

The President's Page

NOT SO STRANGE

FOR some time experts have been making much to do as to the reason why soldiers fail to utilize their weapons to the maximum, notably in Korea, while others deplore the fact that the Army has completely failed to put over the Troop Information and Education Program. For the failure to fire weapons to the maximum in battle, a number of reasons are advanced, and since such contentions are supposedly based on "on the spot observation" and opinions of experts, there must be some basis in fact. As to the contentions relative to the failure of the Troop Information and Education Program, the experts would have us believe that the fault lies primarily with the particular individual detailed to enlighten the troops on what they already know and with which they are probably not too much concerned. If the nonmilitary experts are as much concerned as they indicate with the failure of this particular program, they might give more than passing consideration to the proposition of having assigned to each outfit a political commissar *a la* the Communists, and then Servicemen everywhere would be subject to round-the-clock indoctrination based purely on the governmental or party line.

We dismiss for the time being the Information and Education Program and concern ourselves with the criticism concerning the failure to fire weapons to the maximum in battle, and a seemingly all-around lack of marksmanship in the Infantry, for after all there is considerable truth in the allegation. It has been contended by writers and substantiated to some degree by military personnel that a substantial number of infantrymen fail to employ their individual weapons when targets of opportunity are presented; that the reasons are lack of confidence in their weapon; tendency to hoard ammunition; lack of motivation; fear of retaliation; indolence, and all sorts of other reasons; and that such behavior in battle is incomprehensible, and no doubt it is. Perhaps one of the solutions would be to heed a recent observation of the Johnson Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee that realistic training is absolutely essential.

It is submitted that one of the great essentials of training is the training of marksmen. Not so many years ago the Army put great stress on training in rifle marksmanship, and the Marines still do. Within more recent times the emphasis has been placed on careers, MOS's, pay and promotion rather than being grounded in Infantry fundamentals, including smallarms marksmanship, which, after all, is primary.

Long ago, 3 June 1916 to be exact, under the provisions of Section 113 of the National Defense Act the Congress enacted legislation for the encouragement and promotion of rifle practice, and to see that its policies in this respect were carried out, it established a National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice, made up of personnel from civilian life, the several Services, and the Civilian Components of those Services. On 14 Feb. 1927 Congress further amended the Act by providing that annual National matches would be held, for the conduct of which appropriations were

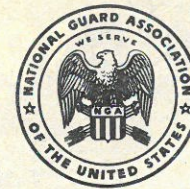
duly made. As a consequence, for many years until the outbreak of World War II, the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice exerted great influence on the development of rifle and other smallarms marksmanship throughout the country. Annual Matches, rifle, pistol and small-bore, were held at Camp Perry under the auspices of the National Rifle Association and the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and were participated in by the Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, National Guard and civilians. As a result, thousands of individuals throughout the land trained long and faithfully and practiced assiduously in order to qualify themselves for such participation. While these matches were intensely competitive, the primary function, nevertheless, was to develop highly competent rifle and pistol instructors who would, on their return to their home stations, serve as instructors to those who were armed with the rifle or pistol or who were interested in marksmanship, and well did they fulfill their mission.

Even the Congress, notwithstanding the laws which it has enacted, has failed for years to remotely support the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and has appropriated nothing for the National Matches for a decade or more. It has radically reduced or eliminated almost altogether the scanty appropriation for the development of Junior Rifle Clubs. As a result, the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice has become ineffective, and the Army, seemingly, is quite content to have it so. No longer does this agency perform what was once a great mission.

