Dear Colleagues

**The origins of rifle shooting in mental control**

**Problem:**rifle shooters generally regard their sport as being based upon mental processes and their control. Most are however unable to say exactly which mental processes are the sources of particular shooting techniques. It is often considered that mental controls provide a strong basis for the following:

* trigger-release [with physiology for controlling rush of adrenaline and a tremor]
* holding the rifle dead still [with physiology for placement of a limb and the sling]
* avoiding muscular and other bodily movements which affect the natural point of aim [with physiology and nervous system components connecting the body from head to toe]
* shooting automatedly (or in the zone) [nervous system functions sub-consciously]
* remaining unaffected by the scores of competitors [mental discipline to avoid being distracted]
* the exclusion of mental distractions while shooting [with the discipline to keep the mind focussed upon key functions, e.g. keeping bodily muscular systems motionless]

However, these few mental controls alone are insufficient for a person to become a highly skilled shooter.

This article outlines the full range of mental processes routinely used by many highly skilled shooters. Yet, very few appear to be aware of the mental controls used. Some of the thought processes differ greatly from the practices of less-experienced persons, who work hard at shooting well. Sadly, for some reason many shooters appear not to utilise help when offered by leading shooters. Otherwise many have adopted a naïve outlook, where they are wrongly led to believe that rifle shooting techniques are largely acquired through personal experiment. Few people realise however that most people do not live long enough to ‘reinvent the wheel’.

**Discussion:**in addition to the above mental processes are employed for:

(strategic initiatives and others which should not be followed)

* studying wind patterns before stepping up to the mound, deciding to only release shots in wind that is not stronger than indicated by a particular flag shape or less than another flag shape
* studying wind patterns before stepping up to the mound, deciding the number of good shots able to be released while the wind remains at a particular velocity and direction
* studying wind patterns before stepping up to the mound, deciding whether it will be possible to alter the sight upon the preceding shot in the target or alternatively, if it will be necessary to alter the wind reading and fire directly upon wind strength indicated by the flags alone
* adopting and learning techniques when offered by a leading shooter (instead of the immature practice of rolling the eyes up into the head, seeking to convey boredom)
* deciding to share helpful techniques with other club members (instead of keeping them secret for fear that a friend might rise higher in the club championship)
* utilising techniques believed to be helpful, but which actually have no experimental basis
* naively nurturing a sense of pride at having been thrown in the deep end as a new shooter, then left alone to work out which techniques actually work
* naively joining with unthinking shooters, who reject opportunities to learn to shoot under different conditions, e.g. in tricky wind at 1000 yards, becausewe don’t do that at our home range

(the shot release technique)

* while waiting for the previous shooter to finish, the shooter fires a dry shot to ascertain the degree of care required for a trigger release to not generate a tremor
* mentally following the final, slow trigger pull near the point of release, ensuring follow-through and also avoiding the generating of a tremor.

These thought processes indicate the range of ideas that occur in the minds of shooters who compete at a Queen’s Prize meeting. Readers can be guaranteed that in order to gain the necessary skills to become a leading shooter, these skills are rarely discovered, but taught.

Note that shooters have a need to first overcome technique difficulties, which must precede the purchase of equipment to enhance their shooting skills. It is sad, when it is considered that excellent rifle actions, barrels, hand-loads and other equipment, tend to be overshadowed by the continued use by shooters of clearly inadequate techniques. Overcoming this also involves another important thinking process: attitude of mind.

**A critique:**a shooter who recognizes the importance of the mental processes listed above, inevitably sets out to achieve much more than the release of a good shot. Such a person who works at becoming a leading shooter, soon realizes the need to learn and communicate with others in a rifle club. The purpose of a rifle club was initially intended by two early rifle shooters: Dr Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling, to be a place where learning is encouraged. Unfortunately, the majority of rifle clubs of Australia appear to have become places of a much more socially important function, the club championship. It often decorates a wall so that all can see the current success of proud members of the club. In contrast, those who compete outside the club and at Queen’s Prize meetings are often not shown.

**Practice:**Thinking club member are particularly skilled in strategic initiatives, which fill the shooter’s mind as he/she walks up onto the mound. Among them arepre-shoot initiatives, such as testing and adjusting sling tension. Another carried outbefore every shot,concerns the testing and adjustment of the natural point of aim, which must be set exactly to avoid a major source of error. A thinking shooter also resolves to undertake a detailed initiative to avert the generation of a nervous system tremor inthe release of every shot. Although this was discovered in the 19thcentury, most shooters a century later have never even heard of it. Yet, in 1950 the writer was taught and repeatedly drilled in this initiative to overcome the tremor. Shooters at that time were intent upon improving the accuracy of the .303 and continued it indoors as miniature rifle shooting. Today, with the 7.62 mm cartridge, shooters seek to score a 1.0 MOA group (TR) or a 0.5 MOA group (F Class) instead of much larger groups out beyond the 6-ring to the perimeter of the bullseye (2.0 MOA or larger).

**Conclusion:**today’s rifle shooters once again appreciate the use of mental controls: to remember and perform absolutely necessary shooting techniques, to undertake strategic initiatives and to acquire effective attitudes of mind. All are required if a person is to become a leading rifle shooter, whether TR or F Class.

Best regards

Geoff