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October 06, 2003

The Proper Use of the Rifle Sling

A sling is not merely something used to carry your rifle with minimum effort.

It's one of the most useful accuracy aids ever devised. With a properly adjusted sling your shooting will be almost as steady as from a bench rest.

The proper slings to use as aids to accuracy are the U.S. military M1907 sling (or a copy thereof) or the U.S. G.I. web sling (cotton version).

The M1907 sling is a two piece sling, consisting of a short strap & a long strap. It is usually made of leather & is between 1.25" & 2" wide. There are two leather keepers on the long strap, & each strap has a two pronged hook at the end that secures each strap into a set of holes in either piece. The short strap has a metal loop called a 'D' ring that's used to connect it to the long strap. The end of the long strap with the hooks is called the upper hook. The end of the short strap with the hooks is called the lower hook.



The long strap is the piece that aids accuracy. The short strap is there to aid in carrying the rifle.

When properly assembled, the long strap runs through both the front sling swivel on the fore end of the rifle & the 'D' ring on the short strap. It's inserted so the feed end goes through the swivel while the upper hook goes through the 'D' ring. It's secured by fastening the upper hook into the 4th set of holes in the top of the feed end. The upper keeper

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should be near the front sling swivel with the feed end going through it just before & just after it passes through the front sling swivel. The lower keeper should be near the 'D' ring with the hook end of the long strap going through it just before & just after it passes through the 'D' ring.

The lower hook is then run through the rifle's rear sling swivel at the butt stock & connected to the holes in the long strap directly underneath the upper hook.



To tighten the sling take the upper hook in one hand & the opposite side of the long strap in the other hand, then rotate the long strap clockwise (when viewed from the left side of the rifle) so the upper keeper will move closer to the front sling swivel. To loosen the sling take the upper hook in one hand & the opposite side of the long strap in the other hand, then rotate the long strap counterclockwise (when viewed from the left side of the rifle) so the upper keeper will move closer to the trigger guard. You can push the upper keeper towards the sling swivel to maintain the adjustment of the sling. You can also push the lower keeper up until it passes over the feed end, but personally I stop it just before the feed end would pass through it to lessen the stretching of the lower keeper.

That is how the 1907 style sling is used for the purpose of carrying &/or storing the rifle.

To use it as an aid to accuracy one starts by unhooking the lower hook from the long strap & hooking it into the holes in the short strap near the rear sling swivel.



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Now unhook the upper hook & place it into the feed end. Where will depend upon the shooting position you use, as well as your body's characteristics. You'll have to play around with it a bit, but most people will find between 4 & 6 holes from the top of the feed end is a good starting point for use in the Prone position. Squatting, Kneeling or Sitting positions will usually require adjusting the upper hook two holes further away from the feed end. Once the upper hook is in the right set of holes, slide the upper keeper down over the upper hook to secure it.

Rotate the long strap to move the upper hook closer to the 'D' ring. This is so the upper hook &/or upper keeper won't bite into the back of your hand when you fire the rifle. About halfway between the 'D' ring & the front sling swivel should be enough.

Slide the lower keeper up until a loop big enough to place your arm through is formed at the bottom of the long strap between the 'D' ring & the lower keeper. Make sure the 'tongue' of the feed end is not inside the lower keeper. Just let it dangle. Having it inside the lower keeper will unnecessarily stretch the lower keeper.

Take the strap & twist it slightly to the left so that your left arm can pass through the loop. It is important to have the loop on your upper arm. How high will depend on several things specific to your body, but there should always be a little space between the crook of your arm & the strap. Most will recommend having the loop above your bicep, but I've found that any place on the upper arm above or below the bicep is good as long as there's a little space between the strap & the crook of your arm. Once the loop is around your upper arm slide the lower keeper down to secure it.



Take your left forearm & wrap it around the strap. You want your left forearm to move underneath & to the left of the long strap to wrap it partially around your forearm & your hand when you grasp the fore end of the rifle. Now move your hand up so the strap is flat against the back of your hand as you orient your hand to grip the rifle's fore end from

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underneath. Make sure the rifle rests in the 'V' formed between your thumb & first finger.

This should result in the strap being pulled tight against your forearm & the back of your hand as you grip the rifle.

Now take the butt of the rifle & place it in the hollow of your shoulder. You should have to push the butt into the proper position due to the tightness of the sling.



If the sling feels comfortable & doesn't impede circulation then tighten it up by hooking the upper hook into the set of holes in the feed strap closer to the front sling swivel. A proper sling position will be uncomfortable to painful depending upon your tolerance. If it doesn't hurt it isn't tight enough.

