

BEST TARGETS

BEST Targets Shooting Team After Action Report (AAR)

Event: 2022 Mammoth Sniper Challenge
Date: January 7-9, 2022
Location: US Army Base Fort Gordon, Augusta, Georgia
Websites: <https://www.g3dynamics.com/>

Shooter: Scott Whitehead
Rifle: Mausingfield Action, Hawk Hill Barrel, KRG X-Ray Chassis in 6mm GT by Joel Pendergraft
Ammo: 6mm GT Handloads. 115gr DTACs, 35.3gr H4350, CCI primers, Lot R2a
Gear: Vortex Razor AMG 6-24x scope, Vortex Precision Rings, Kahntrol Solutions brake, Ckye-Pod bipod, Vortex Fury 5000 Laser Rangefinding Binoculars, Vortex Radian Tripod, Cole-Tac rear-bag CZ75 Phantom by Cajun Gunworks, Vortex Venom red-dot, Safariland holster, CCI Blazer 9mm ammo Sierra Designs Pack, REI Magma 15 Sleeping bag, Z-Lite Sleeping Pad, Custom gear by Sunrise tactical, Clothes by Exoficio, Wild Things, Patagonia, and Arc'Teryx. Altra Lone-Peak 4 shoes. RS3 rifle cover.

Shooter: Joe Burdick
Rifle: Barnes Precision Machine AR15, Krieger Barrel, TT Diamond Trigger, Luth AR MB4 Buttstock
Ammo: .223 Handloads. Sierra 77gr Match Kings, 23.6gr IMR8208xbr, CCI BR4 primers, LC brass
Gear: Vortex Razor AMG 6-24x scope, Seekins MXM Scope Mount, Kahntrol Solutions brake, Ckye-Pod bipod Vortex Fury 5000 Laser Rangefinding Binoculars, Cole-Tac rear shooting bag Sig-Sauer P320 X5 handgun, Vortex Venom red-dot, Comp-Tac holster, CCI Blazer 9mm ammo Sierra Designs Pack, REI Magma 15 Sleeping bag, NEMO Tensor Sleeping pad, Clothes by Exoficio, Wild Things, Patagonia, and Arc'Teryx. Altra Lone-Peak 4 shoes. RS3 rifle cover.

Event & Facility Notes

The Grunt Style Vortex Optics Mammoth Sniper Challenge has over a decade of history as a match that intimidates competitors and demands grit and focus. 2022 was no different, with match director Chris Andrews from BEST Targets combining his skills with Tim Jensen at Grunt Style, match sponsor Vortex Optics, a group of amazing match staff and the team at Fort Gordon to run a near flawless event. Thank you to the Fort Gordon staff and the Fort Gordon MWR team for hosting us at this amazing facility.

Event Format

The Mammoth Sniper Challenge continues to define the team ruck match segment of the long-range shooting world. High attrition rates make it an accomplishment just to finish the match. In 2021 we won the Regular division, which included all the same shooting and physical challenges, including all the same rucks, but did not require the camping element. For 2022, the Regular division was eliminated, which meant that all 104 registered teams were in the same division, under the same rules. 2-man teams compete with a primary shooter (caliber open) and a secondary shooter (caliber .223 or .308) to compete 30+ miles of timed rucks and 11 shooting stages. The shooting stages are where points are earned, but the rucks, with their 16 min per mile pace, are what determines what teams finish the match, and sometimes even the high scoring teams fail to finish a ruck, ending their chances at a good finish.

Background

For Joe Burdick and Scott Whitehead, The Mammoth Sniper Challenge is the Super Bowl – the event that makes every other rifle match during the year feel like practice. For Scott, this is his 9th consecutive Mammoth Sniper Challenge – the longest continuous running competitor. Joe is not far behind with 6 runs at this event. This is a match that many people consider as a bucket list item to even attend and many never have the desire to return. But for Joe and Scott the drive to



conquer this match has become an addiction. We have sat on every step of the podium in the past, and we have gotten DNFs which sent us home early. But the drive to return continues.

