

Chapter 5

Pistol Firing Positions and Grip

The M9 service pistol is fired from the standing, kneeling, and prone positions. Each firing position may be adapted to either a Weaver or Isosceles variation. The Weaver and Isosceles positions have distinct advantages in combat: The Weaver variation has a distinct advantage in stabilizing the pistol sights; the Isosceles variation has a distinct advantage in managing recoil. The advantages apply whether the Marine is firing in the standing, kneeling, or prone position. The Marine must be able to select and assume a stable firing position that provides a solid foundation for accurate shooting while meeting the demands of the combat situation

Note

The procedures in this chapter are written for right-handed Marines; left-handed Marines should reverse directions as needed.

5001. Selecting a Pistol Firing Position

In combat, the Marine must select a firing position based on considerations of mobility, observation of the enemy, and stability.

a. Mobility. A firing position must provide mobility should the Marine need to move. The standing position permits maximum mobility because it can be quickly assumed and easily maneuvered from and it permits lateral mobility to engage widely dispersed targets. The prone position provides limited mobility because it is the most time consuming position to get into and out of and it lacks lateral mobility to engage dispersed targets.

b. Observation of the Enemy. A firing position should allow observation of the enemy while minimizing the Marine's exposure. In combat, there can be many obstructions to a clear field of view. Terrain features such as vegetation, earth contours, and man-made structures can often dictate the firing position. The prone position normally allows the least exposure, but it usually provides a limited field of view. Kneeling may provide a wider field of view, but generally provides less concealment.

c. Stability. A solid firing position establishes a stable foundation for target engagement. A firing position must provide maximum stability while firing. A good firing position provides a stable platform for accurate and consistent shooting. The definition of a stable position is one in which the body is positioned so as to resist forces tending to cause motion (i.e., recoil and movement of the weapon sights). The standing position is the least stable firing position, while the prone is the most stable firing position.

(1) Purpose of Stability. A consistent, stable position is assumed for two distinct purposes:

(a) Minimize Movement of the Weapon Sights. A pistol firing position must be stabilized to minimize movement of the weapon sights so an accurate shot can be fired. A stable firing position enables the weapon's sights to be controlled to deliver accurate fire on a target.

(b) Minimize the Affects of Recoil. A pistol firing position must be stabilized to minimize the affects of recoil for recovery of the sights to the same area on the target. In combat, it may be necessary to engage the same target more than once to eliminate it. If the firing position is stable, the pistol sights should recover to the same area on the target, allowing rapid reengagement. Distributing the body's weight to balance the position will stabilize it and allow better management of recoil.

(2) Controlled Muscular Tension. A pistol firing position is stabilized through controlled muscular tension. Because the pistol is fired without benefit of bone support, muscular tension is needed in the body to stabilize the position and the weapon sights.

(a) A consistent amount of muscular tension is needed to hold the weapon steady so the sights can be aligned with the aiming eye and the target.

(b) Controlled and consistent tension in the body allows the Marine to offer resistance to manage recoil and bring the sights back on target quicker. Controlled muscular tension can reduce the effects of recoil by making it more manageable.

(c) Too much tension, however, can cause strain or produce additional movement by trembling.

(d) Muscular tension is correct when the Marine can control the pistol before, during, and after firing the shot.

5002. Purpose of a Pistol Firing Grip

Key to a pistol firing position is the firing grip. A proper grip is one that provides maximum control of the pistol before, during, and after firing.

a. A Proper Grip Must Stabilize the Weapon Sights Before Firing. To fire an accurate shot, the pistol sights must be stabilized prior to and as the bullet exits the muzzle of the weapon.

(1) A proper grip controls the alignment of the weapon sights and stabilizes the sights so an accurate shot may be fired.

(2) To have a proper grip, there must be muscular tension in the wrist and forearms. Consistent muscular tension in the wrist, forearms, and grip helps maintain sight alignment by reducing the movement in the grip that can cause movement in the weapon sights. The grip is correct when it allows the pistol sights to be naturally aligned to the aiming eye.

