Dear Colleagues

**Developing a desirable attitude; a shooter competing only with him- or herself**

**The Problem:**The attitude of a shooter is not regarded as a technique, although it needs to be developed in order to overcome many anticipated shooting difficulties. This can lead to poor shooting performances as a result of the shooter becoming distracted and even nervous.

The answer while shooting is of course to shut other competitors out of one’s mind. If the performances of other competitors were to suddenly disappear, there would be little opportunity for nervousness. However, few competitors are ever in a position to practise this by competing solely against themselves.

When deciding to travel halfway around the world to compete at Bisley, a shooter should set out known handicaps to practice and then overcome them. As a result, shooters on their home range often practise shooting in pairs in the English style. There is however far more to shooting at Bisley.

Many local shooters on Stickledown are used to wind readings of 14 to 25 MOA. Shooters from Trentham (Upper Hut, New Zealand) are well practised and not concerned about wind strength at Bisley. On the other hand, Australian shooters rarely get this type of practice. When the wind gets up, Australian shooters try to wait it out in the hope it will return to a lower strength. At Bisley, shooters would be penalised when the time for a shot is exceeded.

This article describes the most valuable practice a visiting shooter may obtain, having travelled around the world to compete at Bisley. It is recommended that the serious shooter should ignore unsolicited advice from others, that they should take the week off and see the sights in London. Upon arrival, practice on Stickledown Range is instead recommended.

**Discussion:**   shooting alternately with a partner can present a sudden shock when firing the first few shots at Bisley. For some country shooters in Australia this is still the norm today, where targets on their ranges are balanced with two on each frame. Two shooters on the firing point release shots at these alternate targets bearing spotters from their previous shots. This has been the practice in Australia since pre-WWI days. In the 1950s, prize meetings advertised the newest innovation, Bisley marking. A single shooter fires at a target balanced with a dummy frame bearing a score indicator. Upon the dummy being pulled down, it is replaced with the shooter’s target bearing the spotter from the last shot. The result in Australia was a change from alternate shooting to releasing a string of shots.

Alternate shooting was however retained in Great Britain, where it was considered far more demanding for a shooter to have to read the wind off the flags, then fire within 45 seconds. Whereas, firing a string of shots had inherent advantages for those who knew how to capitalise on this. Australian shooters preferred to release as many good shots as possible while the wind continued to blow with the same strength. The error in reading the wind, winding this on the sight and quickly releasing a shot, is far greater.

Shooting competently in wind from 16 to 25 MOA is the norm on Stickledown Range. Yet, the NRA of Australia chose to abandon the designs of flags for shooting at wind velocities of more than about 9 MOA. As a result, few shooters from Australia now have this experience. However, it is almost a necessity for overseas shooters to learn to use the three sets of Bisley flags. These same sets of flags, were previously employed for the past century, where they were needed on rifle ranges throughout Australia. The NSW Rifle Association complied with the standard set by the NRAA and abandoned them in favour of the 0 - 9 MOA low-wind flags, now in sole use at the Malabar Rifle Range, Sydney. In contrast, on that range a sea-breeze often blows without interruption up to about 18 MOA.

**Practical:**   upon arrival at Bisley, overseas travellers are welcomed at prize meetings run by the British Commonwealth Rifle Club and the North London Rifle Club. These events are conducted on the Century Range over 300x, 500x and 600x. There is a further opportunity to learn to shoot in pairs at the Weekend Aggregate prize meeting over 900x and 1000x on Stickledown Range. This shoot is on a weekend well before the start of the two-week Bisley Imperial Meeting, which culminates with HM The Queen’s Prize aggregate.

If an Australian shooter wishes to gain practice with the larger flags on Stickledown, there is a full week of shooting available during the Hopton Match Rifle Aggregate, which runs for a full week before the Target Rifle events.  Match Rifle is fired in either prone or a supine position, often with the rifle resting across a leg. Telescopic sights and hand-loads are used. Wind readings when using a 200gr projectile, can be as little as 10 percent of that for a target rifle using 155gr projectiles. Hence, a Target Rifle shooter who shoots in the Match Rifle events will be in a one-person match.  This is however the best way of learning to use the three sets of Bisley flags in high wind. Australian shooters inevitably appear and explain, we didn’t enter for this because we don’t do that where we come from.

Another unsolicited opinion may be received from the fellow at the counter in the NRA office, who sells the tickets for competitors to shoot in the Hopton.  He told the writer, clearly an overseas shooter, that he was wasting his time at long range using the standard ammunition. It just does not carry past 1000x. Clearly, he was unaware that there is a match known as the Maxwell Aggregate (after James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879), rifle shooter and founder of electromagnetic field theory), for the shooter whose score includes all the Hopton Match Rifle and the Target Rifle events fired over the whole Bisley Meeting. The Maxwell Aggregate has been won by Australians using 7.62mm 144gr Radway Green ammunition, fired from a Lee Enfield No.4 rifle over 900x, 1000x, 1100x and 1200x.

Upon arrival at Bisley, the writer found that his trigger-release technique had been gradually deteriorating for some months. At 1000x, the numbers of bullseyes being achieved did not lead to scores of better than 46, while at 1100x, the maximum score was about 42. The first change was to improve the technique for rifle support, so that it was dead still and did not wander off the target. This really enhanced the second stage of trigger release. Another change was to adjust the period of second-stage trigger release, which brought shots closer to the centre of the bullseye. Hence, when a shot was close to the edge of the bullseye, this indicated that the time for release should be increased by a second or two. During the Hopton Aggregate it was found that enhanced trigger-release from a dead still rifle led to 75/75 scores at 1000X. This was just not achievable before improving trigger-release.

**Conclusion:**   If a shooter at Bisley has been able to shoot his/her way into the final 100 and be presented with a Queen’s Hundred Badge, it is then necessary to come to the Queen’s Final that afternoon on Stickledown Range, to shoot 15 shots at each of 900x and 1000x. At 900x, the wind on Stickledown at target numbers 1 to 15 is often 4 -10 MOA. However, shooters up the hill, on target numbers 35 to 50, may at the same time require from 10 to 15 MOA on their sights. In 1981 the writer’s winning score in HM The Queen’s Prize required wind readings of 14 to 18 MOA at 900x, while at 1000x, the wind remained between 16 to 24 MOA. The week’s practice in the Hopton enabled the writer to instantaneously read wind at 14, 16, 18 and 24 MOA at 1000X.

Best regards

Geoff