

TRAP SHOOTING 101

Trapshooting¹ is one of the three major disciplines of competitive clay pigeon shooting (shotgun shooting at clay targets). The other disciplines are skeet shooting and sporting clays. They are distinguished roughly as follows:

In trap shooting, the targets are launched from a single "house" or machine, generally away from the shooter.

In skeet shooting, targets are launched from two "houses" in somewhat "sideways" paths that intersect in front of the shooter.

Sporting clays includes a more complex course, with many launch points.

There are variations within each group.

Note 1: Definition provided by Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. For additional information visit their website at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trap_shooting.

Iowa High School and Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) competition events currently consist of 25 birds shot from the 16 yard line (singles) and 25 birds shot from the 19 yard line (handicap). A season is made up of your four best competition event scores shot during the season or 200 birds in total.

Key Points

The clay target thrower or trap machine is positioned in a structure, called the trap house, 2½ feet below the ground 16 yards in front of the stations. The trap machine oscillates 44 degrees (22 left and 22 right of center) and has an interrupter to keep competitors from guessing its cycle rate.

The clay target birds exit the trap house at between 44 mph and 46 mph.

The clay targets are set to crest at 25 yards and land around 50 yards out.

Because of physics and the way most trap guns are set up, it is much easier to hit targets while they are on the rise. Once they crest the shot becomes very difficult for a number of reasons you'll discover once you're shooting on a regular basis. This means you'll be breaking targets within 41 yards from the 16 yard line and 44 yards from the 19 yard line.

There are five shooting stations positioned 11 degrees apart measured from the centerline of the trap house. This means the maximum angle at stations 1 and 5 should be 44 degrees with the possibility of a straight presentation as well.

The shooting stations are paths radiating out from the trap house with distances from its leading edge marked from 16 to 27 yards.

In American Trap a round of singles (from the 16 yard line) is 25 birds, 5 being shot from each station in rotation. A round handicap (from 17 yards to 27 yards) is 25 birds, 5 birds being shot from each station in rotation. A round of doubles is 50 birds, 5 pairs being shot from each station in rotation.

You can practice hold positions by using a stack of clay birds positioned on the leading edge of the trap house.

