

BEST TARGETS

BEST Targets Shooting Team After Action Report (AAR)

Event: 2017 Purgatory Sniper Challenge by Lanxang Tactical
Date: September 15-17, 2017
Location: Arena Training Center (formerly Legion OTG)
Websites: <http://www.purgatorysniperchallenge.com/>
<https://www.arenatrainingfacility.com/>



Shooter: Scott Whitehead
Rifle: Stiller Action / Hawk Hill / KRG Chassis Rifle in 6.5CM by Accurate Ordnance, Kahntrol muzzle brake
Ammo: 6.5 Creedmoor Handloads. Berger 140 Hybrids, 43.0gr H4350, Lot R10f & R10g
Gear: Vortex Razor AMG 6-24x, Vortex Precision Rings, Harris BiPod w/Kahntrol Pod-Mods & Wiebad bags. Eberlestock "Gunslinger" pack, Merrill "Vent" boots, WrightSock double-layer anti-blister socks, Patagonia Capilene base layer shirt, Exoficcio underwear and lightweight pants, Mechanix Wear gloves.

Shooter: Joe Burdick
Rifle: Nordic Components .223 NC-15, Luth-AR stock & Fast Acq. V-Tab buttpad, Kahntrol muzzle brake
Ammo: .223 Handloads. 77gr SMK, 24.0gr IMR-8208xbr, CCI primers, LC brass
Gear: SWFA 10x42, Vortex Precision Rings, Harris BiPod w/Kahntrol Pod-Mods
Eberlestock Lo-Drag pack w/ Zulu gear admin pouch, Asolo Neutron boots, Smartwool PhD socks, Outdoor Research pants & hat. Exoficcio underwear. Big Agnes UL-2 tent.

Facility Notes

The Arena Training Facility is a 2300-acre training complex in Blakely, GA, that includes a 2200yd UKD range, a 1000yd KD range, a large pistol complex, MOUT facilities and shoot houses. The grounds are well maintained, and every range and shooting position posed different challenges. While the facility was originally built as a DoD and LEO training facility it's being used more and more for civilian training and mixed military / civilian competitions like this one and it even offers about 20 cabins that are available for rent. We really enjoyed the facility and can't wait to come back to Arena in January for the Mammoth Sniper Challenge. If Arena is within driving distance for you, we highly recommend you check it out!



Event Format

The Purgatory Sniper Challenge was a brand-new match this year put on by the guys at Lanxang Tactical combined with Joe Harris and Marcus Harrison (the brains behind the Mammoth Sniper Challenge) and we had very little information to go off of while planning and packing. The concept was a match which was more physical than any before it and captured the types of training and competition used in the nearby Ranger battalions at Ft. Benning. I would shoot the primary role, out to 1100 yards, and Joe would shoot the Secondary role. We knew that the match started with a shooter's briefing on Friday morning and immediately after that shooters stepped off to begin the match. We knew we would have 3 days to complete the match and that there would be about 10 physically demanding stages. We also knew that we would have to supply all our own food, camp out and carry everything we needed.

To prepare we spent lots of time planning our load-out. There was some unpredictability in weather. In our initial planning a few months out, we assumed it would be a hot weekend. Forecasts a week or so out showed extensive rain throughout the weekend. We spent a lot of time trying to find the best compromise between weight and comfort when it came to sleeping gear, worked on ways to keep gear dry inside our packs but still be quickly accessible and trying to find the most weight-efficient ways to carry enough calories to keep us going for three days. Shooting gear was also a big decision. We had to decide if carrying a "heavy" rear bag was worth the weight, if packing the weight of a shooting tripod was a smart decision, and exactly how much ammo we needed to carry. Scott's pack was about 70# and Joe's was about 55#.



We also tried to tune ourselves up before the match with some hot-weather and wet-weather rucks and some physical training. No amount of training was going to put us on the same level as the 20-something US Army Rangers we would be competing against but we did what we could to minimize the deficit.

We arrived late the night before the match. We got moved into our cabin and emptied both our packs so we could do one last gut check. Do we have everything we need? Are we carrying duplicate items we don't need to carry? Are we familiar with how each other's critical gear (first aid gear, rain gear) is packed so we can quickly access it? At the zero range, Scott confirmed his zero and Joe put a rough zero on his last-minute 45* offset iron sights (although he noted a little visual obstruction from the windage knob of his scope).

