



The Diary of a Metronome

Sandy Walker, the OF Rifle Club's most successful ever member, travelled to New Zealand as the youngest ever member of the Great Britain Rifle Team. At a mere 22 years of age he is now an international sportsman.

He is only the third OF to shoot at international level, following John Horton in 1972 and David Argent in 1994. Here the wunderkind, known to his OFRC clubmates as the Gangling Metronome, himself gives us an exclusive view of what it is like to shoot at the highest possible level.



Saturday 16 January, 2010.

Queens Final Day, Trentham Range, Wellington, New Zealand

The morning's provincial match was over, the wind was getting ever stronger and the crowds and TV cameras are amassing to witness the crowning of New Zealand's oldest sporting trophy, 'The Ballenger Belt'.

For me this was the dawn of Day 21 of an extraordinary tour of NZ which had seen team GB travel from south island to north, experiencing jet boating in Alma Springs, whale watching at Kaikora, sea kayaking through the Marlborough Sounds and (most importantly!) wine tasting throughout Blenheim..... all this before shooting had even started. Since then, GB had broken the World Record in the New Zealand Match (1189.237 out of a possible 2000.400) and 19 of its 20 shooters had qualified for the prestigious Queens Final.

As I sat on my stool behind the 900 yrd firing point setting what I hoped to be the correct sight settings on my trusty rifle, I had 'roomie' Jon Clod to my left, TV cameras and expectant crowd to my right and places 26 to 50 of the Grand Agg taking on the ferocious Trentham wind in the first detail of the final ahead of me.

I looked out, concentrating on the conditions in preparation for my quest for glory, half the flags on the range blew one way, the other half, the other. This peculiar situation had become the norm towards the end of the week, meaning that scores across the board had plummeted to an average of around 35 – 40/50. To make it harder, all shoots at the end of the week were at 900 or 1000 yds and as a guide to the usual severity of the 'Trentham wind', 2010 was the first year in which 1000 yds had been shot as in previous years too many people were missing the target due to misfortunes in reading the South Pacific elements.

Jon 'if Carlsberg made riflemen' Underwood (2009 winner of the Bisley Grand Aggregate and England Commonwealth Games hopeful) had even come away from 1,000 yds with a 39/50 earlier in the week. Gulp. With iPod plugged in, I concentrated on the task in hand.

Half an hour later I was down and ready on Target 34 to master the conditions as one of the top 25 competitors after a week of shooting. I went into the final in 19th place, 5 points behind the leader and confident that my wind-reading mojo would stay with me.

It had been firmly on form for me for the previous two days – a rarity in itself. With NZ preferring the ‘string shooting’ method where one is allocated to a target and given a time limit to fire a set amount of shots (rather than 3 to a target in the UK), I began my 15 shots at 900 yds.

I started steadily, carefully choosing my time to shoot in an ever-changing wind. The strength was similar to a windy UK Bisley but it was the rate and angle of change that caught people by surprise.

Similar to the speed in which the ‘mirage’ changes in South Africa, the wind, strength and angle changed as fast in NZ, meaning that missing the target altogether was commonplace for many shooters.



I started well, converting a ‘bull 5’ from a sighter, to my first to count. However, subsequent quick changes whilst I was in the aim meant that my 2nd and 3rd shots went just left and right of the bull, both scoring 4. It was obviously going to be a long and hard shoot.

Undeterred by my original strategy, I continued to carefully choose the times that I squeezed the trigger. After another steady patch, my next 5 shots went in the bull and V-bull before I noticed a dramatic change in angle.

I was aware that many of my competitors had gained wide shots scoring 2 and 3 at best so decided to wait out the change. I waited..... and waited but the original wind never returned.

With the current patch relatively steady but very different from before I decided to press ahead, winding the wind on my sights from 7 ½ minutes right down to 3. At that range this represents a physical change of approximately 5 feet.

I shot and up came a ‘bull’ so with a quick correction I motored ahead firing as fast as I could to take advantage of the steadier wind conditions. Another 4 shots down in less than a minute and another 4 bulls and V-bulls – my strategy was paying off.

Then came another big change..... and subsequently, another big wait. With 3 minutes remaining of my allotted 24, I had no choice but to press ahead and hedge my bets. Bang..... 4 – out left. A quick change thinking the wind had straightened, bang..... 4 – out right!

Another wind change and I shot again thinking that my previous wind setting would be correct this time..... 4!!!! Grrr!

I finished my final shoot with 70.6/75 and packed my bag fuming at my missed opportunity only to find that my score was respectable when compared to others and given the conditions. If anything, my last 3 shots were a stark reminder of the harshness of the Trentham wind, leaving me as confused as when I arrived. Merely to think that I could predict such an animal was foolish.

I finished the prestigious ‘Ballenger Belt’ in 20th place despite my poor finish and whilst Jon ‘roomie’ Clod, as the winner, was hoisted aloft during the customary chairing of the winner, I

looked back on my personal display with satisfaction. I came to New Zealand as one of the youngest to tour with a senior Great Britain side and had, by all accounts given a good showing.

NRA CHAMPIONSHIP BALLINGER BELT		
1	J A WATSON	486.51
2	B MEHRTENS	486.50
3	J CLOAD	486.47
4	R GEANGE	486.35
5	JC UNDERWOOD	485.64
6	AR WILDE	485.60
7	RCT JEENS	485.48
8	J MILLER	484.48
9	M MAXBERRY	483.55
10	DR COLLINGS	482.52
11	L ARTHUR	482.49
12	R JOHANSEN	482.46
13	ASH McCULLOUGH	481.60
14	J MESSER	481.58
15	RJ McQUILLAN	481.55
16	MJ COLLINGS	481.51
17	J SNOWDEN	481.47
18	N STANGROOM	481.44
19	A WALKER	481.40
20	GK ALEXANDER	480.50
21	RR CHILCOTT	480.48

I'd won all 3 U25 trophies, helped GB smash the World Record in the New Zealand Match, had gained my first cap in the Mini Palma Match and had now finished 20th at a place widely regarded as the hardest range in the world.

With many of the best individual shots from Australia, South Africa, Malaysia, Great Britain and New Zealand in attendance, this was no mean feat, even for a 22 year old gangling metronome.

To tour New Zealand with Great Britain, to experience the Trentham range and to share that experience with some of the finest riflemen in the world was an honour and I will cherish every minute of it for the rest of my days but it also reminded me of how I got here.



Without the financial support of the O.F society, the training and patience from Malcolm Todd during my days at Framlingham College and the support and friendship of the O.F Rifle Club, this would have never been possible. Boys, this one is for you.

So, until I tick once more, I think it is time for me to clock off.....

Sandy 'the gangling metronome' Walker (Rendlesham 2000-2005)

