

This fascination with this weapon of war is a reflection of our culture — one filled with fear, separation and division — with a disconnect between the people and the wars fought on their behalf. I know, I live in a Republican county, and a state that is now considered the most polarized in the country, but this isn't a Republican or Democratic issue. It's an American issue, a cultural issue, an issue about the right of our children to feel safe.

The NRA would have us believe this is about the Second Amendment, and their mantra is one of fear and paranoia, about storm troopers taking away our guns. If you believe that, and hate this country and it's leadership to that extent, then there's probably nothing that can be said, except to recommend a few good history books.

The three main things being proposed in an assault weapons ban would not affect my hunt one bit and it just might lesson the fear and angst in this culture. I know there's no single answer to this complicated issue and the NRA is recommending censorship, armed guards and armed teachers, but let's get real!

Maybe hunters and veterans like myself have a special responsibility to just say "Enough."

I know there's got to be a few out there who don't follow lock-step behind the NRA. The NRA has hidden behind us too long!

Gregory Schiek Sr.

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