DAY 1

The shooter's brief held a few surprises. The match would include 9 stages and we were given a map of the facility with the locations of the stages. There was a central road through the facility and except for a few portions that were closed (and required a rather lengthy detour) all travel was done on this central road and most stages were located along it. There were a few curveballs however. First, at no time in the match could you shoot two adjacent stages one-after-another. This sounds simple but there were lots of places where this could really bite you and make you hike a long way out of your way. Second, all teams needed to cross the "O-Course", an Army-spec obstacle course, before you could even start hiking to the first stage.

Obstacle Course

At the start buzzer, there was a very short (1/4 mile) hike to the O-Course to get started. The first obstacle was an 9-foot slat wall that had to be climbed. Scott went over first, we handed packs up and over, and Joe followed. This was an easy start.

The next obstacle was a telephone pole walk with our packs. Joe breezed through this, and Scott managed to get through it as well.



Our third obstacle was the gut buster. We had to climb onto

one telephone pole about 4' up, and then jump to another one which a few feet higher and maybe six feet away. After landing chest first on the second pole, you had to climb over. Scott got this one on the first try and Joe got through it on his second try with a Purgatory bruise to show for it! Nearly every competitor had bruises on their chest and arms from this obstacle.

The fourth obstacle was a balance beam walk with our packs. This seemed pretty simple and Joe cruised through it like nothing but Scott did not. Joe came to the rescue providing balance help to Scott and taking advantage of the rule that once one person got through any obstacle they could help the other person. Teamwork!

The final obstacle was the pull up bar. With a little teamwork we were both up and over this one along with our packs, and we were on our way to our first shooting stage.

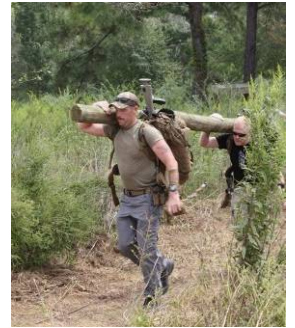
Stage 1 – Logs and Barrels

After a short hike, we came to Stage 1 and with only one team in front of us in line we decided to stop and shoot our first stage. (With such long stages, getting caught in line at a stage is a quick way to burn a lot of time and it was something we thought we needed to watch out for).

On this stage both shooters needed to climb up on a platform and engage several targets each. Then both shooters needed to pack up their gear, climb down and carry a telephone pole segment about 300 yards to the pistol bays. There both shooters each needed to retrieve a half-barrel and pull it to a pistol target where both shooters engaged a hostage target. Both shooters again then dragged their half barrels (this time through a plastic culvert) to another pistol shooting

location. Finally, both shooters had to drag their barrels to the other pistol bay and engage several targets which were hidden in the grass and shrubs. We had no idea where they were.

Joe and I did a good job on stage prep here talking through every movement (at least on the part of the stage we could see) and when the buzzer went off we got set-up on the platform and went right to work ranging targets. We struggled getting stable enough with the rangefinder and getting good reads through the branches between us and the target but we managed to get on target and impact every one (even though it took us a few too many shots to do it). We quickly climbed down, geared up and grabbed the telephone pole segment.



The walk across the field with the telephone pole was exhausting but not difficult. Once we dropped it off and picked up the weighted half-barrels we had to drag though things got tough. The ground was mud and getting enough traction to get the barrels moving was difficult.



Drawing my pistol for the first time in the match was eye-opening. I don't think I have ever shot my pistol while this tired and I need to practice it. My usual pistol form was disrupted by heavy breathing and tired muscles. My shot on the hostage target didn't completely flip the target, it just pushed it backwards, and I needed to run up and manually move it the rest of the way. Joe quickly hit his target.

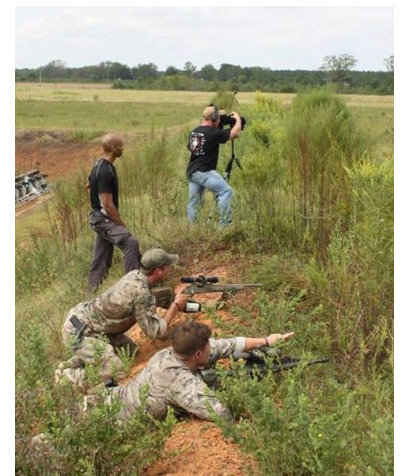
We again picked up the ropes attached to the barrels, went through the low culvert and shot another hostage target. After shooting the second hostage target we fought deep mud to get the barrels back to the 2nd pistol bay. I felt like the road-runner in a comic book – my feet were moving but my body was not. It took forever to get enough traction to move the barrels back to

their starting position and retrieve our rifles. Once we did, we were told we could engage from anywhere along the 50yd long shooting line. We both took up a position and we quickly found the first target and each hit it.

