



THE EARWIG

A Paper Containing Neither Politics, Literature,
Science, Nor Art

Issue 3, July 2010
(An Irregular Publication)

Welcome to this, the third issue of the Earwig for the NRA's 150th Anniversary. We have been delving further into the trash can of history and personal memory, and thanks to our contributors we have some more stories and a few cartoons for your edification. As we seem to be saying, Earwigo again.



Health and Safety From the British Medical Journal, 1869

Hints for Volunteers in Warm Weather

Until the last few days, there appeared every reason to believe that the year would boast of no summer at all or at the most three days of sunshine and a thunderstorm"...but no sooner had our Volunteers set themselves down on Wimbledon Common than the temperature rose and during the week we have been exposed, on and off to a close, damp, unpleasant, muggy heat.

It is gratifying to see the increased precautions taken which the experience of former years has taught many of the Volunteers to adopt against the evil effects of sun and heat. The white muslin band around the camp or more simple still, the white pocket handkerchief so fastened as to protect the back of the neck will avert many a headache, if not more serious illness.

A flannel shirt worn next the skin both day and night is advisable' it is a bad heat conductor and protects the spine against the direct rays of the sun and the chest and body against chill. It would be well if dark green, blue

and black coats were, when possible put aside and light coloured and more especially cotton clothes worn instead.

Heavy meals in the morning before exposure and fatigue are injudicious. Over fatigue in the sun is one of the most frequent causes of sunstroke and heat apoplexy. Alcoholic drinks in the early part of the day should be especially avoided. Attention should be at once given to slight indisposition and especially to diarrhoea.

A cold bath in the early morning is refreshing and invigorating; it increases the action of the skin and thus protects from the heat important vital organs. Attention to such simple precautions as these will greatly help to diminish the sick list this year and increase the enjoyment and sort of health to be derived from a fortnight's outing under canvas.

The Last Words

To protect the innocent and the guilty, I shall write this without naming names. It concerns a father and daughter incident at another range, but both are in the camp at this time. As is common enough among shooters,

A certain amount of repartee was taking place between this family duo, even though they were shooting a couple of targets apart. The father thinking he was making the best of it, the daughter (trying hard to shoot her best) was becoming increasingly annoyed as well she might. And then Dad went too far – he having finished shooting and she with a shot still to go - he made a remark intended for her to hear, which she did.

She fired her shot, looked in his direction, and loosed, off a pretty good verbal response which he would have done better had he allowed it to be an end of the affair. The audience was impressed at such a remark from such a fair young lady, as Dad was only too aware. Everyone looked his way in anticipation. Would he quit now and let her win? Would he try to finish her off with a clever paternal killer one-liner? The suspense was palpable.

His authority was the prize, and so he upped the stakes, and made a remark to his daughter that really was tending towards the injudicious, and for which all who heard it reckoned the lassie would not have an answer.

How wrong we all were. The Audience switched its gaze to the young lady, who now having fired her final shot, stood up, looked her father straight in the eye, pointed an

accusing yet threatening finger at him, and said those terrible words to which there was absolutely no possible reply, "I am going to tell Mummy you said that."

CY

To complement this year's Australia Match we reproduce here an account from the Australian and New Zealand Gazette in 1862

The First Australians

Australian competitors have a long and distinguished history at the Rifle Contest. In 1862 the Volunteer Service Gazette, the Volunteers' weekly newspaper reported that:

Mr. Allan M'Farlane, jun who it will be recollected, distinguished himself in the rifle contests held last year [1861] at Wimbledon, purposes being a competitor again. Colonel Blyth, we believe has written to Mr. M'Farlane, congratulating him upon the position he attained in 1861 as a rifleman and hoping he would represent the colony of South Australia in the forthcoming competition. Mr. R. Searle, a member of the Eastern Suburban Rifle, also intend, if he arrives in time, to be a competitor at Wimbledon this year.

Limerick No 1

We invite last gasp efforts of a printable nature to be submitted to the Managing Editor across the front counter of the NRA Office by 8am on second Friday.

A silly boy drinking at Bisley
Swilled ale that was terribly fizzly.
He just would not stop,
Then he burst with a POP!
The result was both gruesome and grisly

THE RIFLE

An Interlude In Three Acts (Continued)

Act two – eighteen months later. Bisley
Scene one. A bitter February day on Shorts.

"Which one have you got?"
"Mine's the one with the Tony Curtis rearsight. I see you've landed the Jonah Barrington special."
"Yes, and John's got the one with go-faster stripes."
"Tim, have you got your big screwdriver handy? My bedding looks peculiar."
"Show it to George."
"This is no bloody good. Where's my Australian ammo?"
"I've only dropped one so far, but it's knocking hell out of my jaw."
"Do you realise it's freezing?"
"Stop griping and shoot! We're supposed to be the experts putting this thing through its paces."
"How the hell am I supposed to test a rifle when I can't even feel it?"
"You were chosen for your beauty, not your wit...."

