

## **A Greenhorn's Perspective** by Rod Vigstol



### **Prologue: August 2011**

Rod V. "Well Russ, is my season of shooting in the North Dakota winds going to help me at Lodi?"

Russ Theurer: "Nope, not at Lodi."

### **Sunday morning, September 25th**

I'm all packed and ready to make the 8 hour drive from my home in Fargo, North Dakota to the F-Class Nationals Championships in Lodi, Wisconsin. After giving my wife and girls all the necessary hugs and kisses to last me a week away from home, it was Eastbound and down - I was on my way.

Now, of course, I wasn't 15 miles away from home before I began to worry about what I may have forgotten. Well, if you know me, you know I am one of the meticulous types that have printed out checklists and I use 'em. So after a brief scare, I found my checklist, or one of the 5 or 6 I was using at the time, and reviewed it one last time before I could really relax.

It was time to drive and get to Lodi in one piece. After an uneventful drive with only a brief pit stop in the Minneapolis – St. Paul area of Minnesota for gas, I found myself pulling up to the clubhouse of the Winnequah Gun Club of Lodi, Wisconsin, looking for the club campground. Not quite sure at that point what I was expecting; maybe some sound effect that you hear on a movie soundtrack that causes a visceral gut feeling signaling that I have arrived at a place of significance. I sat there for a moment looking for my friend's camper and waiting for this sound effect to occur, when I saw the camper. I pulled up and got out, I was here... at Lodi, attending the F-Class Nationals and shooting alongside the Top-Shooters in the country! Oh man, what did I get myself into...



But those fears were quickly forgotten as my good friend Bob Pastor from Gobles, Michigan and my other roommate for the week, Mike Warner of Latrobe, Pennsylvania stuck their heads out from around the camper and hollered it was time to eat. Nothing allays the fear of competition like the smell of a T-bone sizzling on a grill! I have known Bob for close to 10 years, Bob talked to me about Mike for the past year and said that we would get along great. Heck, once I found out that Mike bought enough steaks for all of us, for the entire week, I knew he was going to be my good friend, at least for a week. After a good meal, catching up on all the scuttlebutt and a walk through of the range, it was time to call it a night and be ready for a 0700 roll call at the range stat house.

Dang, it was just like Christmas eve when I was a kid, I couldn't fall asleep. Okay, what did I forget? What kind of greenhorn mistake am I going to make tomorrow? Sure as heck I'm going to knock somebody's gear over and it won't be another noob's stuff, it will belong to someone like Shiraz Balolia. But eventually I fell asleep, even with all the first day jitters flying thru my head, the driving time took its toll and I crashed hard.

#### **Monday morning, September 26th**

Coffee is brewing and I am ready to roll. What the heck is that sound? NO! Not more rain... Oh well, glad I brought rain gear; it was right next to my extra biohazard suit - don't ask why I had one of those, but I was prepared just in case. I suited up, got a fresh cup of coffee and went off to the stat house to figure out just what the heck was going on for the day. I guess if we were to

shoot in the rain, I was prepared for that too. After all, it was practice day with informal matches at 600, 1000, and 1200 yards.

The stat house was full of folks milling around, chatting and smiling. I wandered over to a table that had some free samples and business cards on it. I thought cool, something to read and some cool decals for the shooting box to take home. Well, my browsing at the table, kind of carried over to the next table and I picked up a barrel to fondle, thinking wow, now this is one heck of a free sample table. Somehow, when I asked the burly guy sitting there if these barrels were free samples, the intended humor was lost in the early morning hours. He failed to even crack a smile. Dang, some folk just aren't morning people. It was announced shortly there after that practice would be delayed until 1100, provided the weather cooperates.



Well, by 1400 the rain had let up enough for those of us who wanted to verify zeroes. We each got 15 minutes at 1000 yards. Earlier Bob told me to make sure I had my cleaning rod in my gun case when I went to the line. Of course, I wasn't worried, I never yet had anything go bad on me that I couldn't handle discreetly on the firing line. I don't need my cleaning rod right behind me on the line... Well sure as heck, my turn on the line and I cannot chamber a round. Instant panic, why did I not listen to Bob! Luckily Mike did listen and I used his cleaning rod to knock out the patch that I am sure someone else had left in my barrel - because there is no way I could have done that...

After a few shots down range, the targets went down and came up, the scoring disc was in a respectable spot; I was ready to go, confidence restored, let's go shooting! Unfortunately the rain was coming back and after 30 minutes, it was time to go back to the camper and wait until tomorrow. Another fantastic T-bone steak from my new best buddy, Mike Warner, and it was time for bed. This time sleep came a lot easier. I did not knock Shiraz's rifle into the mud and I had my greenhorn mistake out of the way. I can sleep restfully now.

