



Dry Practice and Drills

In the 2016 Rio Olympics, Vietnam won their first-ever gold medal in ten-meter air pistol with Hoang Xuan Vihn's victory. He was at a severe disadvantage compared to most of the other competitors because he was very limited in the amount of ammunition available to him prior to the Olympics.

Hoang incorporated a regimen of dry-fire, practicing thousands of repetitions of his shot process, and practiced honest self-assessment of what he was doing. These things are what allowed him to compete at the highest level and win. Dry fire drills work for an Olympic-level competitive shooter. They are more than good enough to work for Soldiers.

Dry fire drills are built around the following Principles: Mindset, Efficiency, Individual Tactics, and Flexibility.

Mindset is the Soldier's ability to perform the functional tasks of operating the weapon under stress. Mindset is what will make or break your focus on your environment. Efficiency in reference to these drills is being able to use the minimal amount of time and resources to achieve the desired outcome. In other words, producing repeatable results in minimum time. Individual Tactics are done to maximize chances of survival and victory. Examples include choice of cover and standoff from the threat. Flexibility is realizing multiple techniques can be used to achieve the same goal.



The Drills

A dry practice plan is covered in current Army Training Circulars for small arms training. Appendix Delta covers these dry-fire drills.

Having covered principles, what drills should we use? While skilled shooters already have and regularly use useful dry practice drills (that's how they became skilled) most Soldiers do not. Appendix D of all current small arms Training Circulars lists eleven recommended drills to get started. The A through K Drills are common to all small arms, modified as appropriate for each particular weapon and its intended role and application.

Drills Alpha through Charlie are the basic functional tasks that it takes to operate a weapon. These reinforce that the Soldier is the weapon's safety.

Drill A the Weapon Check, an accountability check and visual inspection that it's clear, conducting a functions check, location of the rail, data and zero dope, magazines, and noting all serial numbers. The weapon check is a visual inspection of the weapon by the Soldier, verifying at a minimum that the weapon is clear, serial numbers (weapon and devices) and attachments, Functions Check, and serviceability. This is initiated when first receiving the weapon from the arms room, storage facility, or stacked/grounded location.

Drill B is place weapon in action. With rifles and automatic rifles, this is Sling/Unslung, pistols is Draw/Holster, and crew-served machine guns it is the crew drill of mounting and emplacement. This tests the ability to change the location of the

Left: Olympic shooters have won medals using dry practice drills. They will work for you as well.

weapon on demand.

Drill C is an equipment check, a pre-combat check that the system is ready for action. This Pre-Combat Check ensures the aiming devices, equipment, and accessories are prepared. This includes any batteries are installed, that everything is secured correctly, that equipment does not interfere with tactical movement, and the basic load of magazines are stowed properly.

This builds in some redundancy from **Drill A** to ensure everything is ready to go. Note, this requires organizing and repurposing the issue Pogie Bait pouches and MRE holsters, otherwise known as "magazine pouches." This provides a place to carry those spring-loaded bullet boxes, otherwise known as "magazines."

Drills D and E are the basic functional tasks for handling the weapon in a combat environment.

Drill D is an 'administrative' load, done after Drill C as the weapon is placed into Amber or Red status.

Drill E is the Carry 5/3 which goes through five methods of carry three times. Five carry methods include Hang, Safe hang, Collapsed low ready, Low ready, High ready or Ready up). Moving through these as appropriate for your weapon at least three times show proficiency at basic handling skills.

A leader will announce the appropriate carry term to initiate the drill. Each carry method should be executed in a random order a minimum of three times.

The next drills cover moving into and out of useful positions.

Drill F is Fight Down, moving effectively and efficiently downward into lower firing postures. Starting from the standing position, on command the shooter moves into the

next lower position as announced. This typically goes from Standing, Kneeling or Squatting, Sitting, then Prone in order. Variations of each position as appropriate to the weapon and conditions are encouraged.

Start standing. “Kneeling” (move and settle). “Sitting” (move and settle). “Prone” (move and settle.)

Drill G is Fight Up and is the same idea but done moving into higher positions.

Drill H is Go-To-Prone, which is ability to drop from a standing or crouching position to prone. This should also be done from a walk and a forward sprint. Standard time is below two seconds. This is time to drop, not to fire a hit if done with live ammunition or simulator.

The focus needs to be on natural point of aim and wobble zone so the position can be shot from accurately. These drills should not be done for time initially, as the Soldier needs to be able to self-assess their positions. Begin by announcing each position and allowing plenty of time to assume it. As shooters improve, increase the tempo of the drill to assume positions faster. This can be incorporated while walking and rushing. Add variations to the call and use irregular intervals.

Drill I is Reload. Executed from load-bearing equipment, working on quickly and reliably reloading from various positions, such as standing, kneeling, and prone. Soldiers must be encouraged to adjust ammunition pouches to facilitate this. There will be variations between personnel. Uniformity should not be considered, only performance. For machine guns, this also includes a barrel change as appropriate.

The first step is to organize the ammunition pouches and magazines so they can be reached from various positions as done in Drill C. To conduct a reload, sweep from center to the next ammunition pouch.

If a reload is needed and there's no magazine in the pouch, then sweep

until the next available magazine in your load-bearing equipment is found. It's important to set this up so the reload is efficient. Uniformity among Soldiers should not be considered, only performance.

Drill J is Clear Malfunction. The best approach is doing whatever is required to make the weapon functional. This requires understanding the cycle of function and knowing what to do with it. Overly-simple approaches that previously attempted to avoid learning this have been found to be ineffective. Any reference to a game played with a ball is wrong because no single response can address every possible malfunction type.

The problem with an overly-simple, stepped mechanical fix is that no single procedure or approach can fix every possible cause. The better solution is to understand the cycle of function and then do the simplest, fastest thing possible.

The most common malfunction is a failure to fire and the most common symptom is a tell-tale click when a bang is expected. The fastest means to reduce this problem is the best approach here. Let's say our shooter here has a failure to fire. He attempts to shoot by applying smooth trigger pressure straight to the rear and gets a click. To reduce this stoppage, the fastest thing is likely to ensure the magazine is seated and run the bolt.

Another form of immediate action is to transition to a secondary weapon.

If immediate action fails and no secondary is available, remedial action is likely best served by clearing the weapon to find the problem. Perform an Unload/Show Clear. This also happens to be Drill K.

Drill K is Unload/Show Clear. This is another 'administrative' drill, but important. The Soldier needs the instilled habit of making their weapon safe and clear, both to an instructor and for their own situational awareness.

These drills only work if they're done regularly. It's recommended that active duty and mobilized personnel should be doing these at least once a week. That won't be enough for a high level of skill but it will create solid familiarity. Done dry or with a simulator, they cost nothing and can be done right outside of the arms room, or at home with personally-owned firearms. As with the APFT, a 300 is not possible without on-going work. The same goes for weapons mastery. **USARCMF**