This is where things got tough. We both searched and searched for targets and found nothing. I leap-frogged Joe down the line about 10 yards and still found nothing. Joe leap-frogged me another 10 yards, found a 2nd target hidden in the grass and hit it. I tried to find it from my position and could not. Rather than moving to his position, and knowing there was one more target out there, I moved all the way to the other end of the line hoping I could both see the target he had just hit and also find the 3rd. I found and hit the 3rd target. Now we each had one more to find. Rather than move (poor judgement because we were absolutely exhausted?) we both tried to talk each other to the target we could see. We wasted a bunch of time doing this and ran out of time. Regardless, we put up a respectable score for the stage and we were ready for a break.

Stage 3 – Shoot House

We hiked about ¾ of a mile, took a water break and arrived at Stage 3. This stage started with a run to a berm to do some long-range shooting. Then you ran to a rope crossing, then to another berm for more long-range shooting by the primary shooter. Next, the secondary shooter had to run to a small wooden bench and shoot a plate rack off-hand at about 100 yards. Once that was done, both shooters had to advance on two more plate racks and clear them. Finally, both shooters had to move through a shoot-house, engaging paper targets throughout.



This stage was the first one we shot where we had a new twist – time management. If both shooters did not complete the shoot house within the 15-minute time period, the entire stage was scored zero. Like many other stages to come, if you failed to complete the final task you lost all your points. Time management just became a huge priority!



We ran to the first berm, got a range call with great difficulty and started shooting. We were allowed 3 hits from each berm and we started on the 2-point target. After three hits, we left the berm and ran to the rope crossing.

At the rope crossing I made one huge mistake. I've seen rope crossings plenty of times and didn't fear it at all but my lack of experience bit me. I got on the rope the wrong way – feet first. For the beginning of the crossing, "down-hill", I was fine but at the far end, moving somewhat uphill, I used up a lot more energy and moved much slower than I should have. Lesson learned! Joe got across much quicker than I did, and we sprinted to the 2nd berm.

From this berm, for a reason I cannot recall, we engaged the 1-point target. This second berm was a much tougher position – I was sliding down it with each shot and not stable at all, and the exhaustion was really setting in. We scored three hits and Joe ran to the bench.

Standing on the bench, off-hand Joe absolutely rocked the plate rack - cleaning it with few if any misses. His Nordic Components rifle just hammered plate after plate, and his Kahntrol muzzle brake kept him on target in a tough standing position. As soon as he was done, we ran up and cleaned the pistol plate racks. Like some of the previous pistol shooting we had done, neither of us shot our best, but we got it done. We then went through the shoot house. We were told that at least half of each shooter's hits needed to be head shots so as we moved through we both shot all head shots, just to make sure.

When we came out of the shoot house, praying that we had completed the stage in time, we found we had nearly 3 minutes left. We had not watched our time or judged our time usage well and we probably left points on the board here. This was a lesson we tried not to repeat throughout the match but estimating the time it will take you to complete a physical task is HARD and the consequence for getting it wrong can be disastrous. We had the highest score of any team on this stage.



Stage 6 – Trailer

In order to get to our next stage, we needed to cross into the other half of the property and basically walk past the camping site. It was a 2.5 mile walk and we were already pretty tired from completing the obstacle course and two very physical stages. We didn't have much idea of what was in front of us but we had plenty of time left. We took a good break to drink some water, eat some food and we pushed on. Somehow the 2.5 miles of this hike felt like MUCH longer.



At the Trailer stage, there were two steel pistol targets, 6 long-range targets for the primary shooter and 6 for the secondary shooter. The stage started with drawing pistols and each shooter engaging two pistol targets. Then the shooters and all gear needed to move about 40 yards along with a large steel trailer which was our shooting position. Shooters had to build a position ON the trailer and each shoot three of the 6 targets. Then both shooters needed to gear up and move the trailer another 40 yards or so to the second shooting position, build a position on top of the trailer and shoot the next 3 of 6 targets for each shooter. Finally, we had to gear up and move the trailer the 80 yards or so back to the original starting point and each engage the two pistol targets again. If the trailer did not end in its original position or the pistol targets were not engaged a second time by each shooter the stage score is ZERO.

