

## A VERY LONG SHOT

Many of the students we get at our academy want to work on long targets. Shotgun, rifle, handgun students make no difference. They want to be able to kill live birds at extended ranges, four legged beings across the valley, and clay counterparts at 50 yards and beyond.

When I ask, as I always do, why they wish to do so, I get mixed answers suggesting an attempt to salve an injured ego. After all, if a shooter or hunter can bag a target at distance he MUST be a better huntsman, gatherer, shooter, spouse, or some other human psychological mainstay.

“How are you doing on short shots,” I inquire? The usual answer is that the student gets MOST OF THEM MOST OF THE TIME. He or she states and believes that the shorter targets are missed because they are easy and therefore are taken for granted. Evidently it is more excusable at the post shoot gab session to exclaim, with a smile, of course, how many easy targets the chatter has missed. Never mind that anyone listening believes not a word he is uttering.

Ponder this. Does it make any difference when the day is ended whether you killed that pheasant rooster at 60 yards or 6 yards? Will your competitive score be higher because you chipped a clay target at 53 yards or 15?

Since your answer to the above two questions MUST be a resounding “NO” does it not make sense then to work mostly on the most commonly presented targets?

Gil and Vicky Ash (they run a fine shooting school also) have done broad research on many issues facing shooters, one of them being the percentage of targets made known at various distances at sporting events. Their findings allow that about 70% of all targets on a sporting clays layout are within 28 yards from the person holding the gun.

Using simple math means that only 30% are further away than 28 yards when fired upon. So, why not perfect your game to kill everything within 28 yards knowing that if you do you only need to execute half of the remaining birds to have an average of 85%!

That, dear reader, puts you into master class at every lever of shooting.....shotgun, rifle, pistol, archer, and the heretofore forgotten atlatl. (If you do not know what an atlatl is, call me. I like to visit about them.)

The next step at our facility is to place the student 20 yards from a 90 degree crosser. The goal is to break a cool dozen in a row. A few balk, but there is method in my self acclaimed madness. If the learner can break that dozen we move back five yards and do it again. Oh, I almost forgot. When he or she breaks 12 from left to right, we kill 12 from right to left. I am a demanding coach!

Sooner or later...almost repetitively sooner, misses begin to occur. When this happens I know that we have found the point at which this scholar's confidence level, move and mount, eye movement, focus, foot placement, or ALL OF THE ABOVE have been compromised.

Not a few, at this point, put forward that a tighter choke is in order. That is never the correct narrative. No, sir. Did I mention that we never mention choke during our training programs?

If an individual cannot plunk 12-15-17-21-25 in a row at 20-25-30 yards, how in the world can he expect to pick off what he perceives as looooooong shots?

Let us now assume that you have taken to heart the advice so far and are now ready to work on 40yard presentations and afar.

Ready? Here we go.

Hire a good coach. The guys and gals you shoot with may be the best folks on earth but how are they doing on the targets YOU want to work on? Not willing to pay top dollar when you can learn it on your own? Well then, follow along, just be prepared to spend much more that any quality coach would ever charge for services rendered.

Get out a sheet of paper.....write 'CHECKLIST' at the top and proceed as follows.

On the left column write:

DISTANCE TRAINING. I can count on less than one hand the number of gunners (bow hunters excepted) who have ever done any training on measuring distance with nothing but their finger, gun barrel, or eyes. I want you to get yourself a handful of targets in each size and place them beside each other at FIXED distances from you. Start at 20 yards and place one at 5 yard intervals until you get tired of walking.

Then go back to where you started and memorize what those distance look like relative to the target sitting out there and your finger width.....or you could do what I did. Take the gun you plan to use and figure out what the barrel size looks like compared to the target at each distance. After all, how can you expect to hit long presentations if you cannot accurately determine how far away they really are?

Another tactic that has helped me based on my baseball days is that the run from home plate to first base is precisely 30 yards...not an inch further. That, you can visualize.

Next you write:

EYES. Are your eyes moving around when you call for the target? If you are hunting they likely will be, but ought NOT to be. Eyes operate on muscles, just like every other part of your body. If they are moving when the mark presents itself they must first stop, find the mark, and then go after it. Is that not a prescription for PANIC?!

GUN AWARENESS. I will bet you a fried egg sandwich (hold the mayonnaise please) that being aware of the sight or the barrels while you are trying to hunt down a target beyond 40 yards is the closest to a guaranteed miss that I can think of. That brings us to the next item.

FOCUS. I want you to take 3 of the mini targets that you used earlier in this exercise, put them in your basement, garage, porch, or recreation room (that is where I do this so nobody will think that I am crazier than frequently demonstrated). Where do I put them, you ask?

Boy, oh boy, can I tell you where to put them. To start, position them on edge on a flat surface...I use the table my wife thinks is for plants...pose them about 12 inches apart and back up as far as you can with an UNLOADED gun in your mitts.

If you did your homework correctly outside the house you will notice that the mini targets inside your house have a relationship to your gun barrel similar to regular sized targets at diverse ranges. You now can practice distance training and dry firing at night, during rain storms, in the winter, etc.

The second use of these minis is to train your eyes to move from one target to another BEFORE you move the gun. Say to yourself as you focus on the left edge of the right hand target (or vice versa) "eyes; bang"...move to the adjacent target and do the same thing and then on to the third bird. Then do this in reverse. Do it ten times a day for a month and you will have learned to move your eyes first, then the gun. This will help those long targets appear slower so that the next item below will be easier for you.

GUN MOVEMENT. Long, outlying targets have the illusion of being slow. Thusly, most shooters have way too much gun movement, which can cause the eyes to come off the target to check the lead. The target is surely missed, but that is not the worst of it. The eradicator of targets will not know where he missed, and therefore, cannot make an accurate correction for the next one.

We teach everyone we work with that if you cannot tell exactly where you were when you pulled the trigger that either you took your eyes off the target or left the target with your muzzle too soon. Always watch the target break until your subconscious mind has it down pat.

NEGATIVE TALK. I suggest ear plugs AND muffs for two reasons. Firstly, I want you

to be able to hear until you are 99 years old and I do NOT like having to repeat myself to folks around me who shot up their hearing over the years.

Secondly, I do not want any form of negative talk going on around you.....especially coming from your own mouth or brain. From this day forward, neither do you.

Never tell yourself that you cannot hit this or that target. Never again allow that voice of doubt to tell you in advance that you missed. If you do, it will be right.

If you do all the things mentioned in this diatribe something fun and giggly will begin to happen. Long targets will begin to fall to your fusiliering attempts.

There is more to muse, but space limits this epistle hence.

Until next time.....keep the faith.

THE FOX