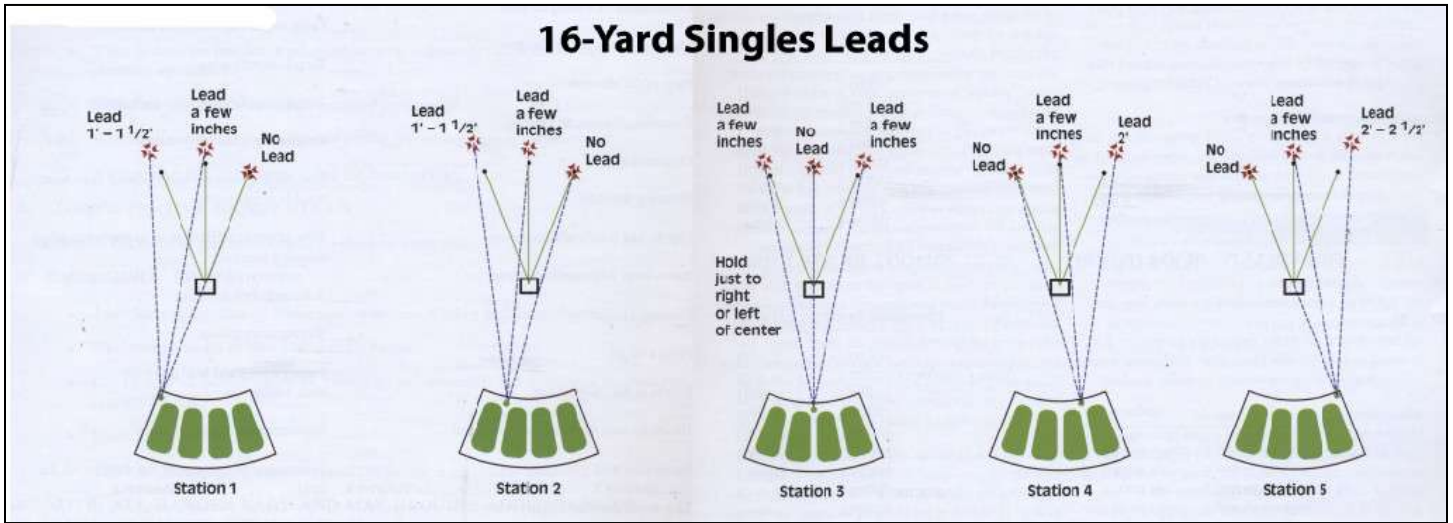
- a) The Birds should be set at both corners for stations 1 and 5, offset right or left of the center (depending on the shooter – right for right-handed; left for left-handed) for station 3, and halfway in between each for stations 2 and 4. These represent good starting reference points that can be adjusted with practice. You may find that some right handed shooters pick up the targets better on stations 4 and 5 if they adjust slightly to the right, even if it means holding off the edge of the house on station 5. The opposite applies to left handed shooters on stations 1 and 2.
- b) The height of the stack is relative to the distance from the house. At the 16 yard line the angle of flight at the point of launch, relative to your shooting position, is much greater than it is when shooting from the 27 yard line. To decrease the need for excessive vertical gun movement, once the target is acquired, you should choose a hold point 2 to 3 feet above the trap house. Stack the clays to accomplish this and adjust until you are comfortable. Then, practice until you have memorized this “sight picture”.
- c) As you move back from the trap house to increase yardage, you lower the hold point to adjust for the decrease in angle. At the 27 yard line most everyone holds right on the leading edge of the house. At distances in between you can adjust proportionate to the distance with the 21½ yard line or mid-yardage point being half the height you used at 16 yards.

For the two weeks leading up to your first practice you should stand in front of a mirror and execute 25 correct gun mounts per day to establish muscle memory. This will significantly improve your consistency and ability to break targets. Simulate all of the motions you would go through while on station: load the shell (simulate this); close the breech; mount the gun. Ensure your posture is correct, that your hands are in the right place, and that your cheek is positioned correctly on the comb. Look at the sight bead(s) and then your reflection. You should be standing close enough to the mirror to see your pupils and verify that you are able to duplicate your mount time after time until it becomes second nature. If you are new to the sport you should do this wearing your vest or shell pouch, shooting glasses, and eye protection. Returning shooters who have taken time off should practice this exercise at least once with all their gear to be sure everything still fits and feels right.

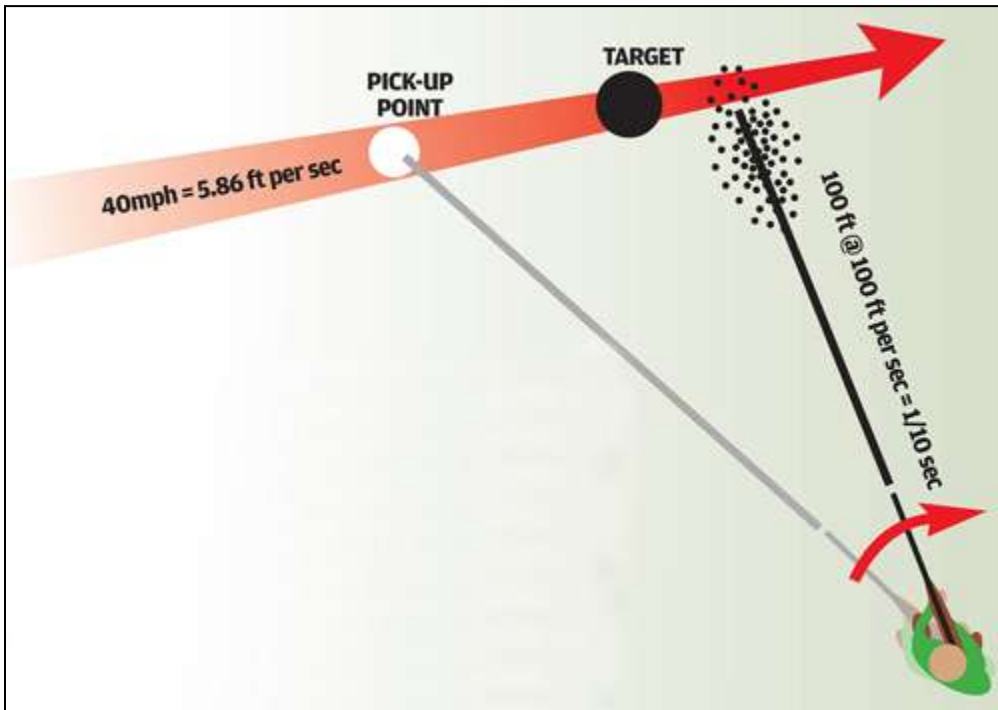
ALWAYS TREAT YOUR GUN AS IF IT'S LOADED AND KEEP YOUR FINGER OFF THE TRIGGER UNTIL YOU ARE ON POINTED DOWN RANGE AND CALLING FOR A TARGET!

