

OF Shooters at the World Championships

In late January and early February 2019, New Zealand was host to the World Long Range Championships and associated International team matches held every 4 years, as well as to their own National Championships. OF Rifle Club members **Sandy Walker (R 96-05)** was selected for the GB Palma team, whilst **James Mehta (S 67-75)** was picked for the GB Veterans Team.



The culmination of two and a half years of selection and training saw the teams travelling to Heathrow for the long journey to the other side of the world. Getting fifty odd shooters with their equipment and seventy odd rifles to Auckland via Hong Kong proved relatively straightforward with the airline providing dedicated check-in desks. Even in spite of the rather bizarre instruction received from the Chinese authorities not to pack anything dangerous in the rifle cases.

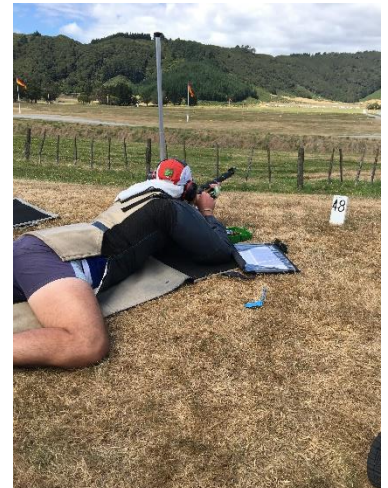
Arriving from a frozen UK to a New Zealand in the middle of summer in a heatwave was a welcome relief, with three days of R&R in the North Island to recover before establishing ourselves in the Hutt region.



The Seddon Range in Trentham at Upper Hutt, near Wellington, was the venue for all the individual and team matches spanning two weeks of competition. Trentham is known to be one of the most difficult ranges in the world in which to shoot full-bore rifle, and it proved to fully deserve its reputation, with mainly strong and very fast-changing winds being in evidence almost every day. As a result distant onlookers must have been very puzzled by

the lack of high scores from such a strong international field, with teams from Canada, USA, South Africa, Australia, GB, New Zealand, Japan and the Channel Islands.

Most competitors had at least one score that they would rather forget. The skill was not solely in reading the wind but managing it. Unlike the shooting format with which the GB competitors are most familiar, i.e. shooting in threes or twos and firing within 45 seconds of the target appearing for their shot, all the



individual shoots were conducted shooting singly with a set time limit for the entire shoot. Such a format allows the competitor to choose when they fire, with the usual tactic being to fire rapidly when the wind is more steady, and waiting (not firing) during periods of extreme turbulence. That however was the theory, but with some of the most rapidly changing winds generally encountered anywhere it proved very difficult, if not impossible, to enact. The results spoke for themselves – few escaped getting scores in the 50's out of 75 and the best word to describe it was carnage. Other terms heard during the matches were “mystifying”, “merciless”, and “brutal”.....and many others not suitable for publication. Thankfully, there was no rain to compound the misery.



Notwithstanding, the cream rose to the top with a lot of the usual suspects on the leader board, but similarly several big names struggled. Sandy, fresh from winning the bronze medal in the Brisbane Commonwealth Games, was unlucky to narrowly miss the final ten shooting for the World Title, eventually finishing in 14th place. Mehta self-handicapped in the early stages by firing a pin-hole centre-bull on the wrong target; an error from which there was to be no recovery. Happily the random target allocation saw the OF pair shooting together for the majority of the individual competition.

The results throughout the event showed the dominance of the Australian squad, who won all the team matches with GB coming in second place, and Aussie individual champions now are on top of the pile.

It's a bitter pill to accept, having travelled so far with every hope of success. But thanks must go to our gracious hosts in New Zealand for organising such a splendid event. The next World Championships will be held in South Africa in four years time.....see you there!