

Old Farty Productions presents...

An Old Framlinghamian Rifle Club production...

Astor la vista baby! (18)

An epic on-the-edge tale of gunfire, gold medals and Prosecco.

By Bisley Correspondent Steve McDowell

Starring:

- John "Allahuakhbar" Halahan as *Seamus O'Charlatan*
- James "100 percent Jock" McMehta as *The GeeBees*
- Jon "Smallbore" Ford as *The Queen's Prize*
- Kim "Close Enough" O'Pope as *Lucky Heather*
- Steve "Two Knobs" McDowell as *The Welshman*
- Nigel "Cyclops" Burnip as *Double C the Chairman*
- John "Double Entry" Horton as *The Adjutant*

And

- Sandy Walker as *Himself*

Co-Starring

Sebastian "Canada" Treacy

Bertie "One Cap" Southworth

Ellie "Consistency" Partington

Guest Starring

John "Minion" Miller as *The Chief Range Officer*

SCENE ONE

Day one of the 2015 Imperial Meeting, Bisley.

The half-mile wide 500 yard firing point is crammed with veterans of public schools aged 19 to 90 gathering to compete for the honour of being the best. The OFs once again have managed to get enough shooters to muster three teams to compete in the Vets' aggregate. Only eight schools have managed this feat in itself. Two cadets from the College have stayed on, Ellie and Bertie, to shoot the meeting and improve as shooters. We welcome

back Tom 'Handsome' Hampson who has travelled from his first year at Loughborough University to pick up a rifle for his debut as an OF. Next year we will have Seb Treacy too, who first has his tour to Canada as an Atheling – the UK's cadet rifle team. The last one of us to be an Atheling was Sandy Walker and we know what happened then.

The mood is excited and full of fun. The College is celebrating. Despite mustering only five shooters, due to unfortunate circumstances, they came third in the Ashburton Fours – Ellie, Bertie, Seb and James Watt – and are sporting bronze medals.

Now it is the turn of the Vets and McDowell, a tidy and encouraging 49.6 under his belt, is in the coaching chair and Halahan is raging.

Halahan (ranting): "You twat, McDowell! Crap wind-coaching!"

McDowell (simpering): "But John you got 50.9 winning an HPS cross and possibly being top gun out of all these thousands of shooters."

Halahan: "What kind of a bungler would convert my second sighter – a mere bull 5 – and then allow me to put all the rest of them in the V-bull."

McDowell (bottom lip quivering): "This is the OFs, we take bullseyes where we can get them."

Halahan: "But not off the shelf in Lidl, you oaf."

McDowell: (now sobbing openly): Sorry John.

He storms of rage left, sulking and muttering "I should bloody-well think so" and lights another fag.

Meanwhile, Kim O'Pope hits a 50 – sign of things to come – and McMehta with another 49. The Vets match is beginning to look useful.

But it is impossible to win because there are several schools that take this very seriously – The Old Guildfordians, our old chums The Bedfordians and so on. The OF A team comes 15th, the OF Bs come 12th and the C-team 15th giving us a fifth place in the overall Ps Vets aggregate.

Other than the usual cast, taking part are the stalwarts Neil "Father of the House" Joy, Brian "Bush" Smith, David "AWOL" Argent, Geoff "Moon Unit" Houston, Andrew "Santa" (because he only appears once a year – geddit?) Horton and Jim "Ride 'em" Overbury.

We are delighted to see the return of the Chairman, even though he drops three, because he has only recently undergone a second bout of surgery to correct a detached retina in his left eye. This is an injury as potentially career threatening to a shooter as a footballer stepping on a landmine.

It is an achievement in itself to get three teams out and we enjoy ourselves with some Framlingham College 150th Anniversary beer, the last three cases apparently – some of our old chums disappearing until next April and the new season. Leaving 11 of us to carry on the fight. Gresham's have been seen off that's the main thing.

SCENE TWO.

Day two. It is 0710 hours on a deserted 300 yard firing point, some of us with the first of what will be a few hangovers. We are there to shoot a famous national tournament called The Astor. For more than 100 years every county has sent a representative rifle club to compete for the Astor Counties Championship Trophy. Traditionally, there are heats in each county to find a regional winner who then enters the national final. But the OFRC is there at short notice, because the West Suffolk Rifle Club, who should have been Suffolk's representative, was unable

to raise a team. Enter the OFRC range right. It is the first massive competition of the Meeting and one which sees international-level shooters heading to the range as the bemused OFRC contemplate something which might, with only a little imagination, resemble a strategy.

Halahan: "Right, we are allowed two coaches but we've only got one and he's a twat, as we well know."

McDowell shuffles uneasily and balefully contemplates the sight of two former Queens Prize winners walking down the range.

