

# SOF SHOOTING – TOUR REPORTS

## James Mehta (S 67-75): NRA Team to the Channel Isles May 2014

I was selected for the National Rifle Association team to tour the Channel Islands in May 2014. Regarded as a “development” team, none of us were “established” shooters, although most had represented their county, and ranged in age from teenage students through to older salts.

Several training sessions were organised under the guidance of the Team Management who were all very experienced international shooters, including Ant Ringer who has won the Queens Prize not once, but THREE times: an truly remarkable achievement. Team bonding, team shooting drills, and individual skills were all honed under their tutelage over several weekends.



The tour lasted just over a week and included shooting on both Guernsey and Jersey, with plenty of time to enjoy some R&R, which mainly consisted of sight-seeing, eating and drinking. Although we won our final warm up match –v- The London & Middlesex Rifle Association, we narrowly lost both matches on the tour. The Channel Islanders are formidable competitors, no doubt because nobody lives more than twenty minutes from a range, and there is a considerable home advantage in knowing how to deal with the stiff sea breezes that affect them.

Personally my shooting improved by leaps and bounds, scoring 150.25 ex 150.30 in the Guernsey

match, and achieving 7 “Highest Possible Scores” out of the fifteen or so shoots. I won the aggregate in the Guernsey Meeting, and was presented with a fine silver salver. Unfortunately this had to be immediately returned as it’s not allowed to leave the island!

The effect on my personal shooting has been tremendous and continuing: I had a very successful Imperial Meeting in July, reaching the final of the Queens Prize, and was selected for Scotland in the National Match. Just recently I represented Scotland again in the European Long Range Championships which we won. So I’m now a European Gold medallist! [James is pictured top right]



## John Halahan (S 72-75): Reflections of a GB tourist to USA & Canada September 2014

“You have been selected to represent.....” It’s always been good to see these words next to your name. Even better this was not the Framlingham College U15 rugby 2<sup>nd</sup> XV: this was for the Great Britain Rifle Team tour to the USA and Canada.

It was a long tour and at times very tiring. I shot the Imperial Meeting at Bisley at the end of July for ten days and then, with only two weeks at home and work before the tour departed, I was off for three weeks in Canada and USA. Understandably this caused one or two arched eyebrows at both venues but I just ran up the Union Jack and ignored them all.

Shooting in the North American continent is on ICFRA (International Confederation of Full-Bore Rifle Association) targets. For reasons clear only to them, this means shooting on a Bisley sized-target was deemed far too easy and they have reduced the dimensions of the bull and V-bull. This makes the opportunity of scoring a “Possible” (Highest Possible Score) a touch more difficult - but in fairness results in tighter groups and an overall raising of one’s game







Ammunition quality has a greater impact on the scores achieved at this level of competition than it had say 10 years ago when life in general and shooting in particular seemed a far simpler proposition. A world away from my chums at the OFRC, that's for sure.

There was much 'pulling' and 'pushing' of the bullet heads (extracting and reseating) and in-depth discussions on the pros and cons of different bullets, powder loads and brass used. All absolutely fascinating stuff if you know what you are talking about. It was like being at a technical business meeting. And one where you are hoping against hope that you are making the right noises in the right places and not appearing to be a total fool. I was, but I think I got away with it.

It is the people you meet on a tour such as this that go an awful long way to making it the tremendous experience that it was. Both in Canada and the USA the shooting fraternity welcomed the GB team with honest and open friendship. While we were shooting in competition against 'them' then the professionalism and competitive spirit shown by the GB team was second to none but when the shooting was over, handshakes and congratulations (or commiserations) were the order of the day.

The GB tour members were a varied collection of very talented shooters, but operated as a team and the amount of help and advice given to the newer GB members by the 'old lags' was gratefully received and thankfully applied.

There was an awful lot of travelling, and the "hurry up and wait" was very reminiscent of my days in the Army. This ranged from three hours to check in at Toronto airport (BA check in staff there have a lot to answer for) to six hour drives to and from Canada/USA. All part of the rich experience of an international tour and, though their cars are big and comfortable, the national speed limit can at best be described as 'quaint' for such a large country.

Food. Hmm. There was a lot of food closely followed by even more food. Quite a reasonable variety available but somehow seemingly lacking in substance, bland and plentiful though comparatively cheaper than in the UK.

Alcohol, well it would have been rude not to partake of the occasional libation. I believe that the appropriate phrase is "work hard, play hard". We worked extremely hard and perhaps I don't need to develop that point further.

However like the National football team, the night before a match alcohol and revelry was limited. Again the hospitality and friendship of the Canadians and the Americans was excellent and genuine.



Would I go again? Hell yes but perhaps wishing to have continued domestic bliss and a job to come back to, I might leave it a few years before deciding to throw my hat into the ring again for selection. We all have pinnacles in life that we aspire to and I am proud to achieved one of mine.

