

# BEST TARGETS

## **BEST Targets Shooting Team After Action Report (AAR)**

**Event:** 2021 Mammoth Sniper Challenge  
**Date:** January 8-10, 2021  
**Location:** US Army Base Fort Gordon, Augusta, Georgia  
**Websites:** <https://www.g3dynamics.com/>

**Shooter:** Scott Whitehead  
**Rifle:** Mausingfield Action, Hawk Hill Barrel, KRG Whiskey-3 Chassis in 6.5 Creedmoor by Accurate Ordnance  
**Ammo:** 6.5 Creedmoor Handloads. Berger 140 Hybrids, 43.5gr H4350, Wolf LR-M primers, Lot R11h  
**Gear:** Vortex Razor AMG 6-24x scope, Vortex Precision Rings, Kahntrol Solutions brake, Ckye-Pod bipod, Vortex Fury 5000 Rangefinder, Vortex Radian Tripod, Cole-Tac & Reasor Precision bags  
CZ P10F handgun, Vortex Venom red-dot, Safariland holster w/ QLS, Federal Syntech 9mm 150gr ammo  
Eberlestock LoDrag pack, Rock Solid Shooting Solutions (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 Razor 4000 Laser Range Finder, Cole-Tac & Reasor Precision shooting bags  
Sig-Sauer P320 X5 handgun, Vortex Venom red-dot, Comp-Tac holster, 9mm 147gr Handloads  
Sierra Designs pack, Rock Solid Shooting Solutions (RS3) rifle cover.

### **Event & Facility Notes**

The Mammoth Sniper Challenge has over a decade of history as a match that intimidates competitors and demands grit and focus. The last three years have been no different, with match director Chris Andrews from BEST Targets combining his skills with match owner 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 - especially with the COVID complications that were introduced in 2021.



### **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. Shooters are divided into two divisions – Tough Man and Regular. In both classes 2-man teams compete with a primary shooter (caliber open) and a secondary shooter (caliber .223 or .308). Teams in both classes shoot the same stages with the same targets. Before and between stages, all competitors in both classes must tackle some demanding rucks – with tight time limits while carrying all their gear. It's these rucks which define Mammoth – because failing a ruck by even a few seconds puts you to the bottom of the score sheet no matter how many targets you hit. So, while the shooting is what earns you points, you need to finish all the rucks to even stay in the game.

What separates the two classes is the camping element. Regular teams will complete 10+ miles of timed rucks each day but are free at the end of the day to get a good dinner and stay in a hotel. Toughman teams must camp at the campsite and have no opportunity to re-supply. They need to carry everything they need to cook and camp with them the entire weekend. So typically Toughman teams will be carrying 10+lbs more each compared to the teams in the Regular class.

For 2021, Joe stepped off at 43lbs of total gear weight, and Scott started the match at 52lbs. The weather was cool but not too cold with some sporadic rain but nothing heavy.

## 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 8<sup>th</sup> consecutive Mammoth Sniper Challenge – the longest continuous running competitor. Joe is not far behind with 5 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. In the past 8 years the two have brought home multiple podium finishes, and more than one DNF, but the win has eluded them.

For 2021, we had two unique honors before the match even started. First, we were chosen to represent title sponsor VORTEX OPTICS. Second, we were one of three teams to be followed by a camera crew during the match as part of the Mammoth Sniper Challenge TV production. Doing interviews and discussing how you are preparing for the match while it's going on is both a blessing and a curse but for the most part we enjoyed it.

## DAY 1

We started Friday morning with a 2.41-mile ruck (34:20, 14:14 pace) to our first stage, RED TARGET. Each shooter had to engage a single array of three pistol targets and three rifle targets. All we knew before the stage started was that we had to engage the targets near to far, and that the nearest target was identified by red paint. After a run to the shooting position with all our gear, we found that the target arrays were both lines of targets where the first target, the red one, was partially or completely obscuring the view of the second and third targets.

Scott started with pistol and did not lean aggressively enough to get clean shots and got a miserable 2 hits out of 9 shots. Then Scott transitioned to the rifle where leaning was not an option - but the back targets had their heads just barely peaking out above the nearer targets. Scott scored 9 impacts out of 9 shots on the miniature torsos at 257, 282, and 307 yards. Joe came up next, scored 6 out of 9 pistol targets and also cleaned the rifle targets with 9 impacts. We were really happy with our rifle performance here but Scott especially was disappointed with his pistol performance.