Scene two. The North London Rifle Club gun room.
"OK, so we got the results from 200 yards. John's wouldn't chamber RG – that's soluble. Philip's went well. My trigger had six distinct pressures but grouped

tightly. George's rearsight needed two rubber bands, and we've two dodgy extractors."

"Why was the rifle chosen?"

"The Frimley tests clearly demonstrated its superiority; and the accountants agreed."

"It's snowing. What about tomorrow?"

"We'll sort out the technical problems this evening and take tomorrow as it comes."

"Just what are we supposed to prove in the middle of February with this rifle?"

"That butt markers don't hibernate. What do you think?"



The 'go faster' model....

Scene three. The next morning at 600 yards.

"If you think I'm going to get out of my car and shoot in that, you're ***** insane."

"Oh, come on" England expects."

"**** England!"

"Target 58, message four, please. The marker probably can't hear the shot in the wind."

"How do you know it got there?"

"I don't, you fool. But if it did, it'll have been the original flying snowball, and there'll be a bloody great hole in the target."

"Who's that on 59?"

"Haven't a clue. Hang on, that's the Jonah Barrington special, so it must be Tim; looks more like a Cossack who's escaped from Siberia."

"They're going in all right: must be his thermal long johns."

"You can't seriously expect me to get out of my car to test a frigging rifle in -2° centigrade and heavy snow, plus a fifteen knot wind?"

"Yes."

"What size foresight element were you using?"

"4.6, but it was far too small. Trouble was, I couldn't unscrew the bloody thing. Lucky the barrel was warm enough to melt the snow so I could see through it."

"And you put them all in?"

"Target 58, message ten, please."

"What?"

"58, message ten."

"What? Hey, lend a hand, George: John's finished, but he's frozen to the point and I can't hear what he's mumbling. Come on!"

"I've already told you that I'm not getting out of my car!"

“What’s that? The 'phone? OK, I’ll get it. What? Message 9 on 57? Yes, he’s still shooting. He’s on aim right now. What! Five minutes since the last shot? What? Oh my God! Quick...!”

A Bisley Mugging

It was a beautiful sunny and hot Bisley Ashburton Day, the year 2004. The ice-cream vans were keeping up with demand. However, being towards the end of the week, there was among the cadets, a supply problem. Their supplies of cash were running low, and there was the expense of a “last night at Bisley” to keep in mind. All school economics lessons were cast aside; this was no conventional “supply and demand” problem – this situation required special tactics far beyond the imagination even of Adam Smith. The Wealth of Nations was of no matter – the lack of wealth of the cadets was a far more pressing business.

Three of ‘my’ girls, Charlotte, Zoë and Donya, delightful girls all (provided things went their way), were known throughout school as ‘the Three Wise Monkeys’. I suppose looking back, I should have been put on guard, especially as not long before, Charlotte had told me – “Look, this is how it works – Zoë is the brains, Donya is the cute one, and I am the muscle, so there’s no point in arguing”. And on this trip, they were joined by Camilla and Shona. *“In loco parentis”* takes on a seriousness of truly mind-numbing magnitude.

Anyway, back to this tale of supply and demand. All five girls were in a huddle when the ice-cream van arrived just behind us. Apparently picking her moment with the skill of a professional card-sharp or politician, Donya (you remember, ‘the cute one’) rose to her feet, and stood right in front of me. And then the performance began.

“Would you like an ice-cream?” Donya asked. “Yes thanks, that would be very nice” I replied, in all my naivety and innocence. I was barely aware of all this being keenly observed by the other four young ladies. “Would you like an ordinary ice-cream for seventy pence, or a special big one with a flake and sprinkles for a pound-twenty?” Donya continued. I said that an ordinary one would be just fine for me, and then I made my big mistake, by asking “Are you having one too?” Really, I should have known better.

The reply of “Yes please!” was accompanied by an outstretched hand, palm uppermost. “Ahh, I see” said I, “so this is going to cost me a pound and ninety pence is it?”

“No” said she still smiling that deadly smile, it’s six pounds and seventy pence, because you see, there’s Charlotte, and Zoë, and Camilla and Shona too”

I handed over the ten pound note, and a short while later was presented with my 70p ice-cream and the three pounds thirty change. As Donya settled down with her chums to enjoy their special big ones with a flake and sprinkles, I distinctly heard the words “We Gottin”, but I was never able to pin down which one uttered them.

