

Fairly early in the War there came into being a monstrosity called the Swift Training Rifle. This was a device for teaching marksmanship in a small space indoors, or out,

[169]

without expenditure of ammunition and without noise or any danger. I underline the farcical attributes! It consisted of a rifle which was similar to the service rifle in weight, shape and balance, and trigger pull, and had a breech bolt that had to be handled in the same way as when loading the normal rifle from a magazine. There was a target stand to which the rifle was fastened when in use; this stand moved freely so that it adjusted itself to any movements of the firer when he was taking up position, either prone, kneeling or standing. The target marker was a rod which was projected a short distance from the muzzle of the rifle, being propelled and almost immediately drawn back, by the action of springs. The rod was provided with a double marking end; one was sharp pointed and marked the actual impact of the "shot" and the other was lance-shaped, and hit below the aiming mark showing, if the paper was cut or distorted, that the rifle had been moved during the "up-the-barrel" period. Also, if the lance-mark was out of the perpendicular as regards the hole made by the *bullet*, it showed that the rifle, and therefore the sights, had been canted.

It was about this weird and wonderful invention that the leading shooting magazine in England said:—"With this ingenious piece of apparatus the whole of rifle training can be taught." To read such a eulogy of what the majority of riflemen surely thought a useless toy was enough to make one despair forever of the future of British shooting. I maintain that the use of the Swift training rifle was that it might possibly be used as a rather uncomfortable drawing-room game. And yet, in 1942, NCOs of my Regiment travelled hundreds of miles to take a *24-hours' "course" on this "weapon,"* and I never knew one who did not come back to treat the matter as a huge joke.

In February 1942 I was at the R.A.F. School of Musketry which was run by Flt. Lt. Hanson, probably one of the best all-round shots in the world, and an ardent enthusiast

[170]

whose keen exuberance was contagious. The Swift Training Rifle was supposed to be one of the weapons we "took"—we saw it and immediately forgot it. It was clearly apparent that none of the instructors had any time for it. And I certainly had not! I have been amused many times by laudatory references to the weapon in the one or two magazines devoted to shooting in this country. Read this:—"The Swift Training Rifle is a rifle and target combined. It has the same weight, holding, balance, sighting, trigger release and bolt action as the Service rifle. It is a psycho-technical method of synthetic training—which, besides training men to aim correctly, teaches them to effect subconsciously and automatically with a rifle having the

characteristics of a Service rifle, the series of movements necessary to make a good marksman." (The Rifleman, June 1942.) In the same journal in March 1943 there appeared in the Correspondence Columns a letter from a Brigadier in which this extract appeared:—"It does great credit to the R.A.F. that they were first to clearly understand the immense advantages of musketry training's mechanisation aid to the self defence of their airfields by making their ground staffs excellent shots in the quickest and most economical way by using the Swift Training Rifle." My comments on this are brief since I know a good deal about the ground staffs' excellent shooting—the majority could not have hit a haystack at 100 yards; and I think it is to the eternal credit of the British Army that they had little to do with this, to me, idle toy.

I never came across an Army man who 'knew anything about the Swift. Any instructor knows that rifle shooting can be taught successfully *only by shooting*, and that the so-called "psychotechnical" method was entirely lacking in elementary psychology. The user of the Swift rifle knew that there was to be no noise, no "bang" and no recoil, and it is this noise and kick of which the recruit, who is at all nervous, is most afraid.