

# BEST TARGETS

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

**Event:** 2020 Mammoth Sniper Challenge  
**Date:** January 10-12, 2020  
**Location:** US Army Base Fort Gordon, Augusta, Georgia  
**Websites:** <https://www.g3dynamics.com/>

**Shooter:** Joe Burdick  
**Rifle:** Custom Bolt Rifle, AG Composites Stock, Kelbly's Action, Proof Carbon Fiber barrel  
**Ammo:** 7mm Practical Handloads. ADG Brass, Hodgdon H1000 powder, Hornady 180 ELD-M bullets  
**Gear:** Bushnell Scope, Kelbly's Scope Rings, Kahntrol Solutions brake, Ckye-Pod bipod  
Vortex Razor 4000 Laser Range Finder, Cole-Tac & Reasor Precision shooting bags  
Sig-Sauer P320 X5 handgun, Comp-Tac holster w/ Safariland QLS, Defender 115gr FMJ ammo  
Sierra Designs pack, Rock Solid Shooting Solutions (RS3) rifle cover.

**Shooter:** Scott Whitehead  
**Rifle:** Custom Bolt Rifle, KRG Whiskey-3 Chassis, Trued Remington action, Brux Barrel  
**Ammo:** .308 Handloads. Lapua Brass, Hodgdon Varget powder, Sierra 155 TMK bullets  
**Gear:** Vortex Razor AMG 6-24x scope, Vortex Precision Rings, Kahntrol Solutions brake, Ckye-Pod bipod,  
Vortex Fury 5000 Rangefinder, Desmond Tripod, Cole-Tac & Reasor Precision bags  
CZ P10F handgun, Vortex Venom red-dot, Safariland holster w/ QLS, Federal Syntech ammunition  
Eberlestock LoDrag pack, Rock Solid Shooting Solutions (RS3) rifle cover.

### **Event & Facility Notes**

The Mammoth Sniper Challenge is an event that has a long and colorful history, and has been run continuously for more than a decade at various facilities, including Rockcastle Shooting Center, and Arena Training Center. Last year and this year, the match has been owned by Grunt Style, Inc, sponsored by Vortex Optics, and has been run by new MD Chris Andrews (of BEST Targets) at US Army Base Fort Gordon in Augusta, Georgia. While this facility creates some complications (for instance federal background checks to get on base), the additional facilities it offers are staggering and the match has been thriving and growing this past two years. 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 has always been, and always will be, a gut-check match. With an attrition rate that approaches 50% each year, the match is intended to represent a feather in the cap of anyone brave enough to attempt it and is a true accomplishment for those who complete it.

Shooters are divided into two divisions – Tough Man and Regular. Both classes have to create a 2-man team 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 put 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.

## Background

For Joe, this was his 4<sup>th</sup> appearance at Mammoth. For Scott, this was his 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive appearance. In 2019, Joe and Scott competed together and both shot very well during that match. In fact, Joe and Scott had the second highest point total of all the competitors. This year the focus was on completing all the rucks and completing the event to the very end.

The evening before the first day we had registration and we spent some time at the zero range. Joe had gone to the range that very morning to collect data on his new-ish 7mm Practical rifle and we spent some time reviewing our data and making sure we were properly packed up for the event.

This year's Mammoth Sniper Challenge had some unseasonably warm weather in the forecast, getting down only into the mid-50s at night and the low 70s during the day. Compared to previous years where the weather hasn't hit 20°F, this was a heat wave. We adjusted our load-out accordingly with almost no cold-weather gear and some light rain gear.

## DAY 1

We started Friday morning with a 2.47-mile ruck (35:43, 14:26 pace) to our first stage, WALK IT IN. This stage had four torsos and a hidden "defilade" target and each shooter could engage all 5 targets, shooting from prone. The spotter would have to get up on a raised platform to spot the hidden target and we decided that, although those hits were worth more points, they were not worth the time until we had shot everything else. It turned out to be a good decision as we picked up 16 out of 24 possible hits on the 4 visible BEST Targets torsos. Interestingly, not a single team in the entire match connected with the defilade target. We felt pretty good with a 20-point performance as we stepped off for our 2.41-mile ruck (35:12, 14:37 pace) toward the next stage.



Our next stage was THE PITS. In this stage, each shooter had to climb down into a concrete "pit" in the ground, the two shooters were about 100 feet away. Each shooter had 10 pistol rounds to engage a few targets, and then the two shooters had to read from target cards in front of them, instructing the other shooter what target to engage, switching back and forth with each shot. There was a lot of yelling, but the stage goes smoothly if both shooters know their job and can find the rhythm of the stage. Joe and Scott both went 8 for 10 on the pistol targets and did well on rifle targets as well, struggling only on the thin rulers, and acquiring 44 points – another good stage.