(3) When establishing a two-handed grip, equal pressure must be applied with both hands. Consistent, equal pressure from both hands will stabilize the weapon sights and allow them to be aligned and level with respect to the aiming eye.

b. A Proper Grip Must Allow Trigger Control to be Applied During Firing. The grip should provide a foundation for the movement of the trigger finger. The trigger finger must apply positive pressure on the trigger as an independent action, completely free of the other muscles of the gripping hand. There should not be excessive pressure on the web of the hand on the backstrap of the pistol because it will interfere with the manipulation of the trigger by the trigger finger.

c. A Proper Grip Must Manage Recoil After Firing. Once a shot is fired, the pistol recoils, disturbing alignment of the sights. A proper grip must facilitate a quick recovery from recoil so the sights quickly return to the same area on the target.

(1) The amount the muzzle climbs during recoil depends on the amount of controlled muscular tension in the grip and wrists applied to stabilize the weapon and create consistency in resistance to recoil. Controlled muscular tension allows the weapon sights to recover consistently back on target within a minimum amount of time.

(2) Equal pressure must be applied to the grip with both hands because recoil will travel where there is least resistance and the sights will not return to the same area on the target. Firm pressure ensures the pistol does not slip during recoil.

(3) An improper grip or lack of controlled muscular tension will cause the pistol to move in the Marine's hand after the shot is fired, disrupting sight alignment and requiring the Marine to reestablish his grip.

5003. Withdrawing the Pistol from the Holster

The firing grip is not established in the holster, however, a proper firing grip can be established if the weapon is withdrawn from the holster correctly. The weapon should be withdrawn from the holster in one continuous, fluid motion:

- Place the heel of the left hand at the center of the torso with the fingers extended toward the target. At the same time, unfasten and release the D-ring with the right hand. See figure 5-1.

Note

The left hand should be placed on the torso in a position that allows a two-handed firing grip to be established in a minimum amount of movement.



Figure 5-1. Withdrawing the Pistol from the Holster.

- With the right hand, place the thumb on the forward edge of the lower portion of the holster and the fingers around the back edge of the holster, keeping the trigger finger straight. See figure 5-2.

Note

The left hand may assist in holding the holster flap up.



Figure 5-2. Withdrawing the Pistol from the Holster (Cont.).

- Slide the hand up the holster until the fingers come in contact with the pistol grip. At the same time, keep the thumb above the pistol to guide the holster flap up. See figure 5-3.



Figure 5-3. Withdrawing the Pistol from the Holster (Cont.).

- Grasp the pistol grip with the fingers and draw the pistol straight up. Continue withdrawing the weapon while moving the thumb to a position on the safety. See figure 5-4.



Figure 5-4. Withdrawing the Pistol from the Holster (Cont.).

Note

This hand placement allows a firing grip to be established once the thumb disengages the safety. Any adjustments made to the firing grip after the safety is disengaged should be minor.

- Once the muzzle clears the holster, rotate the muzzle forward to clear the body. Ensure the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction.
- Establish a two-handed grip on the pistol by joining the left hand with the right hand in the front of the torso. See figure 5-5.



Figure 5-5. Withdrawing the Pistol from the Holster (Cont.).

CAUTION

Ensure the muzzle does not cover the left hand when establishing the two-handed grip.

5004. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Weaver and Isosceles Positions

a. Firing Position Variations. There are two variations of each firing position that can be used to establish a solid position and maximize control of the weapon: a Weaver variation and an Isosceles variation. A firing position is chosen based on the combat situation and the individual's body configuration. The position chosen must permit balance, control, and stability during firing.

(1) The application of the firing position variation is the same whether in the standing, kneeling, or prone position.

(2) There is a specific firing grip that supports each variation; the grip is the key to establishing the variation.

b. Selecting a Weaver or Isosceles Position. The size of the target, distance to the target, time, and type of engagement needed (i.e., two shots, single precision shot) are important factors to consider when deciding whether to fire in the Weaver or Isosceles firing position.

(1) Weaver Variation. The Weaver variation is effective at any distance, however, some aspects of the position make it more effective for long range or precision shots on small or partially exposed targets.

(a) Long-Range Engagement/Partially Exposed Targets. At longer ranges, the target is smaller and a more precise shot is required to eliminate the target. Even at closer ranges, a precision shot may be required to engage a partially exposed target. Because sight alignment and sight picture are more critical to accuracy, stability of hold is a bigger factor in precision and long-range engagements. A small movement will move the sights off the target so the weapon must be steadied.