Target Lead: Sustained Lead versus Swinging Through the Target

Sustained Lead



Come from behind and Swing Through the Target



Trap Etiquette

American Trap shooting, more so than other shooting disciplines, including international trap, develops a certain rhythm to a squad timing between shots. The manners of any other squad member(s) can affect the performance of individuals within a squad. Shell catchers are a must for anyone using a semi-automatic - a shell hitting you in the head or arm can certainly disrupt your concentration. Most shooters also carry a few extra shells in case they drop one. It is better not to pick up any dropped shell, or other item, until after the 5th shooter has fired his 5th shot of the station and the squad is about to rotate to the next position. Idle chatting between shots, vulgar calls, and unnecessary movement can be generally disruptive. Things are considerably more relaxed during a practice squad, but one should use some discretion.

Commands from the scorer and other shooters are as important to squad timing as the behaviors of the shooters on the squad. To start a squad the shooter will ask if the squad and puller are ready, followed by asking to see one free target and his first target. The scorer will call missed targets with a command of: loss, lost, etc. When the first shooter has fired his final shot of the position the scorer will sometimes call "end" and will command "all change" after fifth shooter has fired his last shot. The shooter on position five then moves behind the rest of the shooters on his way to the first station and will signal when he is ready to the First shooter who is now on station two. The call for a target is "pull."

Trap Shooting Tip: Look at the Bottom Edge

By Phil Bourjaily

April 13, 2012

I have given a lot of shooting advice to a lot of high school kids on our trap team in the past four years. If you threw out 99.9 percent of what I've told them, trap can be boiled down to two things: "Keep your head on the stock" and "focus on the bottom edge of the target."

The former is obvious, since we have all been told forever that your eye is the rear sight of a shotgun. The latter, however, works wonders, and it surprises me every time it does. Looking at the bottom of the target should be wrong because trap targets are rising. But from what I have seen, far more targets are missed over the top than underneath. For whatever reason, people who don't lock their eyes onto targets usually miss over the top.

The bottom edge of an outgoing target is distinct and easy to see. While I generally dislike the word "aim" in conjunction with shotgun shooting, the saying "aim small, miss small" applies here. If you look at a small part of a target (or the head of a game bird), that's what you will hit.

Last night at practice, one of our novices was mostly missing or chipping the few he hit. At first, I could see his barrel slowing as it got to the bird -- one sign the shooter is looking at the bead. I told him not to worry about hitting the target; just to look at it. He kept missing, but at least the barrel wasn't stopping anymore, so I knew he was looking at the clay.

I asked him, "What part of the target are you looking at?" "The top," he said. "Try looking at the bottom," I told him.

