

# An Improved Method for Teaching Prone

*An On the Mark Series by Gary Anderson, DCM*

Several years of experience in developing and evaluating instructional curriculum for teaching rifle marksmanship to new junior shooters has led us to a conclusion that the best sequence for teaching the firing positions, for most shooting coaches in most instructional situations, is to start with a supported position where basic shot technique can be most effectively practiced. The second position taught should be standing, both because it is simple and because it is the most critical component of later success. The third position should be prone. Prone should come after standing because it is more complicated and because proper sling use can be best taught after the new shooter is comfortable in handling and firing the rifle. The fourth position should be kneeling, because it is the most complicated position and because prone position experience makes it easier to learn kneeling.

Continual evaluation of the instructional curriculum we provide to several organizations has also led to some changes in the method that we recommend coaches use to teach prone. Earlier methods used a three-step method: 1) get into position without the rifle, 2) get into with the rifle, but without the sling and 3) assume the position with the rifle and sling. In numerous trials with new shooters, better prone positions were developed when we had new shooters attach the sling to the rifle and put it on before getting into position. The teaching method then goes through a series of key points that must be followed in order.

Let's go through the *Steps in Building the Prone Position* to see how they fit together and to understand what each step seeks to establish. Note that all descriptions are for a right-handed shooter—simply reverse left and right for a left-handed shooter.



Steps 1 & 2, place the mat at a 25-30°, kneel on the mat with the rifle and place the sling on the arm.

**Step 1: Place the shooting mat at a 25-30 degree angle to the line of fire.** Prone should be fired on a shooting mat so the initial placement of the mat can help set up the proper body angle when it lies in position. If you place the mat at a 25-30 degree angle, even a first-time shooter will start by laying on the mat with the body at a this angle to the line of fire. Most good prone positions will end up with the body lying at about this angle.

## STEPS IN BUILDING THE PRONE POSITION

1. Place the shooting mat at a 25-30 degree angle to the line of fire.
2. Put the SLING on long and loose.
3. Lie down on the mat with the left ELBOW under the left sideline.
4. Position the BUTT UP in the shoulder so the head is up.
5. Adjust the LEFT HAND location on the stock to bring the sights to target level.
6. Tighten the SLING until it supports the rifle.
7. ROTATE the position on the left elbow so the sights point at your target.

**Step 2: Kneel on the mat with the rifle and put the sling on.** Start by making sure the sling swivel is moved forward so that it will not influence the left hand location. Also make sure that the sling length is as long as possible. This will assure that the sling is “long and loose” when the shooter first gets into position. Form the arm loop, turn it one-half turn to the left, place the loop high on the arm and tighten the arm loop, but not the sling. Extend the left arm and rotate it over the sling so that the left hand grasps the fore-end and the sling passes over the back of the hand. Be sure to keep the sling long and loose at this stage—trying to adjust sling length before getting into position is one of the worst mistakes that can be made.

**Step 3: Lie down on the mat with the left ELBOW under the left sideline.** After lying down with the proper body angle, there are three keys to building the position correctly. The first position key is the left elbow. To determine where it should be placed, have the shooter imagine a straight line extending from the left foot to the left hand. The correct location for the left elbow is directly under this line. As a coach you can stand over or behind the shooter and easily see whether the elbow is under this “sideline.” Placing the elbow directly under the left sideline will keep an imaginary plane cutting through the bent arm and sling vertical so that it is best positioned to support the weight of the rifle and upper body.



Step 3: Lie on the mat with the left elbow under the left sideline.

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**Step 4:** Place the butt-plate high enough in the shoulder to keep the head reasonably erect.

**Step 4: Position the BUTT UP in the shoulder so the head is up.** The second position key is the location of the butt-plate in the shoulder because the placement of the butt-plate determines the head position. The code phrase to remember here is “butt up—head up.” If the butt-plate is up in the shoulder, the head will also be up so that the shooter can look comfortably forward through the sights. If the butt-plate is placed too low, the head must be lowered so that the eye must look up instead of forward and aiming is strained. Once the butt-plate—head position relationship is established, the butt should not be shifted up or down in the shoulder to get the sights to point at the target. Do that by going to Step 5. And remember that at this step, the sling swivel must still be forward and the sling must remain loose.



