

A New "Band Wagon" For Civilians

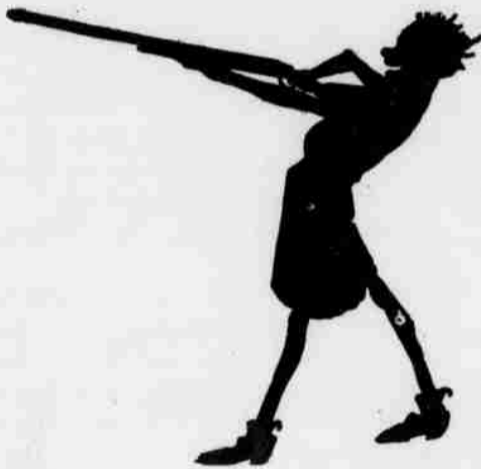
By Wilbur Rogers

*The pit is dirty, the butt is dark,
The rifle's shaky, and so's the mark;
But the thrill that comes
As a shot rings true
Is the thing that carries the "civie"
through.*

—Lays of a Civilian Shooter.

Lying on damp ground, with mud oozing up behind your ears and grease trickling down from a rifle that sags over a tired elbow does not seem, at first blush, like an indoor sport which is particularly attractive. If you add to those conditions a guilty conscience which is constantly crying aloud that you never could shoot straight and never ought even to touch a rifle, you will probably be lucky, when you come to fire your first shot, if you don't wing a butt attendant three or four yards further down the firing line.

But if, in that first shot, you should



happen to graze the target it is "good night" for you. You are worse off than any golf or tennis bug in the country. Your wife might just as well pack the dog up into his traveling basket, store the silver and the furniture, wash the baby's face and go along off to mother's. A golf widow is bad enough, but a civilian shooter widow hasn't a chance!

All of which leads up to the remark that civilian shooting is growing in prominence and is increasing its following every day. There is a thrill in shooting a rifle that is hard to appreciate until your hand has been on the trigger.

When the smoke puffs out at your shot, your heart goes thumping its way into your mouth. Your eyes get weak from trying to watch the wavering course of the Pitman's pointer. But a good shot! It has about one hundred times more thrill—and civilians are learning to be good shots.

Civilian rifle shooting is the natural result of the war. We took a few million clerks, bankers, lawyers, hod carriers and truck drivers and made them victorious soldiers while our enemy was sleeping. But we have given them the "feel" of a rifle. Now they do not want to let go.

But the army and navy authorities are with them. They have suddenly realized that if the whole country,

whether it consists of clerks, hod carriers or college professors, can be taught to shoot straight, America, even without a standing army, will be something not to tamper with. When a couple of million civilians can hit a bull's eye three out of five times, there will be no great enthusiasm in staging a general attack against them.

Of course there are many other results that will be gained. Preparedness is a virtue, but not the only one. There is the spirit of sporting in it. It is certainly a great game, this rifle shooting. It is mighty good training. It brings out the best in every man who tries it. And there is confidence. You would certainly feel lot more secure if you knew you could shoot straight when the occasion demands it.

All of these reasons led to the opening of the Caldwell, N. J. rifle range to the public last August. The National rifle matches were held there as an incentive, but on top of that, the greatest range in America extended an invitation to any civilian who wanted to shoot to come out, grab a gun and get busy. There are about 200 butts at Caldwell, and the week-end shooting now going on there has made rich men of taxi-drivers, who carry civilians to the reservation.

During the month, young men and old congested in civilian clothes early and late at Caldwell. The "bang" of the rifles could be heard until it was dark—and even some adventurous soul would get an idea that he was an expert at night shooting.

Lieut. Col. William C. Harlee, commandant of the range, admitted his surprise. He had planned to receive a great many civilians. But he had not expected they would come in such droves as to run over his Marines and the other service outfits which were there. Why, on some days they had to re-arrange the program completely so the "civies" could all get a whack at the butts.

Probably more civilians branched out as experts in rifle practise that month than ever did before. The sport began to show its popularity then, and now, at least in the vicinity of New York, the rifle is being wooed with as much constant ardor as are the chorus girls who are back on their jobs after their strike.

It is the same, so reports say, all over the country. There is a new range near Chicago which has suddenly become as popular as the loop, and the state guardsmen of New Jersey turned out in force when the matches were held at Sea Girt, N. J. In fact there was an alarming lack of kitchen police at Sea Girt, because all the guardsmen wanted to get to the butts as early as possible.

All sorts of citizens turn out weekly at Caldwell. There are the substantial gentlemen who are wheeled out in limousines, the less important financially who come in Fords, and the poor pikers who have to wait for the auto-busses to come along and take our fifty cents from us. But we all get in our shooting.

You can bet your life, too, that the pikerest piker is probably as ardent a shooter as is the most substantial gentleman.

It is easier, if we may be pardoned for introducing this bit of psychology, to shoot than to stay at home.

There was a time when it was the most comfortable thing in the world to sit in a back room somewhere and shoot the bull over a glass of something amber or something red. Now it is better to shoot rifles, because there is no nourishment in lemonade.

It is not the purpose here to state that the revival of civilian rifle shooting is a direct result of prohibition. But rifle shooting is a sport, and more men have been getting into all kinds of sports than ever before since July 1st threw its cloud over the interesting corners of the country.

The process of rifle shooting is easy. Get a rifle, and a not too clean suit of clothes and go to it. Most ranges keep annual records, so if your score to-day is unpleasant you can come back next week, or year from to-day and see how much better you have become.

Then there is the club shooting and amateur tournaments. These both foster the game. It is dollars, hundreds of them, to a second rate Salvation Army doughnut that the tournament this winter at Pinehurst brought out more shooters than ever before. That is because civilian shooting has started its rejoicing way to a place in the sun.

Like tennis, which became so popular this year that Australia had to butt into American affairs; like golf, which is making church a more shunned place every Sunday; like baseball, which is filling parks in spite of money-mad magnates; like all these things civilian rifle shooting is feeling the effect of post-war influences. It is coming and it is an enjoyable band wagon to ride. And few of the riders seem to be falling off these days.

Yes, civilian shooting is coming along abit. Like the maiden lady who had rheumatism on Sunday, but who, on Monday when she was invited for a buggy ride found it was better, civilian

shooting has turned the post and is headed due north to success.

There is a bit of gossip that has neither been affirmed nor denied officially. It is that when the Marines tossed their hats into Belleau wood there was not one of them who had not qualified as a sharpshooter or a marksman. It may be true. From general results it would seem to be the fact.

But if it is true, it is a commentary on civilian shooting—because the gang that tripped up Von Marwitz was not all old leathernecks; they were a lot of



boys who had dropped their picks, their pens, or their books and went to war on a couple of hours notice. They were civilians until they landed at Paris Island, but they were marines when they slipped the knock-out drops to the Germans.

We probably will not have another war. Respect is a great defense and fear is a greater one.

But if we do, stake your last penny on a bet that the civilians who are riding on the rifle shooting band wagon to-day will be right there when the gates are opened for them.

