Jan. 4, 1966 F. F. SCHWAB 3,227,449

DRAPED-WEB TARGET DEVICE

Filed May 13, 1963

FIG. 1

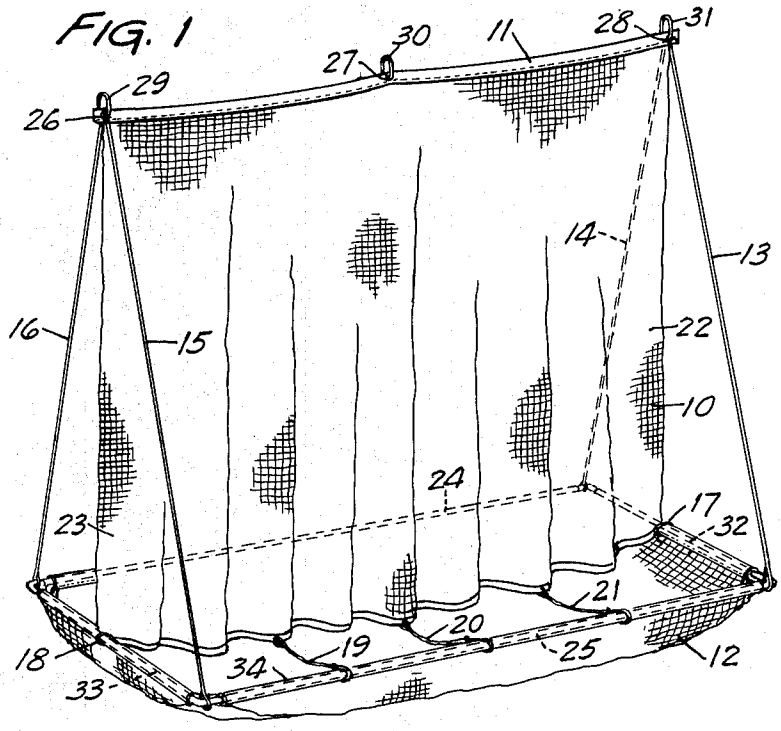


FIG. 2

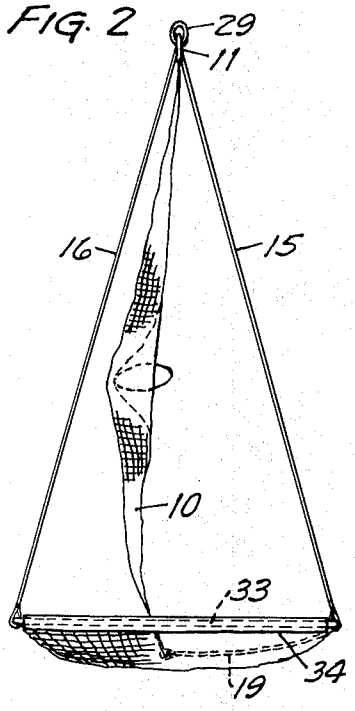
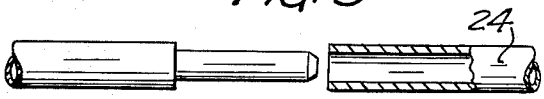


FIG. 3



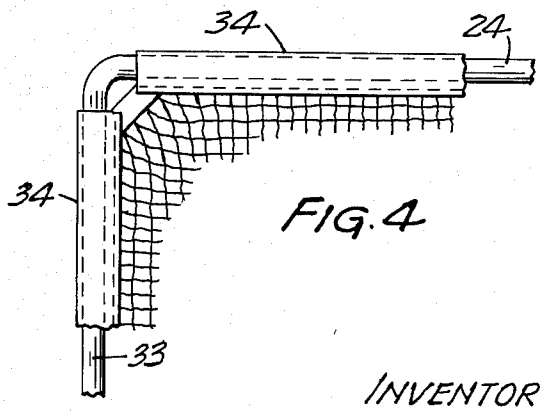


FIG. 4

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3,227,449
Patented Jan. 4, 1966

3,227,449

DRAPED-WEB TARGET DEVICE

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Filed May 13, 1963, Ser. No. 279,746
8 Claims. (Cl. 273—55)

This invention relates to a device useful as a practice target or inanimate receiver for projectiles of the type commonly used in various popular sports and games, particularly football.