As we planned for the stage, we estimated how long it would take us to return the trailer to its starting position and shoot the steel. Working backwards on the 15-minute par time we then knew what time we needed to leave the second shooting position and we would stick to that.

We shot the targets for the first time, loaded up the trailer and pulled it to the first position. Joe was on one side pushing while I lifted the tongue. Our plan was to use a tripod sitting in the trailer because we knew we needed to be at standing height to see the targets and engage them. This worked okay but it was far more complicated than we expected.

The trailer bounced, tilted and moved. The tires had quite a bit of flex to them. We attempted to wedge a 4x4 board under the bumper to keep it stable but that did not work. We made the best of a bad position but the tripod was clearly a huge help. It allowed a far more stable shooting position than most other teams were able to achieve. Most other teams shot off the back gate and had great difficulty. Our biggest issue here was ranging targets. Getting stable enough to get a good reading was tough. Getting a reading through brush made it tougher. We moved the trailer again and shot well from the 2nd position (although we again struggled with ranges). With 2 minutes left we departed the second position, pulled the trailer back and shot the pistol targets to complete the stage. The RO's told us we had one of the best scores so far for this stage and we felt good with three strong stages under our belt.



Decision Time

Both of us were very tired at this point. We had pushed hard, completed an obstacle course and three stages along with a good bit of heavy rucking. Our plan all along had been 3-4-2 - three stages the first day, four the second day and two the third day. The weather forecast for the next day was grim and we didn't want to shoot at targets we could not see due to fog / rain so we needed to do as much as we could. We had good light and calm winds and it was a good time to do some shooting. After a brief gut-check, we decided to push on and complete one more stage on Day 1.

Stage 8 – Skid-Co

About 100 yards from the starting position sat a wooden barricade which was the first shooting position. Another 40 yards from that was a second shooting position – the top of a “pill box”. One shooter needed to pull the other and all their gear on a Skid-Co sled halfway to the first position. Then the two shooters switched and the other shooter pulled the rest of the way. At the first position we had to build a position and each engage three targets. Then we had to pick up two large weight plates and bring them and all our gear to the second position where we had to engage the remaining three targets. We then had to pack up, carry the weight plates back to the first position, load up the Skid-Co and use it to return to the starting point. Both shooters had to get back to the starting position on the sled before time expires or all points are lost.

There's that time limit thing again. Estimating how long it would take you to drag a 250# partner and 150# of gear 100 yards is hard enough but estimating how long it will take when you're already exhausted is even harder. We did our best, came up with a time when we had to be leaving position #2 with the weight plates in hand and discussed and rehearsed the stage several times – talking through every movement.

Both Joe and I are former offensive linemen. While bodyweight exercises can be tougher for us, something like dragging a sled should be our forte. This was hard. I dragged Joe 50 yards and we switched off. We were both already a little wobbly.



On the first barricade, we had a horizontal 8"x8" beam to work from and it was extremely stable. Once again, the range finder use proved to be the hardest part with the 2nd and 3rd primary targets almost impossible to get an LRF on. My rifle was extremely stable on this barricade – the KRG chassis with ARCA rail gave me a fantastic flat surface to work from. My only mistake here was when I had to pan sideways to a far target. The distance between the back of my bipod (on an ARCA-equipped spigot mount) and my barricade stop was just about right for the barricade when I was perpendicular to it, but as I panned, that distance needed to grow, and it was not sufficient to let me swing where I needed to. I fought the gun, because it needed “just a little more”, when I should have just reached up, loosed up the bipod, slid it forward a fraction of an inch and tightened it back up – an adjustment that the ARCA system makes easy! Lesson learned! I eventually hit the intended target but I sent several bad shots while “muscling” the gun over.



We picked up the weight plates, moved to the second position and, since we were shooting the same targets, we simply reduced the ranges a bit and shot. This worked pretty well and we did well again. When the timer went off we moved fast. We carried the weight plates back and I set up to pull Joe. I had promised him I would make the full pull back on my own. This turned out to be a promise I could not keep. I started pulling him and I tried to move fast but I set a pace I simply could not keep. Just past the halfway mark, my legs failed me and I knew I was not going to make it in time. With my tail between my legs, I had to ask Joe to take over and he did. Joe put in an amazing effort to get us the last 50 yards with only 9 seconds to spare. He collapsed to the ground as we crossed the line. We both had nothing left.

