

How to Shoot Well.

[Lieut. J. M. Partello, Champion Shot U. S. Army.]

In these piping times of peace when there is little else for the soldier to do, the principal duty of our small army of regulars is to acquire the science of shooting and marksmanship. Shooting to hit is the objective point of military art. All other drills and studies are for the purpose of placing the soldiers in a position to do this effectively. As a preliminary to target firing, he must know how to aim, and he cannot aim correctly unless he can see straight. The most common defect in the recruit is inability to see straight. Bad aiming, bad holding of the piece, constrained position of the body, canting the piece—that is, inclining the rear sight to the right or left—and fear of recoil, all these defects mastered, the recruit is bound to be a good shot in spite of himself, and possibly a fine marksman. Color blindness is another important drawback, and one much more common in the average mortal than most people imagine. Practising at vision tests soon overcomes any tendency to crooked sighting; holding the piece properly and with ease cancels bad aiming, unsteadiness of body, constrained position, etc., and a proper grip hold as well as butt position against the shoulder, will render the heaviest recoil of no moment. There is a system of preliminary drills adopted in the United States army which it would be well for the militia of the several States to pattern after.

We get raw, green, verdant material, genuine numbskulls, who really do not know which is the dangerous end of a gun, and out of this stuff it is a fact that fine, accurate marksmen are developed, and even the finest grade of all, sharpshooters.

The difference between our regular army and the State militia is that the former makes all duty, work, and labor subserve the end of target practice. With the regulars the most important of all drills and exercise is to perfect the soldier into a shooting machine, while on the other hand the time of the militia is occupied in fancy drills, parades, reviews, and other show work. The United States has to-day an army of marksmen. The officers thoroughly understand their business, and the soldiers take great pride in becoming fine shots.

The service rifle is a good gun, provided with excellent, durable sights, and the mechanism is so simple and easily understood, that it is equal in every respect and superior in some to the best repeating rifle yet invented. Our government is right in not adopting a magazine gun until it finds one that is better than the Springfield service rifle now in use. This arm has a notch near the muzzle on the bayonet stub that answers for a front sight, and a buck horn or a V shaped crotch near the breach for a rear sight. The latter is mounted on a movable leaf that can be used in three positions at once. Lying flat along the barrel the piece is then ready for a blank range, or any distance within two hundred yards. Raise the leaf quickly and according to the position of the buck horn, which combines a peep sight and an open sight, two other distances are at command. Now look through the notch at the extreme top, and the rifle is ready for long range work. This leaf has a movable screw by which the sight can be set either to the right or to the left, to overcome drift in the twist of the barrel and cross winds, and also a slide to raise or lower the elevation.

Allowing that all minor difficulties have been mastered, and that the recruit sees straight, holds correctly, and has a good position, does not cant the piece, and does not fear the recoil, why is it then that when he fires—each shot with the same elevation and under the same conditions—his bullets scatter and a bad score is made?

The answer is very simple, and next to pulling off, the defect is the most common of all and the most easily remedied. I once stood beside a militiaman who was shooting at 500 yards, conditions perfect, ammunition without fault, his nerves steady, and his piece carefully handled, and yet in spite of all he could do his bullets would fly first up then down, and not infrequently from the target altogether. He could not understand the cause, and was much provoked at himself; yet the reason was plainly apparent to me, and a few words of caution served to overcome the difficulty, and enabled him to finish his score with fair results. The whole fault lay in drawing an imperfect bead each time.

The front sight may be so arranged to the eye that it falls into the buck horn at the rear, either as a large, medium, or small bead, and it is this little drawback that causes nine-tenths of the misses at long range. If, for instance, the marksman is shooting at 600 yards, and the gun is so sighted (all other conditions being favorable) that the medium bead will place the lead on the bull's-eye; if he should now by accident or otherwise, substitute a coarser or finer bead the chances are that the bullet would fly clear over the target, or fall short of the same. It is this fault that causes such irregular grouping by amateur marksmen. Which one of all who try is absolutely sure that he draws twice in succession the same size of bead? Very few, if any, can truthfully assert they are perfect in this respect. Then it is not the gun that does such poor shooting, but rather the man behind the gun. A little careful practice will

overcome defective holding, fear of recoil and canting; but it requires long, faithful, steady and watchful work, the utmost care and attention to aim truly and successively the same way. My own company attained a percentage last year at fixed distances of more than 90 per cent. This excellent showing was mainly due from a system of preliminary practice followed indoors during the cold months, so that when the time came for open range work, the men were ready to begin scoring at once without the usual waste of ammunition. This is the scheme, and it would do the militia a vast amount of good, besides saving them lots of ammunition money, if they first adopt this course for the preliminary training of their raw material, before commencing range shooting out of doors. A sheet of white blotting paper, say two or two and a half feet square, is placed against a wall, and thirty or forty feet distant a musket is steadied on a sand bag rest, or in a tripod, so that it can be arranged in a sighting position to suit the observer.

(To be continued.)

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