

PRONE SHOOTING

As a beginner to rifle shooting you will probably find that the wealth of different positions used by people to shoot prone is very confusing at first. Many of the differences can be explained away by saying that everybody is a different shape, therefore they adopt a different position and there is an element of truth in that statement, but it doesn't explain why so many people look so awkward when they're shooting. If, in trying to achieve the perfect position, you come across a pain barrier then STOP!

Rifle shooting is not about pain and gain, it's about persistence and gain. You have to develop patience.

There is going to be a certain amount of discomfort because you're going to ask your body to do strange things that it might never have done before, but that shouldn't develop beyond simple discomfort. If you find that you're getting a stiff neck or aching shoulders on a regular basis, then you're doing it wrong.

Basic Position

Get as low as you can. Spread yourself out as much as you can. By hugging the ground you'll be more stable, but if you get too low you'll have problems tilting your head back far enough to see through the sights. Hug the ground.



There is a 30-degree rule which applies to the angle between the forearm and the ground. You're not allowed less than 30 degrees, but that's not difficult to keep above, even with a very low position. You just need to keep your left elbow (if you're right-handed) as far forward as possible, then the forearm angle looks after itself.

People with high positions tend to shoot on the point of their elbow, which is not only unstable, but also extremely painful. By getting your elbow forward and your left shoulder down you tend to lay on the back of your elbow rather than on the point, which will be much more comfortable as well as stable.

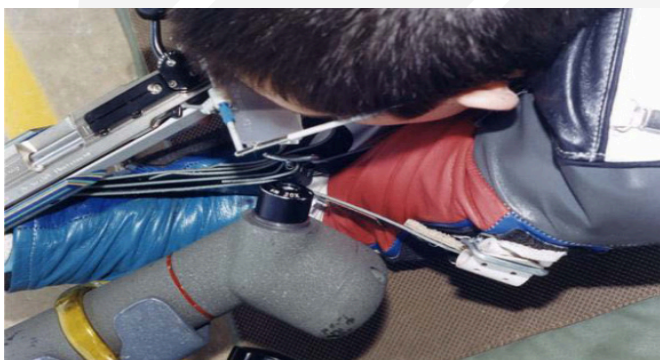
Shooting with as short a butt as you can, brings your body round behind the rifle, which is a good thing, and spreading your right elbow as far out as you can will lower your right shoulder.

Get the buttplate in towards the base of your neck as far as you can, and don't be afraid to cant the rifle over towards you to get a better fit in the shoulder. Canting the rifle is good for you as it enables you to keep your head level, which is important.

It is of paramount importance that the wrist of the supporting hand is kept straight, as any tendency to bending caused by a sling which is too tight can have an excruciatingly painful effect. A straight wrist will support much more weight than a bent one, so while a sling should be tight enough to support the rifle, it should not be so tight as to bend or force the wrist into an unnatural position.



The position of the elbow relative to the rifle is also important; while there is no absolutely exact position because this varies with body size and weight, the extremes can be defined. In plan view, it's unwise to have the elbow outside the sling because of the tendency to lean against the rifle. At the other extreme it would also be unwise to have the elbow too far under the rifle, as this tends to create a rather springy hold, causing the rifle to want to fall to the left (or to the right if you're left-handed).



How far up to bring your knee is a matter of personal preference; just settle for whatever you find the most comfortable. Adopting this position also helps with your balance; however, by trying to get as low as possible and spreading yourself out you may find that you have a problem with reloading when you lift your elbow off the ground (which is the only way to do it).



What you don't want is for your position to collapse because you've taken one elbow off the ground, so you need to be balanced with very little weight on the elbow of your trigger hand, so that when you lift it to reload you don't disturb your position. By raising your knee you tend to push your balance over to the sling side and take some weight off your loading elbow.

Don't be afraid that you'll get out of position if you lift your elbow to reload. As there's no weight pushing on that elbow, you can easily pick it up and put it down again if the sights aren't aligned on the target after reloading.

If you aim to get a position so comfortable that you're completely relaxed, then you can concentrate one hundred per cent on your shooting. The athletes' maxims of 'pain barrier' and 'no gain without pain' don't apply to rifle shooters. Pain to us is dropped points, which is not acceptable.

Pain will interfere with your concentration; rifle shooting is like sex - if it hurts, you're doing it wrong ('more pain, less gain').

There is absolutely no reason why you should be in pain while you're shooting - you may be stretching certain muscles which aren't used to it, and they may complain, but that shouldn't reach a level which impinges on your consciousness.

If, for example, your sling arm goes dead while you're shooting, and you get up afterwards with the most awful pins and needles, then you're doing it wrong. Pins and needles are caused by blood returning to nerve endings previously starved of blood, and it's far better not to cut off the blood supply in the first place.

Therefore, keep your sling loose enough to be able to get at least three fingers down between the front of your arm and the sling; that then means that there's enough room for the veins, muscles and arteries to be moved, rather than being crushed against the bone.