Our mistake was made hours before this stage. We simply had not eaten and drank enough. Joe looked like he was not doing well even after a few minutes of rest. We worked hard to get some calories and water in him. After about 30 minutes of rest he was ready to make the hike back to the campground. Another lesson learned – just like the Mammoth Sniper Challenge, or any endurance event (just ask an Ultra-Marathon runner!), this is also an eating competition.

We also recognized here that we needed to be a little more conservative with our time hacks. Zero'ing a stage was not worth a few extra seconds of shooting time and we had cut this one too close to the buzzer.

NIGHT 1

After a hike of about 1.5 miles, we pitched our tent in a grassy open area of the campsite and started to settle in for the night. We both knew we needed to eat some serious calories but much of the food we brought just didn't sound good to us. We had brought lots of nuts, beef / bison bars and other calorie dense foods which just didn't sit well with us in the hot, humid conditions. We devoured all the gel packs and gel cubes we had brought but some of the other foods (which we loved when we tested them at home) just were not appealing. We had to fight to make sure we got in 1500 calories each.

The temperature got to the low 70s at night, but the 90%+ humidity was just miserable and it was impossible to get comfortable. The sleep pads and bag liners we had brought worked well and were as comfortable as they could in those conditions. The tent, an ultra-light 2-man, was probably not big enough for two big men. It also got pretty warm no matter how hard we tried to get circulation in it. Neither of us got a great night of sleep that we badly needed.

We used our shooting tripod to hang our packs and rifles overnight. Our rifles were in their Rock Solid Shooting Solutions (RS3) gun covers and leaned up against our packs and a custom RS3 sheet kept the entire pile of packs and rifles dry all night. It was so humid that dew covered everything else in the morning and drying out clothing or gear was basically impossible. Even our contractor-bag vestibule floor was dripping wet. Luckily, we had anticipated this and we had plenty of dry gear. Interestingly, I found that putting on my slightly lighter-weight pants and shirt from the day before, even though they were still wet, was much more comfortable than putting on my back-up pants and shirt that were dry. We were going to be soaking wet soon enough – so I figured I might as well start off wet and have the lightest, best clothing we can have. (Also, I hated the idea of putting heavy wet clothing in my pack).

DAY 2

We slept in to get as much rest as possible and had a relaxing morning before leaving the campground. I don't think either of us wanted to rush the day any more than we needed to. We dried out, packed up and rucked 1.5 miles to our first stage of Day 2 – Stage 9. Halfway there we realized we could not start on Stage 9 because we ended the previous day on Stage 8. We then rucked back to Stage 5.

Stage 5 – Cars & Trucks

This stage started with a little bit of pistol shooting. After engaging a few pistol plates, shooters had to roll or carry two large wheel & tire assemblies about 100 yards to a 5-ton truck. All gear had to be off the ground and shooters had to engage 3 of the 6 Primary targets and 3 of the 6 Secondary targets from within the back of the truck. After that was complete, we had to get down off the truck and move to a car where we had to engage the other 3 targets remaining for each shooter. Finally, both shooters had to pick up all their gear, roll their tires back to the starting position and engage the pistol targets one more time each. As had become a theme at this point, if the tires were not rolled back and the pistol targets were not engaged a second time to end the stage when the buzzer went off the team scored a zero for the stage.



For some reason I cannot explain – maybe it was focus on everything else in the stage – we both struggled on the pistol shooting here. We rolled the tires across the grass, hung our packs on the truck (so they were “off” the ground without being in the 6” of mud and water in the back of the truck) and climbed in. The shooting position here was pretty stable and we started engaging targets.

Like many of the stages, this was a stage where planning was very important. Each shooter had 6 total targets available to them. Shooters were not allowed to “game” the stage before hand, walking through and seeing what target could be seen from what position, so we had to use good judgement when we got on the truck to determine what targets should be shot from there and which ones should be shot from the car. It would have been easy to just shoot the first

three targets from the truck, but you might get to the second position on the stage and find you can't see one or more of the last three targets that remain.

The second position, the car, was surprisingly unstable (I was slipping down the car after every shot). Overall, we shot the entire stage pretty well. We struggled a little with the LRF on at least two Primary targets. One Secondary target was tough to shoot because of obstacles in the way. We rolled our tires back, shot our pistol targets and had 20 or 30 seconds to spare. This was more good time management on what was probably the physically easiest stage of the entire match.