A short (less than 1 mile) ruck away was Stage 5, LRF DOWN. In this stage, one shooter had to engage some pistol targets with an airsoft pistol while the other mil-dot ranged some distant targets. We got all the pistol points available, but failed to get within the 3% margin on any of the mil-ranged targets. (Judging by the score sheets, very few teams got any of those ranges correct). And after that, we set off on another sub-mile ruck to our last stage of the day, thankful that our Vortex LRFs were as reliable as they were – and that hopefully we'd never have to rely on our mil-ranging skills.

The last stage of Day 1 was Stage #2, THEY'RE OUT THERE. Teams were told they had a short run to a position behind a shipping crate. They had to engage pistol targets each, then engage a package of 5 rifle targets from behind the crate. After the run, both Scott and Joe cleaned their pistol targets, and settled in to start ranging and shooting rifle - locating the first target at 211 yards. Joe's rifle connected three times before we realized that we were not getting points because this target was not part of our target package – match director trap! It took us another 20 seconds or so to retrieve our notes and figure it out, but once we got past that, we got back to work. Joe connected with an additional 8 shots and Scott took over. Many shooters struggled with this shooting position – a very shallow perch meant many shooters made do with only one point of contact, but Scott's KRG Whiskey-3 with ARCA rail meant he had the flexibility to move the bipod back to the magwell and build a traditional front rest / rear bag set-up and get rock solid. Scott connected with 11 of his next 12 shots, but poor communication with the RO and each other cost us three of those points.

### WHISKEY-3 CHASSIS



We finished Day 1 with a 2.40-mile ruck (35:11, 14:40 pace) back to Start/Finish. We felt good on all our rucks, and even won a few of them among our squad, but Scott was starting to pick up some “hot-spots” on his feet.

## DAY 2

Day 2 started with a 2.88-mile ruck (42:52, 14:53 pace) to Stage #4, COVER FIRE. In this stage, teams needed bound from their starting position, into one bunker, and then into another – with one shooter providing cover fire any time the other was moving. Just add a little stress, an injured team member, simulated with a heavy dummy, needed to be moved as well. Only after both team members, and the dummy, were in the third bunker could team members start shooting rifle targets – with the two shooters alternating through a 4-target array. Unfortunately, Scott started his pistol sequence on the wrong target, losing credit for his 5 pistol hits, while Joe got 3 pistol hits. On the rifle side, Scott connected with 11/12 rifle shots, and Joe connected with 5/12 – struggling with his position in the bunker. Ordering the PRS length Ckye-Pod was a bit short sighted. The standard length Ckye-Pod (with longer legs) would have been a better choice for this match.



Following a 2.81-mile ruck (40:07, 14:16pace) we arrived at Stage #7, TALL WEEDS. Before we even started to shoot, Joe used a little of medical expertise to dress Scott's blisters, and make sure he could keep rucking. Falling out of a ruck is a one-way ticket to the bottom of the leader board, so maintaining ruck pace is paramount. During the stage, teams had to engage pistol targets with one shot each, then build a position which allowed them to shoot over the tall grass at several rifle targets. Joe and Scott connected with a combined 15 of 20 pistol shots, then moved through their well-rehearsed stage plan to a tripod seated shooting position using an Armageddon Gear “Fat Bag”. Out of 30 possible rifle hits from that position, the team connected with 28 of them and lost one more point due to shooting one target out of sequence.

Our longest ruck to this point, 3.46 miles (52:12, 15:06 pace) led us to a stage which we have come to think of as our nemesis – OVER / UNDER, or just “That Barbed Wire Stage”. Shooters need to get themselves and their gear up a concrete staircase, with barbed wire suspended all over the railing. If they can make it to the top without donating blood, they have a run to a raised platform where they have to lay down and shoot targets strewn around the range. The wind here once again gave us fits as we failed to get a grip on what it was doing, and managed only three hits on this stage. Joe's rifle had some feed issues here and we timed out without getting him many rounds downrange.