If it is a fact that soldiers fail to shoot while engaged in battle, have little faith in their weapons, and marksmanship is far from what it should be, then, perhaps, it is time that there was a return to the fundamentals and realities, for, from a military point of view, not all that was done in the past was wrong, and certain it is that some things have been discarded with the onward march of time which should have been retained. If this be true, then let the Secretary of the Army fulfill his responsibility in the matter by seeing to it that the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice is made to function once more and fulfill the mission assigned to it by law; and, if not, then let it be abolished and those responsible accept the consequences of their acts. Let there be a restoration of the Annual National Matches, supplemented, if deemed advisable, by a School of Fire at Camp Perry or elsewhere, as was done in World War I, and which school turned out top-notch instructors for all smallarms. These things are not only well worth considering, Mr. Secretary, but they are well worth trying again, for these things and the agencies which had to do with them served a worthwhile purpose in days gone by and will do so again if afforded the opportunity.

E. Walsh

THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN



OFFICIAL

PUBLICATION

National Guard Association of the United States
400 Sixth Street, N. W., Washington 1, D. C.
Phone: District 0341 TWX: WA 208

JULY, 1951

VOL. 5, No. 7

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Published monthly by The National Guard Assn. of the U. S. Publication Offices: Telegraph Press Bldg., Harrisburg, Pa. Advertising, Circulation and Editorial offices: Stewart Bldg., 400 Sixth St., N. W., Washington 1, D. C. Entered as second class matter on September 1, 1947, at the post office at Harrisburg, Pa., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Domestic subscriptions: \$2.00 per year to members of the National Guard Assn. of the U. S.; \$3.00 per year to non-members (Foreign and Canada \$3.50). HOME DELIVERY TO NATIONAL GUARD ENLISTED MEN, \$2.50 PER SUBSCRIPTION.

SPECIAL RATES TO N. G. UNITS FOR BULK SUBSCRIPTIONS TO ONE ADDRESS.

11 to 50 subscriptions, \$2.00 per subscription.
51 to 100 subscriptions, \$1.75 per subscription.
101 or more subscriptions, \$1.50 per subscription.
Single copies, 25c.

Manuscripts and pictures should be addressed to the Editorial Office. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage, and no responsibility is assumed for their safe handling.

Address changes should be forwarded to Circulation Dept., The National Guardsman, Stewart Bldg., 400 Sixth St., N. W., Washington 1, D. C. PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR OLD ADDRESS WHEN REQUESTING CHANGE TO NEW ADDRESS.

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JULY, 1951

Dear Guardsmen;

The sadness of parting sometimes is compensated for by the return of old friends who have been away. And so, a dull, rainy day is brightened by the reappearance of one of our long-time contributors.

We're talking about Bob Richardson, the rotund Photographer whose clay figurines have given a laugh to many a Guardsman over the past three years or so.

Bob was laid low for a time, and his 'toons disappeared from the pages they had shared so long with "Pentagon Paragraphs." Now, we're pleased to say and to see, he's on the rebound, as you can verify by turning to pages 22 and 23.

As we've noted before, one thing we'd like to have more of, is news and articles of and by the enlisted men as well as the officers. As most National Guard officers know (having started in the ranks) the privates, corporals and sergeants contribute much—besides their presence at drill and field training—to the Guard. It isn't everyone who is a literary genius, but we're looking for sound ideas more than we are for expressions of precocity. (Most genuine geniuses are fairly hard to take, anyway.) So, if you've an idea that has been kicking around, seeking expression, buckle down to putting it in black and white, and let us try it on for size, anyway. If it's good, we'll print it; if not, we'll tell you why.

Another thing we're glad to see is the first trickle of news out of Korea about the doings of ex-National Guard units now in combat or in support of combat units. Thanks to the initiative and interest of IX Corps PIO, we have this month some interesting accounts and pictures from a number of our units over there.

We've written to a number of unit commanders in Korea, trying to smoke out some first-hand stuff about what they or their officers have experienced and learned. We'll pass it on to you as fast as we get it.

The Staff

OUR COVER

Like a grownup's version of a youngster's Erector set, a Bailey bridge takes form in the hands of men of the 103d Engr. (C) Bn. This is a Philadelphia unit of Pennsylvania's 28th Inf. Div., now in active Federal service at Camp Atterbury, Ind. The versatile "Bailey" is an Englishman's invention. The version shown in this Army photo is rated at 100-ton capacity.

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