Dear Colleagues

**Team shooting techniques shared between the shooter and coach**

**Problem:**each shooter and the coach of a team are very often the result of selectors with little or no understanding of what each must do to achieve a better combined shoot. Hence, the practice still exists today where team selectors describe a coach as being restricted to managing the wind. A coach is as a result described as awind coach. That is, the coach is not thought capable of also assisting team members to shoot better. As a result of this limited outlook, teams are often severely handicapped by slow shooters who may be included in a team. These shooters commonly feel under no obligation to practise shooting with a variable speed of release. If they were to do this, it would enable a maximum number of shots to be released while wind velocity and direction remain the same.

There is a widely held standard for international teams, that each shooter should be able to release a shot within 3 seconds of the coach indicating go. A recent Australian Rifle Team to North America was cited by several experienced coaches as containing members who were unable to release shots within this time. When wind changes occur rapidly, the need to release shots within the 3 second limit is self-evident.

At club level the usefulness of team shooting is often not realised. Some clubs today regard a team shoot as a match for occasions when clubs get together. Hence, if isolated by distance from other clubs, team shooting may never be practised.

This article describes team shooting as a way of bringing individual club members up to the level of skill attainable within a club. For example, the ability of TR shooters may be increased to enable them to group at 1 MOA (the size of the V-bull) instead of the 2 MOA bullseye. Likewise, F Class shooters may be alerted by a coach when their group has widened from 0.5 to 1.0 MOA or more. The shooter may then return it to 0.5 MOA by adjusting the degree of care when releasing each shot.

**Discussion:**in the 1890s, rifle clubs of Australia represented a sporting activity of military reservist units, particularly those concerned with the manning of shore batteries to protect Australia against a threatened Russian invasion. Shore batteries largely consisted of local residents with little experience of the techniques of rifle shooting. Although each member worked at mastering the techniques, wind changes tended to upset all that had been mastered. A more skilled shooter with skills in managing the wind was in great demand. Teams’ matches enabled club members to work together with wind specialists.

In the 2010s, where TR and F Class shooters shoot alongside each other, individually and in teams’ matches, clubs now have the opportunity to master techniques which are common to both disciplines. As a result, it is important for shooters to release as many shots as possible while the wind remains at the same velocity, is common to both types of shooting. However, when a shooter increases the pace of shot release, this often increases the size of a group in both TR and F Class. A coach and shooter are now able to work together, with the coach alerting the shooter as soon as the group begins to widen beyond 1.0 MOA (TR) or 0.5 MOA (F Class). In each discipline, enlargement of a group out to the 2 MOA width of the bullseye can be disastrous. A coach must identify when a group crosses into the inner ring (TR) or into the bullseye (F Class).

Today, a club that looks after its members and assists them with techniques to keep group sizes under control, can field a team where the coach and shooter work together. This is illustrated upon assisting a shooter to instantly adjust his/her degree of care, to avoid generating a tremor when releasing a shot. Tremor shots tend to result in a far wider group, often around the 2 MOA perimeter of the bullseye, scoring say 47.3 TR or 53.2 F Class. A shooter alerted by the coach to a reduction in the level of care, is able to instantly return a group size back to the 1.0 MOA size of the V-bull (or 6-ring) or 0.5 MOA X-ring and score say 50.8 TR or 60.7 F Class.

**Practical:**in the 2010s, a coach and each shooter from a club are able to work together over several weeks to enhance:

* selection of ring size and thickness, which enables the aiming mark to automatically appear in the centre of the ring (TR)
* support of the weight of the rifle on one elbow, with no tension in arm muscles, enabling the sling to support only the bones of the forward arm (TR)
* body position, so that the weight of the arm and rifle can be supported with no perceptible movement right through to the moment of shot release (TR)
* body position, so that when a shot is released, it occurs at the natural point of aim (TR)
* attention to sling tension, with a routine test of tension before each shoot (TR)
* hand in contact with the pistol grip and trigger, so that it is correctly anchored and wide shots do not occur due to recoil of the stock against the thumb and poorly anchored palm muscles (TR and F Class)
* focus upon a quick initial trigger pull, which changes to a very slow pull, with the mind concentrating on follow-through until the shot is released as a surprise (TR and F Class)
* finger-tip reloading and start of the trigger pull, until the coach says go, which instantly starts the slow and mentally concentrated latter part of the trigger pull and hence the degree of care needed to avoid generating a tremor (TR and F Class) .

If a coach and shooter work together on non-team days, followed by a well-practised performance in a teams’ match, the club will have contributed to a high standard of both shooters and coaches. In previous decades it was common for clubs to include such shoots in their annual championships.

If a club succeeds in assisting every individual shooter (TR and F Class) to progress along the path to enhancing skills, then it has served the range of interests of its members. This enables a club to progress a new shooter through utilising the skills of all members. As a result, when shooters reach middle level enhancement does not stop. If it does, a club will find it has a large number of shooters at middle level, who cannot see how they can continue their improvement and hence tend to lose interest. Grouping skills quoted above should become routine for every club member, whether shooting individually or with a coach. Likewise, a club should employ the skills of a suitably experienced shooter to teach the strategies needed for shooting in changing wind.

**Conclusion:**practising teams’ match shooting with a coach should become a routine club activity, which will enable every member to enhance their skills for both individual and teams’ matches.

Best regards

Geoff