A mid-morning ruck (1.53 miles, 21:35, 14:04 pace) to the Fort Gordon MOUT site brought us to a target identification stage – MOUT SITE INTEL. MOUT stands for Military Operations on Urban Terrain – basically a series of buildings used to simulate combat within and between buildings. Each team was given a clipboard on which to make a range card with targets called out by color and range after spotting them from the roof. Teams had 4 minutes to move to the roof via an unseen set of stairs, find the targets, make their range card and had to be in the “finish” box before the 4:00 timer sounded. If both teams and all gear did not make it to the box before the timer went off, the team would score zero points. Time management was critical.

Joe and Scott had two timers for redundancy - and somehow, even 2 was not enough with both timers failing to start properly. As we made our way up the stairs we found some barbed wire we had to crawl under and then got to the roof. The building across the “road” from us had targets in it, as well as numerous targets around it, on top of it, and behind it. The Vortex Optics Fury 5000 LRF was the perfect tool here – with it's generous Field of View (FOV), excellent glass and excellent range finder, we were able to use one tool instead of switching between one tool to find the targets and one to range them like many teams did. Without a timer working we had to “bail out” a little early to be safe, but it felt like the safe thing to do. As it turned out, we had only 20 seconds left when we timed out so it was a VERY good thing we did. Our poor timer performance almost cost us a lot of points.



We stepped off again for a very short ruck (0.89 miles, 12:14, 13:47 pace) to our third stage of the day, HIGH / LOW. When the stage started, we needed to run to the top of a set of bleachers, identify the three primary targets and three secondary targets and then move down off the bleachers and into the pits to engage those targets.



When we got to the top of the bleachers our communication fell apart a bit. We started finding each other's targets and spending too much time talking each other onto targets. Again, without a timer and someone to watch it, we spent way too long finding those targets. When Scott had found his targets, he moved down to the pits but Joe stayed on the bleachers to find his last target. Scott could not start engaging targets until Joe was down and when Joe came down, Scott got off one shot – a hit – and time ran out. While our failure to monitor time in the last stage (MOUT SITE INTEL) probably did not cost us too much, our lack of a

timer on this stage cost us severely. What we should have done is get off the bleachers even if we only found a few targets to engage, rather than waste time and scoring nearly nothing.

We left that stage with our tail between our legs a little and rucked 2.41 miles (35:05, 14:33 pace) to our final stage of the day, OVAL THROWBACK. In a throwback to a similar "Ovals" stage back in 2016, various size ovals were placed at a known distance for both shooters to engage – with the smaller targets being worth more points there was a Know-Your-Limits style challenge involved. Secondary targets were at 800 yards and primary targets were at 1000 yards. Shooters needed to identify their target on each and every shot or risk not getting the points they had earned.

Joe and Scott worked on a wind call before the stage began and on his very first shot Joe connected for one point on the largest oval. After that, Joe continued to hit the 1-pt target, but forgot to call his target on the next four shots. Normally Scott could have identified this issue but the two shooters were placed too far apart to be able to assist on things like this and we lost 4 points until Joe figured out the issue. Joe finished his shots with several more hits. Scott did very well on his first 10 shots as well scoring about 8 hits. Each shooter then got to shoot another 10 shots – with Joe doing very well on his shots. Realizing that the 2pt target was as wide as the 1pt target because of the way it was oriented, Scott engaged the 2pt target, but fought elevation issues (being low) and only connected 4 times. The logic was sound but the choice to go to the 2pt target was probably a wash.

Our last ruck of the day brought us home at a more relaxed pace (2.47 miles, 36:25, 14:46 pace) because on the last ruck of the day there is truly no incentive to push the pace at all. We went back to our room to clean up, met some fellow shooters from the Maryland State Highway Patrol for a delicious Italian dinner at Gioradano's, and repacked our gear for the next day.

## DAY 2

Although Day 1 did not start well for us, we felt good about how it ended, and we looked forward to a strong Day 2 performance. All our rucks had so far been completed without issue and very comfortably under the time hacks but our morning ruck was not routine. Some rucks are very short, and this ruck was only ¼ mile long and in the cold of the morning. To ensure a good shooting position for the first stage, Joe and Scott tried to run this ruck, but barely halfway in Scott got a massive Charlie-horse in his calf. Limping to the finish, this Charlie-horse, and the ensuing muscle soreness from it, would dominate every step of the rucks for the next two days for Scott. (0.25 miles, 2:55, 11:50 pace)

The first stage of Day 2 was NO COMMS. We elected to shoot near the end of the shooting order here, hoping to give Scott's calf a chance to settle down. This stage rules dictated absolutely no verbal communications between the two shooters so after the stage brief we set about making a plan on how we would communicate. The shooting challenge was straight-forward, but required teamwork, so we agreed on a series of hand-signals and after we did that we stopped talking to each other at all. We figured that talking was a habit and the sooner we got used to not doing it the more natural it would be during the stage. And we saw several teams score a ZERO on the stage because they had accidentally spoken without thinking – and we were not going to make that mistake. We had time before we shot, so we rehearsed and rehearsed and, when the time came to shoot the stage, it was flawless. All the hand-signals worked well, we were completely comfortable not speaking while still operating as a team and we each impacted 9 pistol and 9 rifle shots for a perfect score of 36 points.

