

BEST TARGETS

BEST Targets Shooting Team After Action Report (AAR)

Event: 2015 Mammoth Sniper Challenge, Open Division

Date: January 9-11, 2015

Location: Legion OTG, Blakely, GA

Websites: www.mammothsniperchallenge.com
www.legionotg.com

Shooter: Scott Whitehead with Chris Andrews

Gear: Custom Built 6.5 Creedmoor, KRG X-Ray chassis, Vortex Viper 6-24x50 scope, Handloaded ammo

Facility Notes

In January of 2014, I shot the Mammoth Sniper Challenge at Rockcastle Shooting Center in Kentucky, along with Chris Andrews. It was our first match, and we later understood that it was an unusually tough match to start on, but we had fun and did surprisingly well. In 2015 we decided to return to the Mammoth Sniper Challenge at LegionOTG, both as Stage Sponsors (with BEST Targets) and as shooters. LegionOTG is a fantastic training facility in southern Georgia.

Event Format

The first stage we shot was Stage 4, the Tahoe stage. Driver and passenger needed to start in the front of the SUV, with all the gear in the second row. On the start buzzer, driver and passenger had to climb to the back of the car and shoot from the rear of the SUV. For the shooter, you could get prone but the car was awkwardly tilted, and of course it was moving around as any vehicle with a suspension will do. The first targets at 345yds, 462yds, and 596 came easily with very little wind call. The fourth target also was an easy hit. I decided to skip over the fifth target, a poor decision being right next to the fourth target, and the sixth target (hard to see) to engage targets 7 and 8. Unfortunately, I struggled with the DOPE and was unable to see misses, only later finding out I was low on these targets, and was not sure why. Several things on this stage (Armboard data cards, easy magazine access) went well thanks to our pre-match prep.

The second stage (Stage 9) was the match Run-N-Gun stage – and having cleaned the equivalent stage last year, I had high expectations. The first shots were standing offhand at 300yds on a plate about 12x18. I was able to hit it after a few shots despite having a lot of off-target time in my reticles natural motion, and then moved to two very small targets at 200yds shooting off a vertical post. With nothing to rest the rifle on, you had to find a way to make the most of the support – and I did that by moving my front TAB Gear bag to the right side of the gun, and pushing it forward against the post. I neglected to change my scope settings, and sent the first three (of four allowed) shots over the top. Luckily my spotter emphasized to me that all the hits were significantly high, which caused me to check my elevation turret and notice my mistake. After fixing the mistake, I shot both targets fairly easily and sprinted to the next position. In the next position we had to again shoot the 12x18 offhand, and I again took about three tries to get it. The last two shots were taken with the bipod (and nothing else) on a bench, and the awkward position and very small targets made these 280yd targets difficult, but I was able to get them both. My position here benefitted greatly from a large bag between my right knee and elbow – greatly stabilizing my shooting position. I was able to clean a very dynamic stage, and was very happy about that.

The third stage (Stage 2) of Day 1 started with a sled pull and then had us shooting at an odd angle off a porch. From this position, we had four BEST TARGETS ovals, and one small popper bonus target to hit. I was able to hit all four ovals, three on the first shot, and then moved on to the 1050yd 8" bonus target. With misses being all but invisible, I poked at four places, but could not get a feel for where I needed to be, despite having the wind call nailed from the four previous targets. Conditions made it tough to see trace or misses, which only made it harder to hit things. My DOPE out to 875 yards had been spot on – definitely a strong stage for me.

The final stage of the first day was Stage 1, the Barbed Wire Stage. In this stage we needed to move ourselves and our gear under a low barbed wire tunnel. The tunnel, however, was not the toughest part of the stage. Once you got to the top of the hill, a range card you were handed was your first glimpse at the targets, and it was very tough to follow, out-

of-scale, and in many ways just flat wrong. Shooter / spotter communication and target spotting ability was key here, and many teams struggled throughout the entire four minute time limit. We struggled as well. After hitting the first target, we spent a long time trying to see the second target (which was not located in the same orientation as it was drawn). Eventually we decided to move on to the third target, and after shooting at it once (and missing), we again wasted time confirming if it was the right target, and time expired. Communication on this stage was critical, because the stage card and the reality of the targets were so far removed from each other. I can't say we did this stage well, but nearly every other team struggled here too. We probably need to practice, as a team, finding and getting on targets that are hard to see.

We started the second day on Stage 10. This stage was run on the 1000yd KD range, and we had to shoot 4 ovals at the base of the 1000yd berm. I had reasonable confidence in my DOPE going in, but my elevation was off, and the wind was a challenge. I was ultimately able to score some decent points here, but Brandon Green showed us all who was boss on this stage by repeatedly ringing the highest-point value target 14 times with his 20 available rounds, and likely put the entire match out of reach on this stage. This is a stage where some traditional F-Class style experience would have served us well. Furthermore, after the stage I got confused where I was shooting when I did get my hits, and lost the opportunity to learn from my misses for next time.

A short Polaris ride away sat a 2.5 ton truck that we would be shooting out of (Stage 3). But before we could shoot, we had to load logs into the back over it's 5 foot tall tailgate and climb into it. To add an additional challenge, we had to unload the logs before the timer ran out. Penalties were assessed if the logs were not unloaded in time, so the time keeping pressure was on, and our timer was a hit – being borrowed by nearly every team in the squad. I was able to hit most targets, except for the “blind” target that the spotter was supposed to walk you into. I also had a tough time spotting this stage for Chris – battling the movement on the truck, the muzzle brake's concussion, and conditions which made it hard to see trace.