In preparation for the competition this year, we spent a lot of time researching gear and making sure we were making good decisions about the functionality and weight of everything we carried. Not knowing the weather several months out makes it hard to plan the details, but as the match approaches, gear is narrowed down and hard decisions are made. Trade-offs between weight and things like shooting stability, round count or sleeping comfort are decisions which you have to live with for 3 days. Scott stepped off at 57# total (47# pack weight) and Joe stepped off at 56# (49# pack weight).

2022 would be different in another way. We were each a year older – nearly 97 years of combined age. But in March of 2021, Joe had endured an ATV accident which had nearly taken his life. It cracked every rib in ribcage (some more than once) and left him several other broken bones and internal injuries. The recovery period for this was expected to be measured in years, but Joe refused to give up and combined his training and recovery efforts. Scott also had a challenge – although a much smaller one. Scott had knee surgery just 7 weeks before the match, and then a complicating infection delayed his recovery. Both of us were happy to have the chance to compete, and were hoping that our physical challenges in 2021 would not hold us back. In fact, we were both DETERMINED not to let them hold us back.

DAY 0



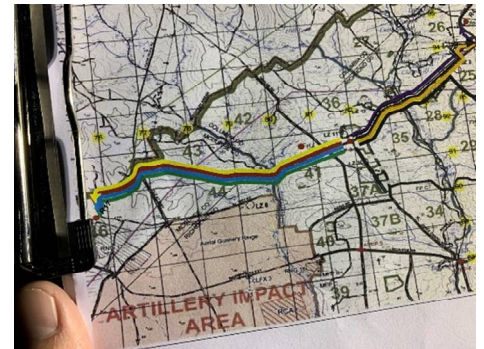
On the zero range, we both had a good chance to confirm our rifles were in good order. Only very slight zero adjustments had to be made, but guns chrono'ed just as they should have, and a few confirmation shots at 350yds found their mark. We also shot pistol out to about 100 yards to make sure we knew how they would perform. Most of the work done on zero day is just confirmation work – an opportunity at the very last minute to make sure everything is as it should be.

The highlight of zero day was getting a chance to work with Brazilian Ju-Jitsu and Mixed Martial Arts legend Royce Gracie. We spent a few hours with him talking about our gear and weapon systems, about the competition, and teaching him a little about long-range shooting. We may have been a bit

star-struck. After a trip to the hotel, a quick cheese-steak sandwich and a gear review, we hit the sack as early as possible in preparation for our 4am alarm clock.

DAY 1

The format of the rucks changed slightly for this year. In the past we had a mix of 1 to 3 mile rucks all day long. This year, we got started earlier, and had a long ruck each morning and evening – typically in the dark. Our first ruck was 4.7 miles to Range #17, and it was a brisk 40°F. We both have different strategies for handling cold-weather rucks, and managing our temperatures and sweat during the rucks, but we both enjoy dry rucks in that temperature range. As an added bonus, our feet stay cooler, which means less blisters.



Our first stage of the match was Stage #5, SHAPES. This was a rather straight-forward way to start the match, with both shooters required to shoot both pistol and rifle. There were a total of 30 pistol impacts available, and we scored 25 of them, which we were happy with, but when we went to rifle, we struggled. Rifle targets and ranges were on a card we found only after the stage started, and to make matters tricky, some of the ranges were in meters, and some in yards, so we had to do some quick conversions. We laid down looking right into the bright morning sun (see picture), and just finding the target troop-lines was very difficult. The first targets were 3" wide wind strips at over 650 yards, and we spent way too much time struggling to get a wind call on these. We went to our second set of targets, sent a few rounds, and ran out of time. In this stage, although we were happy with our pistol performance, we did not

score a single impact on the rifle targets. In hindsight, we should have skipped the super-narrow first targets, and moved on to other easier targets, but we didn't think to do that on the clock – a mental failure. (Score 25/80)