The problem of training more than a few members of a football squad to be accurate passers is currently complicated by the fact that several running receivers are needed for each man on the squad engaging in passing practice. Generally, a quarterback passer will keep three or more receivers busy in any concentrated spell of passing practice. Thus, the development of one good passer on a squad requires the time-consuming efforts of several members of the squad; and the development of several good or excellent passers on a squad is sacrificed necessarily because of the lack of manpower to permit extensive passing practice by more than a few.

This invention provides apparatus of a specialized character which permits any member (or all members) of a squad not only to become as proficient at passing as extensive practice will allow, but also to acquire versatile techniques for handling the ball in a pass or "pitch out" of any type. At the same time, use of my apparatus avoids tying up several other members of the squad with the member engaged in passing practice. Thus, by following the teachings herein, members of a squad may devote greater practice time toward perfecting their performance in assigned positions, as well as toward acquiring, on an individual basis, a new and unexpected skill for passing.

In addition, this invention provides apparatus useful by football enthusiasts to improve their passing skill, as well as physical endurance and coordination, by practice both indoors and outdoors. Space in the average basement of a residence is sufficient for practical use of my device in football throwing practice.

Various target devices for projectiles used in sports and games are, of course, known. However, no prior-art target device known to me is particularly suitable for use in practicing football passing. The non-spheroidal nature of a football makes for errant directional return of it from an immovable taut web, regardless of the function of such taut webs when used as a target or part of a target assembly for spheroidal projectiles (e.g., baseballs or golf balls). In brief, target devices known to me suffer from such defects as inability to effectively collect and retain footballs thrown thereagainst, a tendency to cause errant discharge or immediate return of a football thrown thereagainst, etc.

My target device effectively collects and retains footballs thrown thereagainst. Several footballs may be thrown successively at my device without causing earlier thrown footballs to be discharged or dislodged from the collection means of the combination of elements comprising my device. Errant return or rebound of a projectile thrown at my device is essentially completely obviated.

The preferred embodiment of my target device possesses not only the foregoing advantages, but also is essentially noiseless when struck by a projectile. Its combination of properties makes it especially suitable for indoor residential use without disturbing others or causing damage to articles of furniture.

The foregoing and other advantages for my device will become apparent from the following description, wherein reference is made to a drawing, made a part hereof, in which:

FIGURE 1 is a schematic perspective view of the preferred embodiment of my device;

FIGURE 2 is a schematic side elevation of the device in FIGURE 1, illustrating graphically what occurs essentially instantaneously after a ball first hits the draped panel of my device;

FIGURE 3 is a schematic exploded side elevation of a section of the frame for the collection hopper of my device, showing the manner in which sections of the frame may be joined together; and

FIGURE 4 is a schematic top elevation of a corner section of a collection hopper for my device.

Broadly my target device, as illustrated in the drawing, comprises a flexible web **10**, means such as header portion **11** of the web from which the web is suspended as a substantially vertically oriented panel yieldable flexibly when struck by a projectile, a hopper **12** having a wide open mouth for collecting spent objects propelled against the panel, means such as flexible ropes **13**, **14**, **15** and **16** to support the hopper at the lower terminus of the panel, preferably with at least a portion of the lower terminus of the panel extending or projecting into the mouth opening of the hopper, and means such as yieldably mounted ring fasteners or flexible rope ties **17** and **18**, as well as optional flexible strands **19**, **20**, and **21**, to maintain the lower terminus of the panel in cooperating relationship with the mouth of the hopper to prevent loss of a projectile falling from the panel to the hopper. Fastening means **17** and **18** hold the lower part of each side edge **22** and **23** of the panel against significant dislodgment from cooperating relationship with the hopper when the panel is struck by a projectile. Optionally, rings mounted along the edge of the panel and slidable over a rod or similar member (e.g., a smooth surface for members **13** and **15**) mounted in generally vertical relation may be used. Even rigid fastening means may be used; but flexible or yieldable means are preferred, since some relative movement between each side edge of the panel and the hopper or other elements of the device is permissible and even in some instances possibly preferred, provided such movement is not so great as to impair cooperation between the panel and hopper. Preferably such movement is not so great as to allow the lower part of each side edge of the panel to be drawn or forced out of the hopper beyond back lip edge or frame member **24** of the hopper when struck by a projectile.

