

Royal Air Force blown off course by 'The Few'.

From Bisley Correspondent Steve McBowell

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There's nothing like a bit of chutzpah to make you new friends – even more so when you pushily invite yourselves to join a shooting match and then win it.

Not only that, but the OFs won it a bit like the RAF's bombing practice – by miles.

Even skipper James 'Biggles' Mehta's natural braggadocio was muted by the obvious faux pas of sending a highly decent bunch of RAF chaps to a crushing defeat.

In fact, the normally chipper RAF team showed as much stiff-upper lip in the face of adversity as was last seen at the Stalag-Luft 13 Christmas party.

Tempestuous winds had something to do with it, however, and the generosity of our friends from the RAFTRC mixing up their veteran shooters with the novices in their two teams was also helpful to the cause – but the fact remains... The OFRC beat the RAF at shooting. (Cue fanfare of martial music).

So four of us, the 'few' we could manage to get to Bisley - took up the generosity of the RAF's offer of a spare target in their annual match with Hampshire.

As with all shooting in April there is a fair chance of weather anomalies and this match certainly had all of them. Rain, wind and skies blacker than a coal miner's vest.

The Boys in Crabshell Blue should know a thing or two about weather but lacking the OC Meteorological for RAF Stickledown, they were as clueless as us – albeit with a great deal more common sense.

The OFs could muster four markspersons in the shape of Skipper Biggles, Kim "Waaf" Pope, Nigel "Algie" Burnip and Steve "Ginger" McDowell. (It was noted that Air Commodore Jon Ford OF was conspicuous in his absence. Possibly diplomatically wise.)

The match began at 900 yards with the following exchange:

Biggles (in the coaching chair): "I say Ginger, there's a mighty blow on – we'd better go upwind 10 minutes."

Ginger (speed-cranking windage onto his sights): "Right you are Biggles." BANG!

Biggles: "Ahem. Better make that 15 minutes old thing."

Ten minutes later and McDowell has 42.4 ex 50 with three 3-point scoring magpies left and right of (and some distance away from) the bull.

Biggles: "Funny thing Ginge old fruit. I can't seem to tell the difference between the wind-flags at 12 minutes and 16 minutes."

Ginger gruffly reminds the bungling skipper that he has just returned from the World Championships in New Zealand where it was winder than the Spanish Main.

With Ginger in the chair more of a handle was grasped on the wind with one of Burnip's shots plotting out at 19 minutes of angle. At 900 yards (just over half a mile) away this translates to 171 inches, or 14.25 feet. He is in effect aiming at the left-hand side of the target to the left of his.

The following exchange was heard over the OF RT:

"Ok, Algie, old bean, have a bash at Target 19."

Algie fires and grunts: "Um - bit left."

At this very moment the wind at the end of the range picks up in a gust and tears the face off Target 14 which barrels across the range like an abandoned tent.

"Yes it was a bit Nige."

With theatrical pause worthy of the Royal Shakespeare Company Nigel ruefully shakes his head: "I can deal with the up and down bits but how much lead do you give an airborne target at 900 yards?"

Finally, we all managed to complete a 900 yard shoot – some of us even did two until the RAF range officer, despite displaying numerous qualities of Dunkirk Spirit, finally had to admit defeat to the weather as the target markers were now complaining of 'incoming' bits of target frame.

After lunch we resumed at short range and happily wasted ammunition into the wind, ten scoring shots at a time at 300, 500 and 600 yards.

Shrieks of laughter from unexpectedly wayward rounds resulted in the OFs being sternly reprimanded for 'hilarity on the firing point'.

Everyone else, it turned out, shot only seven scoring rounds but no matter. The Skipper and the Waaf deployed some creative arithmetic to average down our ten round scores to seven.

Creative maths aside – we had won by 25 clear points from RAF A and B teams and Hampshire's two fours. Adding insult to injury Cap'n Mehta claimed a gong for top shot.

Shuffling red-faced away from a splendid tea at the RAF's well-appointed clubhouse, the Waaf bullishly observed: "What are we ashamed of? All four of the OF here are multiple internationals. They got a righteous spanking!"

She has a point.

How far we have come.