

Sniper Platoon, 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland Open Sniper Competition 2023.

Cawdor Rifle and Gun club received an invitation from the 3rd Scots, sniper platoon to enter a open competition at Fort George and the Tain Air Range to consist of three days of shooting in various sniper oriented competitions commencing on November the 29th.



This was distributed to the club membership and eight hardy souls eventually arrived at Fort George on at 08:00 on the Wednesday morning. I was one of those souls. It must be said I was quite nervous about what would be asked of us and even if I was even a good enough shot or fit enough to enter up against real military snipers. I had already let CSgt Brownless know about my age, dodgy hips and general poor fitness levels, “Not a problem” was the response.

We were quickly taken to a meeting room where various items from the competition sponsors were distributed and details given as to the rules and what we were going to get up to. As CSgt Brownless and his team explained what we were to do I became relaxed, more and more excited as I realised we were in for a real treat.

As a background here, I knew I would not be willing to lug my F class rifle around the various challenges and so had already asked if I could use my 1941 Lee Enfield SMLE, CSgt Brownless had already given me permission to use that rifle and was interested to see it on the ranges we were to use.



I will detail the three days competition in order commencing with day one:

Wednesday the 29th November, Fort George;

Event one, Bingo.

Shot at 100 meters. This consisted of a bingo card as the target with each numbered square being around 3.2cm in size. A random number was called out and you had to hit the number called. Needless to say with open sights I could not see so I just aimed at the card.....I did not do well! The shooter had at claim lines and full cards, a couple did lines, but no full houses.

Event two, Plate Party.

Also at 100 meters, this was 11 circles on one target, the largest plate being 12cm in diameter, but only scoring one, the smallest being 9mm in diameter and scoring 11, five shots allowed. I did OK on this and scored 14. One of our Cawdor members scored the maximum of 45, hitting the 11 score, a remarkable effort of marksmanship.

Event Three, Rapid Bolt.

Shot at 400 meters, shooting at a large round target and then 5 smaller targets above;



This was starting to increase the distance and was also the first time we moved with our rifles as we started 10 meters behind the firing point and had to run forward load and put five rounds in the big target and one in each of the smaller targets. Needless to say I ran out of time.

Event four, Know Your Limits.

This was from 300 to 600 meters, once again moving with your rifle, shooting at a figure 11 target, starting at 300 meters, 10 meters behind firing point. You then had 90 seconds to run forward, load, shoot one round, show clear and run back to the next firing point place your rifle on the point and dress back 10 meters. This was repeated a further three times with each position adopting a different firing position, 300 meters - standing, 400 meters - sitting, 500 meters – kneeling, 600 meters – prone.



Event five, Change of Pace.

This was from 600 meters to 300 meters and back again and was the first of the real physical tests. Using a number 11 target.

Starting at 600 meters, prone, fire one round in five seconds, then on a command move you have 50 seconds to show clear, run to the 500 meter point, adopt a sitting position reload with one round and make ready. Then once again it is five seconds to shoot, then 50 seconds to show clear and move to the 400 meter point. This is repeated a further six times with alternate prone and sitting shooting positions.

At the end of it on the last 600 meter position, my heart was pounding , I was gasping for breath and the end of the rifle was bouncing up and down like a yo-yo.

That was the end of day one. I was very tired, not wet though that was to come later and enjoyed a brilliant days craic with all my fellow shooters and range safety management detail.

At each of the details each shooter was accompanied by their own safety supervisor to ensure a safe operation of equipment and correct loading and unloading procedures. There were many members of the Fort George compliment who were assigned butt duties, safety duties and many other back ground tasks, these were all carried out with complete professionalism and in a very friendly manner.

So at the end of day one, what had I scored? fourteen points, of which I was very proud, others had done a lot, lot better. But as a bonus the old SMLE behaved impeccably and created a lot of interest.

Thursday 30th November, Tain Air Range. The Hunt.