The panel is also flexibly secured against rearward movement or dislodgment at its lower extremity beyond back lip edge or frame member **24** of the hopper; and this is preferably accomplished by a plurality of spaced flexible strands **19**, **20** and **21** connecting the lower terminus of the panel at intervals to the front lip edge or frame member **25** of the hopper. Where a web not stretched easily (or where the panel is provided with a band at its lower portion between fastening means **17** and **18**) is fastened by elements such as at **17** and **18** so as to prevent the lower terminus of the panel from passing beyond frame member **24** of the hopper during use of the device, the fastening elements **19**, **20**, and **21** become unnecessary. But it is desirable, and usually even critical, particularly where stretchable or easily yieldable webs are employed, to use at least some means such as, for example, one or more flexible strands or ropes **19**, **20**, and

21 to prevent the lower edge terminus of the panel (even if it may terminate slightly above the level of the hopper mouth) from passing sufficiently beyond the back frame member 24 of the hopper to allow a projectile thrown at the device to fall outside the hopper by passing between the lower edge of the displaced panel and back frame member 24. Of course, strands 19, 20 and 21 are spaced sufficiently wide apart to allow the projectile employed for practice purposes to pass therebetween during its fall from the draped panel to the collection hopper, but are sufficiently close together to prevent intermediate portions of the lower terminus of the panel from stretching or moving (when a projectile strikes in said intermediate portions) beyond the back frame member 24.

Another feature of the preferred embodiment of my invention is that of the suspension or mounting means for the collection hopper 12. Preferably this hopper will be suspended as illustrated in the drawing. Of course, means may be employed for mounting the collection hopper in a relatively immovable rigid position at the lower terminus of panel 10. Such is not preferred, however, since it occasions some interference with allowable movement for the panel, and increases the bulk for the total apparatus since extra mounting bars or legs usually would be necessary.

A particularly significant discovery utilized to advantage in the preferred embodiment of my device is that of the ability of a draped panel (suitably one draped at a gathered width between about 50% and 90% or even 95% of its ungathered width), suspended to as to be free swing to and fro, to act as a dampening panel to absorb the energy of impact of a projectile striking thereagainst even when the projectile strikes that panel at extremely high velocity. Thus, for the preferred embodiment of my device, the panel 10 is draped in a manner such as illustrated in the drawing. Projectiles thrown or batted or hit against such a panel with as much force as one can muster will cause the panel to extend (or be displaced) out of its plane of draping (see FIGURE 2); but even under such circumstances the result surprisingly is that of ultimately absorbing the force of impact and causing the projectile striking the panel to essentially cling to it during easy and non-violent fall of that projectile downwardly to the collection hopper. In fact, the projectile clings during its downward fall almost as if some magnetic force existed between the panel and projectile. For maximum utilization of this phenomenon, it becomes critical not only to employ a draped panel free to yield flexibly out of its plane of suspension when struck by a projectile, but to employ one which is allowed to swing to and fro.

I also find it to be particularly important, and even critical for maximum reliability of operation of my device, to suspend the collection means 12 (the recess or pocket of which is preferably formed of flexible material) in a manner such that it also may move in a to and fro arc similar to the to and fro arc of movement traversable by the draped panel. In other words, in view of the connections (such as a fastening means 17 and 18 and strands 19, 20, and 21) between the hopper and draped panel, the preferred mounting for the hopper is such as to not interfere substantially with maximum to and fro movement for the draped panel.

