NOT SO STRANGE

FOR some time experts have been making much to the effect that the United States had better utilize their weapons to the maximum, notably in Korea, while other experts deny 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 experts have advanced, and since such contentions are supposedly based 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 or to the Communist, 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 critical conditions that are the result of our failure to respond 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 loss of confidence in their weapon; tendency to hand ammunition; lack of motivation; fear of retaliation; all reasons and other reasons; and such behavior in battle is incomprehensible, and no doubt it is. Perhaps one of the solutions would be a study of the Johnson Senate Committee of the Senate Armed Services Committee that realizes the situation.

It is submitted that one of the great essentials of training is the training of marksmanship. 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, MOSs, pay and promotion rather than being grounded in Infantry fundamentals, including small arms marksmanship, which, after all, is primary.

Long ago, 3 June 1916 to be exact, under the provisions of Section 118 of the National Defense Act the Congress enacted legislation for the encouragement and promotion of rifle practice, and to see that its policy was 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 small arms 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 those 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 its once great mission.

If it is a fact that soldiers fail to shoot when en- gaged 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, as far as possible, 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 discussed 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 sending to the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice, instructions to make it 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 small arms. These things are not only well worth considering, Mr. Secretary, but they are well worth trying again, for these things and the apathy which had to do with wishful thinking and the nonsense which has been gone by and will do so again if afforded the opportunity.

July 1951

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JULY, 1951
VOL 5, No. 7

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As We See It Inside Back Cover

Our Cover
Like a grown-up's version of a youngsters' Erector set, a Bailey bridge takes forms in the hands of men of the 18th Bngr. (C) Bn, this is a Philadelphia Sub-unit of Pennsylvania's 28th Inf. Div., now in active Federal service. Called the "Bailey" by the Engineers, it is an Englishman's invention. The version shown in this Army photo is rated at 100-ton capacity.

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