

Mastering the Rapid Fire Stage

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When I asked people in the past for a personal account of rapid fire, they have usually said, "Just shoot timed fire twice as fast." I think that this is what hinders most new and old shooters alike. True, you do shoot it twice as fast, but unless there are some alterations in stance, squeeze, recovery, etc., there tends to be a great deal less effectiveness. In other words, a definite drop off in score. When I first started to shoot, I often heard the older shooters say, "It's rapid fire that divides the men from the boys." It is not the rapid fire itself that makes the division, but rather a lack of belief in oneself that he is capable. I believe that all shooters are capable of rapid fire scores comparable with their timed fire and slow if they will concentrate on the fine techniques during practice and matches.

To get a closer look on just what I have been doing during rapid fire strings, I went to the range and fired a few strings with each gun. The things that I noted are many but the main ones are as follows:

- Number One: There was a deliberate thought process prior to each string. While I was loading my magazine, I concentrated on just what I was going to do as soon as the commands started. I will call this "organization of the graymatter."
- Number Two: I was always certain to make sure that my grip was exact. Equal pressure throughout strings.
- Number Three: I took quite a few deep breaths prior to each string to ensure my lungs of needed oxygen.
- Number Four: During firing I always placed importance on sight alignment.
- Number Five: I fought off panic. With these things well fixed in my mind, I took the positive approach with myself and said, "Combine and control these, Cartes, and you can really set the world afire." I must say that this is true. Follow these rules and anyone probably could, but the key words are combine and control. Both easier said than done.

Now what do I do to assist me in an attempt to combine and control. I think that knowing my equipment and ammunition are in tip-top shape relieves me of some worry. I If you have ever had to fire an alibi string of rapid fire, you know how costly this sort of thing tends to be. Also, I know that in the past I have been able to fire rapid fire with a certain amount of respectability. Knowing this, I worry over it as little as possible. That doesn't mean that I have little to fear about not doing it again. It simply means that I am capable. After this comes the guts and determination that you find only if you look hard enough and then say to yourself, "I will not fall down because of stupidity. I will not allow myself to give way simply because I lost control for a split second. I must recover immediately from all distractions either mental or physical. I must be the dominant one for ten seconds and not my pistol."

It is a fairly simple matter to "throw a match" to take off pressure but you have accomplished very little when all is said and done and you know why you lost. I say this now because most matches are booted out the window during the rapid fire stage. It is not a common rule for humans to push themselves to distraction but with pistol shooters, it becomes a second nature. Again it is organization of the gray matter.

The mental picture is an important one if not the most important. It is through complete control over yourself that you can perform not only as a respectable shooter, but even occasionally as a winner. How often as a winner, depends upon the individual. Physical aspects of shooting rapid fire vary with all shooters and with me, they vary with the wind. I can't say how many matches I have won in the wind, but I do know that my ability to shoot rapid fire during the wind at the National Mid-Winter pistol matches in 1958 was the deciding factor in wrapping up the championship. Though I did not win the 45 cal. rapid fire match (I was out'X'ed) I did manage to gain up to fifteen points on my two closest competitors. The important change I made that day in my shooting habits was during rapid fire. I turned almost face in to the targets, spread my legs like I was straddling a mud puddle, turned in my toes and leaned forward. This may sound uncomfortable and it is. Not only uncomfortable, but completely off balance; but I can guarantee that it is the most wind resistant stance that I have found. What happens is that the body being off balance, there is less tendency to sway. Turning the toes slightly inward braces you from falling on your face. Also, leaning forward tends to cut down on the recoil. Since then, I have adopted this stance, with certain variations for weather, with all three weapons.

Another habit I think a must to good rapid fire scores is last second concentration prior to the turning of the targets. This concentration must be placed on the front sight. We all know that the front sight must be aligned with the rear notch during the squeeze to insure a good shot. What most of us don't realize is that it takes about three-tenths of a second for a person with normal vision to accommodate their eye to focus on any given point. This time element is costly if when the targets turn, you are watching the target line instead of your gun. There is a tendency at times to let your eyes drift to the targets but fight it off and just keep watching your alignment. When the targets turn,, don't look down; just lay down on that trigger and break the shot. No jerk, but a firm movement to the rear of the trigger with the finger. This movement must be of an ever increasing pressure or else you will "freeze." Okay, the first shot has been broken and probably a good one. Regardless, don't start searching for it. Just keep your eyes focused where they should be and recover. Now on that recovery. Don't dip your front sight or else you will find yourself wasting time trying to get it back in the notch. Keep it high and recover quickly. Don't become unloosened. Keep your wits about yourself and fight all urges to jerk the next one. Also, don't start the squeeze till those sights are back in alignment. Keep your eyes on the front sight and be as calm as possible. They're aligned and now in the area of the black. Squeeze hard. The shot breaks and an explosion. Don't look down range, just follow the same procedure as on the previous shot.

Now just three more shots to go and you will have finished your first string. Don't lose faith in yourself. Hang on and follow the rules. You know you have fired a couple of really good shots and there is a strong tendency to look down and admire them. Don't be foolish, for if you do your next shots will look like a couple of satellites in orbit. This is where the determination comes in. This is where you must master the pistol. A little pressure is off now. You have finished the first string and you have a few minutes to check things over in your mind prior to the next five shots. Don't spend this time discussing history with your neighbor on the next point, but slowly load your magazine or cylinder and methodically remember what went right and what wrong. If all was right, wonderful. If not, carefully account to yourself how your rhythm continued or discontinued. What disturbed it? How will you correct it in the following string? Were the sights aligned and did you have the intestinal fortitude to squeeze instead of jerk? Did you lose control and can you remember

where and why? Don't expect possibles but, in turn, don't get excited if one does show up on the target. You have to get used to good scores if you are to become a winner. If it turns out to be the opposite, a really bad one, ask yourself why. You must be able to find out why you are making mistakes before you can correct them. Remember this. Everyone in the match will make costly mistakes. Don't let a mistake get you down.

Rapid fire never came easily to even the best of shooters and to some it will probably never come. One thing we have to face though, in a pistol aggregate, thirty-three and one-third percent of your score is comprised of rapid fire. This must not be treated lightly. Experience is only a good teacher if you are a good pupil!. There are too many shooters today who have been shooting for ten years but only have one year's experience ten times. All shooters commit ridiculous mistakes and all feel like the world has fallen down upon them at one time or another. It is the man who can snap back into form by immediately realizing what he was doing wrong and can make the necessary corrections, that improves and in time becomes a winner.

It is not easy for a man in any profession or sport to become a champion overnight. Nor is it necessary for anyone who is physically qualified to stay at the same level year after year and not improve. Hard work, an open mind, and a desire to try new things are the points which put most people on top in any game.