So the serious stuff begins. This day was spent at the Tain Air Range, a massive area of ground.

The Hunt consisted of shooters being divided up into two man teams, a sniper pair, carrying all our kit and rifles, but no ammunition, we had to navigate, find and approach without being seen an observation point. The OP was considered the enemy and were on the lookout for us. We had to approach “tactically” which means crawling around in the peat bog and through the trees to form a point where we were camouflaged and with in a good firing solution on the OP.

Once achieved and so long as we were not seen a range and shooting stance was recorded by the supporting military staff, along with a record of the distance the sniper pair thought they were at, this is important!

This period of approach took several hours and was over several kilometres in distance. Fortunately I with others was given the loan of a camouflaged jacket.

Unfortunately my partner and I were perhaps a little cautious and took a little too long travelling to the OP position hence did not manage to establish a good firing point.

Once a range and position without being seen was recorded we then moved to a range were targets were set out for each team at the distance. Some got as close as 200 meters or less, others were hundreds of meters away, as guests we were allowed to shoot at a target at 300 yards, but I believe with no score.

Then each shooting pair were shown their targets at the actual distance, but instructed to shoot with sight elevation set to the distance they quoted as being at. This lead to some misses at seemingly simple targets.



End of day two, absolutely shattered, covered in mud but very happy what an experience. Also I claimed a UK record as being the last person in the UK to use a 1941 SMLE on a military exercise.

It was a joy to be allowed to move around a safe area, with your rifle, trying to sneak up on an objective.

Friday 1st December, Fort George, Judgement Day.

Now the real pain, or as the Physical Training Instructors called it “the beasting” begins.

We were given choices....;

1) 3 km run with various exercises like crawling, duck walk (my hips did not allow that), tactical low level movement, within a time limit. If completed lose zero points, if fail lose many points.

2) 1 km run with crawling in a time limit. If completed lose many points, if fail lose even more points.

3) 200m walk, lose a lot, lot more points. Not available for the real snipers.

If you failed the time limit I believe you were disqualified. I initially opted to try the 3km run (a moment of insanity) after watching the others I changed to the 1km run.

I did complete the run in the prescribed time but it was seriously hard as it involved 4 by 25 meter belly crawls, easy you might think, try it with your rifle and ruck sack, you like me will be close to throwing up.

After the beasting, we were taken to the rifle range to shoot 2 rounds at a figure 11 target at 500 yards....only problem we had to crawl with full kit from the 600 meter point. By the time I got there

I was struggling, heart going like hell struggling for breath and on aiming the end of the rifle was once again dancing around the target.



Once again I did not do well, but some in the club managed it with several completing the 3km run and getting the targets, massive, massive effort and to be applauded. That was the end of shooting.

We then had a presentation and BBQ, in the afternoon, with many prizes, Cawdor Rifle Club did well, winning the open competition best shooter and second for best sniper pair.



Finally we were joined by the Depute Provost of the council, who supported and congratulated the Scottish Regiment on running the three days of competition.

Final Thoughts.

This competition with being allowed to shoot at Fort George and Tain Air Range, while mixing with and shooting against real snipers and with my fellow club members was a real privilege and honour. I enjoyed every minute of it and am already planning to attend next year.

Being on a rifle range eating the provided food, with your rifle by your side while surrounded by folks in their uniforms was quite an experience, as one of the other club members said, it was like being in a movie.

I also learned so much about the military shooting discipline and range control, some things are similar to how us civvies do it, others very different.

It was interesting to me that while the ability to shoot well is expected, it is not the skill for which the highest points were awarded, much greater emphasis with much higher point availability was rewarded for a successful hunt and ability to complete the physical fitness elements of the competition.

The amount of support and effort put in by CSgt Brownless and his team was remarkable and they must be thanked.

Next year I will take a more relevant rifle, the SMLE while not missing a beat, even while covered in mud was totally outclassed. I also would like to be fitter, one I guess will happen, the other probably not.

Martyn Asker

5th December 2023