

Incidentally . . .

Fellow out in Idaho dropped us a card the other day and asked a pointed question. "What," he wrote, "are NRA field representatives? Why do you need 'em?"

The answer lies mainly in the growth of NRA-affiliated clubs from a prewar total of 3,000 to nearly twice that number. It wasn't possible to continue to service that many clubs from an East Coast main office. But what the hell, you say. Why worry about a few thousand rifle and pistol clubs when there are 300,000 individual members. That's true, but misleading. A lot of those 300,000 members also belong to one of the NRA's 5,800 clubs. (We checked not long ago and found that the average club membership is 43 . . . which means that we have well over a quarter-million shooters, junior and senior, tied in with the club program.)



Another thought in connection with the NRA's program of servicing the 'competitive' shooter lies in the complaint that we pay too much attention to that one class of member. Could be . . . but the competitive shooters are among the few groups that have organized so that they're in a position to be helped. Also, statistically speaking, there are a lot more of 'em than we sometimes realize.

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What does a field representative do? That's as hard to pin down as analyzing the President's job. There are some phases of a field representative's task, though, that should be mentioned. Club organization is one of them. Last year, for instance, NRA field men helped 460 new clubs get started. Up in New England alone, field man Ed Bridgman visited 95 summer camps in order to spur the NRA's program of encouraging junior shooting. Ed may not have thought of it that way when he made those visits, but he was helping to insure the future of American shooting.

Encouraging every and any kind of shooting is the keynote of a field man's job. His contacts in giving that encouragement vary from newspaper editors to college rifle clubs, from radio appearances to police departments, from club tournaments to showings of NRA-sponsored training and safety



COVER

The subject of the fifth Rifleman cover to picture North American big game is a species of caribou that few riflemen have hunted, the Grant. It is found only on the treeless Alaskan Peninsula. The detailed Kodachrome of a family group in its native habitat—one of the many life-like exhibits in New York City's American Museum of Natural History—is used by permission of the AMNH.

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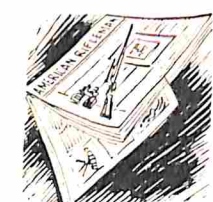
films. Annually, each field man does a glorified salesman's job in spreading the gospel of shooting to thousands of Americans. The nice thing about the business is that a fat percentage of those Americans might otherwise never get the good word.

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Finally, who are they? That's a tough one. Take Echols, for instance. One-time Customs Service man, record-holding pistol shooter, raconteur, a good man-on-a-party, Echols is familiar with every inch of his Southwestern territory, speaks the language, and knows all the pistol shooters in the country by their first names. (For the last year he's been trying to catch up on the rifle-shooting brethren.) And there's Ray Whitaker, who has an 'office' (when he's not officiating on one range or another) in Tulsa. Ray's idea of a good time is to come to NRA Headquarters every few months and ask all the embarrassing questions he can think of. Like Echols, he's a good mixer, a good organizer, and can probably name every rifle and pistol club in his territory from memory.

Ed Bridgman, who has the New England beat, is Walter Roper's old shooting partner and, as we've said, a shark for junior shooting. Along with Dow Smith, who headquarters in Elkhart, Indiana, Ed has done as much as anyone we know to promote shooting interest among 'teen-agers.'

Dow Smith, who smokes the biggest pipe we've ever seen, was the NRA's first field man. After he'd served successfully as a guinea pig for the whole idea, other offices were gradually added to form the present four-man setup. Dow, incidentally, is an ex-schoolteacher, and an enthusiastic idea man for the whole club program.



One warning: Don't drop into a field office and expect to find anyone home. Last year the bunch of them traveled over 100,000 miles in making their rounds. 'The office,' to an NRA field man, is just a place to pick up his mail.—J. S.