Then he started center-punching targets until I stopped handing him shells. Shooting a shotgun is easy when you look hard at the target.

Basic Trap Shooting

Respectfully reprinted from the website of

Carney Rod & Gun Club

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<http://carneyro.dot5hosting.com/page9.html>



#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Halfway from middle of trap house and left front corner; 1-1½' high.	Middle of trap house; 1-1½' high.	Halfway from middle of trap house and right-front corner; 2-2½' high.	Right-front corner of trap house and 2-2½' high.	1-1½' off right-front corner house, and 2-2½' high.

Gun Hold Points

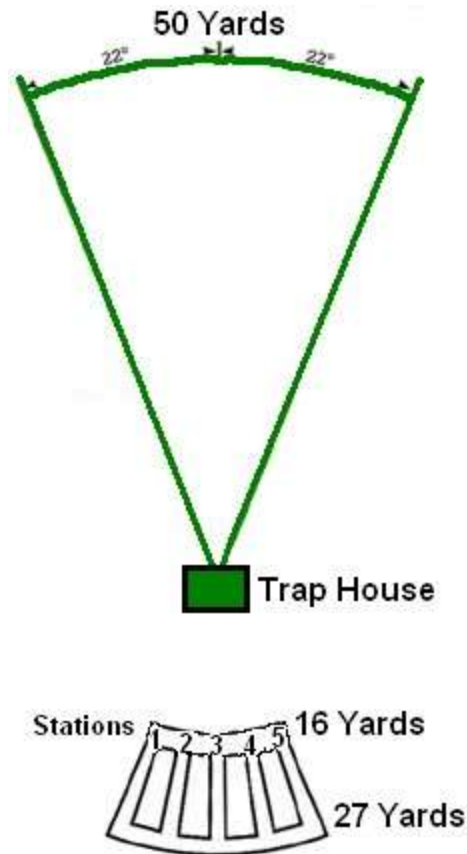
The gun hold point on each position is a necessary compromise which prepares you for whatever target angle is presented to you. On each position you favor the left angle target with foot and body position; and take a gunpoint that favors the right angle target. This is because a right handed shooter finds it easier to swing to the left from the gunpoint, without any muscle restrictions. Suggested gun hold points for each position are indicated for the five positions in the graphics above.

Foot Position

On each station, your toes should be placed on an imaginary line which would parallel the line of flight of the extreme left angle target from position #5.

Trap shooting, often called "American trap shooting" to distinguish it from other forms of trap shooting, is but one of many sports based on shooting small disks launched into the air. These disks are of various sizes. They are shaped somewhat like a Frisbee and fly in a nice arc through the air. They are made of various combinations of substances so that they break when hit. Well, sometimes they don't break, but they're supposed to break. The matter of "hard" clay pigeons is a constant source of complaint. Clay pigeons are commonly called "birds" and I'll switch to that name to save typing all those extra letters. In addition to trap shooting, people also shoot other games involving these disks, such as skeet, sporting clays, 5 stand and wobble trap. This last is like trap shooting,

except the trap machine is set up to vary both the direction of the clay pigeon's flight and the angle of elevation.



Trap Field

Trap is shot at a range. A trap range has at least one, and perhaps many, trap fields, each of which has a little structure called the "trap house" that houses the machine that throws the birds into the air. This is called the "trap machine," and sometimes just the "trap." The trap machine throws the birds in a random pattern limited to a 44 degree horizontal arc, with the birds exiting the house at about 47 miles per hour and traveling about 50 yards before hitting the ground. The trap range uses either a hand release run by the score keeper, or voice calls that respond to the shooters' voices to send an electric signal that causes the trap machine to launch a bird. Each trap field has five shooting stations in an arc, each station being 11 degrees away from its neighbor. The shooting stations are paths radiating out from the trap house with distances from the house marked from 16 to 27 yards. A round of trap is 25 birds, 5 birds being shot from each station in rotation.

