THE WHOLE ART OF SNIPING

THE SNIPER DOESN'T SNIPE simply by getting behind some convenient object and discharging his rifle. Experience has taught him much, and he now has a code of rules to observe, some of which relate to the accuracy of his fire and some to the efficiency of his concealment from the enemy. With the recent return to the United States of a group of snipers attached to the American Expeditionary Force, the "detailed lessons in trickery and shooting-magic," as Ret Harrow expresses it in "Popular Mechanics" (Chicago, November) have become known. Ingenious and scientific to a microscopic degree, they reveal how technical, and yet how fascinating, sniping became in the progress of warfare. Says Mr. Harrow:

"Without a doubt the most dangerous pursuit in the war, sharpshooting was the one branch of the service that Americans clamored with the greatest fervor to join, for it harked back to a traditional American superiority--the use of the rifle. Not even the generally credited statement that a sniper's life was, on an average, but 10 days, stopped them, and with the British and French they worked out an artful system of rules that completely baffled the Germans. Toward the last of the fighting, the American sharpshooters came to be called 'body snatchers,' on account of their success in this particular field.

"The first rule for these daring riflemen who stole out in 'No Man's Land' to pick off opponents, was that they should always hide 'before' cover rather than behind it. By lying down between an object and the enemy a sniper was much more efficient than when lying with the protecting object between him and his prey. He was taught to blend himself with the house, tree, wall, or trench in his rear, open to the enemy's fire, but concealed from his sight. He was never to let his head appear against the sky line; never to shoot at a German head directly in front of him but always at heads far to the right or left. This mode of procedure prevented the Germans from discovering the angle from which the bullets were coming.

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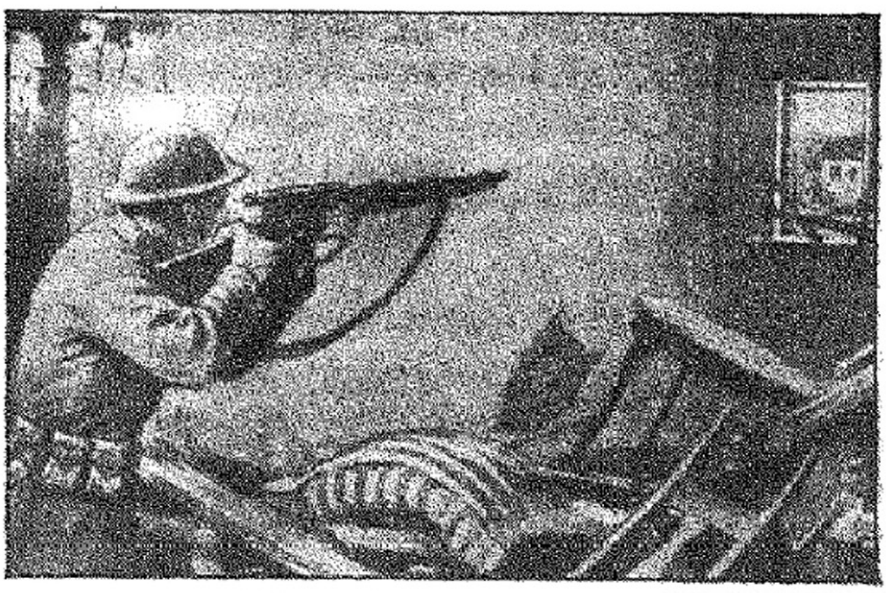
"One extremely important rule was that he should swab the muzzle of his rifle after every shot, to make sure that no moisture had collected there. One tiny drop of water would, upon the rifle's discharge, send up a puff of steam that would reveal him to his carefully watching enemies.

"When shooting through a loophole in masonry, the sniper must water the aperture thoroughly so no dust would be blown into the air when the rifle spoke. In shooting from a house, the sniper never occupied a window, but stationed himself at the far end of the room where he could not be seen, and sent his bullets through the window from this distance.



AMBUSHED IN A RUINED HOUSE
The Sniper Never Took Up a Position at a Window, but Stationed Himself at the Far End of the Room, So That He could See without Being Seen.

"He was never permitted, in the later days, to use binoculars, but was supplied with a telescope, for the use of the latter meant that the gleam of only one glass lens might be caught by the enemy, thus betraying the sniper, whereas with binoculars the chances were double. With this telescope he studied enemy trenches and 'snipers' nests' all day long, scarcely moving, so keen was the enemy's lookout.

"Snipers always worked in pairs, one using the telescope and the other the rifle, the former whispering directions to the latter. Lying a few feet apart, so that, if one was detected, the other need not necessarily be killed also, they lay all day long in one position, their only relief being the exchange of spyglass and rifle to lessen the intense strain.

"Each pair of snipers made two sets of 'nests' on nights before going out, establishing a false pair of 'nests' where the enemy might discover them and placing near by the hiding places which they would actually occupy. Often from the shrewdly camouflaged 'nests' they could discover German snipers shooting at the dummy retreats and perhaps get a bullet into self-satisfied Heinie. If their nests were discovered, they took chances on wriggling out into shell holes, and thus away, but not until they had put up a little sign reading 'Danger,' which they always carried, so that no brother-sniper might occupy it later to his misfortune.

"One of the most imperious rules was that no sniper who suspected the presence of an enemy sniper was to look directly at his adversary's hiding place. He was taught to move his eye all about the vital point---above, below, and to either side--but never squarely upon it. This was in obedience to the optical laws of man. The center of the eye fastened upon an object cannot detect action nearly so readily as can the outer sections of the eye. About the rim of the eye's pupil, action is caught quickly, and then the center of the eye automatically swings upon the object and focuses perfectly. For this obvious reason the sniper was drilled to observe this rule rigidly.

"Snipers' rifles were always the pick of those furnished an entire division and were fitted with extremely complicated and accurate calibrated sights. Small telescopes, with scaled measures spaced upon them, gave the sniper the distance of an object while he sighted his weapon, and permitted him to tell within a few feet how far away his intended prey was stationed."