(b) Advantage - Stability of Hold. The Weaver variation provides additional balance, control, and stability of hold during firing due to the placement of the arms; the left arm is bent and the pistol is in closer to the body. Therefore, it is generally easier to maintain sight picture using the Weaver variation because it is easier to hold the weapon steady.

(c) Disadvantage - Management of Recoil. Recoil has a larger effect on the Weaver variation due to the hand placement on the pistol; some of the pistol grip is exposed and pressure is applied in two different directions around the pistol. Recoil will travel to the path of least resistance. Therefore, recovery of the sights back on target may take longer in the Weaver variation. This factor may make the Weaver variation less effective at short ranges for quick engagement than the Isosceles variation.

(2) Isosceles Variation. The Isosceles variation is effective at any distance, however, some aspects of the position make it more effective for close range engagements. When confronted with a target, the natural physical reaction is to face the target and push out with the arms. This makes the Isosceles variation advantageous for quick engagements at close range.

(a) Short-Range Engagement. When a target is at short range, it must be engaged quickly before it engages the Marine. The management of recoil is a bigger factor in short-range engagements because it is more likely that multiple shots will be fired to eliminate the target and the sights have to recover quickly back on target. However, at close ranges the target is larger so stability of hold is not as important because it is easier to hold the sights on target and sight picture is not as critical.

(b) Advantage - Management of Recoil. In the Isosceles variation, muscular tension and grip pressure are evenly distributed around the pistol, causing the effects of recoil to be less than in the Weaver variation and allowing quicker recovery of the sights on target. This makes the Isosceles variation effective for firing multiple shots.

(c) Disadvantage - Stability of Hold. The stability of hold is degraded in the Isosceles variation due to the weapon being further from the body without support. This makes acquiring sight picture more difficult because it is harder to steady the weapon. This factor may make the Isosceles variation less effective than the Weaver variation at long ranges and for precision shots on a small target.

5005. Standing Position

The standing position is often employed in pistol engagements due to the short distance of engagement and the nature of combat. When properly assumed, the standing position provides a stable base for firing, a clear field of view, and excellent mobility. The standing position can be adapted to either the Weaver variation or the Isosceles variation.

a. Weaver Standing Position. Key to the Weaver variation is the body's angle to the target and the "push-pull" pressure applied to the grip. To assume the Weaver standing position:

- Face the target and make a half turn right, keeping the weapon oriented to the target. This orients the body at approximately a 40-60 degree angle oblique to the target. The shoulders are angled to the target, the left shoulder forward of the right. The feet are about shoulder width apart, the left foot forward of the right.
- Firmly grip the pistol with the right hand on the pistol grip. Place the right thumb on the safety in a position to operate it.
- Keeping the shoulders at a 40-60 degree angle oblique to the target, raise the right arm and extend it across the body toward the target. Ensure the right shoulder does not roll forward or turn toward the target.
- Extend the left arm to the target, bending the left elbow to join the left and right hands. The left elbow should be inverted and tucked in toward the body so the left arm supports the weapon.

Note

The angle of the body will determine
how much the elbow bends.

- Establish a two-handed firing grip in the Weaver variation (see figure 5-6):
 - Place the palm of the left hand over the front of the right hand so the palm covers the curled fingers of the right hand. The trigger guard should rest in the "V" formed by the left thumb and forefinger. The knuckles of the left hand should be just outboard of the trigger guard. A portion of the pistol grip should be exposed.
 - Rest the trigger finger naturally, straight and outside of the trigger guard, so the finger can be moved quickly and easily to the trigger.
 - The left thumb rests against the receiver so both thumbs are on the left side of the pistol. Once the safety is disengaged with the right thumb, the left thumb should be placed over the right thumb and positive pressure should be applied to hold the right thumb in place.

- Apply rearward pressure with the left hand and forward pressure with the right hand to achieve a "push-pull" grip. Isometric tension (push-pull) stabilizes the weapon during firing.



Figure 5-6. Weaver Grip.

- Lean slightly forward and apply muscular tension throughout the body to stabilize the position and better manage recoil. The muscular tension in the upper body will not be symmetrical due to the "push-pull" tension applied on the grip. See figure 5-7.
- Keep the head erect so the aiming eye can look through the sights.



