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ON RIFLE SHOOTING IN HER MAJESTY'S NAVY.

By Lieutenant JOHN FERRIS, R.N.

THE sister service, in which great care and attention are bestowed upon the musketry instruction of the men, contrasts with the Royal Navy in a manner which is anything but favourable to the latter; not but that the seamen from the gunnery ships have, and always do, hold their own against all comers at the Wimbledon meetings, but that as a large body the seamen of Her Majesty's Navy do not come up to that standard of good shooting, which is of such vital importance, and rendered so comparatively easy with modern rifles.

Let us consider the general system of blue-jackets' rifle shooting under the following heads:—

- 1st. What is the present system?
- 2nd. How is it carried out?
- 3rd. How could it be made more efficient?

1st.—What is the present system?

On referring to the service field exercise book, we find the musketry course for ships in commission, which prescribes the position and aiming drills, also the number of rounds to be fired at the target, together with theoretical instruction, the whole of which have been carefully revised, and rendered simple.

2ndly.—How is the present system carried out?

On the Mediterranean station there is a special Officer at Malta whose duty it is to put the whole of the men on that station through their annual course of musketry, and in proof of how well this acts, it is only necessary to compare the averages, and it will be seen that the Mediterranean far excels any other station in good shooting.

The Royal Naval rifle-range at Malta, on which the whole of the annual musketry course takes place, is in as perfect a state of order as could be arrived at: the men are given entirely over to the charge of the musketry instructor (a Gunnery Lieutenant), and have an undisturbed course of each long day's drill, and this devotion of time to one object has obviously many advantages, and contributes to give the men an interest in themselves.

On other stations it cannot but be admitted that a thorough course of musketry is but seldom carried out, though of course it is supposed to be gone through, as laid down in the Field Exercise Manual. Irregular modes of carrying out the position drills, owing to constant disturbances, indifferent rifle-ranges, and too often a general carelessness as to the training of the seamen, all lead to a falling off in the average, and a general inclination to hurry over the course cannot be productive of good shooting.

3rdly.—How could the present System be made more efficient?

It will be seen by reference to the Manual, that in the annual musketry course for sea-going ships, the seaman does not practise at longer distances than 400 yards. Now it is obvious that in the present day of long-range rifles, and hence loose order of skirmishing, how necessary it is that our seaman, like his brother soldier, should be taught to shoot at much greater distances than the above. The reader must remember that in the present course the men are never (since distance is not over 400 yards) taught to fire with the flaps of their sights raised. It may be contested that there is little utility in firing at long distances, when men are but indifferent shots at short ones; but let the reader remember what lessons in the necessity of steadiness are learnt from firing at long distances, and how easy accuracy at shorter distances seems to come after practice at the longer ones.

More time should be devoted to musketry, and other drills disregarded, in order to bring the bad shots into a higher state of efficiency, as cases are not uncommon of finding young ordinary seamen so afraid of their rifles as to miss the target repeatedly at short distances, from sheer nervousness, which could easily be corrected by a few extra drills and more practice on a rifle range.

Each ship should have targets supplied for use on shore, and no expenditure of the quarterly rifle ammunition should take place except at these targets, and this should be done in a careful way, and not hurried over. A detailed return of the ball-practice of each quarter should be submitted to the authorities. Also at an Admiral's inspection more weight should be attached to the efficiency and precision with which the men can use the weapons supplied to them, and on this occasion the musketry averages should be gone into.

In the annual musketry course the number of rounds fired in skirmishing order should be increased and should be fired at longer distances, and some encouragement should be given to the men to obtain high scores in this particular practice.

Lastly, judging distance should be taught most carefully, which of course would greatly improve the men in the skirmishing firing, and render them much more practical marksmen for the field.

In conclusion, let us look round us at the arms used by other nations, and we shall see how rifles generally have become improved; their sighting, for instance, how distant it is! There is our own rifle to 1,400 yards, the Mauser to 1,750 yards, the Berdan to 1,200 yards, the Gras to 1,960 yards. The new pattern American rifles and others all point towards a general idea, *i.e.*, "to open fire at long ranges with "picked marksmen as soon as possible."

The Royal Navy is so often called upon to fight (and well it does fight) in all parts of the world, that a little more trouble and care as to the eye education, and practical good shooting, of its rising generation, would not be lost to the country, whose right arm lies in its welfare. Machine guns and shrapnel shell on shore, electric firing and torpedoes afloat, may do much, but will not always substitute the steady hand and eye of a well-trained marksman.

FIG. 2. Longitudinal Section through A.C.

FIG. 3.

Cross Section through E.F.

Plan.

FIG. 4.