

# Up Close and Personal

## Dry firing; the PISTOL SHOOTERS key to improved scores

by T. Redhead, NSRA National Pistol Coach

Okay, okay I'll admit it. If ever there was a case of a poacher turning into a gamekeeper this is it. During the years when I was a member of various National Pistol Squads, I hated and loathed dry firing. It was boring, useless and only for wimps. What was the point in being on a range and just clicking at a target, when I could be firing for real? So, like 99% of my peers, I never did any whatsoever. Of course, if my coach asked about dry firing I lied and said, "Well, yes I do a certain amount".

Prior to the Berlin Wall being torn down in 1989 and the Soviet Union imploding in 1992, little was known of the former Eastern Block's research into shooting techniques. Target shooting was the subject of very serious scientific research, for example, East Germany allegedly had 16 scientists working for 10 years (or was it 10 scientists working for 16 years? Whatever!).

The fruits of their labours were buckets full of medals, however, anyone who imparted this knowledge would probably have become an unwilling recipient of hospitality in a 'minus five star' state institution. Circumstances have changed and we are gradually becoming aware of the results of their research, which leads me nicely into explaining the benefit to be gained by doing 'UP CLOSE & PERSONAL' dry firing.

I have learned to appreciate the fact that dry firing is the pure training exercise. It is now a very important part of the training regime of all members of the NSRA National Pistol Squad. Done properly it doesn't have to be either boring or time consuming, in fact it can be stimulating and very beneficial. You'll be surprised just how rewarding it is especially when your dry firing session goes well.

The fundamental difference between the 'old' concept of dry fire and the new is

that it mostly takes place in your home, with the muzzle of your pistol only forty five to fifty centimetres (eighteen inches) away from a plain blank background. A door, a wall, a sheet of paper will do very well. At this distance the feedback is excellent and the distractions almost zero.

Start by using a completely blank aiming area and then progress to using a small dot, thin horizontal or vertical lines. To maintain interest vary between them. You may find you need to increase the width of your rear sight slightly, in order to gain a clearer sight picture but no buckets please.

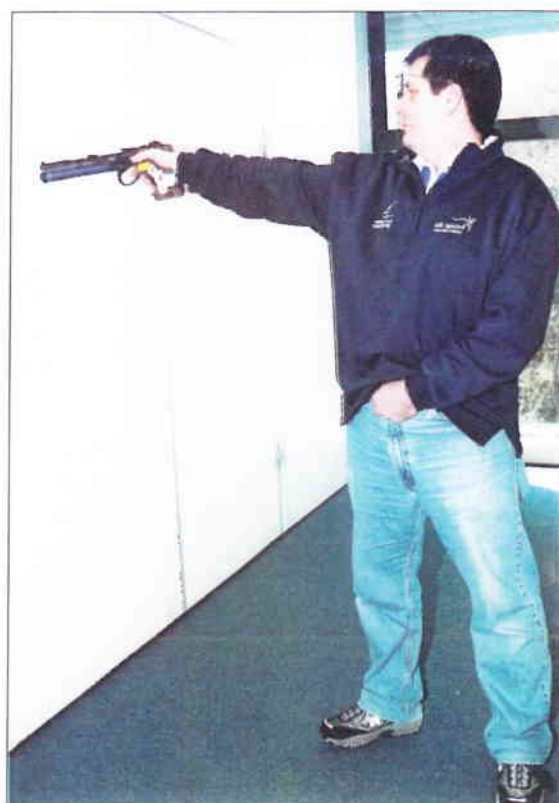
Initially when 'on-aim' focus your attention on aligning the tip of the foresight and then, **this is very important**, switch your attention to controlling the notches either side of the foresight. When you release the trigger any errors in your technique will become instantly noticeable. Now consciously work at eliminating

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## Dry Firing



*"That's the way you do it!" Mickey Gault demonstrates the correct dry-fire method. (Above) He starts by placing the pistol muzzle lightly against the blank aiming surface. (Above right) He then steps back half a pace and commences his training session. Note his "ideal" stance. (Below right) Mickey usually prefers an entirely blank aiming surface to ensure his concentration is focused fully on sight picture and smooth trigger release.*



these 'errors'. The primary objective is to acquire a smooth, prompt, trigger release.

A 'little often' is much better than a 'lot infrequently'. A 20-minute quality training session, two or three times a week, will improve your shooting to a marked degree. The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it. Mornings are better than evenings when you're much fresher. This is especially important if you are training to compete in shoulder-to-shoulder competitions because they are usually held during the day, not evenings.

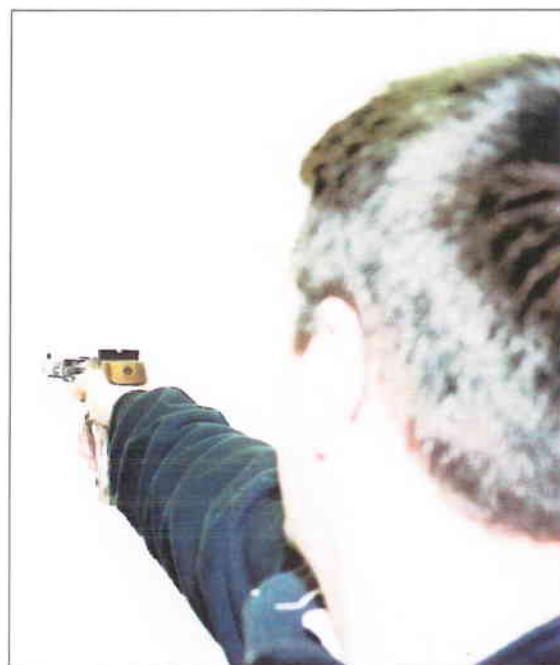
You are training to sharpen your fine motor skills, as well as habituating your technique, therefore it is essential to do it right. To ensure that you set your aiming mark at the correct height, follow this procedure:

On your 10 metre range 'go on aim' at a target and get someone to measure the exact distance from the floor to the underside of your pistol (Air cylinder or barrel whichever is most appropriate). Then at your dry firing location reverse the procedure, holding your pistol on aim, get someone to give you the correct height and then place your aiming mark as dictated by your sights.

Give it a go. You never know, you might get to like it and it will certainly improve your scores. Trust me, I'm a National Pistol Coach!

### Golden rules of dry firing:

- Get 'up close and personal' a few centimetres only.
- A 'little often', is always better than a 'lot infrequently'.
- Try to dry fire when your mind is fresh and alert i.e. mornings.
- Dry fire for twenty minutes.
- Dry fire against a white area, use horizontal, vertical, cross or dot aiming marks.
- Keep your aiming lines thin, vary them to maintain interest.
- Concentrate on controlling the top of the foresight.



- Wear your shooting apparel, as much as is practicable.
- Remember practice does not make perfect but it does make permanent!
- Avoid lazy habits whenever you are training.
- Work at it, don't daydream and be sure to make your mind concentrate and FOCUS.