Canterbury Trap have developed another world first, a fully automated Bunker system that only requires one shooter to set up and operate.

The Canterbury Auto Trench replicates a traditional 15 trap ISSF layout with simple push button controls for set up and changing between ISSF programs.

The system comes complete with Voice release and control console.

Additional features include multi positional practice modes and ABT/Continental/Wobble trap facility.

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Growing up in Pendleton, Ore., and having been exposed to firearms at an early age, it wasn’t a surprise that shooting would end up being a large portion of my life. I began competitively shooting American Trap through the Amateur Trap Association (ATA) when I was 12 years old. Given my natural aptitude for the sport, it was easy to land a spot amongst the top ATA shooters and remain there with minimal training.

The world of Men’s International Trap, Men’s Double Trap and Men’s Skeet is a different animal. I wish I could say that when you start shooting the international events it will only take a year or two to become competitive, but that is not the reality. There is no set time period that dictates when a shooter is supposed to reach the height of the sport—I have seen people compete at a high level in only a few years and others in 14 years. That is a big reason why there are a lot of people who come and go, and tend to do so quickly. The international game is a very humbling experience.

There is one thing that these athletes have in common—sacrifice. When you look at an international shooter who is dominant and competitive at a national and world level, you are looking at a person who has sacrificed a lot of things, including family, friends and money. Once they commit, they have no choice but to place the majority of their everyday life on the back burner and dedicate an astronomical amount of time, energy and knowledge to the sport. We do this to achieve not only the high level of competitiveness, but to ultimately earn an Olympic medal.

Personally, my path to shooting world-class scores has taken longer than the average international medalist from the United States. I started shooting the Olympic discipline of Men’s Trap in May of 1998 and didn’t win my first National Championship until...
2005. I finally broke through on the world stage in 2009, winning my first World Cup gold medal in Cairo, Egypt, followed by a second gold in San Marino only a month later. That is 11 years of grueling training, day-in and day-out, to become a world-level competitor.

How did I do it? Well, I will start by crediting a great support group. I have a wonderful family, great friends and teammates. Surround yourself with positive influences. If you are around people who are negative, then you tend to think and believe that way. In order to go out on the field and beat the best in the world, you have to believe you are the best in the world. Dan Vitchoff, the mental trainer for many U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit athletes, refers to it as possessing unshakable confidence. You don't get that by being negative.

You have to be prepared to sacrifice things you want to do in order to get to the top. You have to assume that your adversary is practicing right now. You have to push when you don’t want to. You have to train when you don’t want to, and you have to overcome the mental blocks when quitting early or taking a day-off seems so much easier. Nobody is going to hand you anything. You have to want it, earn it and go take it. Dedication and commitment are critical to becoming an elite athlete.

Fitness has been a huge factor in my success. You may laugh because shooting is not a physically demanding sport, but I believe that a healthy body leads to a healthy mind, and it is widely accepted that shooting is a mentally demanding sport. When you are out-of-shape, poor fitness hinders your attitude with a low self-esteem and low performance. Again, you need confidence.

One common factor that I notice about many successful shooters is that they participate in as many matches as they can to feel the pressure of competition or they train with other top-level athletes. The best case scenario is to do both, but if shooting an abundance of matches is not feasible, it is good to train with other top-level athletes rather than solo. I prefer this because it allows athletes to push each other. Let’s be honest, if you can’t handle getting beat, you better hang the gun up and pick a different profession because the next level requires sportsmanship. You have to accept the losses with the wins.

A big key is coaching. Don’t ever think that you have shot long enough or won enough that you think you don’t need a quality coach. Also, don’t limit yourself to one person. I think everyone has something to offer. But be careful because some coaches or self-proclaimed experts believe that their method is the only way. In my personal opinion, a good coach is someone who takes your style and tweaks it a bit to suit the shooter. If you look at the overall spectrum of shooting athletes, nobody shoots
the exact same style. So make sure that you use a reputable source when deciding who to work with.

Just like coaching, equipment is a factor that you can choose yourself. Don’t talk to one person, run out and buy the first shotgun you see. Talk to other shooters, shop around, try out a few models and then decide what you like best. Three common shotguns used in international competition are Perazzi, Beretta and Krieghoff. They all have different models and variations that can be set-up to fit your build or style. Yes, these are more expensive than your average shotgun, but they will more than likely stand the test of time and you can hand it down to your grandchildren. I shoot a Krieghoff and have always had consistent performance, but the most important thing is finding a shotgun that fits your body and shooting style. These three companies produce a good quality product that will last a lifetime.

The best thing for a person to do is to get involved into an organization that will help you obtain your goals. In the earlier stages of the game, you might want to get involved with some groups such as 4-H programs, college shotgun programs, or the NSSF (National Shooting Sports Foundation). Later on you can join and shoot for USA Shooting. Another option, and the route that I chose, is the U.S. Army and the United States Army Marksmanship Unit (USAMU). It has been a huge contributing factor developing my shooting career. Everything I have previously discussed, the Army has provided for me. It is a place for my family and a place that I call home. It has surrounded me with outstanding friends and colleagues, that I also call soldiers and teammates. The USAMU is a first-rate organization that provides the means for soldiers to be the best shooters in the world in whatever discipline of shooting that they decide to do. The U.S. Army provides physical and sports psychologists to augment my training. The U.S. Army also provides all the amenities of fitness programs and outstanding facilities. These are just a few of the many things necessary to become a world class shooter. I think Lieutenant General Freakley said it best: “The Army teaches you Excellence, Responsibility, and Leadership.” Everything you need to be the best in the world or anything you aspire.

• Staff Sergeant Ryan Hadden