

Profiting by War's Lesson That Skill With Small Arms Is Vital



Group of Naval Men and Officers on Range for Rifle Practice.

Lieut.-Col. Harlee Hopes to Make the Great Piece Meadow Range Largest and Best in World

BIG Berthas, giant mortars, long range cannon and quick firing field pieces, important though they are in modern warfare on land, do not mean that arms of lesser calibre are of correspondingly lesser value. If the recent war taught us anything it emphasized the importance of the fighting man's rifle, which more than once turned the tide of battle.

It is just as well for the American people to keep this fact clearly before them. Science in the course of decades has developed for the infantryman rifles capable of doing effective work at ever increasing distances, but these technical achievements would offer little improvement without skill on the part of the man who aims the rifle. As a people we have fallen in marksmanship far below the standard set by our forebears.

In 1775 our militiamen, firing from behind trees, stone walls or any other convenient cover—using tactics which their contact with the Indians had taught them—worsted the British regulars at Concord. At Bunker Hill, the shooting of the American's defeated Gen. Howe's platoons. So time and again during the Revolution American marksmanship meant victory. It won us our independence.

Skill Well Authenticated.

After the end of the Revolution in advancing our frontiers we still had to contend with hostile Indian tribes. Our pioneers, our woodsmen, realized fully their security as well as much of their daily food depended upon their quickness and skill with their rifles, which were either in their hands or continually within reach.

The wonderful shooting of these men and boys is not a pleasing fiction but a thoroughly authenticated fact. Without it our forebears would not have been able to push further and further westward.

Again in 1812 we were put to the test of war. Again marksmanship stopped the best of Great Britain's battle seasoned troops, this time at New Orleans.

Similarly during the Mexican war it was the infantryman's shooting that broke the foe's resistance—the marksmanship of American frontiersmen. At that time rivalry in target practice was part of nearly every holiday. The man who could split a bullet upon a knife blade or deliberately form a cross with his accurately placed shots was no rarity.

Neglect in '60s.

But by the time of the civil war there were thousands and thousands of our men and youths who knew little if anything about handling a gun, and during that struggle nothing was done to improve the marksmanship of our soldiers. A man either knew how to shoot or taught himself as best he could. It has been said that our regular troops were given no special instruction in the rifle. In fact, no attention was directed to this important branch of military training until after the opening of the Creedmoor range early in the '70s.

Gen. George W. Wingate, who has done so much to encourage marksmanship in this country, has positively stated that during the civil war and thereafter until 1871 "neither the army nor the National Guard of the United States were ever given any instruction in rifle shooting." It was supposed that a man was either born a good shot or he was not, and if he was not it could not be helped."

At the first rifle match held at the Creedmoor range, which was brought into being by the National Rifle Association, the United States Army was represented by a team drawn from troops then stationed at Governors Island. When the contest ended these men ranked lowest. Their poor showing was quite logical. Gen. Wingate was present, and just before the match was shot he spent about two hours with the Regular Army team trying to teach the men how to use the sights on their guns! Up to that time, so it would seem, they had hardly once fired a rifle.

The opening matches of the National Rifle Association took place in Creedmoor in 1873. But the actual initiation of rifle practice among the



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Lewis Machine Gun Practice.

National Guard of New York and New Jersey began in 1872 at the little range at Clifton, N. J., within a few miles of the present master range at Great Piece Meadows. From that modest beginning developed the universal encouragement of target practice throughout the military forces of this country. And now for the story leading up to the establishment of the range at Great Piece Meadows.

About ten years ago Lieut.-Col. Harlee of the United States Marine Corps—then a Major—was bitten by the shooting "bug." He became imbued with the idea that marksmanship should be developed throughout the

ranks of our sea soldiers. His ambition was to make every marine an efficient rifle shot and encourage them to become sharpshooters.

He found the opposition that usually confronts the enthusiast. The advent of the machine gun, so his critics said, would discount the work of the individual rifleman. He was told that the soldier's musket would have little use in combat except for the bayonet.

But Major Harlee, by sheer persistence, gradually wore down the opposition and got the ears of those in high authority. It was not long before the good shooting of the marines became a byword at national

rifle matches; and we have had numerous eloquent testimonials laterly to the grim effectiveness of this peace time training. Without it Paris might have been in the grip of the Germans months ago.