### **Tuesday, September 27th**

0550, I found myself making coffee and looking for food. Dunno what it is, but I cannot function 5 minutes in the morning without food. Thankfully, I listened to the wife and brought some of those foo-foo diet-breakfast shakes she bought for me, as they actually do a good job of filling me up for a couple hours. Now, who'd have thought to listen to his wife when she says, "Honey, I bought you some breakfast shakes for breakfast, you need to keep your nutrition up." Wow, go figure, she was right! I'll have to add those to my checklist.

After roll call and figuring out my squadding assignments, I found that I begin my day in the pits, shoot and then end my day in the pits. Fortunately, Mike and I were teamed together on a target, as his rotator cuff is damaged and I am really good at providing grunt labor; so we made a natural team. Next to us (two burly manly men, I might add) were two high school age, young ladies that were part of the volunteer target pullers for those that couldn't. I thought it was pretty cool that they took the week off to earn some extra cash. Sure they were wearing "Criterion Barrel" hoodies, therefore they must know something about the shooting sports or they wouldn't be here.



Well I am here to tell you, those two young ladies (Dani and Dee-Dee) are the most proficient and efficient target pullers I have ever seen. They were each single-handedly pulling, marking, scoring and putting back up a target frame in half the time it took two of us burly manly men to do the same thing. Wow - I was impressed! After spending more time with them, I became more and more impressed by their skills, knowledge and maturity. They are definitely top shelf young adults! And it was my pleasure to tell them and their mother that. Never did catch their last name, but their Mom (Betty) was a Range/Line Officer (R/O) and their Dad was involved at Criterion Barrels.

Pit change came soon and I found the tension building on the bus ride back to the line, "What am I going to screw up this time?" Admittedly, I was concerned about getting my stuff to the line safely and with plenty of time to spare, so I could compose myself. The moment the R/O said "Relay 5, you may bring your gear BUT no rifle to the line", I was there. And in all honesty, I was ready to shoot at the beginning of the three minute prep period, but now it was time to sit and wait. In retrospect, I think I really got caught up in the self-image issue of wanting to make sure I at least looked like I knew what I was doing. No one will notice at first if I can't shoot, but as long as I look like I can, it will be alright.

Well, with all that said and done, the 600 yard matches went off pretty average for my skill level, 145, 147, 145, dropping 13 points. But the question of the day was: "What is with all this vertical dispersion?" I came to find out, that's Lodi!

One of the many first day highlights was meeting Mr. Charles F. Clark of Denver Colorado. Charles came over to our camp site and quickly became the target of many of our childish verbal pranks. Considering the skill with which we implemented them, we certainly must have impressed him because Charles became a regular fixture at our campsite after shooting hours the remainder of the week. Come to find out Charles is a very accomplished shooter with a long history of both Smallbore and Palma. Eventually I come to figure out that, ya know, I should really pay attention to his shooting because this cat hits what he aims at. But I don't want to get ahead of myself. After another fantastic steak supper, (supper is when us rural raised folk eat today's dinner), compliments of Chez Viper, it was time to crash and be ready for tomorrow's matches. Three adult men in a pick-up camper isn't too bad... yet.



Charles in position, and Bob extolling the many attributes of a Viper F-Class Rest

### Wednesday, September 28th

1000 yard shooting today, yee hah! I am in the big time now. Prior to this day I had only shot in one 1000 yard match and that was in 2004 with a borrowed rifle. The dang butterflies were building in my belly, so off I went scavenging for food.

Squadding assignments had been posted and were very favorable to me. I found myself in a familiar spot on the line and with plenty of time to wake up and appreciate the experience I was gaining, learning, and hopefully taking home. Shooting at 1000 yards simply rocks! I am hooked and love the challenge. Everything was coming together well, I sure as heck wasn't going to

break any records or be in the hunt for awards, but I wasn't at the bottom of the list. I set my goal earlier and it was simple: place in the middle of the pack. I had a chance of doing that, so life was good.

Today brought me a few more new friendships. I found several folk from Minnesota and by the luck of the draw, I was teamed with them in the pits. I got to meet Brenda and Gary LaValley of Phoenix Precision Target Sights in Elk River, Minnesota. And well, I guess you either have to be raised in Minnesota or be of Scandihoovian heritage to fully appreciate the fun we had. And fun we certainly did have. Only another Scandihoovian would understand how dang funny it is to hear someone try and tell an "Ole and Sven" joke, by starting out with "Didja hear the one about O'le and Seven"... I also met Adam Shidla and Ben Winget from the Twin Cities area. Both are up and coming shooters, with more skill than I possess that's for sure.



Gary, Adam, Brad & Brenda

Adam has a Celestron Regal 65 ED glass spotting scope, the model I had been eyeing for the past month or two. He let me play with it most of the week whenever I wanted to. He was just one of those nice guys, maybe he saw me as one of those responsible guys, but I tend to think he was nicer than I was responsible. Anyways, my eyes found that scope to be a great deal for the money. Over the course of the week, I had the chance to look through some lesser scopes that cost more and yes, some better scopes for much, much more money. The resolution, sharpness and fantastic fine focus function makes this spotter a great deal. It is now on my wish list. Thank you Adam!

