

Margaret Murdock

There have been changes in the standing position since ten years ago when I went to MTU, even though the MTU manuals are still saying the same thing. We are not teaching differently, but we are shooting differently. It hasn't been a major change, but what I want to teach you is what the shooters are actually shooting now. One thing that influences your offhand is body build. Like I jokingly told Marsha, to be a shooter you have to be short and squat, which gives a few of us an advantage. We have a short U.S. rifle team. Women are often more flexible than guys, which presents a problem to them as shooters.

Way back the gallery shooters had the flamingo stance with all their weight on their forward foot. Then we studied the Russians in the early 1960's and came back with the idea that you had to have your weight evenly distributed on both feet, with a back twist and a lean backwards to counterbalance the rifle. Equipment changes, especially the jacket change, has resulted in this change. Look at Wig, Writer, Bassham and myself. None of us have our weight equally distributed on both feet now nor an exaggerated back lean. I now put about seventy percent of my weight on my front foot. You will notice the back foot is out, almost on a straight line with the left forearm. The front leg now makes more of a post to set



HEAVY JACKET



LIGHT JACKET

the rifle on since the light jacket provides little back support. The recoil comes through the body from the supporting arm to the back foot. I can feel the recoil travel down my back leg. The position is more to the side now rather than facing the target as the Russians did in the 60's. We're shooting now at about ninety degrees. My own position feels tight, so that when I twist I come to a stop that seems to be in the back leg. The gun weight comes down onto the front foot.

EP: Is it wrong to put your elbow on your hip joint?

MM: No. If you can do it, fine. The women have an advantage here. Women are usually more short-waisted. The guys usually have to rest their arm on their rib cage, but I can rest mine on my hip. You need to take advantage of this standing, especially since women are denied use of the palm rest with the standard rifle.

Gloria is shooting with a bent back leg. Now I would advise her to try to straighten this out. She really won't need to alter the rest of her position to do this. With a straight back leg, recoil should be more consistent. I talked with Colonel Pullum about this and he says it's not wrong, but he's never had a world class offhand shooter use bent knees.

EH: I have trouble getting my elbow to my hip if my leg is completely straight.

MM: You're shooting with your upper body straight up without any twist or bend. Put your feet a little farther apart and get a small back bend. Look at Writer because he's thin enough you can see what he's doing.

Several of you can move your supporting elbow a little more to the side, away from the left front of the body, which should tighten your position. This will help eliminate elevation errors. I really don't have many elevation problems offhand with a tight position. That solves fifty percent of the problem, then you only have windage to worry about. You all approach your gun well, with good head positions.

Ethel, you're using an extreme hand position by turning the V of your hand toward your body. It allows a lot of strain, even if it feels locked, especially for a woman's wrist. I suggest you use one of the conventional methods. Personally, when I shoot without a palm rest, I shoot off my fist. I also try to keep a new 10-X glove for offhand. It's a little stiffer and makes a difference for standard and air rifle. I use an older glove for prone and kneeling that is softer. I do not use the Gehman glove for offhand because it is too soft, although a lot of shooters do use it.

To change elevation with air rifle and standard rifle there are two methods you can use - move the back foot or the forward hand. I'm talking about moving the back foot maybe a quarter inch, which looks like six feet through your sights, or moving the supporting hand back and forth along the rail. To lower, move the hand forward or the foot forward a tiny bit. To raise the rifle, move your hand toward you or your back foot back a little. Be conscious where you put your hand along the rail, especially air rifle because it influences your recoil. Mark it with a piece of tape on the stock. I also change my cant by turning my fist - sometimes toward my body and sometimes away in a counter clockwise direction. Be aware that changing the amount of twist in your wrist may change the cant or zero.

GP: I was having trouble once with my offhand and kept getting high sevens. Finally I realized the rifle was on my class ring.

MM: Little things make the difference. You need to keep your head together when you are shooting, because it isn't the big things that make the difference after you reach a fair amount of proficiency. For example, if you wear a thick pair of socks instead of your thin pair of socks, it wipes out your kneeling that day because you are too high. Don't wear anything in a match you haven't worn in practice. If you have a good day in practice, I really urge you to look at your position. If you have a shot that just holds exceptionally well, shoot the shot and then look at your position. Think about how your whole body and its parts feel and write it in your shooting diary. What you want to know is what feels good and what gives you good shots, and this is what you want to get back to each time.

GP: If you do something wrong, do you write it down and think about it?

MM: I've always written down major things like the differences in my positions from 50 meters to 300 meters. I don't usually write down what's wrong but usually I will make a note that says what I tried to correct and what worked best that day. I do think about it too. To really make the most of your shooting time you have to have thought about it enough to know exactly what you're going to do or try that day. So when I'm having a problem, I do think about it at night and decide exactly what I'm going to try the next day to alleviate it. If you keep a diary, you'll find shooters are running in a gigantic circle. Maybe two years later you'll have the same problem you solved once before. Reread your diary periodically and you'll

find you've forgotten something you had already figured out once. You can save yourself several months of training. If I were to lose my book now, I'd be through shooting. There is no way I can lay off for a year and come out for two weeks and put everything together without my book. I shoot by my book now.