It is customary at this stage to thank family, friends, long lost acquaintances et al but you know who you all are and if you don't realise that without you and the Old Framlinghamian Rifle Club I would not have made it, you don't need me to say so. So there.

## **Nigel Burnip (S 58-65) and Kimberley Pope (M 04-09): Tour to USA "Spirit of America" Meeting September 2014**

Two OF's Nigel Burnip Chairman of the North London Rifle Club (NLRC) , Bisley and Kim Pope were in the NLRC team which travelled to 'The Spirit of America meeting' held at the NRA Whittington Center, New Mexico, USA. This is an annual meeting hosted by the Bald Eagles Rifle Club in memory of the 3000 who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

The Whittington Center is 5 miles from Raton in the north eastern corner of New Mexico and is one of the largest shooting ranges in the USA with 33,000 acres.

Further information can be found on the NLRC website [www.nlrc.org](http://www.nlrc.org) . At about 6,500 feet altitude sickness can be a

problem so the team arrived a few days before the meeting for a bit of recreation and acclimatisation which included a visit to the top of Pikes Peak in the Rocky mountain range at the summit 14110 feet.

The shooting programme was 7 days alternating between individual and team matches incorporating all distances between 300 and 1000 yards. Day 3 Kim Pope achieved a 2<sup>nd</sup> in Class with a score of 442.17 ex 450.45 and the NLRC team achieved a very respectable 3<sup>rd</sup> place on 2 days when in 1<sup>st</sup> place was a USA national team and in 2<sup>nd</sup> place the US Marine Corp! [Kim and Nigel are 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> from right in the photo below]







## Jon Ford (S 58-62): 2014 South Africa Tour with the RAFTRC

The OFRC Captain has been nagging me for a while to write a report on a Tour to South Africa which I did from 25 Mar-14 Apr 2014 with the RAF Target Rifle Club. So here goes, but perhaps I can first give an insight into my shooting career which is divided into 2 distinct stages. Firstly my time at Framlingham College when I started in the Cadet Pair at Bisley when John Horton was the Captain and thence to my final year at school when I was the Captain and our Chairman, Nigel "Bullets" Burnip, was one of the cadet pair and David Argent the other.



On leaving the College I joined the RAF and, apart from my annual RAF weapons qualification, I did not shoot again until 1996 a break of some 34 years. In that year I visited Bisley and it stirred memories so I started to shoot again with the OFRC. In 2007 the RAF grounded me for medical reasons so I decided that I needed a new hobby. I started with Small Bore and steadily improved and then decided to go into Full Bore. Bullets was selling one of his target rifles and it is since I bought his rifle and joined the RAFTRC that my shooting has improved significantly.

The RAF tour to South Africa in 2014 had 2 elements – a week in Cape Town, mostly holiday, with a match against the Peninsular Club on a range with Table Mountain as a backdrop. My scores were not brilliant for several reasons. I was trying out a new “Right Sight”, the South African Bull is smaller with the V Bull considerably smaller and I found the changing wind very difficult to read.



We then travelled up the east coast to George, Knysa and Plattenberg Bay before entering the stunning Tsitsikamma National Park. This was a memorable trip up the Garden Route before cutting inland to head for Bloemfontein and the South African Bisley Union (SABU) Championships.

The shooting starts with a Free State Provincial Championship shot over 2 days and thence the SABU Championships shot over 7 days culminating in the State Presidents (the equivalent of the Queens) shot in 3 stages. I found the South Africans very friendly and delighted we were there, but fiercely competitive. They shoot in metres and Bloemfontein is 5,500 ft above sea level so my Bisley Zeros were useless. However, an excellent talk from David Calvert helped give the expected changes in elevation from the Bisley settings and the elevation change from one distance to another.

The first shot down the range is at 0800 so an early start was necessary. Prayers were said on the firing point each day before shooting started. It can be very hot at Bloemfontein and we had several rounds popping primers. There was a break every day for an hour at lunch time and it was important to get in the shade. Once again I found the wind difficult to read and it regularly fishtailed and I was still struggling to get used to my Right Sight. However, I made good progress and ended up with a 50.6, 48.3 and 49.5 in Stage 2 of the Presidents which qualified me for the final. My scores in Stage 3 were reasonable but with an element of being raped by the wind! There is nothing like experience and it was interesting staying in the same hotel as the other Brits including Parag Patel and David Luckman one of whom won the Presidents and the other the Grand Agg; that is what I mean by experience!



I was selected to shoot for the RAF in the Chairman’s Competition which was shot at 300, 600 and 900 metres. I held my own! But appreciated having a wind coach!

My tour to South Africa was most enjoyable and I learned a great deal. Once I had got used to the Right Sight and got a good set of zeros my scores improved and the experience set me up extremely well for the season at Bisley culminating in my reaching the final of the Queens. Not bad for relative new boy! I am most grateful to the OFRC for getting me back into shooting. It is great being in the company of fellow shooters both with the RAFTRC and with the OFRC.