

Colorguard Rifle Tosses

By Fran Simmons, Colorguard Floors

This article discusses basic rifle tosses, from single to quad. It assumes that the reader has had at least a little instruction in tossing a rifle, knows the parts of the rifle, and understands the positions of left flat and right flat. *This article does not claim to cover every nuance of tossing, or describe the "only" or "right" way to do rifle tosses.*

Getting started

Stand in a stable position. I like second position "boxed out" for practice. Feet are apart, shoulder width.

Start with the rifle at left flat. The left arm is bent, elbow free of but *in line with* the ribcage, with the left pinkie barely to the left of the bolt. I like to let the thumb ride along the very bottom edge of the barrel but it is tucked down, not extended. Keep the gun in your fingers, not in the palm of your hand. This reduces twisting on the release. The right elbow is 6-8" out, in line with the body, forearm straight. The right hand rests lightly at the very end of the gun with no fingers overlapping. Keep elbows higher than wrists.

Stand with shoulders back, stomach in, feet shoulder width and legs turned out. Relax from head to toe; nothing twisted or tilted. Have enough tension in your shoulders, back and arms to keep someone from taking your rifle away. Check again when it's time to boost (aka dip - I don't like "dip" because it implies lowering the hands and neither hand should drop).

The boost

My groups don't boost for a single. But for doubles and up:

Raise the right hand to shoulder height. Separate your shoulders. Don't grip the bottom hand too tightly.

Don't dig your elbow into your ribs. That can ruin arm path, slow down rotations, and, if you do it on the catch, it's Very Ugly because your body will contort around the rifle.

When you are set, look down at the rifle and make sure that your hands are in a straight line, and that the rifle is not rotated towards or away from you. Usually the culprit is too much tension in your fingers. Any line on the floor can be used to check your position. This helps improve pitch.

Break it down

There are four parts to a toss: push, lift, release, catch.

1. The **push** controls the rotations. I like to use the tips of my fingers to drag down the butt of the rifle like I'm slamming a door, but straight down, lined up with my elbow. Don't lean or bend your body forward or back during the push. Don't push the butt forward here or your toss won't be flat to the front (a.k.a. bad "pitch"). The push happens half a count before the release... e.g. "five six seven eight AND one", where you let go on one at the release point. You can subdivide this (as in the exercises to the right) using the word "re-LEASE", with the emphasis on LEASE because that's when the hand opens.

2. The **lift** raises the gun to the level where you're going to let go of it. Squeeze the left hand as the rifle is pushed down and transfer the energy from the swinging of the butt to the barrel. As you lift straight up, turn the left wrist like you are twisting a doorknob and lift straight up in line with your shoulder. I call this "**the channel**", an oval that goes up from your elbow straight up in a line that reaches higher than your head. If you do it right, your left elbow will follow your wrist straight up and not swing out as you toss. Again, keep the gun in your fingers.

Hot tip: *To work on the push and lift separately, do "fakes": push and lift to that release point but don't toss.*

3. **Release** at shoulder for single, at chin for double, eyeball for triple, and barely overhead for quad. I tell my kids that the release point is not negotiable – we all have to let go at the same place if we want the tosses to be the same height. The biggest rookie mistake is to do an extra push or twirl at the release point. Don't! Just open your hand there. Release straight up from your shoulder/ elbow line – don't "rainbow over". If your rifle is flying to the left, right or forward, it's because that is where you opened your hand. This *point of release* can be altered for your direction of travel... if you are moving to the right, release to the right, and the rifle will travel to the right with you. P.S. Don't jump!

In between release and catch, have a free hand position.

4. The **catch** for a basic toss is at right flat, hands at the grip and tip, wrists below elbows. Wait at your free hand position until the very last moment to catch the rifle. When you catch, act like you are pulling the rifle apart and box out. This helps control the line of the catch, and it looks impressive. Releasing on *and one*, I catch a single on *two*, a double on *two and*, a triple on *three*, and a quad on *three and* (or catch on four if you're just starting to throw quads).

Exercises: These are some exercises for Rifle Tosses.

- The word "release" is used to help subdivide the count
- My groups say the words exactly as written below.
- We say "hit" instead of boost... use what works for you.

Sgl:	Spin, spin, stop, wait, Re – LEASE! & 2 (hold, push 8)
Dbl:	Spin, spin, stop, hit, Re – LEASE! & 2 AND
Triple:	Spin, spin, stop, hit, Re – LEASE! & 2 & 3
Quad:	Spin, spin, stop, hit, Re – LEASE! & 2 & 3 AND!

Catch on either the count or half count (but don't stop counting). Push on 8 to restart the exercise (at spin, spin). For singles and doubles, you can count 1-8 continuously. For triples and quads, count 5678 in between for a breather. If your hands are sore, switch hands on 1 & 3 (boost 4) instead of spinning and stopping. For variation, try catching at angles, vertical or with creative free hand positions/action. Or try catching in a pose, lunge, or plié.

About technique

I hope you enjoyed this article! These techniques have helped my teams over the years. I learned them from my instructors, & supplemented with WGI equipment technique tapes. If you're already on a team, go with the techniques your team uses so you will adhere to your team's style. If what works for me doesn't work for you, please write me. I'd love to hear what others do or what might work better. If you want to contribute an article to be posted in our Instructor's Resources section, please contact me. Good luck, competitors!

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