

## A LONG RANGE FIRNG STRATEGY Don Sjoblom

A firing strategy is nothing more or less than **knowing when to fire so that your shots come up in the center of the target**. Don't fear the conditions, everyone has to shoot in those very same conditions, the winner will be the shooter who knows when to shoot and when to hold off in tough conditions. Val has a phrase - "The wind is my friend" and she is very-very serious when she says it. I say, "if you crank your sight you will generally lose." In the Midwest we very seldom see days where the wind is steady and stable and even less often are we likely to see those calm conditions at the Northstar Rifle Club Range.

If you have to move your sights from shot to shot you are allowing the conditions to dictate your actions rather than you controlling the conditions. You should always strive to shoot in the exact same conditions shot to shot. At times this may mean that you wait 5 or 10 minutes between shots, but if you are within the time constraints this is always the best strategy. Once you are in the X ring with your sighting shots the wind is not what you need to watch, instead you must concern yourself with the **changes in the wind** both direction and velocity. Carefully watch that direction at Northstar! If you find yourself running low on time because of variable conditions - generally the last 5 minutes for me - you then must "bite the bullet" and jump in with both feet and start spinning those knobs from your best guess of the "**changes**". This can ultimately cost a few points but in the long run probably fewer than those who finished firing 8 to 10 minutes into a tough 22-minute long string. Remember, you shot the first part of your match with no changes at all if you followed your strategy.

If you're forced to make sight changes because of time constraints try to avoid becoming a knob twisting- spotter chaser. Always know what you have on the gun - shot to shot. You **MUST** keep track either by writing it down in a scorebook or by remembering what you've put on and taken off your gun during the string. **NEVER** fire a shot without knowing exactly how much you've changed that wind zero since your sighters. If you get lost go back to your wind zero and start over and this time keep track of those changes. In my opinion the only reason to keep a scorebook is to help you remember your sight corrections and then only if you're one who tends get lost. If you're keeping a plot book, throw it over into the weeds and don't worry about it again. While you're busy plotting shots in your book be certain that I'm watching the wind and that I **will catch a wind change that WILL cost you points**.

Look for wind changes on the upwind side of the range. Changes on the downwind side are **HISTORY** and tell you nothing about what to do for your next shot. Indicators closer to the firing line are better than those down near the pits. Watch flags for direction as well as how the tail hangs or stands out. Watch the mirage, wind flags, trees, and grass, dust off the road, smoke or whatever you can see that shows you those changes. Remember you want to see the exact same condition from your best most honest indicators before you fire your next shot. Don't neglect the use of all available indicators; always know who is on the two targets to the left and right of your firing point. If you get reasonably good shooters watch their shots carefully. If you suspect a change has occurred and someone shoots - **WAIT!** When their target comes up use their shot to dope your next one. You can get great information about what the condition is worth without loosing a single point. Feel free to use my target anytime because I'm surely using yours.

When looking for mirage try to view something as close to the path of the bullet as possible, the top of the target frame works well but if you have target numbers above the targets use them first. Focus your spotting scope on the object and then move the focus closer to you until you can clearly see the waves move across a horizontal line on your sighting object. Remember that mirage is only useful up to about 15 mph and above that it gets too messy to use reliably. Upwind flags will show a drop-off before mirage so they show you what WILL BE - mirage will show a pick-up before a flag because it's instantaneous and it takes time for the flag to lift and indicate a pick-up. Try to shoot when the flags and mirage agree if possible because that shows a stable condition. Don't shoot in a changing condition if at all possible. Flags show direction better than mirage.

Try to pick your dominant condition with respect to the wind. Wind comes and goes in waves not unlike swells out in the open ocean. If you can watch the indicators and get a feel for the dominant wind condition before you fire your sighters you are less likely to run out of time in that match. Be patient, wait for your dominant condition and always use a stopwatch to keep your time. You paid for the time and pit service so use it wisely.

When you see your dominant condition shoot as fast as possible and work to be able to break each shot within 5 to 8 seconds of coming off your spotting scope. At 600 yards a small error in sight alignment may turn an X into a ten but in the span of 15 to 20 seconds at Northstar you can easily see three significant wind changes and end up with an 8 or a 7 and worse still you'll have no idea why. To be able to break shots as fast as possible you should try to keep the rifle in your shoulder for the entire 22 minutes or as long as possible. It simply takes time to break the rifle down and then build it back up shot to shot. Keeping it in your shoulder is not easy at first and if your position is a good one it will hurt like crazy until you condition your body to do so. I guarantee it will be worth your effort but it takes practice time on the range. Don't forget to take the time and make the effort to maintain your "natural point of aim," it is more important in prone shooting than in any other firing position, you simply cannot muscle a shot and expect to have it come up in the same place shot after shot.

If you have a calm day disregard all the above and break each shot "perfectly in the center." Don't let yourself break a bad shot because here in the Upper Midwest you will be competing with folks that will shoot 800 out of 800 and you must have the high X count to win the match. The X count is the name of the game on calm days - period.

The 4-gun 600-yard match shooting in the Midwest has changed dramatically in just the last 3 years. The 6mm has become extremely dominant in a very short period of time. The conversion began with the 6-BR then went to the 6mm/22-250 and most recently to the 24ONMC. In September I saw a Minnesotan fire a 24ONMC in a 4-gun 600 with an absolutely phenomenal score of 800-69X's. I doubt that anyone could argue with the accuracy and dominance of this cartridge. With a muzzle velocity of 2900+ fps fired from an 8.201, twist barrel firing 105-grain 6mm LD or VLD bullet the 240 has nearly the same ballistics as a 30 cat Magnum out to 600 yards with the accuracy and recoil of a very-very good .223. Boots Obermeier says that if it ain't 6mm you're 3 years behind, I agree! In the 2001 Missouri State Long Range Championships a 24ONMC finished first and a 6mm/22-250 finished second. The Any-Any and Any-Iron team matches were both won by an all 6mm team shooting against Magnums, Palma rifles and 6.5-284's. 600 yard shooting in Eau Claire and La Crosse has been absolutely dominated by 6mm's for two years now.

Check out the 6mm/22-250 article in Precision Shooting this month. Many valid points were presented however, in my opinion the author is at least one year behind the curve. If you're in the market for a gauge change in your 600-yard rifle my recommendation is absolutely the 24ONMC. It's the next generation to follow the 6mm-250 and Honady is producing 24ONMC die sets now. They will in all likelihood come out with the 24ONMC brass in the spring. For now just expand the neck of your 22-250 brass with a 6mm mandrel then fire-form it and you have 24ONMC brass.

Good shootin,

Don S.