Less than a 1-mile ruck away was Stage #8, POSITIONAL GAME HUNT. We started with 10 pistol rounds each at some very distant BEST Targets duck targets. A quick sprint to the next position where one shooter had to shoot 5 rounds standing off-hand at a wild boar target 150 yards away. Another sprint to a position where the other shooter had to engage another wild board from a sawhorse at 250 yards. Finally, both team members ran to a position where they could engage an army of groundhog targets with nearly unlimited rounds until time ran out. Joe and Scott started off with a very poor pistol showing (3 of 20). Joe connected with two hits before breaking the T-post which held the target, and Scott went 3 for 5 from the sawhorse. Finally, Joe and Scott alternated for 21 hits on groundhogs before the timer went off. Joe's 7mm Practical rifle rang targets with authority at such short ranges, but its small magazine capacity was not well suited to this stage, and definitely cost us some hits here.

A short 1.38-mile ruck (20:24, 14:48 pace) led us back to the Start/Finish line for the evening. Even more than Friday night, Joe had a task in front of him as he prepped and cut all the moleskin and tape he needed to dress Scott's blisters first thing in the morning. A good meal and a good night's sleep was the priority!

## DAY 3

Day 3 began with a short ruck to Stage #9, STRONG SIDE, WEAK SIDE. Teams needed to alternate 10-shot strings between shooters, strong side then weak side, at a 904 yard target (for primary) and a 701 yard target (for secondary). Scott started on the secondary target, scoring an 8 of 10, and Joe followed up with three more impacts on his target from the strong side. Moving to the weakside, Scott secured 6 more hits, followed by Joe who got one more impact in his only shot



before time expired. A good score, but there was more to be had, and we had again run out of time. Primary rifle magazine capacity affected us on several stages, and this was certainly one of them.

Exactly 2.38 miles away (36:07, 15:09 pace) we arrived at Stage #10, AWKWARD. In this stage, each shooter had to shoot 10 rounds (5 strong hand, and 5 weak hand). After that, one shooter had to engage a 325 yard target using standing, partner-assist techniques, and the other had to engage a similar target seated off-hand. While fatigue certainly played a part, as did the foreshadowing “final ruck”, we have little excuse for our incredibly poor performance here. We combined for 3 out of 20 pistol hits, and we did not connect with a single rifle round. To say this is an opportunity to improve would be an understatement!



Where most rucks in the Mammoth Sniper Challenge are done with your squad, the final ruck is conducted all together. Up to this point, nearly 50% of the field had dropped out, and now everyone who was still in the match gets to ruck together, which really changes the feel. Also, this ruck is both the longest ruck of the weekend, and includes the most challenging hills and sand pits of the entire weekend. Joe and Scott set off, despite the blisters, foot pain and fatigue, and completed the 4.95 miles in 1:14.54 (15:07 pace).

As the last final challenge, teams needed to line up and each team member send one single shot at an Accu-Shot card. Primary shot at 100 yards, and Secondary shot at 20 yards. Scott used his short-range data to place a near-perfect shot, collecting the full 5 points.



## Things Done Well

To keep things in perspective, and despite our struggles at times, we brought home 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish in Regular class. A podium finish at a major match like this is a great success, and we're proud of all the work we put in to get there.



Physically, both Scott and Joe showed up ready to push hard in this match. But Joe's physical training was two steps ahead of Scott's. Joe lost nearly 40# since last year, improved his natural pace from mid 15s to mid 13s, and built up cardio that kept him going all match. Scott was able to complete the match, but found himself at times pushing to keep up with Joe.

Our packing and preparation paid off. We both came in significantly lighter than we did last year. Scott stepped off with his pack right about 50# including his rifle, and Joe came in under 40# for everything. This helped us in the rucks, but also helped us manage our gear during stages.

Our experience continues to pay off as well - in several situations this year, we knew what to expect, or how to handle things, when newer teams would have struggled. Every success and failure makes us better.

## Results & Lessons Learned

All four of our weapon systems were reasonably well prepared for the event, but both rifles could have benefitted from more time and more data. Joe's rifle specifically sped up right before the match and had some feed issues. We need to “freeze” the configuration of our rifles sooner, and spend more time getting them dialed in and perfected.

Both of us need to keep practicing with both rifle and pistol. There is lots of room for improvement – and there always will be. We both shot pistol all weekend but never found the right balance between speed and accuracy. And our rifle work needs to include more basic “rifleman” skills, like seated unsupported.

Despite our experience, we still made a few mental mistakes. It's important to understand that matches like this are DESIGNED to take advantage of your fatigue and encourage mental mistakes but we still reach for zero mental mistakes.

From shooting targets out of order to engaging targets that were not on our target package – we have room for improvement here.

## Summary

We were very happy to collect the 3<sup>rd</sup> place Regular-division trophy in 2020. The Mammoth Sniper Challenge is, quite simply, the Super Bowl of team field precision rifle matches in the United States. It's a gut check, and a ball buster, and we walk away every year thinking that we had a great time.



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