**Step 5:** Adjust the left hand location to raise or lower the sights to target level.

**Step 5: Adjust the LEFT HAND location on the stock to bring the sights to the level of the targets.** At this stage in building the position, the shooter must be concerned only with raising or lowering the rifle and rifle sights to bring the sights to the level of the targets. Do not try to force the sights to align on a particular target. This vertical adjustment must be made by shifting the left hand forward to lower the sights or rearward to raise the sights. Here is where a coach or assistant can help. With the left hand located so that the sights point at target level, the coach should move the sling swivel back to the fork of the hand and tighten it to mark the proper hand location.



**Step 6:** Tighten the sling until it supports the rifle.

**Step 6: Tighten the sling until it supports the rifle.** Only after the basic prone body position that is determined by the body angle, left elbow location, butt-plate-head relationship and left hand location on the fore-end is established, should the sling be tightened. After these checkpoints or position keys are established, then tighten the sling until it takes over the work of supporting the rifle.

**Step 7: Rotate the position on the left elbow so the sights point at your target.** With the body in position, and with the sling supporting the rifle and upper body, the sights should be pointing at target level, but they most likely will not be pointing at the correct target. The proper way to move the sights to the correct target is to shift or rotate the entire body-rifle position on the left elbow. The wrong way to do this is to try to muscle or force the sights to point at the target. Learning to shift the entire body-rifle position over the pivot point provided by the left elbow is really the first step in learning how to adjust the natural point of aim (NPA), which will later become a critical success factor in prone. Make this shift by using the feet and legs to lift the body and move it to the right or left (opposite the direction the sights must move on the targets) until the sights point naturally at your target.

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**Step 7:** Rotate the position so the sights point at your target.

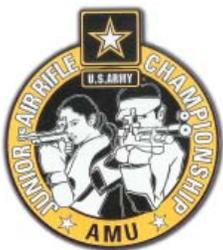


This teaching method is distinguished by how few details are taught when initially getting a new shooter into position. Indeed, many coaches must resist the impulse to teach details like foot and leg position or precise elbow placement. Other critical details like getting the shoulders and spine to form an imaginary “T” are automatically achieved if the new shooter simply lies down with the sling long and loose so that the body holds the rifle in its most natural position. The critical thing to remember here is to save the details for later—shoot in this basic position long enough to become comfortable with it—then attend to the details.

Once the basic prone position is established by following these seven steps in building the position, the new shooter must

**The final step in establishing a good prone position is to practice dry and live fire repetitions in the position. This will provide a sound foundation upon which to perfect the prone position.**

complete many dry fire and live fire repetitions in the position. This is necessary before a new shooter can begin to feel comfortable in it. As this experience base expands, however, the new shooter can start to pay attention to critical success factors like relaxing the left arm as it supports the rifle, relaxing the upper body, sensing and centering the NPA and achieving a near-perfect sight picture for each shot. When this time comes, the new shooters will already have a sound foundation upon which to perfect the prone position.



## Postal Round for the 2008 US Army Junior Open Air Rifle Championship Begins

*By Sommer Wood, CMP Writer/Editor*

The State Championship Postal Competition for the 2nd Annual US Army Junior Open Air Rifle Championships is now open for participants to begin ordering and submitting targets. The event consists of a Three-Position Air Rifle Match for the Sporter Air Rifle Class and an International Standing Air Rifle Match for the Precision Air Rifle Class. Teams and individuals have from 15 November 2007 until 15 March 2008 to enter the postal phase of

the competition. This event is open to all school-age juniors, junior clubs, school teams, 4-H clubs, JROTC Units or other organizations with eligible junior members.

Nearly 2,000 juniors competed in the State Championship Postal round of the 2007 competition, with 15 teams and 69 juniors advancing to the shoulder-to-shoulder National Championships which were held at Fort Benning, GA 8-11 August 2007. The 2008 National Championship will be held 7-9 August 2008 at Fort Benning and will include a special

training clinic conducted by the US Army International Rifle Team. To enter, download the Target Order Form and submit it to CMP with the \$5 entry fee for each participant. The complete program and order forms for this event can be found at [http://www.odcmp.com/3P/Army\\_Jr\\_Championship.htm](http://www.odcmp.com/3P/Army_Jr_Championship.htm). Do not let this match pass you by, download the order form and enter today! If you have any questions regarding match entry please contact Dana Bacak-Lynd at [dbacak@odcmp.com](mailto:dbacak@odcmp.com) or 419-635-2141 ext 1123.