I had been beautifully mugged by consummate professionals, and we all six of us knew it. CY

Put That Light Out

Bruce Parker and Gresham Barber (father of this year’s Cadet Grand Aggregate winner) were musing on Ashburton Day some years ago about their time shooting in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

They were both young members of the North London and, coming from Guernsey where cigarettes were dirt cheap, were regular, if not heavy, smokers at an early age. Sitting down for breakfast, they were puffing away when a roar came down the table from a nonagenarian, Harry Grist (they think).

“Would you two people mind terribly if I eat my egg and bacon while you smoke ?”

They both stopped smoking immediately – in Bruce’s case, forever.



I promise I’m giving it up tomorrow...

Canon Copeland’s Teeth

In the middle 1980s, I shot a little match rifle, and one fine day at 1100 yards I shared a target with Canon Copeland, he lying supine, and I prone on his left. To support his head he used a plastic ring attached to some sort of elastic strap, one end tied to the gun or his wrist, and the ring end clamped between his teeth when he was ready to take aim. It was a time consuming business, but it seemed to work.

On the 4th or 5th shot in, something went amiss, and his grip on the ring relaxed, with the result that the ring, and a half set of dentures, were propelled forwards at some speed. The ring was restrained by the strap, but not the teeth which landed on the grass just clear of the muzzle of his rifle, and his feet.

I gazed in wonder, awaiting developments. I didn't need to wait long. He addressed me thus: " I wonder, dear boy, if you would be so kind as to fetch me back my teeth which seem to have rather slipped out ... ", and so I did

He wiped the grass off, replaced the denture, and we continued our shoot without further incident. CY

A Fair Shot

To the editor of the Volunteer Service Gazette

Sir,- If you think the enclosed account from a local paper of a shooting match which I witnessed at Newton by the Sea is suitable to your valuable Gazette, I shall feel obliged by your inserting it. Mr. Forster who gave the prizes does much to encourage the Volunteer movement in this district and is a good shot himself although eighty three years of age. He was a Volunteer in 1803 and is now an honorary member of the Alnwick Rifle Corps.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant Thomas Robertson,
Sergeant Major 2nd Northumberland Artillery
Alnwick, January 16 1862

PS Perhaps it would interest you to know the sort of person Mrs. Rutter is. She is below the middle height of females of a slender and delicate make, very good looking with a soft and beautiful eye and rather bashful in her manners.

"On New Year's Day, Joseph Forster, Esq. Held his annual shooting match in this pleasant village. To afford a rational and agreeable amusement to the fishermen who are tenants of this garden allotments as well as to habituate them to the use of the rifle and qualify them (in the most essential particular) to take their places among our Volunteers, should that important boy ever be required for actual service, are the praiseworthy objects Mr. Forster has in view.

On the present occasion, the prizes given by him were two valuable pigs. The competitors were fifteen in number but what added most to the interest of the day's proceedings was the fact of Mrs. Rutter, the wife of a fisherman being again amongst the number. We have before had the pleasure of mentioning her as a skilful shot and have alluded to the peculiarly graceful manner in which she bring her gun from the "capping position" to the "present".

On the former occasion, among fifty competitors, all of whom shot well, she stood third. This year, she not only bested all her opponents but did it effectually. In her first shot she stuck the bull's eye at about two thirds from the centre. Her next ball entered the inner ring.

AT the end of the third round she and two of her opponents being equal, each having made five points, the contest was continued among them when she sent one ball through the very centre of the bull's eye and the other into the inner circle thus making ten points; while James Blair (the winner of the second prize) made eight. She was consequently declared the winner of the best prize amidst the hearty cheers of all present. Even her

late opponents did not allow their defeat to interfere with the just recognition of her superiority.

The target was placed at a distance of eighty yards; the parties used their own smooth bored guns and had no rest except what their own left arm afforded. The shooting was creditable to all. In the afternoon, with his characteristic hospitality Mr. Forster entertained sixteen of his friends at dinner in his mansion house and when the hour of departure came the universal wish was that he might live many years to preside over similar amusements and festivities. DD

Out With A Bang

A revered old muzzle-loading rifle shooter once counseled his grandson that if he wanted to live a long life, the secret was to sprinkle a little old-fashioned black gunpowder on his oatmeal every morning. The grandson did this religiously every day for the rest of his life and he lived to the age of 103.

After he died, he left 14 children, 28 grandchildren, 35 great grandchildren, and a ten foot hole in the wall of the crematorium. CY

Amendment - Message 15

For use only on Corporate Days

Message 15: for heaven's sake marker, give the firer a bullseye.

Thanks

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and others, wittingly or unwittingly.

We also acknowledge the original artists, the historical illustrations from 'Punch' and 'The Illustrated London News'. Contributions from any shooter, their partner, companion, staff or other personage are welcomed. They should be taken to the front counter clearly marked "Earwig Contribution" c/o Karen Robertson and with your contact details on Camp.