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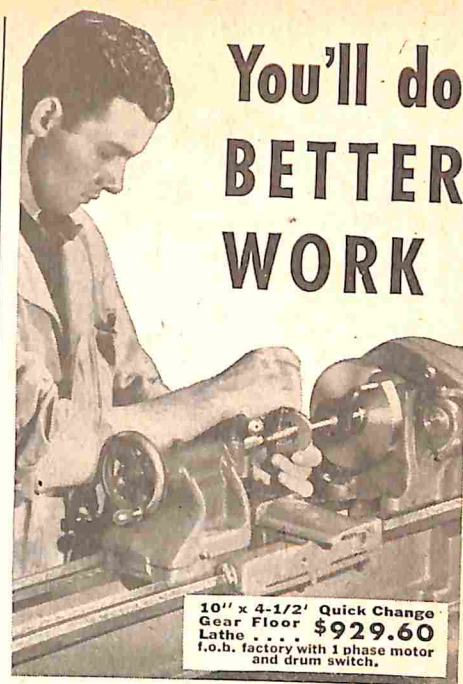
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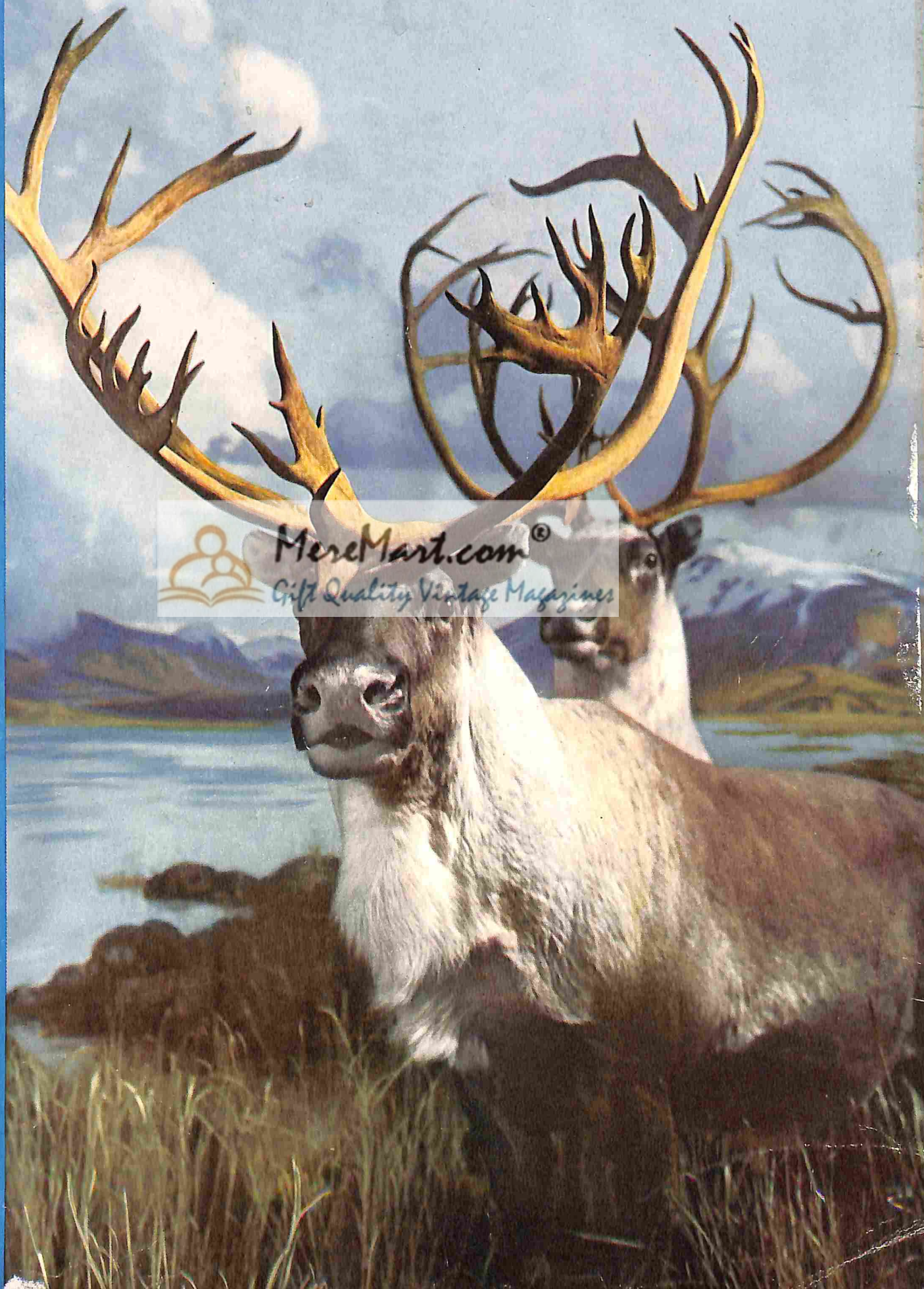
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