Stage 7 – Conex

After a quick rest break and another short hike, we got to Stage 7. This stage was highlighted with two significant obstacles – a full size Conex box and a huge pile of massive truck tires.

Shooters had to begin by flipping – not rolling – a 7-foot truck tire about 60 yards. After that exhausting task, shooters had to run another 50 yards or so to a Conex container and scale the side of it to shoot off the top. Both shooters and all gear had to be on top of the box while engaging four targets each. When that was complete, shooters got down off the box and moved, with all their gear and the tire, back to the starting position. The heavy truck tire, along with several other tires sitting around, needed to be piled in such a way as to get enough height to build a shooting position to each engage the same 4 targets again. There was no task that ended the stage – we could shoot from the second position until the buzzer went off.



While Joe and I were scouting the stage a bit, we were not allowed to get into the actual shooting positions but we did notice that at least one of the targets would not be visible from the second position – in defilade. We'd need to determine an alternate aiming point to connect from the second position. Joe and I were also skeptical of our ability to get on top of the Conex container. Neither of us had ever climbed a container like this before.

After flipping the tire and moving to the container, we both got up it with relative ease. On top of the container, we both got very stable, got a good range and cleaned the 8 targets with only 8 shots! We dismounted off the Conex as quickly as we could and rolled the tire back to its starting position. We stacked the tires and built a shooting position where we could see 3 of the 4 targets. Rather than standing up the top tire (as shown in the picture of another team shooting the stage) we laid the top one down, and used the spiked feet on our Harris bipods (which were both equipped with Kahntrol Solutions Pod-Mods) to stab into the tire and get a stable shooting position. The Pod-mods were a huge help here!

We each cleaned the 3 visible targets and that's when we realized we'd made a mistake. When we were on top of the Conex, we were so tired and excited at our shooting success, that we had forgotten to "mil" the defilade target. We didn't have good data on it and we had to walk away from that target from the second position. Only one team connected with the hidden target and our clean score on the rest of the stage gave us the second-best score of the match on this stage.

Stage 9 – Gas Masks

We felt pretty good at the end of Stage #7 but there was some weather moving in and we buckled down under an awning for an hour or two. As it turned out, the rain never really came. There was some rain and thunder in the distance but we never got more than a shower. We took the time to catch up on some calories and then got rolling on a short hike to the Gas Mask stage.

For this stage, both shooters had to wear an issue MCU-2/P gas mask, affectionately called a "P-Mask", and do a half-mile run / hike, on the clock, with all their gear. Shooters then had to climb an A-Frame and shoot several pistol targets with the P-Mask still on. When both shooters completed the pistol portion, shooters could remove the masks and retrieve their rifles from their packs. The Primary then engaged his targets from the A-Frame and the secondary shooter engaged from a small barricade about 20 yards away. Each shooter could engage targets with 16 rounds.

We both took off pretty quickly on the hike, but then realized that our normal pace was not maintainable with the mask on. You simply could not get enough air to move at a normal pace. We slowed to a quick walk, and pushed through the echoing sound of our own breath working its way through the filters in the mask. We both climbed up on the A-Frame and engaged our pistol targets. It was a relief to be able to remove the masks and get a deep breath for the first time.



As I pulled out my rifle, we had the first of our two issues in this stage. As I got into position with the rifle, I realized I had no bolt knob on the rifle. Uh-oh. Shooting off the A-frame is something I was very comfortable doing. I got a good stable



position, and with a decent range and wind call, got eight good hits. My bolt manipulation was a little slow without a knob but I managed.

After I finished my shooting, our second disaster occurred. Joe could not get his rifle out of his bag. He pulled, tugged, yanked, and swore like a sailor but nothing worked. The 45° offset front sight was firmly entangled in the inside of the pack. I grabbed the LRF and ran to the position to start ranging targets hoping I could at least save us some time at the other end. It took Joe what felt like 10 minutes to get the rifle out of the bag. When he finally got to the barricade, we were both knocked off our game and we had very little time. Joe got off a few shots, connected once, and the buzzer went off. DAMN!

Without a doubt, we lost ground here. Making sure all your gear is easily accessible and does not have the opportunity to fail at any time is a critical part of this game. The offset sights were removed to prevent future problems.