McMehta – for he is skipper – breaks the mood. "Right chaps. McDowell is coaching both targets at the same time. It's seven to count at each of three ranges, 300, 500 and 600 – giving a total of 105. Kim Pope is shooting concurrently for Ireland under-25s"

The team gasps in surprise.

McMehta: "Yes I know, I have passed on our congrats to her."

Team in unison: "Kim's Irish? We though she was from Diss!"

McMehta: "Yes well, apparently her Gran visited the Guinness factory in 1947 and that was considered enough to qualify... Anyway the team is... on the left target Darth Walker, myself and Halahan, and on the right Jon Ford and then Nigel. OK, chaps. First round down at 0800. Anyone got a fag?"

The team turns to gather kit and gird loins while ever-so slightly more serious briefings are going on up and down the range – electronic communications being unfolded and team scoreboards being erected.

The OFRC is picking its collective nose as Adj John Horton hands out the ammo, roughly checks that rifle sights are set correctly and the firers have not already forgotten the Captain's briefing from two minutes ago.

With McDowell in the middle, the first two firers let go, both Walker and Ford going clean with 35s, McMehta too puts in a 35 but as usual with the OFs 300 yards is "for paedophiles" and so Halahan and Burnip both drop a point. Kim is also clean for Ireland.

Still, with 300 yards behind us and only two points being dropped we are satisfied and head back to 500 yards with 228 out 230 points in the bag.

At 500 yards and with a comparatively minimal amount of bickering we settle down again.

Our score-keeper, an experienced Scotland shot, says: "So who's going first and are you shooting alternately because I've got two scorecards and only one pencil."

McDowell: "I dunno, Jon sort of goes first and Sandy sort of fills in when he feels like it. Sort of."

The scorekeeper is struck with horror.

And so it goes. At the end of the shoot and the score-keeper is struggling to keep up as round after round strikes the V bull.

Both targets reappear and both firers have the shot. Bang! Volley fire, the targets sink simultaneously and reappear together with pin-hole V-Bulls on each. 35.6 and 35.5 respectively.

McDowell (big smile): That's my boys!

Score-keeper is gibbering quietly to herself.

Taking their lead, McMehta, The Chairman and O'Charlatan all put in 35s. Only Kim has dropped two.

McDowell (weeping openly in full Uncle Monty mode): “My boys! My boys!”. He has achieved what is known in shooting circles as a “clean target”, that is to say he has coached all his firers to maximum scores. Wind coaches are reputed to dream of such things.

Ellie and Bertie, doing their bit score-keeping for the grateful OFs with neighbouring teams, have the distinct rabbit-in-headlight look about them.

Ellie (sotto voce to Bertie tapping her temple with her hand): “What have we signed up for!”

The team is now four off – 456 ex 460 with a bag of V-bulls – and fancying it. But yet again 600 yards is a great leveller and the wind makes up its own mind. Sandy goes clean for a magnificent 105 possible, but poor Jon Ford drops four, two to wind and two high and low. Halahan drops another but the Chairman goes clean and so, ultimately does Kim. Only McMehta to go - but disaster strikes and the wind gets up giving him a ‘Sammy Davis’ - tap dancing either side of the bull for a 31. Horror.

We have blown it. ‘Red Leader’ Ford is distraught and has already left the range with only the black cloud over his head visible in the far distance; McDowell is miffed that he dropped at least two to wind. Maybe those two would have been would have been enough? Nah! Some smart arse will have got them all in, we assume dolefully.

McMehta and McDowell take off as they have another shoot almost immediately. Ho-hum.

SCENE THREE.

Later. McMehta and McDowell are downcast and on Stickledown preparing for a long range shoot. Enter range left Halahan wearing a grin like a Cheshire Cat who has found the Skunk stash and bouncing like Tigger on a sugar rush.

Halahan: “Do you want a fillip?”

McDowell: “Bugger off, John.”

Halahan: “We won the Astor!”

McDowell: “I’m not in the mood. Bugger off. I mean it.”

Halahan: “So do I!”

Cue amazed celebrations – dancing a jig on the firing point and much manly embracing – to the discombobulation of the Range Control Staff. We have won a gold medal and beaten, by two clear points, the likes of Jersey, East of Scotland, Norfolk, London, Surrey and the RAF, who represented Oxfordshire. It seems everyone else had a nightmare at 600 yards too. The Bedfordians came 15th and the Guildfordians, with a Queens Prize winner in the team, 12th. The OFRC has, literally, beaten the shooting world.

Halahan with a shit-eating grin: “McDowell, you are forgiven.”

SCENE FOUR

Day 3. The majority of yesterday's shoots were forgotten because the OFRC was so stunned we could not focus – there is an audio recording of our win being announced on the tannoy as 'The Old Framlinghams', followed by an audible cry of "Who the f*** are they?"