Figure 5-7. Weaver Standing Position.

b. Isosceles Standing Position. Key to the Isosceles variation is the body squared to the target and equal pressure applied on the pistol from the grip. To assume the Isosceles standing position:

- Face the target with the feet approximately shoulder width apart. The shoulders are squared to the target.
- Establish a two-handed firing grip in the Isosceles variation (see figure 5-8):
 - Firmly grip the pistol with the right hand on the pistol grip. Place the right thumb on the safety in a position to operate it.
 - Place the heel of the left hand on the exposed portion of the pistol grip in the pocket formed by the fingertips and heel of the right hand. There should be maximum contact between the pistol grip and the hands. Wrap the fingers of the left hand over the fingers of the right hand. Ensure both thumbs rest on the left side of the pistol and point toward the target.
 - Apply equal pressure on both sides of the pistol to allow for the best management of recoil.

Note

Ensure the left thumb does not apply excessive pressure to the slide stop or the slide.

- Rest the trigger finger naturally, straight and outside of the trigger guard, so the finger can be moved quickly and easily to the trigger.

Note

The index finger of the left hand may or may not rest on the front of the trigger guard.



Figure 5-8. Isosceles Grip.

- Elevate and extend the arms toward the target.
- Roll the shoulders forward and shift the body weight slightly forward to stabilize the position and better manage recoil. The left foot may be slightly forward of the right foot to balance the position. There should be an equal amount of muscular tension on both sides of the body to best manage recoil.
- Tuck the head between the shoulders; the head is extended forward but kept erect so the aiming eye can see through the sights. See figure 5-9.



Figure 5-9. Isosceles Standing Position.

5006. Kneeling Position

The kneeling position offers a smaller exposure than the standing position and greater stability. Increased stability makes the kneeling position effective for longer range shooting. It does not, however, offer as much mobility for quick reaction as the standing position. The kneeling position can be quickly assumed and it allows firing from various types of cover. There are four variations of the kneeling position that provide varying degrees of observation of the enemy. Depending on the cover and the need for observation, the kneeling position may be adapted to: a high kneeling, a medium kneeling, a low kneeling, or a two-kneed kneeling position.

a. Weaver Kneeling Position. The Weaver variation of the kneeling position offers an advantage in providing bone support due to the left elbow's placement on the knee. The Weaver variation further enables firing from the side of cover while exposing less of the body to a threat. To assume the Weaver kneeling position:

- Make a half turn to the right, drop the right foot back or step forward with the left foot, and place the right knee on the deck. The body should be positioned at a 40-60 degree angle oblique to the target.
 - Blade the shoulders at a 40-60 degree angle oblique to the target, the left shoulder forward of the right.
 - Extend the arms toward the target.
 - Bend forward at the waist to better manage recoil.
 - Place the flat part of the upper left arm, just above the elbow, in firm contact with the flat surface formed on top of the bent knee. The point of the left elbow extends just slightly past the left knee. However, depending on the need for stability or observation of the enemy, the elbow does not have to rest on the knee.
- (1) High Kneeling.** To assume the high kneeling variation, the toes of the right foot are curled and in contact with the deck, or the inside of the foot may be in contact with the deck. Depending on the need for observation, the buttocks may or may not rest on the right heel. The left leg is bent at the knee; the shin straight up and down. The left foot is flat on the deck. See figure 5-10.



Figure 5-10. Weaver High Kneeling.

(2) Medium Kneeling. To assume the medium kneeling variation, the right ankle is straight with the foot stretched out and the bootlaces in contact with the deck. The left leg is bent at the knee; the left foot flat on the deck. The right shin may be angled to the body to create a tripod of support for the position. See figure 5-11.



Figure 5-11. Weaver Medium Kneeling.

(2) Low Kneeling. To assume the low kneeling variation, the right ankle is turned so the outside of the foot is in contact with the deck and the buttocks are in contact with the inside of the foot. The right shin may be angled to the body to create a tripod of support for the position. See figure 5-12.



Figure 5-12. Weaver Low Kneeling.

- (3) **Two-Kneed.** To assume the two-kneed variation, drop both knees onto the deck. The toes may be curled to get into and out of the position quickly. Depending on the need for observation of the enemy, the buttocks may or may not rest on the heels. See figure 5-13.