Trap shooters commonly shoot three events: singles, handicap and doubles. Singles are single birds shot from the closest distance, 16 yards from the trap house. Since the birds are usually about 15 to 25 yards out by the time the shooter fires, even the 16 yard singles are 31 to 41 yards away. Handicap is like singles, except it is shot from various distances, depending on one's ability, between 19 and 27 yards. These birds are 35 to 52 yards away, depending on one's handicap and reaction time. Since very few shooters with slow reaction times ever earn a 27 yard handicap, that 52 yard

figure is an exaggeration. 27 yard shooters actually shoot their birds at 47 yards or less. As you might imagine, a little disk, 40+ yards away and flying at 40+ miles per hour can be a difficult target. Doubles are two birds launched simultaneously, shot from 16 yards. Doubles are even more difficult and are, by far, the most fun. A round of doubles is usually 25 pairs, or 50 birds.

You can use any shotgun gauge, up to 12 gauge. Using anything smaller than a 12 gauge entails a loss of hitting power. Some do choose smaller guns for their lower weight and reduced recoil. Note: in shotguns, a larger numerical gauge designation refers to a smaller bore. A 20 gauge is smaller than a 12 gauge. This holds true for all shotgun bore sizes other than the .410. ".410" refers to a bore that is .410 of an inch in diameter. Unless you are truly crazy, you will not be using a .410 to shoot trap. It is just too small. You may use up to 1 1/8 ounce of shot in 12 gauge. I don't know what the weight limit is in 20 gauge, but typical commercially available target loads are 7/8 ounce. You may use shot sized 7 1/2 and smaller. Like gauge sizes, a lower shot size number refers to a larger shot size. The maximum velocity allowed is 1250 feet per second for 1 1/8 ounce loads. You may use slightly higher velocities for lighter loads, and the whole thing gets really complicated. Why bother with all that? Just get some 1 1/8 ounce #8 shot target loads.

You will probably feel intimidated by the prospect of trying this sport, but if you'll just go and give it a try, you'll find that you will be welcomed by the participants. Practicing safe gun handling is the primary concern. Even though trap shooting is a game, it's a game played using deadly weapons. There is absolutely no room for unsafe gun handling.

Trap shooting has some simple, straightforward rules. Always practice safe gun handling. Only load your gun when it's your turn to shoot. Only load one shell unless you're shooting doubles. For doubles, you may load two. If, while you're on the trap field, the staff needs to tend to the trap house, to reload the machine or otherwise adjust the machine, unload your gun. In trap shooting, the gun's safety is ignored. Do not bother with it. Your gun is either loaded and ready to shoot or unloaded. The only "safety" is an unloaded gun.

There are several interesting rules about gun failures, broken birds and so on. Your fellow shooters and/or the score keeper will help you with them. Just don't get flustered. While shooting doubles, remember that you are only allowed one shot at each bird. If you miss your first bird, you must switch to the second bird and try to break it instead of shooting at the first bird again. Even though a round consists of 25 birds, and a round of doubles consists of 50 birds, you should carry some spare shells in addition to the 25 or 50 you expect to shoot. If a bird is broken in the process of being thrown, you'll get another bird to shoot. If you shoot at that broken bird, you'll need a spare shell. If you shoot out of turn, you'll need to reshoot that turn. If, in doubles, you shoot the first bird without noticing that your second bird broke while being thrown, you'll have to reshoot that turn. If your gun fails to fire after you hit your first bird in doubles, you'll have to reshoot that turn. Obviously, if you miss your first bird, a failure to fire on your second bird counts as a lost pair. Otherwise, sly shooters would tend to have a lot of "fail to fire" episodes after lost first birds.