Of course, striking the draped panel of the preferred embodiment of my device with a projectile will usually not cause a smooth to and fro movement of the draped panel and hopper, even when the hopper and panel are suspended as illustrated in the drawing to permit free to and fro swinging movement. Usually the draped panel will be distended rearwardly at the point of impact of a projectile thereagainst. The beginning of such rearward distention is illustrated graphically in FIGURE 2, which shows the approximate characteristics of the draped panel of my device at the fraction of a second after being initially struck by a projectile. Further rearward travel of the draped panel occurs until the momentum of the projectile is dampened by the panel. Such rearward distention of the draped panel, which occurs rapidly in a jerking fashion as a projectile strikes it, will in turn jerk the suspended hopper along with it a short distance by virtue of the forces transmitted to the hopper through the panel either toward the means for fastening the draped panel at its edges to the sides of the suspended hopper, or toward the means for fastening the bottom of the draped panel to the front lip edge 25 of the hopper, or both. During these jerking movements the flexibleness of the hopper pocket itself aids in preventing discharge or ejection of projectiles previously collected in it. Thus, even though a smooth arc of movement may not frequently be encountered in practical use of my device in passing practice, the general principles upon which most reliable operation depends require the preferred arrangement illustrated in the drawing.

As aforenoted, draped panel 10 is suspended from a header portion 11, which suitably is formed of edging material of sufficient strength to support the weight of the draped panel without tearing in practical use of the device. Canvas is an excellent material and ideal from the standpoint of sewing, since the gathers for the web to cause draping may be sewed into the canvas header. However, a metal strip or rod may be used (e.g., the cross bar of goal posts) and the web draped from it by clips. Indeed any suitable rigid, semi-rigid or flexible material to which the web may be affixed for draping may be used to form the header 11. Even the material of the web iself may be used to form the header. Some means for fastening (e.g., by tying, hooking, etc.) the header to an upper structure (e.g., the cross bar of goal posts on a football field, or the plate above a garage door, or beams in the ceiling of a basement, or beneath the backboard of a basket in a gymnasium, etc.) is preferably provided; and the means chosen for illustration in the drawing consists of eyelets 26, 27, and 28 equipped with rings 29, 30, and 31.

For convenient portability of my device with minimum dismantling, the flexible means such as ropes or chains 13, 14, 15 and 16 for the preferred suspension of the hopper 12 are also mounted to header 11 or to means forming a part of the device and used to suspend it for practice purposes, such as for example rings 29 and 31.

The hopper collection means 12 for my device is most ideally formed by fastening a flexible material to hopper frame members providing for an open mouth. Frame members defining the mouth are front member 25, rear member 24, and the end members 32 and 33. As illustrated in FIGURES 3 and 4, the frame members or elements may, and preferably are, formed of tubes or rods, suitably of metal or structural plastic or a semi-rigid material. If desired, the frame element 25 (or optionally others) may be of the same material as the hopper pocket, and reliance placed upon the other frame elements to form the hopper pocket as illustrated in the drawing. The frame elements are preferably fastened in a dismantleable manner (see FIGURE 3) near the corners of the frame as well as long the length thereof. Of course, the frame members may be united into an integral permanent unit if dismantling of the device to maximum extent is not a major consideration. Or the members may be hinged to permit folding. Flexible material for the pocket of the collector is fastened to the frame members (suitably by tying but preferably by sleeve members 34 of canvas or other flexible material slidable over the tubular frame members) without stretching the material of the pocket tautly between the elements chosen for the frame. The flexible material should sag (or be shaped) between the frame elements so that a hopper recess or pocket is formed having a depth at its greatest sag of at least about 3 inches and preferably at least about 6 inches or even one foot. Deeper recesses are useful, but recesses in excess of about 3 or 4 feet in depth are unnecessary for most practical applications for the device.