We did it OFRC style, with minimal kit and maximum mucking about.

McDowell, now dubbed 'Two Knobs' for his coaching style, is ever consistent in the Century shoot and manages a 40.2 at 600 followed by a 50.7 at 500.

Ellie "Five sighters" Partington and Bertie are beginning to get into the groove with Bertie proudly stating that he had a 'custard' at 300 yards – dropping his last shot for a 49. Ellie thinks the chance of a custard would be a fine thing.

Queue more party scenes.

SCENE FIVE

Day 5. The Lovell, the first 1000 yard shoot of the meeting brings with it an extraordinary wind – one which will lay the foundations for the rest of the week. It is windier than the quality control manager at the Heinz baked beans factory. Winds shifting through 30 degrees of angle from four or five minutes right up to 15. At that range 30 minutes of angle translates to about 12 feet, certainly enough to put you on the neighbouring target if you mis-call the wind. We need angels not angles. Robert Sweegers, a super-talented visiting Australian international who is at his first Bisley meeting, approaches McMehta, O'Pope and McDowell.

Sweegers: "G'day guys. I've never shot here before - what would be your opening bid?"

OFRC: "Uhm, say 12 minutes, that should get you on the target."

Sweegers: "F**k me."

There is carnage. Pope hits 35, Mehta 37. Serious shooters like the quadruple Commonwealth Gold winner David Luckman come off the range with 41. McDowell is dead chuffed to walk off the range with a 43.3, the Chairman stumps up a 45. Bertie and Ellie get their first taste of 1000 yard shooting and it is, apparently obviously, not to their taste.

Sweegers, with two misses, gets 31.

Sweegers: "F**k me."

Miller enters stage left in green vest flapping arms by his sides: "Bananonina! Badabooiee!"

Exit range right.

SCENE SIX

Tuesday. There was a time, not so long ago, when an OFRC member being selected for a county team was a very big deal. But 2015's Intercounties match sees OFs firmly embedded in the county scene. Kimbers as vice-captain of Suffolk, Jon Ford as a stalwart opener, Two Knobs as coach and John Horton the Adjutant; McMehta for Essex; and Halahan and Burnip for Derbyshire (if in the event they actually had a team, but they don't).

The great excitement is that one of our cadets, Bertie, has so impressed the Suffolk higher-ups that he is selected to win his first cap at the age of 15. Pride fills his face as we gather for the short-range element of the match.

McMehta (OFRC skipper): "Bwuhahahha. We've got him now – he's hooked for life."

O'Pope (Suffolk vice): "Snigger. That was the point."

They are right, he, and Suffolk, perform creditably dropping only 22 points and beating both Essex and Norfolk – which of course is the important thing.

SCENE SEVEN

Day seven. Thursday.

The National Match.

Halahan, having toured with GB in the Spring, is now embedded in the Irish team, despite, as we know being a Muslim who's mum once ate a plate of Colcannon, thus qualifying her unborn son to shoot for Ireland.

As we further know, by dint of being born in Dundee, McMehta is Scottish, as is Sandy Walker – thus both taking up the Saltire.

The greater surprise is the selection for a full international Cap for Kim O'Pope in the "National Match", only days after her under 25 debut and the random discovery of an Irish heritage. This even came as a surprise to her bemused father who texted a question that did this make him Irish too as hitherto, and for many years, he had laboured under the misapprehension that he is, in fact, English.

Yet it seems the antics of the OFRC have gone around the camp, and to everyone's incredulity, including him, Two Knobs has been selected as a reserve... for Wales.

Halahan/McMehta (in unison): Welsh?

McDowell: "Actually my Mum was from North Wales so I am actually qualified. Actually. Innit."

Halahan/McMehta: "Cobblers"

McDowell: "No she worked in Asda."

Enter range right O'Pope wearing a chimney-stack hat and smoking a pipe:

"Want to buy some lucky heather, deary?"

McTaff: "There's lovely, see"

Halahan: "Bejaysus."

McMehta: " Haud yer wheesht! " *Which apparently means "Shush! Be quiet!"*

Miller this time in orange jacket: "Tulaliloo!"

As it turns out England and Ireland raced for the title with Halahan and O'Pope dropping only one between them. Mehta hits a 103, Walker a 105 and McDowell wields a pencil with fearsome intensity. Nonetheless Ireland narrowly lose out to the mighty England, and Wales beat the Jocks – serves them right for having a bag-piper on the pitch. The OFRC, however, looms large. With Messrs Ford and Burnip both ex-GB Veterans and John Horton an ex-GB shot (from 1972) we can now field no fewer than eight internationals.

SCENE EIGHT

Prologue. A single spotlight lights an empty range – slowly and purposefully Chairman enters the spotlight, his hands in his OFRC blazer pockets. He fixes the audience with the legendary Bullets Death Stare. He speaks as Henry V, all Larry Olivier.