Figure 5-13. Weaver Two-Kneed Kneeling.

b. Isosceles Kneeling Position. The Isosceles variation offers an advantage in enabling the Marine to fire over the top of cover while exposing less of the body to a threat. To assume the Isosceles kneeling position:

- Drop the right foot back or step forward with the left foot, and place the right knee on the deck.

- Square the shoulders to the target.
- Extend the arms toward the target.
- Lean forward with the shoulders rolled forward and the head tucked between the shoulders to better manage recoil.

(1) High Kneeling. To assume the high kneeling variation, the toes of the right foot are curled and in contact with the deck, or the inside of the foot may be in contact with the deck. Depending on the need for observation, the buttocks may or may not rest on the right heel. The left leg is bent at the knee; the shin straight up and down. The left foot is flat on the deck. See figure 5-14.



Figure 5-14. Isosceles High Kneeling.

(2) Medium Kneeling. To assume the medium kneeling variation, the right ankle is straight with the foot stretched out and the bootlaces in contact with the deck. The left leg is bent at the knee; the left foot flat on the deck. The right shin may be angled to the body to create a tripod of support for the position. See figure 5-15.



Figure 5-15. Isosceles Medium Kneeling.

- (3) **Low Kneeling.** To assume the low kneeling variation, the right ankle is turned so the outside of the foot is in contact with the deck and the buttocks are in contact with the inside of the foot. The right shin may be angled to the body to create a tripod of support for the position. See figure 5-16.



Figure 5-16. Isosceles Low Kneeling.

- (4) **Two-Kneel.** To assume the two-kneel variation, drop both knees onto the deck. The toes may be curled to get into and out of the position quickly. Depending on the need for observation of the enemy, the buttocks may or may not rest on the heels. See figure 5-17.



Figure 5-17. Isosceles Two-Kneed.

5007. Prone Position

The prone position offers many advantages in that it is easily assumed, stable, and it presents a small target to the enemy. Since the prone position places most of the body on the deck, it offers great stability for long range shooting. However, it is the least mobile of the firing positions and may restrict the field of view for observation. The prone position can be adapted to either the Weaver variation or the Isosceles variation.

a. Weaver Prone Position. The Weaver variation of the prone position produces a cocked leg position by angling the body to the target and cocking the leg to support the position. The Weaver prone is ideal for firing from behind cover. See figure 5-18. To assume the Weaver prone position:



Figure 5-18. Weaver Prone Position.

- Face the target and make a half turn to the right (this places the body at a 40-60 degree oblique to the target). Grip the pistol in the right hand, placing the pistol in a position that facilitates control of the weapon. Ensure the pistol is pointed in a safe direction and does not cover any portion of the body.

- Get the body on the deck by using either the squat or drop method. In both methods, keep the body at a 40-60 degree oblique to the target.
- **Squat Method.** Squat down and place the left hand on the deck. Kick both feet backward and come down on the right side of the body with the right arm extended toward the target. Ensure the pistol does not cover the body or the left hand. See figure 5-19.



Figure 5-19. Squat Method.

- **Drop Method.** Drop to a kneeling position, place the left hand on the deck in front of the body, push the pistol out toward the target, and roll the right side of the body onto the deck. Ensure the pistol does not cover the body or the left hand. See figures 5-20 and 5-21.



Figure 5-20. Drop Method.



Figure 5-21. Drop Method (Cont.).

- Bring the left knee up to support the firing position and to raise the diaphragm off the deck so as not to interfere with breathing. The inside of the knee rests on the deck. The knee should be drawn up to provide maximum stability for the position.
- Establish a two handed-firing grip on the pistol. Place the left elbow on the ground for stability. For maximum stability in the prone position, strive to keep the grip firmly placed on the deck.
- The head may rest against the right arm so the pistol sights can be aligned. The head may be canted as long as the aiming eye can look directly through the sights. Strive to keep the pistol sights as level as possible while acquiring sight alignment.
- To make minor increases in elevation, keep the left hand in place firmly on the deck, and raise the right hand to achieve the desired elevation, but maintain contact between the right and left hands to stabilize the weapon. See figure 5-22. (There is a tradeoff between getting the elevation needed and losing stability, so the Marine must strike a balance between the two.)