"Lost birds" are birds you didn't break. "Dead birds" are the ones you did break. A dead bird means you definitely broke the bird. Knocking a little dust off it isn't enough. You must at least knock a chip out of the bird. Ordinarily, the score keeper announces the lost birds but not the dead birds. Among trap shooters, dead birds are the norm, and therefore not worthy of mention. On the other hand, lost birds are announced with great gusto. Hearing "lost" over and over again can get to be quite annoying, to say the very least. In doubles, the score keeper announces the results of every shot: "dead pair," "dead, lost," "lost, dead," or "lost pair." "Lost pair" is never a pleasant sound.

Trapshooting Terminology

All-Around - championship at the Grand, Zone, State and other major shoots based on the combined scores of the 400 championship targets, 200 singles, 100 doubles and 100 handicap.

Average - the percentage of targets the shooter has hit out of the total shot at. .

Average Book - yearly book compiled by the ATA listing all singles, handicap and doubles averages of each member who shot during the previous year.

Back-Yardage - positions in handicap shooting from 24 to 27 yards behind the trophies.

Broken Target - a) one which comes out of the trophies in pieces. It is declared "no target" whether the shooter shoots at it or not, and another bird is thrown. It does not count even if the shooter hits it
b) a whole target which the shooter hits and is scored as "dead".

Call - signal given by the shooter for the release of the target. Usually the word "pull," but any sound may be used.

Classification - a system of dividing shooters into groups - based on previous records, ability, etc. - in singles and doubles. Classification is done by a committee of shooters. AA is the highest class; D or E are the lowest.

Dead - the term used for a target broken by the shooter.

Doubles - one of the three events in trapshooting. The shooter stands 16 yards from the trophies and fires twice, once at each target that are fired simultaneously.

Entries - the number of shooters in a specific event.

Field - the trap field ; refers to the entire layout of the trap and shooting positions.

Handicap - singles targets are shot at by shooters standing a minimum of 18 yards and a maximum of 27 yards from the trap.

High- Over-All - championship based on the combined score of all targets in a program. At the Grand it includes 1,000 targets over the final six days.

Junior - any shooter under the age of 18.

Lost - the term for a target missed completely or only "dusted."

No-Bird - the call given by the referee when the shooter does not have to fire at a target. Ex. A target that is thrown from the trap broken.

Pair - the two targets fired simultaneously in doubles shooting.

Pigeon - clay pigeon, the target.

Puller - the person who releases the target from the trap, either by an electric switch or by hand.

Shoot off - method of deciding ties in which the shooters fire another event.

Singles - targets are shot at by shooters standing 16 yards from the trap. One shot fired at each target.

Squad - a group shooters (five or less) who shoot together at one trap and who shoot in rotation.

Straight - the breaking of all targets in an event.

Sub-Junior - any shooter under the age of fifteen.

