

## *THE METER MATCH, THE MEASURE OF A MAN...*

In my dotage I have retreated from serious position shooting. It seems my body is a less flexible, my reflexes sluggish, and my endurance less than it was. Some of this is due to sloth as I really don't train as I should, but some of it is just the mechanism wearing down.

I had moments of brilliance and managed to worm my way to the stratosphere of the National Guard shooting program in both highpower and smallbore. I was never much more than a journeyman rifleman at my best. But if you shoot long enough you will occasionally luck into a bauble or two. Or, as Dick Scheller, one of my shooting mentors is fond of saying, "Even a blind hog finds an acorn now and then,"

Along the way I picked up a few National Records, mostly in the Codger Category. There were even few geriatric National Championships scooped up when they became available as I aged. Certainly, it was not a testament to my great shooting skills but rather a reflection of the fact that most of my contemporaries had either hung up their shooting boots or passed on to The Great Range in the Sky. There is something to be said for perseverance and good health.

As I scan today's match bulletins, I note that there are precious few of those I started with who are still potting away at targets from ten meters to 1,000 yards. But what I am noticing is that there are some who are at the top of the game who I recall as struggling juniors trying to remember that the pointy end of the cartridge goes in first. One such shooter is Eric Uptagrafft.

Uptagrafft is a two time Olympian, shooting a rifle he designed and built himself. The World and National Record holder has earned the US International Distinguished Shooter Badge, Distinguished Rifleman Badge, NRA Distinguished Smallbore Rifleman award in both prone and position and the Presidents Hundred rifle tab four times. He has been a National Champion in Service Rifle, Smallbore Conventional Prone, International 50m Prone, 300m Prone, and Mid-Range Prone. An Air Rifle and Smallbore All American at West Virginia University he was the 1993 NCAA smallbore rifle champion. Currently he is Sergeant First Class Eric Uptagrafft of the US Army Marksmanship Unit and serves as the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the USAMU International Rifle Team.

When Eric was starting out in the game, he was a typically poverty stricken college kid. Between his All American stints at Texas A&M and West Virginia he joined the National Guard and was immediately picked up by All Guard. I met him on his first trip with us, a ten day sojourn to California. Unfortunately, his pockets only contained lint and car keys and he didn't have enough front money for his motel room. Consequently, Bill Lange and I had him sleep on the couch in our room.

At the 2018 National Smallbore Prone Rifle Championships at Bristol Uptagrafft pulled off an extraordinary feat. Over four consecutive 50 Meter matches he fired an aggregate

score of 1600-158X. After the first two 400-40Xs, shot with metallic sights, he dropped two Xs on the first any sight Meter Match to eked out his third consecutive Meter Match win on a tie breaker with Kevin Nevius. I bumped into him at the scoreboard and couldn't resist a little needling, suggesting that he would have been better off staying with iron sights to keep his string going.

I was gob smacked when he casually replied that he was still shooting irons. The next day he shot a third 400-40X. He won the 2018 Conventional Smallbore Prone Championship on the back of those four Meter Matches, only the second person ever to win the title shooting irons all the way.

Eric's magnificent performance reminded me of another series of Meter Matches I had witnessed. The year I was picked up for the All National Guard International Team I was sitting next to the Army's legendary rifleman and coach Bill Krilling in the Assembly Area at Camp Perry. Back in 1965 Krilling became the first person to shoot a 3200X3200 in NRA registered competition. That was in the days of a required three pound trigger pull, so it was no mean feat.

I had met him at the Third US International Rifle Championships at Fort Benning, just before he shot the 3200 at the Silver Dollar Round-up in Winter Haven, Florida. As a graduation present. my parents allowed me to miss a week of school towards the end of my senior year to ride a Greyhound bus to Georgia to shoot the match with my brother Steve. Well, they hoped it would be a graduation present because at the time I was desperately clinging to a lofty class ranking of 311 out of 375. Being of no danger to the presumptive valedictorian I still had the Anchor Man sweating out his place of honor.

Off and on, over the intervening years, I had run into Krilling at various matches and, although not a friend, he was a good acquaintance. One day we were both scoping Wigger during the first of the two any sight Meter Matches of the second half of the smallbore prone championship as The Old Lion shot a 400-40X.

"Mr. Bill, you won't see a performance like that again in a dozen years." I pompously predicted.

The next day, as we scoped him, Wigger shot another 400-40X. Bill turned to me with an indulgent smile and remarked, "Time sure flies here at Camp Perry, doesn't it, kid?"

It flies even faster at Bristol when Uptagrafft is on the 50 meter line.

Hap Rocketto