Controlled Pairs vs. Hammers

By Brian S. Williams – Founder / Director of Training Services at

Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC

www.greywolfconsulting.us

Introduction

Within the tactical shooting / training communities, the terms “Controlled Pairs” and “Hammers” are often incorrectly used interchangeably. While they are related in concept, are actually very different approaches to delivering multiple shots on a target.

Because combat marksmanship is not simply about how quickly a firearm can be fired, but rather about maintaining control, and making deliberate decisions with the intent of and producing consistent results while maintaining fundamental safety principles and it is for this reason why understanding the distinction between these two techniques is so important.

The Controlled Pair

A controlled pair refers to a shooting technique where two rounds are fired within rapid succession while maintaining control over the muzzle and confirming the sight alignment each shot.

The key characteristic of the controlled pair is found in control. Rather than treating two shots as one continuous action, each shot is considered and treated as an individual event.

The Hammer

A hammer, the alter-ego of a controlled pair represents another technique where two rounds are fired within rapid succession, however with the hammer, less emphasis is placed on reacquiring the sights between shots as with this technique, the sights are aligned once and the firearm is discharged twice.

The Central Difference

The easiest way to understand the difference between these two techniques is through their emphasis on the use of the firearms sights:

- **With a Controlled Pair:** The sights are aligned on the target each time a a round is to be fired.
- **With a Hammer:** The sights are aligned on the target once and the firearm is discharged twice.

The Importance of Understanding the Difference

The difference matters more than many think, because shooting faster coupled with a reduced use of the sights will not automatically produce better performance or the desired results. This is because when the time between shots becomes shorter, the shooter ultimately need to sacrifice a degree of control over the muzzle which can make any errors more pronounced.

Accuracy Needs to Comes Before Speed

Perhaps one of the most important principles of tactical marksmanship is that speed should never come at the expense of accuracy. While it is acknowledged that, during a violent confrontation, time will often represent a significant obstacle which must be carefully considered, the ability to deliver accurate and controlled fire remains a fundamental critical principle. Effective performance therefore depends on finding the appropriate balance between speed, precision, and sound judgment, rather than pursuing speed for its own sake.

Recoil, Recovery and Trigger Reset

After a shot is fired, the firearm moves as a result of recoil. The shooter's ability to maintain control of the firearm and quickly recover / reset the trigger for a subsequent shots if necessary, is therefore an important consideration.

Understanding recoil management requires recognizing that it involves more than simply attempting to minimize the time increment between shots. Effective recoil control begins with establishing a proper grip on the firearm and maintaining the appropriate position of the head, body, legs, and feet. While a minor deviation within any one of these areas may not significantly affect accuracy on its own, errors in multiple areas can compound one another and have a noticeable impact on overall performance.

This becomes even more important and recognizable when discussing techniques which require two or more rounds to be fired in rapid succession such as the “Controlled Pair”and “Hammer” as represented herein. Because the second shot occurs before the shooter has fully reset, even a minor error in grip, stance, or body position can be amplified and result in a greater deviation from the intended point of impact.

One Technique is Not Necessarily Better Than the Other

There exists no universally correct technique for engaging a hostile target with multiple rounds. This is because there exists no universal attack or confrontation.

When it comes to a “Controlled Pair” or a “Hammer”, which technique is more appropriate will be determined by several factors including: Distance from the threat, the shooters skill and ability and the environment.

Again while there is no hard and fast rule as to when each techniques should be used, a general rule of thumb we use at Grey Wolf Consulting and teach our students is as follows:

1. *A distance of 10' – 12' from the target, use a “Hammer” as the threat is considered too close.*
2. *Any distance beyond 10' – 12' from the target, a “Controlled Pair”would likely be more appropriate*

However, this is a subjective recommendation and is based entirely on the individual shooters skill, with the recognition that some may be capable of effectively and safely extending these distances.

The third consideration is the environment, which is referring mainly to the presence of bystanders or other valuable objects.

In Conclusion

Controlled pairs and hammers represent two different techniques for firing of two rounds within rapid succession.

With a controlled pair, the emphasis is on treating each shot as an individual deliberate event and maintaining visual and physical control over the placement of hits. While a hammer will emphasize two rapid successive shots with less deliberate visual confirmation between them.

As with any advanced shooting technique, proper instruction followed by repetitive practice is necessary to increase skill and ability, however it must always be remembered that accuracy should never be sacrificed for speed or in the words of John Farnum a very well known and respected instructor "*You can never shoot fast enough to make up for misses in a gunfight"*.

Ultimately, the objective of responsible training is not simply to shoot faster. But rather to develop competent, controlled, and accountable performance.

Continue Your Training Journey with Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC

We encourage you to continue exploring the Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC training resources and educational articles to help you build a stronger foundation of knowledge and skill.

At Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC (www.greywolfconsulting.us**)** our slogan reads Knowledge – Integrity – Discretion – Honor, It is theses principles in addition to our belief and philosophy that the selection of proper equipment is only one part of developing a responsible and capable mindset. While tools are extremely important, they are only truly most effective when combined with proper knowledge, skill and attitude coupled with sound judgment, and quality training.

Our training philosophy is built around developing well-rounded individuals who understand that personal safety and professional performance require more than simply equipment alone. Awareness, critical thinking, communication, and disciplined decision making skills remain the foundation of effective preparation.

Through continued education with Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC, students can further develop their understanding of:

- The role equipment plays within a broader preparedness plan
- How stress impacts critical decision-making and performance
- The high value of consistent professional training and continued education
- How the correct mindset will impact informed decisions within high stress environments

Whether you are beginning your training journey, expanding your knowledge, or seeking to refine your existing skill set, Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC (www.greywolfconsulting.us) is committed to providing high quality professional firearms and tactics education focused on professionalism, responsibility, and continuous improvement.

About the Author

Brian S. Williams is a professional firearms instructor, tactical trainer, and executive security consultant with greater than 35 years of experience in firearms instruction, use-of-force training, and protective operations. As the founder of several firearms training and security organizations, he has developed and delivered firearms, tactical, and instructor certification programs for civilians, law enforcement officers, military personnel, and licensed security professionals throughout the United States.

Over the course of his career, Mr. Williams has trained and certified more than 10,500 Connecticut pistol permit applicants, instructed more than 2,000 civilians and hundreds of law enforcement and security professionals in advanced firearms and tactical applications, and provided remedial firearms

training to military and correctional personnel. He served as a Marine Police Officer and Watch Commander with the Lake Housatonic Marine Police / Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and was appointed to the Connecticut State Police Firearms Advisory Council, where he contributed to firearms training and policy discussions.

Mr. Williams holds numerous professional certifications, including NRA Training Counselor, NRA Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor, General Dynamics Simunitions FX™ Instructor, The Heckler & Koch International Training Division and Sig Sauer Academy Instructor certifications, and USCCA Concealed Carry and Home Defense Instructor. He is the author of *Welcome to the Real World: A Dangerous Place to Be Caught Unprepared* and has been recognized as an expert in firearms by the Connecticut Superior Courts. His work continues to emphasize responsible firearms ownership, sound judgment, lawful use of force, and practical, reality-based training.