This stage was a point of pride for us. Not only for the perfect shooting score we attained, but because this level of preparation and planning is what we aspire to achieve on every stage we shoot and, while we don't always succeed at it, for this stage we did.

At 9:30 that morning, after a great performance in NO COMMS lifted our spirits, Scott would be tested by the next ruck. Not only was this the longest ruck so far during the weekend, but his calf was still actively cramping, and even walking was difficult. As we preach to other teams – "Never leave your wingman". Rucking together we pushed through this challenge, completing it in plenty of time, and thanks to plenty of painkillers. (3.27 miles, 47:35, 14:34 pace)

Our next stage was a version of a Mammoth Sniper Challenge favorite – TALL WEEDS. On this stage, targets were set into high grass, and after shooting some straight-forward pistol shots, the team needed to build a position in any way they see fit to engage the targets downrange. Because of the tall grass, prone was out of the question, and historically this stage has always required a tripod, so we came prepared.



After making sure to take the pistol shots SLOW to score those easy points, we moved forward to the rifle position where Scott would shoot first. We were told the shooting order was Red – White – Blue – Orange so we went about finding the targets. Unfortunately, the targets were nearly completely devoid of paint at that point, and the sun was glaring. Scott's very first shot connected.... With the wrong target. Because of the light and lack of paint, the orange and red were hard to distinguish, and our poor communication did not catch the mistake. Because we had engaged the last target in the series, we were not able to "go back" and engage the previous targets, and we took a zero on three targets – which was extremely costly.

A further mistake on this stage was bringing the tripod set-up for standing shots. We thought the grass might warrant that much height, but it did not, and the extra height made the shots less stable, and slower, costing us valuable time. On the positive side, however, after missing the chance to engage the first three rifle targets, we had time left at the end and we searched for, located and impacted the bonus target for an additional 5 points! This success took a bit of the sting out of the mistakes of this stage.

The next ruck would again take the title of longest ruck so far this weekend. Scott spent a lot of time warming up and stretching, but the cramp had only started to let up. The next ruck was again a battle and our pace suffered, but we made it through. (3.97 miles, 59:38, 14:46 pace)

After the long ruck, we arrived at the appropriately named NO BARBED WIRE. Typically on this stage, there was barbed wire which shooters needed to crawl under while going up the concrete stairs to the shooting position - but not today. As the buzzer went off, Joe ran straight to the shooting position to start finding targets and Scott stopped to neutralize the mandatory pistol targets before we could start shooting rifle. After the pistol targets were engaged, Scott ran to the shooting platform where Joe had already found and ranged a few targets. We immediately started calling out ranges, working on data and getting our scorer on the same targets we were ready to engage - but our scorer did not respond when we looked for confirmation he was on target. Scott turned to see the scorer not even making an effort to be on glass and we knew something had gone severely wrong.



When a scorer is not on glass that typically means that some pre-shot requirement is not yet met and the team needs to figure out what it is – and FAST – because they won't be scoring any rifle points until they do. After mentally running down the checklist, we still did not know what it was. But a brief glimpse from the scorer back where we had come from gave us a clue – had we dropped something? Dropping a piece of gear means that you have not met the requirement of "carrying all gear throughout the stage" and, with the exception of a pistol which has to be grounded after shooting, we must have dropped something. Scott yelled to Joe to keep ranging targets and ran down the stairs to find Joe's notepad on the ground. Running back up the platform with the scorer now on glass was confirmation that the problem had been solved but critical time was forever lost. Joe engaged 3 targets and Scott had time to engage 1 with every single shot connecting for a very respectable score on this stage, but we made a costly mistake.

Luckily the long rucks were behind us for the day, and after a short hike (0.63 miles, 8:38, 13:47 pace) we arrived at the last stage we would shoot for the day – RUN N GUN. This was an individual stage each shooter had to traverse on their own, with 5 shooting positions, and 2:00 to do it. The first two positions, were pistol engagements of about 40 yards on 75% IPSC targets, the third position was a rifle stage that had to be shot with the rifle laid on it's side, the fourth position was a "free" rifle stage (any position) and the 5<sup>th</sup> stage with rifle standing off-hand.

