

Teaching with the Supported Position

By Gary Anderson, DCM

The supported position, whether it is prone supported or shooting from a table or bench with a support, can play a beneficial role in rifle marksmanship instruction. The primary reason for using a supported position in marksmanship instruction is to provide the most favorable conditions for beginning shooters to master the fundamentals of firing the shot, that is, sight alignment, breath control, sight picture and trigger control. When a supported position is used to teach basic rifle marksmanship, it also becomes the ideal setting for teaching sight adjustment.

The supported position is a teaching position, not a regular position that is used in junior rifle marksmanship competition. Hence the title for this article is “Teaching With...,” not “Teaching the” Supported Position. A supported position is normally used in only two target competition disciplines, bench rest shooting and F-Class prone shooting. Both are primarily tests of rifle and ammunition accuracy and wind estimation; neither are parts of

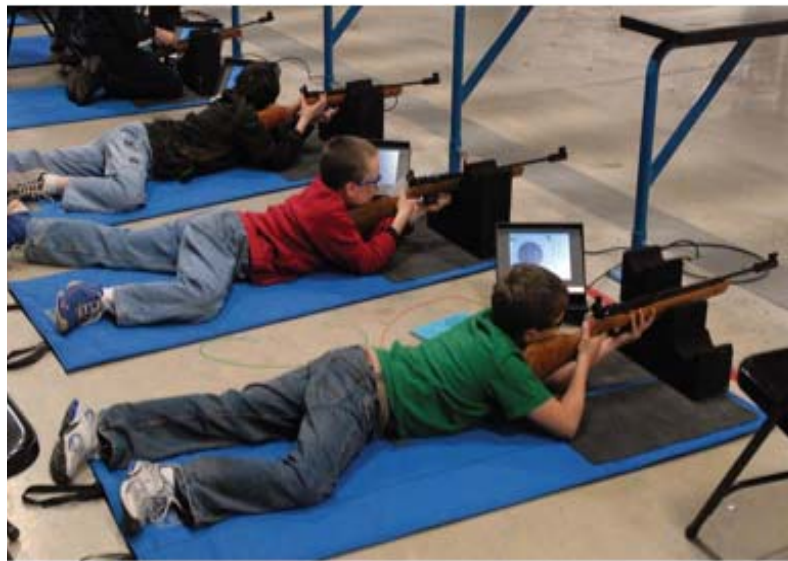
organized junior programs.

The supported position also serves as the only rifle position taught in many junior programs where just a short period of time is available to teach marksmanship. The CMP works with many summer

youth camps where a typical camper has five days of rifle marksmanship lasting perhaps an hour each day. In situations like this, there simply is not enough time for instructors to advance their students beyond the supported position. We should also note that Boy Scout rifle marksmanship merit badge requirements have Scouts do all their firing in supported positions.

The supported position is

i n t e n d e d to be an instructional position for young, new and beginning shooters. It should be used long enough to teach the fundamentals of firing the shot and to advance s t u d e n t s to a stage



Supported prone positions. A regular prone shooting mat is used. The support that is placed under the rifle forearm allows the shooter to select a rifle height that facilitates a good head position.



A supported position fired from a table. In this case, an adjustable support is placed under the forearm to steady the rifle. Note that both arms are placed on the table.

where they are safe and comfortable handling the rifle and are firing small shot groups that confirm their first level mastery of shot technique. It is possible for a good instructor to start new shooters in the standing position if the students are sufficiently mature (high school age or older) and the instructor can provide enough one-on-one coaching to get them started right. In most settings, however, and especially when there are larger numbers of new shooters, doing initial range firing in the supported position is the recommended way to start.

A key to effectively using the supported position is to know when it is time to “graduate” new shooters to standing, the recommended first firing position for most junior programs. If new juniors are consistently firing five shot groups in a supported position at either 10 meters or 50 feet that are in the ten-ring or nine and ten rings on the BMC target, they are ready to move on. A reasonable guide is to require new shooters to be shooting groups that can be covered with a

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quarter. Allowing new shooters to spend too much time firing in supported positions, especially after they are firing good groups, is likely to make the transition to the regular rifle positions more difficult.

There are two supported position options, supported prone or firing from a table with a support. Either can be used successfully. The choice depends upon what is easiest to do in your range setting. The prone supported position requires a shooting mat, a support and targets that can be hung at regulation prone height. The table or bench option requires a table or bench of sufficient size to allow for the placement of both elbows and a support.

