



THE SIMPLE THINGS ARE TOUGH

GRASPING TRIGGER CONTROL

Many students ask what is the single fundamental they should practice in order to improve marksmanship. Although there are many building blocks necessary to formulate a good shot, the one fundamental that can deliver success or render all the practice and preparation for naught is trigger control.

Once the gun is stabilized on the target, all that is left to do to achieve maximum performance is operating the trigger to release the shot without affecting the gun's relationship to the target before the bullet exits the muzzle.

It sounds simple enough to execute, but it isn't that easy. A wise man once said that trigger control is the hardest

simple thing that most gun owners will encounter. Any individual would be hard-pressed to argue that point no matter what firearm he or she uses or discipline in which he or she works.

DITCH 'SQUEEZE'

When investigating simply moving the trigger to discharge the gun without affecting the sights' and muzzle's relationship to the target, it becomes apparent that there are many variables in play. Said variables may be the result of physical, visual or mental deficiencies in the shot-delivery system.

Perhaps the deficiency that is most common, easy to understand and easy to correct is an instructor's use of the

word "squeeze" when describing trigger manipulation to a new student. A student hears the word and associates it with his or her previous understanding of the word with regard to the task to be performed. As it relates to the hand, "squeeze" refers to an equal amount of force applied by all of the digits of the hand simultaneously to the object in question. Think squeezing a toothpaste tube.

The problem is that when the trigger finger applies pressure to the trigger, the rest of the fingers also apply pressure to the gun, which increases as the trigger finger moves the trigger toward the rear. This hand pressure causes the muzzle of the gun to rotate inboard

(left for the right-handed shooter and right for the left-handed shooter) and slightly downward. When the trigger breaks and the shot is fired, the muzzle is off the target because the shooter squeezed his or her whole hand to operate the trigger.

To fix the problem, eliminate “squeeze” from your vocabulary when discussing trigger movement with students. “Operate,” “manipulate” and “pull” are much better words to describe trigger movement – especially when accompanied by the word “smooth” or “fluid” to suggest consistency without interruption.

Even the popular term “press,” used when addressing trigger movement, can be confusing. Most objects that are pressed, such as elevator buttons, are done with the finger moving away from the body. A trigger, on the other hand, is moved toward the body when moved to fire the gun. Hence the term “pull” is a better option in communicating trigger movement to a student.

CORRECTING MISTAKES WITH DRILLS

Once a student understands that the index finger must move the trigger independent of the rest of his or her fingers and hand, progress can be made in correcting identified deficiencies. An excellent drill for addressing almost all of the problems you might encounter with trigger manipulation is the “Wall Drill.” This is a dry-fire drill that lets the shooter see and feel what it is like to deliver a good shot. When the “Bullet Hole Drill” is conducted on the range during live fire, the validation of success will be obvious. Both the “Wall Drill” and the “Bullet Hole Drill” have been discussed in detail in several past issues.

Often a shooter is plagued with perceived gun movement increasing as trigger pressure increases, and his or her answer is to make the gun fire by jerking the trigger before the movement gets any worse. This moves the muzzle off the target a split second before the gun fires, and the desired impact point of the bullet is not achieved. The perceived gun movement is a result



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of a shooter’s eye focus leaving the gun and transitioning in the direction of the target as he or she pulls the trigger. The further the eye focus moves away from the gun, the more apparent movement of the gun (and anxiety of not making a good shot) becomes. This visual deficiency is usually compounded by emotional degradation when success is not realized. And the worst part is that the shooter has no idea why.

There is an easy fix to cure this visual phenomenon: Retrain the eye to stay on the sights through the exit of the bullet from the muzzle.

This can be done while dry-firing using the aforementioned “Wall Drill.” Verify the eyes are actually open during firing and the eye focus is on the front sight at the moment the bullet leaves the muzzle.

Assuming the desired sight picture, the line of sight crosses the ejection port where brass is ejected every time the gun fires. The ejected spent cartridge should be detected each time the gun cycles if the shooter’s eyes are open and focused on the sights. Failure to see the ejected brass indicates the shooter is closing his or her eyes each time the gun fires.

Once the ejected brass is regularly recognized as it escapes the pistol, validating that the eye focus is on the front sight when the gun fires is the next step. When the bullet leaves the muzzle, it is followed by smoke, flash and the high-pressure gases pushing the bullet – all of which are visible around the front sight. Once the shooter sees the atmospheric disturbance around the front sight when the gun

fires, the perceived movement of the gun disappears ... as does the anxiety causing the trigger to be jerked. Once validation is confirmed, hits on target are vastly improved.

‘GET YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME!’

The mental aspect of shooting covers a lot of territory. However, one of the most overlooked is the coordination of visual and tactile input to the brain, both being essential to delivering a good shot. Many a precision shooter has fallen prey to intently concentrating on the sight picture, forgetting to move the trigger until the optimal time has passed. Conversely, there are those who work very hard to achieve a smooth, fluid release of the trigger in breaking the shot while forgetting to pay necessary detail to the sight picture.

The objective is to combine the visual, tactile and mental attention into a single act that provides consistent and accurate results. This can be done by focusing the eye on the front sight – through the opening in the rear sight – while envisioning a connection between the trigger and the front sight in the mind’s eye. By mentally pulling the front sight toward the eye – through the rear-sight notch – with the trigger as it moves until the gun fires, the eye, trigger finger and brain are equally engaged. This effectively balances their individual efforts in delivering the optimum shot.

MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL

It goes without saying that there are many components contributing to shot delivery in all disciplines of shooting, but it is hardly debatable that trigger control, the final act that releases a shot toward the target, is the most important of them all. Master this and you are guaranteed to improve your accuracy.