We decided that shooting the two pistol stages, followed by the "free" rifle stage was the best approach, and we both did the same thing. We both shot pistol reasonably well but Joe did not get all 5 of his rifle shots off – just barely running out of time. We were happy with the decisions we made and our performance, but it against enforced to us that we need to work on our pistol skills.

The day ended with a short ruck – our slowest pace so far. But this was about saving our feet, nursing Scott's still very sore calf and as usual, the ruck at the end of each day brings with it no benefit to do well so just relax and enjoy it! (1.34 miles, 20:21, 15:09 pace).

That evening we got a scoring update. We were 5 points behind the very skilled team of Simpler & Page from the Maryland State Police. These guys had become good friends of ours and they were strong and consistent competitors. We had our work cut out for us.

## DAY 3

Feeling good on the morning of Day 3, we started with a medium length ruck down to the water and back – a ruck with some good inclines and lots of wet red clay making it slippery. (2.48 miles, 37:20, 15:02 pace). Our next stage, ONE HANDED, would require us to shoot prone using only one hand while the other hand held onto a small barbell - AND we were shooting at targets on tall T-posts, which means NO opportunity to see misses. We planned the best possible shooting positions – Scott on a tripod and Joe with a bipod, and we both worked on a plan to keep the low sun out of our eyes – with Joe's gear for this being a little more home-made! When the stage started, we took a few rounds to get a wind call and started alternating 5-shot strings. With both of us stable and solid, we started racking up hits and brought home 38 points – the second highest score of any team in the match.



One more “normal” ruck (2.42 miles, 35:03, 14:29 pace) to our last full stage of the match – AWKWARD 3.0. This stage started with each shooter firing 10 pistol rounds at a distant IPSC target one-handed. After that, the secondary shooter had to shoot 5 rounds at a 325yd target from a standing partner-assist position and then the primary shooter had to drop prone and fire 5 rounds at a 3” wide wind strip. We felt like we had another strong stage, scoring 24 out of 40 points and again scoring the second highest score of any team in the match - we were confident we put ourselves in the lead.



The last ruck of Mammoth is well known for being the toughest of the match, a five-miler accented by some very long grades and a long section of soft-sand which has a way to turning strong legs into rubber. Crossing the line after this ruck is a symbolic end of the match, but one stage still remains.

NEAR AND FAR 2.0 was a combination of shots at 750yds at a steel spade target, and a 100yd Accu-Shot Challenge Card for each shooter. With all the rucks and physical elements of the match complete this stage has a way of feeling relaxed and easy, but the points are very real. We were not able to connect with either of the long shots but we both put decent attempts at the playing card and put a few more points on the board.

## Results, Lessons Learned and Things Done Well

When the scoring was added up, we had more than made up our 5-point deficit and we brought home 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Regular division.

In 2019 we came to Mammoth well prepared to shoot, but we did not sufficiently prepare for the physical elements of the match. We knew better and failed a ruck, despite shooting VERY well and having one of the highest scores in the match. In 2020, we prepared very well physically, and both of us - Joe especially, absolutely destroyed the physical challenges of the match - but we got away from what we did well. We had switched shooting roles and brought two weapon systems that were not sufficiently tested and we paid for it on the score board. This year, our biggest “Thing Done Right” was that we brought together both elements, combining physical preparation with well proven rifles and lots of practice, and we brought home 1<sup>st</sup> place trophies.



Other items, from “Things Done Right” to “Things Done WRONG”:

- We had solid rifle shooting with consistency from both our rifle systems. Our Vortex scopes were flawless, our ammo was consistent and we shot our rifles well.
- Our stage planning is very good. We communicate well, trust each other and always work to help each other. Our rehearsals for NO COMMS was a good example of this.
- Great gear – especially the Vortex Fury 5000 Range-finding binoculars. These were a huge upgrade for us. What we learned is that these are so important, each shooter really needs to have their own pair. This might have really improved our performance during HIGH / LOW and MOUT SITE.
- We have enough experience that our emergency management skills are pretty good. On NO BARBED WIRE, we made a careless mistake dropping a piece of gear but we quickly managed the situation and got back on track with an absolutely minimum amount of lost valuable time.
- We worked on our pistol shooting, and it definitely helped us, but we have more room to improve here.
- We’re not 25 years old anymore – take the time to stretch and warm-up before each ruck, especially first thing in the morning.
- Locate all the targets and communicate them to each other. We know better than to skip steps like this and it cost us points (TALL WEEDS).
- Our most glaring issue was our use of timers. We had poor timers and we failed to use them effectively. At times this cost us points and at times we lucked out but this was a MAJOR issue for us.



## Summary

After a combined 13 attempts between us, we could not be more thrilled to bring home our first 1<sup>st</sup> place finish from the Mammoth Sniper Challenge. We came home exhausted, content and ready for more.



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