The instruction necessary to get brand new shooters into an acceptable supported position should be quite short. The steps to follow in getting new shooters into supported positions are simple:

Step 1: Select a Supported Position Option and Set Up Firing Points.

The instructor must decide whether to use supported prone or to have new shooters shoot from tables or benches. The instructor also needs to decide what to use for rests. The support height for the rifle should, if at all possible, be individually adjustable. The MTM Shooting Rest that is shown in the first photo sells for \$25.00 to \$30.00. A simple rest can be made by using one or two wood blocks or bricks and a kneeling roll. The 3-step molded rests used at the Camp Perry Marksmanship Training Center were originally made for use by National Guard Soldiers to zero their M16s. With a little ingenuity, any junior program can acquire a set of affordable, effective rifle supports to be used by their new shooters. With prone mats or tables and rests set up, you are ready to start.



Low-cost, readily adjustable commercial supports can be purchased for \$30.00 or less.



Conduct a dominant eye test as part of preliminary instruction. If a new shooter decides to shoot from the shoulder opposite his/her dominant eye, be sure to attach a blinder to the rear sight to ensure that aiming is done through the rear sight.

Step 2: Preliminary Instruction. Before any new shooter can start dry or live firing activities, certain preliminary instruction must be given. This instruction must cover gun safety, range procedures, the fundamentals of firing the shot and how to clear and load the rifle. It is also strongly recommended that a dominant eye test be done to help new shooters determine which shoulder to use. This also allows instructors to identify any cross-dominant shooters so that blinders can be attached to their rear sights.

Step 3: Demonstrate the Supported Position.

The quickest way to get new shooters to understand how to get into the

correct position is to demonstrate it. The supported position recommended for rifle marksmanship programs where new shooters will soon be taught the standing, prone and kneeling positions is one where the rifle is held with the right hand on the pistol grip and the left hand on the forearm (reverse for left-handed shooters). Some new shooters may want to place the right hand under the butt-stock to steady the rifle in bench rest style, but that should not be permitted here. The reason is clear. This is an instructional position intended to best prepare new shooters for firing in regular positions.



When the supported position is used for instructional purposes, students should hold the rifle with both hands, one on the pistol grip and one on the forend.

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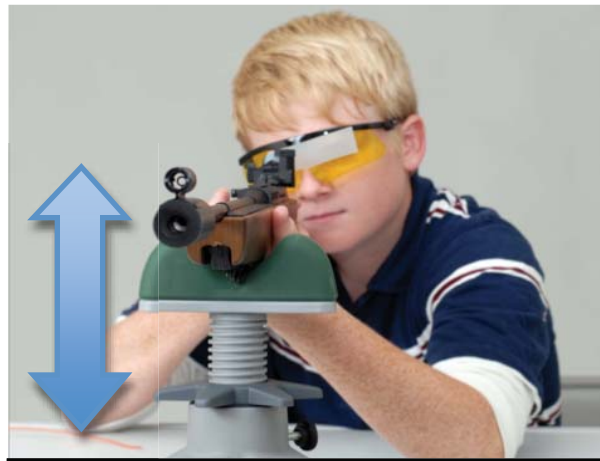
Step 4: Instruction Points. The key instructional points for the supported position to be taught and checked by instructors are:



1) Sit or lie behind the support. In prone the body should lie at a five to ten degree angle to the line of fire.



2) Shoulder the rifle with the butt well up in the shoulder so that the eye can look comfortably through the sights. Hold the rifle with one hand on the pistol grip and one on the forearm. Rest both elbows on the table or shooting mat.



3) Rest the rifle forearm on the support. Adjust the support height so that the rifle sights point at the target height. Be sure to keep the butt up in the shoulder and head reasonably erect while doing this.



4) After the sights are resting at the target height, shift the whole body right or left to align the sights with the correct target.

Experience has shown that new and beginning shooters readily master the supported position and that formal instruction in this position can be kept very brief. If your new shooters have had their preliminary instruction (See Step 2 above), they will be ready to start shooting groups just as soon as their positions are built.

Remember that the supported position is a teaching position and that when new shooters are firing satisfactory

shot groups with sights adjusted so their groups are in the middle of the target, they should be ready for instruction and shooting in the regular firing positions. The one significant exception to automatically advancing new shooters to standing or prone positions concerns the youngest junior shooters. Juniors who are not big enough and whose motor skills are not sufficiently developed so they can comfortably handle a rifle in those positions may be best served by allowing them to continue to practice in the supported position until they are ready.