The width of the hopper mouth, particularly from the front member **25** back to the vertical plane occupied by the draper panel as it hangs into the mouth of the hopper, should be at least great enough to accommodate and allow the projectile employed for practice purposes to pass therethrough. Where very small projectiles are employed, a width as narrow as six inches (or an inch or so less) may be suitable, but preferably at least in the preferred embodiment of the invention used for football practice, this width will be at least one foot in distance and even two feet. It need not exceed and preferably will not exceed about 3 or possibly 4 feet. The over-all width for the mouth opening between the front lip edge member **25** and the back member **24** of the hopper will at least equal the width aforediscussed. Generally this width will be, especially where the device is used for football practice, at least about one foot or even two feet up to possibly about 4 or 5 feet; but the width of the portion of the mouth of the hopper behind the draped panel need not necessarily equal the width of the portion of the mouth of the hopper in front of the draped panel, even though my device is most easily constructed by maintaining such widths about equal. Under all circumstances, however, the width of the portion of the hopper mouth behind the draped panel must be at least great enough to accommodate any back-travel for the draped panel allowed by its lower terminus connections when the panel is displaced or otherwise distended or pushed or drawn out of the plane of its suspension as it is struck by a projectile. Where greater width is desired for the section of the hopper mouth in front of the draped panel as compared to the width (or possible essential omission thereof) of the mouth section behind the draped panel, a relatively convenient expedient to employ is that of adding rearwardly extending frame segments to the rear portion of the hopper, and suspending the hopper by means of ropes or other flexible elements affixed to the terminal portion of the rearwardly extending frame. This arrangement in turn causes a relative shift of the collection hopper itself in a forwardly direction, placing the major portion of the mouth opening in front of the draped panel. Other means may be employed to accomplish a like result.

Generally the length of the hopper between hopper frame end members **32** and **33** should be sufficient to accommodate the full width (i.e., horizontal direction) of the draped panel without constriction of the same, although the hopper length (between end frame members **32** and **33**) may vary up to 20% or so more or less than the width of the draped panel in its gathered and draped condition (i.e., vary up to 20% or twice that amount more or less than the length of header **11** for the draped panel). Where a hopper length in excess of the header length is employed, the means **17** and **18** for fastening or binding the side edges of the draped panel nearest end members **32** and **33** of the hopper may be extended so as not to pull or stretch the lower terminus of the draped panel, or if desired, said fastening means may be made relatively short so as to pull the lower terminus of the draped panel somewhat toward end members **32** and **33** of the hopper. A slight pulling of this type is in fact preferred. However, where the lower terminus of the panel is greatly extended to an ungathered condition, its function as a dampening panel for projectiles striking it may be somewhat reduced near the portion of the panel so extended. Thus maximum extensions of the lower portion of the draped panel are preferably avoided; but some extension of the lower terminus to reduce lower-terminus gathering (e.g., an extension up to about 90% or 95% of the width of the lower terminus in ungathered condition) is quite suitable. Conversely, some constriction of the lower terminus of the draped panel, as by placing said lower terminus in a hopper having a length between end members **32** and **33** equaling only about 80% of the length of header **11**, may be accomplished, if desired. However, constriction of the lower terminus of the panel tends to create so much added web material (unless the lower portion of the panel is made smaller or bound to a strip or band between fastening means **17** and **18**—expedients which are not preferred) for extension behind back hopper member **24** that the use of strands such as **19, 20** and **21** usually becomes vital in order to prevent loss of projectiles behind back hopper frame member **24** during use of the device.

A specific form of my apparatus which has been found to give excellent results will now be described. The draped panel was formed using a substantially-rectangular web about 81 inches in height (exclusive of the header portion **11**) and about 8 feet wide in ungathered condition. The web was cotton netting with mesh openings about one inch square. It was draped in a gathered condition such that the draped panel width was about 5 feet instead of 8 feet; and in such gathered condition it was sewed to a header strip of canvas. The hopper frame was formed using ½ inch steel tubing for the frame elements **24, 25, 32** and **33**. Its width was two feet and its length about 5 feet. A web of the same material as employed for the draped panel was affixed about the hopper frame elements so that the web sagged to a depth of approximately 10 inches at its greatest point of sagging near the center of the hopper. Canvas sleeves were sewed to the hopper pocket webbing and slipped over the hopper frame members in assembling the hopper. The hopper was then suspended as illustrated in the drawing by ropes or cords (about $\frac{3}{16}$ inch diameter) such that the lower approximately 5 inches of the draped panel of web material fell within the mouth of the hopper. Like rope was used to tie the side edges of the draped panel to hopper frame end members **32** and **33** as well as to tie the lower terminus of the draped panel at three intermediate points as illustrated in the drawing to the front lip member **25** of the hopper. Repeated use of this device in actual tests involving throwing a football as violently as possible at it, proved that it failed to dislodge earlier thrown footballs from the collection hopper and that it possesses the necessary simplicity as well as utility for practical use as a football passing practice instrument.