Figure 5-22. Increasing Elevation (Minor Adjustments).

- b. Isosceles Prone Position.** The Isosceles variation of the prone position produces a straight leg position. See figure 5-23. To assume the Isosceles prone position:

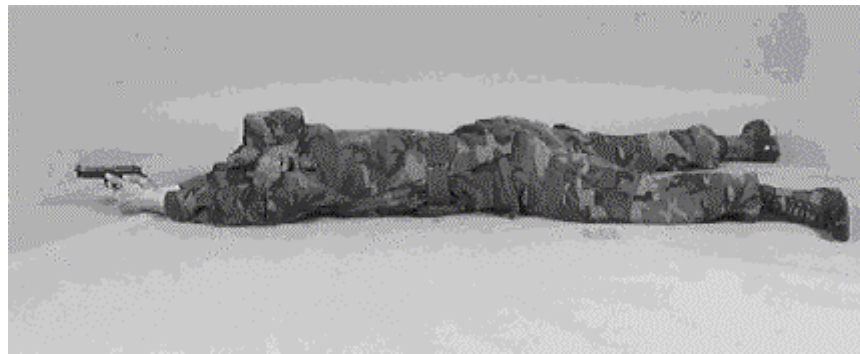


Figure 5-23. Isosceles Prone Position.

- Stand facing the target. Grip the pistol in the right hand, placing the pistol in a position that facilitates control of the weapon. Ensure the pistol is pointed in a safe direction and does not cover any portion of the body.
- Get the body to the deck by using either the squat or drop method.
 - **Squat Method.** Squat down and place the left hand on the deck. Kick both feet backward and come down on the right side of the body with the right arm extended toward the target. Ensure the pistol does not cover the body or the left hand. See figure 5-24.



Figure 5-24. Squat Method.

- **Drop Method.** Drop to a kneeling position, place the left hand on the deck in front of the body, push the pistol out toward the target, and roll the right side of the body onto the deck. Ensure the pistol does not cover the body or the left hand. See figures 5-25 and 5-26.



Figure 5-25. Drop Method.



Figure 5-26. Drop Method (Cont.).

- Establish a two-handed firing grip on the pistol.
- Spread the legs to a position that provides maximum stability. The insteps of both feet may be flat on the deck or the toes may be curled and dug into the deck.
- Keep the pistol sights as level as possible while acquiring sight alignment. Keep the head in a position to allow the aiming eye to look directly through the sights.
 - When wearing a helmet, the head may be canted slightly and rest against the right arm to push the helmet from the eyes so the sights can be aligned.
 - Likewise, the weapon may be canted outboard to allow the aiming eye to look directly through the sights.
- To make minor increases in elevation, keep the left hand in place firmly on the deck, and raise the right hand to achieve the desired elevation, but maintain contact between the right and left hands to stabilize the weapon. See figure 5-27. (There is a tradeoff between getting the elevation needed and losing stability, so the Marine must strike a balance between the two.)



Figure 5-27. Increasing Elevation (Minor Adjustments).

5008. Natural Body Alignment

The body must be properly aligned to the target so when the pistol is presented, the sights fall naturally on the target. It takes a combination of body alignment and consistent muscular tension to ensure the sights fall naturally to the same area on the target every time the weapon is presented. The Marine can check his natural body alignment to ensure his sights are centered on his aiming area.

- Orient the body to a target and establish a variation of the standing position and a two-handed firing grip on the pistol. Aim in on the target.
- Close the eyes and take a deep breath.
- Open the eyes and see where the pistol sights are in relation to the target. If the pistol sights are right or left of the target:
 - Move the feet to adjust the position right or left.
 - Do not force the weapon sights onto the target area by moving the arms; this will increase the muscular tension on one side of the body, disturbing balance and making recoil harder to manage.
- If the pistol sights are significantly out of alignment when the weapon is at eye level, it may be an indication of a poor grip. When the grip is correct, to include the muscular tension in the grip, wrist, and forearms, the pistol sights should be aligned to the point that only minor adjustments are needed to align the sights to the aiming eye.

- Repeat these steps. Body alignment and muscular tension are correct when the sights are naturally placed in the same area on the target every time the Marine aims in on the target.