A short untimed movement led us to Stage #6, LONG REACH. This stage started with pistol targets for each shooter at 46 and 78 yards on a down-sized torso target. That's quite a long pistol shot, but we each went 5 for 6 at those distances, and again did well on the pistol portion of the stage. We then transitioned to prone and started shooting rifle. With a tricky wind we each landed 3 impacts on our targets – which were at 726yds and 801yds for the secondary shooter, and 924yds and 1115yds for the primary shooter. We definitely got our barrels warm, and probably should have shot better, but in the conditions we felt pretty good about that performance. (Score 27/76)



The third stage of the day was Stage #7, GAME HUNT. After a run of maybe 100yds or so, shooters entered the shooting blind, and had to build a position to shoot out the windows of the blind. Scott tried to enter the blind first and got caught up with his pack, but eventually we both got in. Joe started with his rifle on a tripod, and used his pack for rear support, and Scott started searching the area using his Vortex Fury 5000 range-finding binoculars. As Scott found and ranged the targets, he “talked-on” Joe to the targets, and Joe engaged secondary targets scoring 13 rifle points in the process. We also found and shot at the bonus target, but were not able to get a hit on it, leaving a very valuable 5 points on the table. We were a bit disappointed in that score, but were told we had the second highest score so far on that stage, so we felt a little better. (Score 13/60)

The final stage of the day, TOWER INTEL, did not require us to fire a shot. After a long run to the tower, and climbing a few flights of stairs, we needed to locate, identify and range 10 torso target in the woods. Each torso would be worth 1 point, only if we correctly identified the color, range, and location of it. We located and documented 9 of the targets, but only got 8 points so we must have missed one of the ranges or colors. (Score 8/10)

Our ruck back was another 4.7 miler. Like we did on most rucks, we ran a bit in the beginning to build a buffer, and then slowed down to a pace we could maintain for the remainder of the ruck. We finished most of these longer rucks at right around a 15:00min/mile pace, so we had several minutes “in the bank” when we finished.

NIGHT 1

We chose our spot, set-up our tent, and started cooking dinner. After burning somewhere around 8k-10k calories that day, we consumed a bunch of hot Mountain House and PEAK meals, and climbed into our sleeping bags. The night started at about 40°F, and we both found we were too warm in our bags, but as the night dropped to about 20° by day-break, we both appreciated the warm down fill. Neither of us got cold during the night, but Scott did not sleep much. We gave ourselves an hour to take down camp and get to the briefing site, and it was barely enough – we had to skip our warm breakfasts so we were not late.



DAY 2

To start Day 2 we rucked about 4 miles out to Range #4 for Stage #1, DEFILADE FIRST. In this stage, one shooter had to climb the tower and locate a target, while the other shooter set up at the bottom of the tower to shoot a target they could not see because it was hidden behind a dirt berm. The shooter at the top of the tower had to “talk-on” the other shooter using reference points they could both see. Rifle shots on this target were worth 5(!) points each, but we were not able to impact the defilade target.

Scott went to top of the tower, but we had trouble talking each other to the same reference point, and wasted a lot time. After four failed shots at the Defilade target, Scott came down to the bottom of the tower, and we started engaging the other targets which were available. Scott took three shots at the closest targets, scored one impact, and the timer rang. Once we again we started the day with a poor performance, and had to spend the day making up for it. (Score 1/40)

After a short timed ruck, we arrived at Stage #2, HAND TOOL. We were told that we would have to start the stage with a simple operation from a hand tool found in a white bucket. Then we would advance on the pistol targets with all gear and engage them in a specific order with 12 impacts per shooter. Once that was done, we were to advance further with all our gear to the rifle position and engage a hostage target with 10 impacts each, alternating between shooters.