Instead of employing netting for the draped panel of my device, one may employ canvas or cloth materials of the ordinary type which might be characterized as "tightly woven" or non-mesh in character. Even plastic sheets or perforated sheets of various flexible materials may be employed as desired. However, by far the most preferred material for the draped panel, as determined by a series of tests, is netting (suitably of synethic materials such as nylon) having openings of at least about $\frac{1}{32}$ square inch in area up to about two square inches in area. Openings as large as about 3 square inches or possibly 4 square inches in area may be employed where relatively large projectiles such as footballs are to be thrown against the draped panel; but the greatest versatility of use for the device, consistent with silent operation as is desired, arises when webbing of the netting-type is employed and the openings in the netting are within the range of approximately $\frac{1}{32}$ or possibly $\frac{1}{8}$ square inch up to approximately 2 square inches in area. A similar variety of materials, or optionally non-drapeable materials, may be used to form the hopper pocket of my device.

A preferred orientation for the mesh-openings of netting employed for the panel, while not illustrated in the drawing, is that of diamond orientation (i.e., where the mesh-openings are oriented to give a vertical diamond appearance). This orientation provides improved yieldability to the panel consistent with high strength and little, if any, strong resiliency, as is preferred. Besides providing for silent operation of my device, netting or perforated sheeting also is advantageous from the standpoint of offering little wind resistance.

If desired, the pocket or recess of the collection hopper **12** may be provided with an opening to allow collected projectiles in it to drop out of it onto a conveyor

or other means so arranged as to carry projectiles back to the location of a person practicing throwing or practicing other sport activity involving propelling a projectile through the air toward my target device. Other embellishments or additions to my device may also be employed.

While particularly described with reference to football passing practice, it will be appreciated that the device of my invention also is useful for baseball pitching practice, golf driving practice, and in other sport activities.

If desired, a limited portion of the draped panel of my device may be marked with a target ring, or a rectangle for a baseball strike zone, etc. Of major significance, however, is the fact that the draped panel of my device acts as a dampening panel substantially throughout its length and breadth; thus errors of aim within the limits of the dampening panels are, for the most part, not accompanied by erratic re-bound.

The teaching hereof is to be interpreted in its broadest aspect consistent with the spirit of this disclosure and the essence of the definitions set forth in the claims appended hereto.

That which is claimed is:

1. A target device for dampening the movement of projectiles striking the same and for collection of projectiles striking the same, said device comprising a flexible web, means for suspending said web as a substantially vertically draped panel yieldable flexibly when struck by a projectile and free to swing to and fro, a hopper having an open mouth for collecting spent objects propelled against said panel, means to support said hopper at the lower terminus of said panel such that at least a portion of said lower terminus extends into the open mouth of said hopper, means suspending said hopper so as to be free to swing in substantially the same arc as formed by to and fro swinging movement of said draped panel, and means to maintain the lower terminus of said panel in cooperating relationship to said hopper so as to prevent a spent projectile in said device from escaping from said device between the lower terminus of said panel and the open mouth of said hopper as said projectile falls from said panel to said hopper.

2. A target device for dampening the movement of projectiles striking the same and for collection of projectiles striking the same, said device comprising a flexible web, means for suspending said web as a substantially vertically draped panel yieldable flexibly when struck by a projectile and free to swing to and fro, a hopper having frame elements providing an open mouth for collecting spent objects propelled against said panel, means to support said hopper at the lower terminus of said panel, means suspending said hopper so as to be free to swing in substantially the same arc as formed by to and fro swinging movement of said panel, and fastening means to maintain the lower terminus of said panel in cooperating relationship to said hopper so as to prevent a spent projectile in said device from escaping from said device between the lower terminus of said panel and the open mouth of said hopper as said projectile falls from said panel to said hopper, said fastening means including fastening elements connecting said panel to frame elements of said hopper.