NIGHT 2

We were both tired but in decent shape at the end of the second day. We had a solid hike back to the campground, a bit over 2 miles, and we took our time. We had two stages left for the last day. We heard from a little birdie that we were the ONLY team who would be camping out the second night. Every other team had either completed the course or dropped out. Well at least we'd have our pick of campsites!

We elected to set up camp on top of the tower. It had the best view, a solid floor to keep us away from ants and bugs, some limited cover in case it rained and hopefully, being high up, would give us the most possible breeze on an otherwise hot, sticky night. We tried hard to eat but didn't get down enough calories to replenish even a part of what we had burned. Even with unlimited water, the heat and humidity just made us not want to eat – especially anything that was heavy like our Bison bars. Our gel packs and Energy Chews, however, were popular and we wished we had brought more.

DAY 3

The morning came, and the fog was heavy. We took our time getting rolling in the morning knowing that it would be a while before we could see distant targets well enough to start shooting. We had two stages left and one of them had already gotten in our heads.



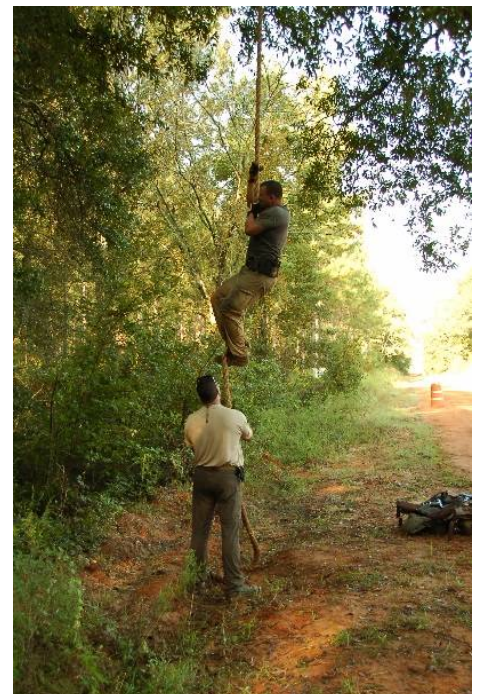
Stage 4 – Rope Climb

We set off on our 3-mile hike to our first stage. Neither Joe nor I are known for our upper body strength to body weight ratios ... and neither one of us have ever had to climb up a rope. As silly as this obstacle sounded to many it was big to us.

We listened to the stage brief: climb the rope and move to multiple shooting positions to shoot both rifles and pistols. We both talked through the stage plan but we both had an echo in the back of our heads – the rope climb.

With a complete lack of technique to support me, I made two attempts up the rope. On the second attempt I made it within a few feet of the top but I was wasting way too much energy holding my weight while fighting to get a decent foothold. Each time I got a foothold I was able to support myself and gain ground but as soon as I let go of it to move my feet I wasted a ton of time and energy. Joe also struggled on the rope and, in the end, we had to bow our heads to this stage. We would not get to shoot a single round or score a single point here.

We had about a one-mile hike to suck it up. We knew that other than one stage, we were shooting well, and potentially in the hunt for a top spot. It was time to step up.



Stage 2 – The KD Range / Lanxang Tactical Stage

Stage 2 started with a short run to some pistol targets. Then shooters had to run (with all your gear) to the KD range. The primary shooter had to drag a tire from the 1000yd berm to the 900yd berm, then from the top of that berm, shoot 16 rounds from their rifle at some targets downrange. Both shooters then had to run to the 800yd berm. There the Primary shooter picked up a Lanxang Tactical .308 rifle, (with a scope in MOA) and took 5 shots from the rifle. Both shooters then ran to the 700yd berm. There the secondary shooter picks up a tire to drag and drags it to the 600yd line. Finally, from there, the secondary shooter shoots 16 shots from his own rifle and 5 shots from another Lanxang stage gun, this time a .223.



I shot pistol first so I could get working on the tire drag while Joe finished his pistol shooting. After a miss or two more than I should have, I ran to the tire and started dragging it. With all the things we had to drag during this match, I always found it was more comfortable for me to step into the rope loop and let it wrap around my hips rather than hold it with my hands. Joe ran by me and started setting up as I got on top of the 900yd berm.

When we looked downrange, there were 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5-point targets – a series of Ovals by BEST Targets that we had made for the Mammoth Sniper Challenge years ago. Peering through the crystal-clear glass in my Vortex Razor AMG, I could see the 1-pt target was more vertical, and the 2-pt target was horizontal. We felt that the smaller targets were sucker targets but the 2-pt target was just big enough with its horizontal orientation making it perfect for a little wind forgiveness. We checked the range, dialed up the

elevation on the Vortex L-Tec turrets, and after a shot or two and a correction, I got to work, ringing the 2-pt target about 10 times. I felt great after this string!