Well, let's shoot and watch our scores go down with our new positions!

(Shooters then shot offhand)

MA: Margaret is worried that in correcting you and critiquing you she might be upsetting you, but I think that's what you are here for. Am I correct? You are all so young, with so many good shooting years ahead of you, if she can help you to straighten out things now it will save you years of training in error. It's so easy to change now while you are young.

MM: I shot low kneeling and flamigo standing in college, and when I got to MTU the team was in Europe. They left me a note that said you have to shoot high kneeling - here's your kneeling roll- and practice standing with your free rifle according to the manual. It only took about two months to shoot better than I had been shooting. You juniors don't have a layoff time which is bad, because you shoot gallery for nine months and then international all summer. When you have matches every weekend you have to use the matches to evaluate the changes. Even if I'm satisfied with a change in practice, I try it in a match before I decide - even testing my guns. In your mind you have to have some matches evaluated as more important than others. Use those not so important matches to train! This is a definite problem for collegiates when you're shooting under win-type coaches with very little other know-how to help you.

MA: Hopefully what we can give you in this school are things that took all of us weeks and months and years to work out. We want to share our knowledge with you and save you some years. Maybe I can equate this a little with gymnastics. It's really important to have sound basic fundamentals like forward rolls because you can't progress to more difficult skills, such as tuck aerials, unless your fundamentals are anatomically correct.

MM: This is true in shooting also. Air rifle and gallery are one hundred percent fundamentals. Outdoors, wind reading and experience create additional factors. You have only a few days to figure out a range for a big ISU competition. I'll have four days in Montreal. If your basics are correct, you can concentrate on what you need to learn about the range, instead of your position problems. I always think of this when I watch the skaters do their figure eights in compulsories. Some of the skaters lose so many points on compulsories and there is no reason to. It's basic fundamentals. Peggy Fleming did well in this and she started points ahead of the field, taking off pressure for her free-style events. It's like shooting a ninety prone in gallery. You've just thrown away ten points to your competitors.

MA: One of the points that came up at the President's Commission on Olympic Sports meeting when we were discussing national teams, was that with civilian jobs we couldn't be together all the time to train, but that it is important to have sessions like this at least once a year. Shooters need to sit around and talk about shooting with other good shooters. We were able to do this at MTU and it is

one of the major reasons U.S. rifle shooters have dominated the world these past ten years. The atmosphere was created by Colonel Pullum and everyone contributed. We need to provide this for you juniors, so you can have this same good experience.

IW: I think what Margaret is trying to say is that if your position isn't fundamentally correct, all you are depending on is your youth, your eyesight and your coordination. When you get to my age you are in trouble.

MM: That's true. One of the reasons for poor performance in a match is the loss of coordination. When you're scared, you're tight. You can't depend on coordination to pull you through.

EP: I don't understand why you need shooting pants for standing?

MM: You don't. Especially in Phoenix! Some matches you pile on everything you own. I have solved a lot of cold weather problems with goose down shooting pants that I talked the Eddie Bauer company into making for rifle shooters. In gallery, due to time, put everything on you will need beforehand, and this would include shooting pants. Actually out here, I think most shooters prefer to have just one pair of pants for shooting to save changing clothes and also carrying one more item of shooting gear.

GP: I'm superstitious. I always shoot with my shooting pants on. I took them off for prone last year and did terrible, so I wear them even in the heat.

MA: Don't let your shooting be controlled by too many special small things. Don't try something in a match you've never done before. But knowing the heat in Phoenix, you could prepare in practice by shooting in less clothing, because the heat brings pulse and stamina problems over the long haul that can be negated by lighter clothing, controlled use of ice packs, Gatorade, etc. Some things can be changed and some things can't, but figure this out in practice.

MM: One year everybody was wearing Adidas track shoes, so I ran down and bought a pair and put them on to shoot prone the first match day. I always shoot prone in my boots, and I had to get up and put my boots on because my position just didn't feel right. Now you don't do a thing with your feet shooting prone, but it was on my mind that my position just didn't feel right and bothered my concentration.

IW: I could never shoot prone in shorts the way you women do. The flies bother me and I'd have the skin on my knee rubbed raw.

MA: I never shoot prone in shorts unless the firing point is covered because you can get your legs sunburned. I've sprayed my legs in practice with OFF, but in a match I'd put on pants. Also, I never wear perfume when shooting outdoors because the bugs think you're a flower and it can be a problem. In deference to your competitors, you shouldn't wear strong perfume in gallery because it could trigger someone's allergy. Another thing I never do is wear mascara in a match, because if you get something in your eye it takes twice as long to rub it and the mascara out.

GP: What about tucking your sweat shirt in?

MM: It's legal. I just don't happen to be one who does it. I'm pinning the bottom of my sweatshirts to my pants now because of my canvas coat. The sweatshirt crawls up when I shoot offhand because I bring my rifle up and then down into position.