3. A target device for dampening the movement of projectiles striking the same and for collection of projectiles striking the same, said device comprising a flexible web, means for suspending said web as a substantially vertically draped panel yieldable flexibly when struck by a projectile and free to swing to and fro, a hopper having frame elements providing an open mouth for collecting spent objects propelled against said panel, means to support said hopper at the lower terminus of said panel with the lower terminus of said panel extending into said hopper mouth and draped therewithin, and fastening means to maintain the lower terminus of said panel in cooperating relationship to said hopper so as to prevent a spent projectile in said device from escaping from said device between the lower terminus of said panel and the open mouth of said hopper as said projectile falls from said panel to said hopper, said fastening means including flexible strands connecting the lower terminus of said panel at intervals to the portion of the frame elements of said hopper located in front of the terminus of said panel, the intervals of spacing between said flexible strands being such as to permit said projectiles to pass therebetween.

4. A target device comprising a flexible web, means for suspending said web as a substantially vertically draped panel free to swing to and fro and flexibly yieldable out of its plane of suspension when struck by a projectile, a hopper having an open mouth, at least six inches in width, for collecting spent objects propelled against said panel, means for mounting said hopper at the lower terminus of said panel with the lower terminus of said panel at least extending into the mouth of said hopper, means mounting said hopper so as to be free to swing in substantially the same arc as formed by to and fro swinging movement of said panel, and means to prevent a projectile striking said panel from dislodging the lower terminus of said panel out of the mouth of said hopper sufficiently to permit escape of said projectile between the lower terminus of said panel and ssid hopper mouth as said projectile falls from said panel to said hopper.

5. A target device comprising a flexible web, means for suspending said web as a substantially vertically draped panel free to swing to and fro and flexibly yieldable out of its plane of suspension when struck by a projectile, a hopper having an open mouth, at least six inches in width, for collecting spent objects propelled against said panel, means to suspend said hopper at the lower terminus of said panel with the lower terminus of said panel at least extending into the mouth of said hopper, said hopper being suspended so as to be free to swing in substantially the same arc as formed by to and fro swinging movement of said panel, and spaced fastening means between the lower terminus of said panel and said hopper mouth to prevent a projectile striking said panel from dislodging the lower terminus of said panel out of the mouth of said hopper sufficiently to permit escape of said projectile between the lower terminus of said panel and said hopper mouth as said projectile falls from said panel to said hopper.

6. A target device comprising a flexible web, means for suspending said web as a substantially vertically draped panel free to swing to and fro and free to yield out of its plane of suspension when struck by a projectile, a hopper having frame elements providing a wide open mouth for collecting spent objects propelled against said panel, the width of said hopper mouth being at least in excess of six inches and the length of said hopper being no greater than 40% different from the draped width of said panel, means for suspending said hopper at the lower terminus of said panel with said lower terminus extending into the open mouth of said hopper, said hopper being suspended so as to be free to swing in substantially the same arc as formed by to and fro swinging movement of said panel, and fastening means to maintain the lower terminus of said panel in cooperating relationship to said hopper so as to prevent a spent projectile in said device from escaping from said device between the lower terminus of said panel and the open mouth of said hopper as said projectile falls from said panel to said hopper, said fastening means including flexible strands connecting the lower terminus of said panel at intervals to the portion of the frame elements of said hopper located in front of the terminus of said panel.

7. A target device comprising a flexible web of open-mesh netting material, means for suspending said web as a vertically drapped panel free to swing to and fro and free to yield out of its plane of suspension when struck by a projectile, a hopper having a wide open mouth for collecting spent objects propelled against said panel, the width of said hopper mouth being at least in excess of one

foot and the length of said hopper mouth being no greater than 40% different from the draped width of said panel, means for suspending said hopper at the lower terminus of said panel with said lower terminus extending within the open mouth of said suspended hopper, said hopper being suspended so as to be free to swing in substantially the same arc as formed by to and fro swinging movement of said panel, and means for fastening the lower portion of said draped panel to the portion of said hopper in front of said panel, the relationship between the width of the portion of said hopper mouth located behind said draped panel and the relative yieldability between the lower portion of said draped panel and said hopper when said panel is struck by a projectile being such that said lower portion of said panel will not be displaced sufficiently beyond the rear part of the hopper mouth to permit escape of said projectile between the displaced lower portion of said panel and said rear part of the hopper

mouth as said projectile falls from said panel to said hopper.

8. The target device of claim **7** having the web of open-mesh netting material oriented to give a vertical diamond appearance in the draped panel.

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