We picked up and jogged to the 800yd line and I got behind the Lanxang Tactical rifle. Getting behind a new rifle is always interesting, especially when your heart is beating through your chest, your breathing is heavy, and you're sweating like crazy. This was clearly a REALLY nice rifle but the eye relief was all wrong for me. I struggled a bit, confirmed elevation, took a rough guess at parallax and held the same wind at 800yd that I had used at 900yd a moment ago with my 6.5 Creedmoor. Nothing. I added wind and still nothing. I doubled the wind I used before – nothing. After 5 frustrating misses, I had no idea why I had missed. (I later was reminded that this was an MOA scope and I was holding wind adjustments in my mind in MILS so I did not have NEARLY enough wind on the rifle.)



We took a jog to the 700yd line and Joe picked up his tire for his 100yd drag. We got to the 600yd line and Joe went to work. Joe's Nordic Components rifle put quite a few hits on the 600yd plates while I spotted with the Lanxang .223 stage gun. After his 16 shots we swapped rifles and a few trigger pulls from the Lanxang Tactical stage rifle later we were done with the last stage. A feeling of relief swept over both of us.

The last thing we needed to do was hike back to the starting point and we had plenty of time to do it. We stopped for a few pictures along the way and covered the last short hike at a nice slow pace. My 3-day old Subway sandwich and a shower were never so good.

Results

When the dust cleared, we finished 4th. In a field full of US Army Rangers and experienced snipers from other branches, along with a small helping of civilians, we were thrilled with our finish.

Things Done Well

We had competed at an event where we had significantly less experience at many of the tasks than some other competitors but we worked hard to succeed. Along the way, we did lots of things right:

- We both shot well overall. The enlightening part of this shooting was doing so at a heart-rate and breathing-rate than we've never had to before ... and with more multi-tasking than we're used to. Joe and I are both veterans of events with some physical challenge and mental stressors but this was the next step up from that. Many times, we were shooting under conditions near physical failure, all while planning our next steps, watching the timer, etc. I think we did well under the circumstances.
- Our time management was good. We never zero'ed a stage as a result of poor time planning – although we came VERY close.
- We had some great gear. Our rifles from Accurate Ordnance / KRG and Nordic Components were both fantastic performers in a pinch. My Vortex Razor AMG was crystal clear – even in some hazy foggy conditions. Muzzle brakes and bipod accessories from Kahntrol solutions were a terrific asset, especially in compromised positions. Our Mechanix-wear gloves saved our hands several times in the event. Gear from Exoficcio, Patagonia, Merrill, Eberlestock, and numerous others were a great investment.
- We both planned and learned for this event. We learned a lot about aspects of hiking, camping and gear selection that we had not needed in our previous endeavors. We cut weight where we could, planned our food and gear and executed what we had learned. We didn't always make the right decisions looking back but we made the best ones we could with what we knew at the time.
- We both dug down to find some mental toughness and supported each other. We both had failures – in performance, equipment and decision-making, but we worked well as a team.

Areas of Improvement

There are numerous things we can better for next year:

- We both need to be physically better prepared. This includes being in better overall physical condition but also includes working on some specific physical skills for next year. We'll never hope to compete with the US Army Rangers who do things like this day in and day out but we can reduce the gap a bit.
- We need an upgrade to our LRF plan. We need better equipment here and we need to spend more time getting good at using that equipment. Hits are points and without a good range estimate you're just wasting ammo.
- We need to have a better plan for spotting trace and misses. While we both spotted for each other a lot, there were definitely points lost every time there was a "no call".
- Food selection, at least for these hot humid conditions, needs to be more centered around foods that are easier to eat when you're tired and dehydrated. Gel packs and gel cubes are fantastic and are still efficient from a weight vs. calories viewpoint.



Summary

Joe Harris, Marcus Harrison, and all the guys at Lanxang Tactical promised one of the toughest sniper matches in the country and they delivered! This was a match that was designed for experienced military snipers and we were lucky enough to be able to accept the challenge, survive and do well. Thanks to all our BEST Targets and Nordic Components team sponsors and supporters as well as to the sponsors of the event. It's time to start preparing for 2018!

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