"It is at this point, gentles all, that we should highlight the achievements of our beloved aeronaut, the noble Jonathan Ford. In four years since coming to full-bore shooting at the age of 68 he has qualified for two consecutive Queens Finals. In 2015 he has finished 22nd in the Grand Aggregate meaning that he is beyond doubt the 22nd best full-bore shot in the world this year. He has raised his classification from T – Tyro through O – Ordinary and A – Advanced to X – Expert – the top 100 shots each year – in four consecutive years."

Chairman pauses for extra dramatic effect and strides stage right.

"This, as far as we can ascertain, and unprecedented success. At 72 he has become a world-class sportsman."

Raising voice: "And OFs in England now abed shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whilst any speaks. That shot with Red Leader upon Queen's Final Day!"

Exit stage right, cue standing ovation.

Spotlight swings left. McMehta stands meekly with his finger in the air.

"Ahem. S'cuse me, but I should like to point out that we had three OFs in the Grand Aggregate 100, Sandy Walker and me – I came 91st. Which is more than Gresham's."

Flurries of cabbages hit the stage.

Miller, in Blue Hi-Vis enters to maintain order, flaps arms animatedly: "Tatata bala tu!"

SCENE NINE

Final Day. Saturday. The meeting is drawing to a close and the finals of the two biggest competitions at the Imperial meeting have arrived. Each has two qualifying stages and only the top 100 can make the finals of the St George's and Her Majesty The Queen's Prize.

There are literally hundreds of casualties on the way so to have an OF representative in each is a great achievement.

Jon "Queen's Prize" Ford makes his second final – watched by the shooting world it is the very pinnacle of rifle shooting. He performs creditably though gets smashed by an evil wind and finishes 90th (from about 1000 people) beating last year's performance by four places.

Only slightly behind him is James McMehta who has made the final of St George's carrying over a massive, near maximum, score of 75.10.

The OFRC can't be bothered to go and watch him because it's lunchtime, the sun is out and there's cold beer to be drunk.

McDowell's phone pings. (Yawning) "James thinks he's won the St George's with 149.19"

Burnip: "Another pint?"

McDowell: "Yes please shall we think about some lunch, chairman?" Ping! "Ah, James says he came third in the St George's he's got his name on the board and wins a massive great cup with a badge."

Burnip (studying the menu): "Cheese and tomato toastie?"

McDowell: "Please mate."

O'Pope: "D'you want to buy some lucky heather, deary?"

Miller: "Badadooooeee!"

CLOSING SCENE

The massive umbrella tent. The OFs queue up with the great and the good, the military in immaculate uniforms and some of the best shots in the world in their blazers and ties (borrowed in McDowell's case since he never expected to win anything). We are loudly announced and we pick up our big shiny gold medals and a serious, proper trophy engraved with famous names going back to 1903.

Now the name of the Old Framlinghamian Rifle Club will be writ large upon it – just like the club itself.

There was nothing left to do – the OFRC's final act – was to fill the famous Astor trophy with Prosecco and drink it with straws, all at once.

Exit range left the OFRC.

Enter range right the Chairman. He is spotlight. There is a strange quiet as the madness of the previous nine days fades like a gossamer cloud.

(Silence) "Where, O where does the OFRC go from here?"

Miller: "Apple!"

Exit.

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Afterword: The Old Frams have come to the end of a long season in which we won the All Day match from the Bedfordians and the Lawrentians, but lost the opening Q Match and Long Range shoot to a collaborative Lancing and Bedford team called BedLancers. There is still a Steward's enquiry.

Yet despite all this our greatest achievement, it is widely agreed, is that the OFRC is in great shape and bringing though young College shooters who in turn reinforce our ranks. Not only are the established Sandy and Kim testament to that, but we are particularly proud to have welcome Tom Hanson and Seb Treacy into the club – we look forward to Ellie and Bertie coming through next. Then we will know where we can go from here.

Final Positions:

Grand Aggregate: 705.141

22 nd : Jon Ford	692.80
81 st : Sandy Walker	687.78
91 st : James Mehta	686.85
387 th Nigel Burnip	668.47
422 nd Seb Treacy (College)	664.58
435 th : Kim Pope	662.65
522 nd : Steve McD	653.46
597 th : Bertie Southworth (College)	637.40
709 th : Ellie Partington (College)	560.29



Top Row L-R

Kip Pope, Sandy Walker, Jon Ford
(inserted John Halahan)

Seated L-R

Steve McDowell, James Mehta,
Nigel Burnip

Absent: Bertie Southworth and
Ellie Partington (both from
College) – Register Keepers



Below is Jon Ford in HM Queen's Prize Final