Section 113 of the national defence act of June 3, 1916, provided funds for the construction and operation of rifle ranges open to any branch of the military or naval service and to all able-bodied citizens capable of bearing arms. The Secretary of War, however, was not inspired by this provision and nothing was done by the army. Lieut.-Col. Harlee was awake, however, and prevailed upon his fel-

low Carolinian, the Secretary of the Navy, to draw upon the appropriation and to go ahead where the War Department hesitated. Mr. Daniels empowered Lieut.-Col. Harlee to carry out his scheme.

Accordingly the first range of thirty-two targets was created at the Great Lakes Training School. Next, with 159 sailormen, Harlee built the range at Wakefield, Mass. In record time, his preparations went on until fifteen ranges were established, operating 1,200 targets, instructing monthly an average of more than 30,000 men and firing every week 2,000,000 cartridges. There was nothing haphazard about

this. As has been said, "Every round expended was fired under the direction of a trained and competent instructor, the navy's policy being to see to it that not a shot was fired without a coach at each firing point."

As a result of all this painstaking there was not a single accident or injury to a participant due to carelessness or fault on the part of any one during the firing of more than 40,000,000 rounds of ammunition—more rounds than the navy had ever fired in peace and war in all its previous history. And this despite the fact that the 250,000 men under instruction were of all sorts, including civilians who as



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Back View of Targets.

a rule had never before held a loaded rifle in their hands.

Formerly every million rounds of ammunition fired in practice had taken its toll of dead and injured. Between July, 1917, and November, 1918, there were qualified in these navy courses 54,147 marksmen, 22,222 sharpshooters and 11,867 expert riflemen. It was from these that Rear Admiral Charles Plunkett, U. S. N., recruited his crews for the naval railway factories.

That the rifle is indeed the weapon of the marine was conclusively demonstrated at Chateau Thierry and in Belleau Wood. Again our sea soldiers showed what they could do with it in

their battle for the St. Mihiel salient, and when they swept the Germans clear of Blanc Mont ridge. In one of the regiments engaged 93 per cent of the men wore the medal of a marksman, a sharpshooter or an expert rifleman. No wonder they amazed the European soldiers who as a rule were accustomed to shoot merely in the general direction of the foe.

Killing at 1,000 Yards.

Under the fiercest fire they calmly adjusted their sights, aimed at a particular man and got him. Where the soldiers of our allies used their small arms only when the foe was within 200 yards, the marines began bagging Germans at 1,000!

All this has disclosed how vital a part the modern infantryman's rifle can play when in trained hands. Of all one ranges brought into being by the war course of the Navy Department none contributes more abundantly to these effective results than the master range at Great Piece Meadows, N. J. The marvel is that a small force of officers and bluejackets were able to whip it into its present fine shape despite initial disadvantages. But the area would not have become the disposal of the Government except for these apparent drawbacks, for good land in that region is too valuable to be left undeveloped.

Notwithstanding the swampy nature of the ground the navy men went right ahead. They dug drainage ditches and otherwise turning a marsh into an ideal range, with a protecting ridge behind the butts. In an astonishingly short time they had everything ready, including a group of 100 targets in a row, with firing lines fixed for distances of 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800, 900, 1,000, 1,100, 1,200, 1,300, 1,400, 1,500, 1,600, 1,700, 1,800, 1,900, 2,000, 2,100, 2,200, 2,300, 2,400, 2,500, 2,600, 2,700, 2,800, 2,900, 3,000, 3,100, 3,200, 3,300, 3,400, 3,500, 3,600, 3,700, 3,800, 3,900, 4,000, 4,100, 4,200, 4,300, 4,400, 4,500, 4,600, 4,700, 4,800, 4,900, 5,000, 5,100, 5,200, 5,300, 5,400, 5,500, 5,600, 5,700, 5,800, 5,900, 6,000, 6,100, 6,200, 6,300, 6,400, 6,500, 6,600, 6,700, 6,800, 6,900, 7,000, 7,100, 7,200, 7,300, 7,400, 7,500, 7,600, 7,700, 7,800, 7,900, 8,000, 8,100, 8,200, 8,300, 8,400, 8,500, 8,600, 8,700, 8,800, 8,900, 9,000, 9,100, 9,200, 9,300, 9,400, 9,500, 9,600, 9,700, 9,800, 9,900, 10,000, 10,100, 10,200, 10,300, 10,400, 10,500, 10,600, 10,700, 10,800, 10,900, 11,000, 11,100, 11,200, 11,300, 11,400, 11,500, 11,600, 11,700, 11,800, 11,900, 12,000, 12,100, 12,200, 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