After we moved around the staging building to the start position, we were told to sit down, and our ankles were zip tied together. Sure enough, about 10 yards away was the white bucket – and all became clear. At the buzzer Scott dropped

his pack and struggled against the ankle cuffs to get up and hop to the bucket to retrieve the cutters. We freed ourselves, and moved to the pistol shooting position. We quickly cleared the pistol targets, and moved to the rifle position, where we also scored all our impacts before the buzzer. Although clearly a lot of teams had probably cleaned this stage, we were happy to have a successful stage to hang our hat on. (Score 44/44)



Another short ruck and we were briefed on Stage #3, PLATE CARRIER. This stage started with a run to a pistol shooting position, where each shooter shot 3 rounds at each of 3 targets in a specific sequence. Hit or miss on these shots, you moved to two “piles” of stuff with which to build a shooting position for the two shooters. Shooters build a position from the debris in the pile, and take turns engaging targets downrange.

We once again did well on the pistol targets, and moved to the rifle positions where Joe optimized his pile of truck tires, and Scott rotated the shipping crate to build a high modified prone position thanks to his Ckye-pod. We alternated through the impacts on the first two targets, and then two things happened. First, Scott could not find his third and fourth target, which were supposed to be round gongs. In an effort to find them, he went from kneeling to standing to see more clearly over the brush, and the second notable occurrence happened – the RO called a CEASE FIRE!. We were both surprised to hear the call, but quickly looked to the RO's for further instructions. After making our guns safe, we were told that by standing up Scott may have “abandoned” his rifle, but after a discussion with the assistant match director, we quickly cleared up the mis-understanding and got back to shooting. Despite not seeing the gong over the shoulder of the

torso, we guessed it might have been there, in a large dark shadow, and sent a round. HIT! With that information, Scott was able to send two more shots, “clearing” this target, Joe cleared his next target, and Scott was able to clear the final target. Other than 4 dropped pistol points, we had “cleaned” the stage! It was a little rocky how we went about it, but we were very happy with the performance. (Score 62/66)

Stage #4, BARBED WIRE, AGAIN was a repeat of a stage from two years ago. Shooters had to work their way under barbed wire strung across a concrete stairway to make it to their shooting positions. One shooter had to engage pistol targets before joining the other shooter in engaging rifle targets.

After watching shooters do this many different ways over the years, we quickly worked our way up the stairs on our hips, with our rifles in our hands, and our packs on our backs. Scott moved to the pistol area to engage pistol targets, and Joe ran to the raised tower where we would be shooting from. Upon arriving, we realized one curve ball had been thrown at us – an approximately 18” tall wood barrier had been set up in front of us, and we had to shoot over it. Scott set up his Ckye-Pod on the highest setting to shoot over the obstacles, and Joe laid his rifle on the barricade using his pack for repair support, and got to work behind his rifle. Like many of the stages where both primary and secondary shooter could shoot freely, we felt the secondary points would be easier / quicker in a limited span of time, and we worked through 4 targets, picking up 7 rifle points. (Score 16/57)



NIGHT 2

We finished the 4-mile ruck back to the campsite and started setting up for the night. It was supposed to be a bit warmer – with a low in the 30s, but we set-up everything the same. We had a hot dinner and headed to bed early. Our bags and pads were almost too warm – but it's a lot easier to manage being a little too warm than being too cold. Scott still didn't get much sleep. Tim Jensen and the Grunt Style crew arrived at about 1:30am to make sure everyone was awake with some loud music, supplemented by the sounds of crying babies and his vocal stylings over a PA system. At this point in the match, we found out we were in 5th place, with the entire top-10 covered by less than 30 points. It was VERY tight, and we had the opportunity to improve our position, or fall depending on how we did on the final day.

DAY 3

On the third day of the match, all remaining teams move and shoot together. By this point, we were down to 54 teams. We made a 3.2-mile ruck down to our first stage of the day, Stage #9, ADD AND SUBTRACT.