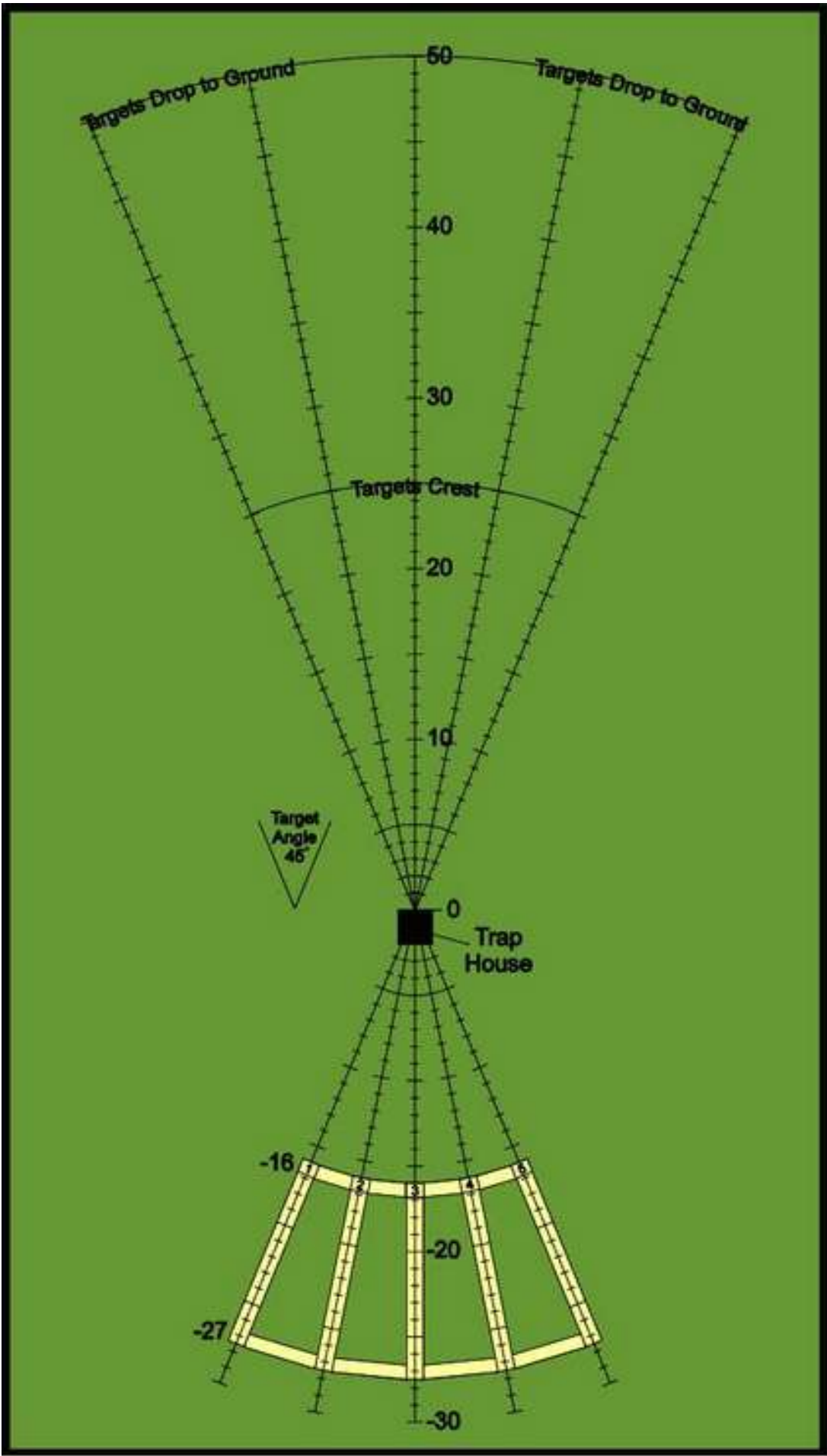
Trap - the device used to propel the target.

Trap House - a structure 2½ feet below the ground 16 yards in front of the stations that houses the trap machine, trap setter (if not an autoloader), and a supply of targets.

Veteran - at the Grand any shooter age 65 or older.

Zone - a) one of the five districts in which the ATA divides the United States and Canada. b) one of the districts into which various states divide their territories.

Zone Shoots - tournament sponsored by the ATA in each of its five zones and for which the ATA furnishes the major trophies.



YouTube Trapshooting Videos

Check out the following links on YouTube or search by either one of the names listed below, “American Trapshooting”, or “American Trap Shooting”. Then follow the links that come up in your search.

A few links to get you started

Dean Blanchard: Basic Trap Shooting 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxdbZ3LPvn0>

Dean Blanchard: Basic Trap Shooting 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcN1bPByGj4>

Dean Blanchard: Basic Trap Shooting 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JKZ2KUg1RU>

Josh Richmond's American Trap Shooting Tips

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0Mfbjg1WnM>

Chris Batha: How to Shoot Trap: Visual Hold

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WYPkVOHfOI>

Chris Batha: How to Shoot Trap: Common Mistakes and Corrections

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=os8NqvNxeug>

Nora Ross: Trap Shooting Champion

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2mW6wE_R78&list=PL9B3A460730E0D3DA