

RIFLE RANGE TARGET FIRES BACK AT G.I.'S

ABERDEEN, Md. (Science Service) — The Army has designed a new target that shoots back at soldiers on the rifle range. An automatic gas-operated pellet gun keeps up a steady attack, firing every half second, to test the reaction of riflemen under fire. And just to make matters worse, a plywood backstop sees to it that every pellet not hitting the soldier makes itself known with a resounding crack.

Though the BB-sized pellets merely sting, protective padding covers all vital parts of the soldier's body. An elaborate hood extending down over the shoulders and chest contains electrodes to measure heartbeat, as well as an electric fan for cooling.

Each soldier is exposed to a sequence of seven targets, shaped like the silhouette of a kneeling figure. The BB gun may shoot back for only two of them, but the threat of return fire provides "sufficient stress." Stress can be varied by controlling the number of hits on the soldier.

The amount of stress affects not only a rifleman's accuracy, but also his rate of fire and the time it takes him to fire his first round, according to scientists at the Army's Human Engineering Laboratories here.