This should have been a simple stage. Lay down prone and shoot at some rather distant targets. Last year at this time, we pulled our strongest stage of the match to move into 1st place in class, but this year that was not to be. We lost a bunch of time at the beginning after identifying two targets which fit the stage instructions (both had red posts) but once we got shooting, we fought the wind hard, watched rounds go off one side and then the other, and we came away with zero impacts at the buzzer. The RO on glass reported that many of our shots were barely skimming off one side of the plate or the other. It was gut-wrenching way to lose positions in the standings, but mother nature had defeated us at that stage. (Score 0/40)



With our tail between our legs, we moved to Stage #10, SECONDARY SHOOTER, PRIMARY RIFLE. In this stage, Scott would shoot Joe's pistol, and Joe would engage rifle targets with Scott's rifle. Shooters were not allowed to handle or touch each other's guns before the stage. We discussed a few details, and went to work. Scott went 9 for 10 with Joe's pistol at a small torso at 27 yards, and Joe went 10-for-10 with Scott's rifle on a 3x15 rectangle at 328 yards. This was a great stage for us, but not enough to make up for our performance first thing in the morning. (Score 29/30)

After Stage #10, all the remaining teams got a little breather to get ready for the final ruck. After consuming some gel packs for energy, checking our socks and shoes, and inspecting each other's packs, we moved to the start line with 53 other teams. In front of us was a 7-mile timed ruck which included the steepest hills on the Fort Gordon property, followed by some time in the soft sand of the tank trails. We fought our way up and down the hills, and through the sand traps, and with a nice 6 minute padding, we hit the asphalt which indicates the last half-mile to the finish line. We agreed to cross the line in a jog.... And then...

Joe: "I'll beat you to the line!"

Scott: "The fuck you will!"



We both crossed the line in a dead sprint, laughing the whole way. It was a great way to finish. Even though one stage still was in front of us, the mental victory of completing the last ruck is hard to explain. It's a huge weight off your shoulders.

After the adrenaline dump of the completed rucks, the mood changes. Everyone is suddenly relaxed – and you almost need to remind yourself you still have one stage to go. Stage #11, PRIMARY SHOOTER, SECONDARY RIFLE, was the opposite of Stage 10, except the target was farther away and the shooting position was a lot less stable. Joe shot Scott's pistol very well (9-for-10), but the Primary had to shoot off a vertical post – a notoriously hard position – and Scott only impacted with 2 of his 10 shots, which was about average for the top teams. (Score 13/30)



Results, Lessons Learned and Things Done Well

Sunday morning's poor performance had dropped us two spots to 7th place. While this was disappointing overall, our biggest victory was just finishing the match – something a tremendous number of competitors could not say. Our physical recovery and training time had gotten us ready, and our knowledge of the event, hard work in planning, and relentless search for less weight had kept us in the game.

I consider our preparation the biggest "Things Done Right". We put in a tremendous amount of effort into our physical preparation and planning, and it paid off. Our other "Things Done Right":

- Both rifles were well developed, had good data, and good ammunition.
- Both pistols were reliable and accurate, and our pistol shooting was mostly excellent.
- We had great optics. Our Vortex Razor riflescopes & Fury 5000 LRF Binoculars helped us at every stage of the game.
- Our planning was thorough and complete. We had a good tent, good sleeping gear.
- Our use of timers was better. We identified this as a major issue last year, and fixed it.
- We used our gear to great effect. Our bags, packs, tripods, and Ckye-pods all got used to create stability. They are all useful tools!

A bit more difficult to isolate, and definitely more difficult to talk about, is the "Things Gone Wrong". But I prefer to think of these as opportunities to get better. So here are our "Things to work on for next year":

- Keep the shooting in mind during preparation. We spent a lot of time rucking, planning, and packing. A large part of that was because we were both recovering from injuries. But we did that sometimes at the expense of just spending time shooting together.
- Our communications felt weak compared to previous years. From trouble communicating the Defilade target TRP, to issues resolving the multiple red-post targets on Stage #10, we need to communicate better, listen better, and trust more. I think we took a step backward in that regard this year.
- We're not 25 years old anymore – take the time to stretch and warm-up before each ruck, especially first thing in the morning. Keep training.

Summary

Our finishing position in 2022 was not what we had hoped for, but it was a victory nonetheless. Every time we compete at Mammoth, it feels like a victory.



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