IW: Some of the men are tucking in the sweat shirt, then wearing a belt, cinched in.

MM: Well, the belt is okay, but don't cinch it too hard or you'll pick up pulse beat. The old shooters may be doing this because a belt snug around your back makes your back feel better. Most shooters have some back problems due to the strain in offhand.

EH: Lanny and Dave Ross wear a regular shirt under their sweat shirt. Why?

MM: You can have 2.5 mm single thickness and 5 mm double thickness in clothing. When we went to light coat, I think some people found a shirt that fit better, made them feel they had a little better support. It really doesn't support, but it just feels tighter and therefore better. You need to be aware of how your coat feels in every position.

MA: When we take you outside for shooting, I'm going to take pictures of all your positions from various angles. If we can get you into good positions once, then we'll send you the pictures and you can use them as a guide to get back into the position.

MM: This is a very good tool. When you're shooting we'll have someone take pictures, then if you get into a slump you can take pictures again and by comparison figure out some of your problems. You can place a good slide over a slide in which you're having problems and sometimes pick up the problem. In 1966, both Foster and I were shooting really good kneeling - in the 390's - both smallbore and 300 meters. We had taken a bunch of slides for one of the MTU manuals and while messing around one day, we put his slide over mine and they were identical.

MA: Unfortunately, the manual isn't as good as it once was. They threw out a lot of good shooters and a lot of good pictures. If you're trying to change your position, you need to look at someone whose body build is similar to yours, and you need to look at a top shooter, not someone on the way up.

MM: I have one thing I want you to do tonight. We've asked you to change some things about your position. I want you to think about why you were doing it your way. I want you to be able to tell me point by point why you did it that way, what you were accomplishing. You need a reason for everything you do or you are just wasting your time in practice. We don't want to dictate to you or force you to change, but we'll try to help you change for the better and you must know the reason why.

EH: I'm having problems with my hold offhand. The last few months it's okay when I start, but then it just deteriorates and I only have about three seconds to get the shot off.

MM: It sounds like you're doing something somewhere in your string that destroys your natural point of aim. Maybe your coat begins to push your stock in some way. You might try some Firm Grip, which is legal, to help keep the butt in position. Your supporting elbow could be slipping. Try to determine what makes it change. Quite possibly the problem is just one point, that is the rifle is being unnaturally disturbed at only one point and you'll have to find it.

EB: Do you use ear protectors when you shoot?

MM: Yes. I recommend ear plugs even with air rifle. You should wear them whenever you are shooting. It really helps your concentration also. If you can eliminate from your mind who's going out with whom or where the party is going to be tonight, your score will probably be better. Behind the line conversations are most interesting, but you need to eliminate the distractions and concentrate on your performance to do well or learn from the day's shooting.

RF: I understand the way you grip the pistol grip of the standard rifle is different from free rifle. Could you talk about that?

MM: Yes. They are quite different. The reason is the absence of the hook with the standard rifle, which makes it muzzle heavy as opposed to the free rifle. I shoot standard rifle with quite a lot of pull back with my trigger hand. I pull straight back. I grip the rifle at the base of my fingers where they join my hand and pull with them rather than also using the palm of my hand. You will find in order to pull straight back you will need to raise your elbow a little - in free rifle it hangs down - and bring the thumb over the top of the stock. You may want to roll the rifle into your face a little more and use more cheek pressure to hold the butt down. These are little things you just have to try to see if it will work. Analyze what you're doing on the days it is going well. When I changed you Rod, you mentioned it changed your zero. It will. Watch your head position on the stock. If your head is closer to the sight one time than another, it will change your elevation, because it changes your cheek pressure and your sight alignment. You can mark your stock so you can feel it with tape. As you shoot more you will be able to tell it by the sight alignment, as the rear aperture will look too small or too large around the front sight.

I noticed someone was using a rubber eye patch attached to the sight. This is fine if the patch is attached firmly so it doesn't slip. Sights are so critical that they can easily be worn so the clicks aren't true or crisp anymore. Hang the patch so it doesn't wear your sight. A patch can also start to loosen the sight as you go along and you pick up a click or two of change. Another method is the one Lanny uses. He puts a cardboard eye patch under his headband (sweatband). Also most of you don't have dial indicators to check your sights, but you can have it done here in Phoenix once a year at least. I'm sure Bill Wiseman wouldn't mind.

Another item to remember is to place your sights on tight, but don't strip the screws. Many of you guys can probably put your sights on finger tight and have them hold, but for most of the women this won't work. I put mine on finger tight and then just snug them easy with the sight tool or a screwdriver. With 300 meter shooting, everyone uses a screwdriver because finger tight is not enough with the recoil. I recommend more than finger tight. It's hard to recover gracefully when

your sight falls off! Always check your action screws too. A lot of these things you are told, but until you do forget it in a match, it doesn't sink in. Once it costs you points, you'll remember. Experience is one of the best teachers on some of these mistakes.

Now we'll practice again.