What happens is the long strap of the sling braces your forearm & elbow together to form a solid rest for your rifle. It is the tightness of the sling that creates the pain, but also makes for a steady platform to shoot from.

Some people get used to the pain. Others simply deal with it, or ignore it. Whatever the case seeing your groups shrink to a tight little cluster will help motivate you to deal with the discomfort that a properly used sling position will create.

It is a good idea to mark which set of holes in the long strap work best for you in certain positions. Some people write an 'S' or 'P' beside the holes they prefer to use for Sitting or Prone position. Others simply number the holes & remember which ones they prefer. Some of the higher quality slings come with the holes numbered for you.

Speaking of quality slings, there are two I'd recommend: JHW
<http://www.mikesshooters.com/jhw.htm> & Turner Saddlery
<http://turnersling.com/miva/merchant.mv?>

Screen=SFNT&Store_Code=TS . Both makers are more expensive than what you can find in Wal-Mart or the local gun store, but the money is worth it if you care about good leather & craftsmanship.

Another sling that can be used as a shooting aid is the U.S. G.I. web sling. I refer to the cotton sling only, as the nylon sling is a bit too slippery to use effectively. It is slightly different than the M1907 sling. This sling is constructed of one strap instead of 2. It has a hook on the bottom to attach to the rear sling swivel & the top end is run through the front sling swivel. The top of the sling is secured by a clasp. What makes it capable of being used as a shooting aid is its metal slider positioned at the bottom of the sling. It's simply a rectangular piece of metal with two slots. The middle piece of this slider has the bottom of the sling wrapped around it & stitched in place. The top of the sling has the hook installed first and then it is run through both slots in the slider. It then runs through the bottom half of the clasp & two pieces of metal are bent to prevent the sling from slipping back through.

To attach it to your rifle for carrying make a loop by sliding the slider about 6 inches or so from the bottom of the sling. Hold the slider in place & hook the sling onto the rear sling swivel. The feed end of the sling is then run through the front sling swivel & back into the clasp. Pull the feed end tight for storage or leave it a bit looser for carrying. The clasp is then latched a few inches from the tip of the feed end to hold the sling in place.

To use the G.I. web sling as a shooting aid, start by unlatching the clasp to put a little slack in the sling & latch it again. Unhook the hook from the bottom sling swivel. Push the bottom end of the sling through the slider to form a slip loop big enough to fit on your left bicep. Next give the slip loop a $\frac{3}{4}$ turn to the right so that the hook will be on the outside of your arm. Insert your arm through the slip loop & tighten it. Now place your left hand on the rifle as you would with a leather sling, partially wrapping the sling around your hand & forearm while the sling rests flat against the back of your hand. Be sure to pull the clasp down so it won't dig into your hand when you fire. Place the rifle against your shoulder as you would fire it. Now take the feed end of the sling & loosen the clasp. Pull the feed end towards you to tighten the sling or let it pull away from you to loosen the sling. When you have the sling properly adjusted tighten the clasp.

Just as with a leather sling it takes a little experimenting to get the adjustments right, but the adjustments are a bit easier to make while slung up than with the leather sling. It is just as important to have the G.I. web sling fit tight to get any benefit from it as it is with the M1907 sling. The cotton web slings are quite common at gun shows & Army-Navy stores & should sell for around \$10 to \$15.

Whether to use a G.I. web sling or the M1907 sling is strictly a matter of choice. Both have advantages over the other, but when properly used both will help with your aim. In fact it is not a bad idea to have one of each & familiarize yourself with both types of slings before you decide which one you prefer.

I must add that a sling is of no use, other than psychological, when shooting from the standing or offhand position. You must have something to support your elbow for the sling to work its magic. Using a sling from the Standing or Offhand positions is akin to having a rifle rest held in your left hand two inches off the shooting bench. The rest itself is steady, but of little use when it is not supported by something.

A variant of these techniques is called the hasty sling. It can be used whenever you don't have time to loop up properly. One merely inserts their arm through the gap between the sling & the rifle, wraps their hand around the sling as described above & grasps the rifle. It's not as steady as a proper sling position & it too does no good when firing from the standing position, but from Kneeling, Squatting, Sitting, Prone or an improvised rest it will help your aim a little.

The most important thing is to practice. It is only through repetition that you'll know when the sling feels right. & it is only through repetition that you'll be able to utilize the sling quickly.

A sling can be used to carry your rifle, but don't think for a minute that carrying is a sling's primary function. Using the proper sling techniques coupled with the appropriate shooting position there's not much you can't hit under 600 yards – assuming your rifle is up to it.

Posted by