Next came a pleasant surprise... there was another short-distance Run & Gun stage (Stage 7). Approaching it like a USPSA stage, complete with Steve Anderson style walk-throughs and visualizations, it required 5 shots using various barricades as support, and I was able to clean this stage easily in the 4 minutes available. Most shooters in our squad cleaned this stage as well, so it was not a stage where you could make up ground on the score cards, but it was great to keep pace with the leaders. One thing Chris and I did well here was “spotting”. Since traditional spotting is not really necessary on stages like this, the spotter becomes a coach, identifying targets, positions, stage cues, and movement that the stager required. Several shooters got penalized on this stage for shooting out of order, or for shooting the wrong target through the wrong port, and Chris and I were both able to avoid these mistakes.

After being delayed in the start of this stage (and going to shoot another stage to fill the time), we finally got to shoot Stage 5, but in a part of the day that proved the downfall of many shooters. In this stage, we had to lay prone and on a bench and shoot 10 shots from each position at four targets with a mandatory “Miss & Move” approach. The targets were small and were from 860 to 887 yards, but the tough part was the constantly changing 5 to 10 mph winds and the horrible mirage which made the targets tough to see. I was only able to score 1 hit among my 20 shots. Dope was not really the issue here – instead spotting and wind calling were again an issue. Even calling the hits was tough, as the spotters and scorers often looked at each other to decide is a shot was a hit. Neither Chris nor I were able to effectively spot misses in the conditions, but Chris got on a roll on this stage, and had a very strong stage here. Having a plan on how to “poke” at targets like this is probably a good thing to have between shooter and spotter.

On Sunday morning, we shot a challenging barricade stage, Stage 6, sponsored by our friends at Accurate Ordnance. Three targets had to be engaged from three different barricade positions (9 hits total) on a 4 minute clock. The barricades were made more challenging by being very floppy – it was impossible to load into them. In this stage, the clock was definitely an issue, with time being taken up by a short run to the barricades, and time spent getting stable in each position. I was able to hit the first 6 targets I engaged, and ran out of time while engaging the 7th target. Clearly I was taking too much time trying to be stable and smooth, but the lack of practice on barricades like these is probably more the issue.

During some downtime, we went back and shot Stage 2 again. This was a very informal shoot, where most of us concentrated on the bonus target – a very tough 8” swinger at 1050 yards. Chris and I both shot this, and rang the bonus target, but we also got some practice on glass while other more experienced spotters from the US Army Marksmanship Unit (USAMU) coached us, and that was also very beneficial experience.

The last stage of the match was a partner assisted stage, Stage 11, where only hands and feet could touch the ground, and in order to see both targets, you had to have the muzzle around shoulder height. This was a very tough stage, shooting at targets the size of an iPhone at 214yds and 261 yards, from an unstable position. In the 60 seconds we were allotted, I was only able to secure one hit.

Things Done Well

We did a lot of things right, and some things wrong in this match. Showing up with better DOPE was a massive step in the right direction, and our efforts to better understand atmospheric compensation really helped, since we were shooting in higher Density / Altitudes than either of us had ever shot in before. Also our efforts to organize ourselves and our packs worked well. We had good data on our armboards, wrote out good stage cards, and used them all day.

Like 2014, our preparation consisted of doing as much DOPE confirmation as we could. Chris and I would both be using well known weapon systems – avoiding the pitfall I had gotten caught in the year before of having to change ammo less than a month before the match. We definitely went into the match feeling better prepared, and more confident.

Things Done Poorly

Before next match we need to work on spotting, and on shooter / spotter communication. When it comes to planning, coaching, and discussing the fine points of the stage, we're pretty good. We saw several teams lose points because they did not effectively understand or execute a stage, and we did a good job of helping each other with this. But spotting for each other is still a weakness, and we need to spend more time in practice spotting for each other, and working as a team.

Results

I finished 13th in Open Division. This was an improvement from last year's 19rd place finish. I was only 10 points out of 3rd place as the field was much more competitive and the scores from 3rd to 20th were separated by 1-2 points per position.

Lessons Learned

Showing up with still better understanding of our guns and their behaviors will help as well. My DOPE past 900 yards was sketchy, and in colder weather (especially first thing in the morning), my load seems to lose velocity and hit low. I need to keep an eye on this, and maybe chrono test it. I had chosen H4350 largely because I thought it avoided this. Again, more time behind the gun taking good notes is what's called for!

Notable Names

This year Chris and I had several sponsors help us with our return to the Mammoth Sniper Challenge. The Last Stands target stands, Mechanix Wear gloves and SPEED Energy drink all contributed to our effort and we're very thankful.

John Friguglietti has been a great help with my ammo reloading and load development – thank you John.

Summary

We always enjoy this match. The physical challenges, the tough targets, and the intentional efforts to avoid clear backstops behind the targets make it a tough match to shoot, but everyone else has the same challenges. It's a great match, with great people running it, and great people shooting it. We'll definitely be back in January of 2016.

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