Pit duty ran very smooth as the club had two very qualified individuals running the pits. "Johnny and Billy" were viewed by some as bungholes, but I found them to be your basic "No nonsense, this is serious stuff" type of folk. They possessed a familiar but unique sense of humor, not unlike your typical Uncle who has to be seen and taken seriously, but not without a sense of juvenile humor. I, like many, caught heck from Johnny when I had it coming and some when it wasn't deserved. In those cases, I threw it back at him and saw a glimmer of a smile form, he was digging it. I knew right then that these guys were good folk. The remainder of the week in the pits proved that time and time again. It was a blast.

Pit duty was safe, efficient, and fun. Professionally directed and administered. And for that, all the credit goes to unsung volunteer leaders, Johnny and Billy! Top shelf guys, as were the local youths that helped out, good kids that the Winnequa club enlisted.

However after a great day on the line and in the pits, interesting fun was still to come. Oh yeah, baby! It was the carnivore hour at the Viper's campsite. Can one really tire of eating steak? Not I. Bud Williams, a friend of Bob and Mike's from Pennsylvania, stopped by with a new gadget. I was busy cleaning my rifle "traditionally" when I began wondering where everybody went. Using the investigative skills I use in my daily life, I found them shortly on the other side of the camper standing around a table watching Bud use what appeared to be a pressure washer on Charles's rifle. Yes, it was a pressure washer.

As Bud explained, he bought this rig, a portable high-pressure steam cleaner, specifically geared to do rifle barrels. I cannot recall the pressure involved, but would guess in the 100 psi to 150 psi range. The wand was a hollow brass rod, of applicable bore size with several outward-radiating holes in the end, next to where you attached a standard bore brush. My first impression was, what the heck has "RonCo" come up with now? But after some thought about what it does, my opinion was that there was no way hot, steamy water and a little psi is going to hurt my barrel. For the record, I still stand by that statement. It might affect some bedding compounds, as it does get to dang hot to handle, (hot enough to generate steam), but I wasn't worried about my bedding because I use Devcon Plastic Steel.



Bud "Steam-Cleaning" Charles's Rifle

Well, as Bud explained, it was not the "one-stop, cure all" for cleaning barrels; but it sure made for some quick work of loosening the crud in your barrel. And, after a few comments on how Charles's barrel had now been annealed and his bedding melted, Bud asked me if I wanted it done. I said "sure", I had just finished cleaning and oiling my barrel, but was game to play with the new toy. Well, I thought I had it clean. After a half a dozen or more passes, the water coming out of the muzzle finally changed from gray to clear. Bud handed me his Hawkeye Borescope and I took a look at the leade - throat area - "Wow", sparkly and shiny clean! My impression of this neat gadget was that hey, it's a great time saver and the barrel sure got squeaky clean. But I am not signing up to get one just yet, only because I still have a spotting scope and a borescope to get and couple of more rifles to build before I start spending money on dedicated pressure washer for my barrels. But if I hit the lottery, I'm in!

Time to crash and get ready for tomorrow's team matches, but I come to find out my team bailed on me; taking the day off to recuperate. We had been dealing with wet and dampness off and on for the previous 2 days, I couldn't blame them. I ran down the stat house and penciled my name on the board for team member wannabes. I came here to shoot and am going try to get in as much shooting as I can. Time for bed! "Mike, remind me to bring an air rifle to shoot out offending lights in the campground next time." "Sure Rod, shut up and go to bed."

#### **Thursday, September 29th**

Man, this getting up at 0545 to go shooting is getting old. Wait a minute, it's raining. Hmm,

maybe I should take a down day instead of shooting in the rain. Two minutes later I was running down to the stat house to cross my name off the team wannabe list and crawled back into bed, with a smile. I think my smile scared Mike, but I was too tired to explain.

Woke up a couple of hours later, refreshed, enjoyed fresh hot coffee and some oatmeal raisin cookies. Ahh, oatmeal raisin cookies from my daughter: breakfast of champions. I threw on my rain gear and wandered on down to the stat house. There were a fair amount of disgruntled shooters down there.



Disgruntled Wet Team shooters

Mother Nature was not cooperating, nor could she make up here mind. To make a long story short, the team matches did not look like fun and from the scowls and howls from the participants, it wasn't. But hey, that's shooting, right? What's for supper? Oh yeah, Steak!!!

### **Friday, September 30th**

Last day of shooting and at 1000 yards again, Schwing! I am really digging this 1000 yard stuff. Up early, gassed up with coffee, a foo-foo diet shake from the wife and cookies in my pocket. I am off to the stat house for squadding. It's going to be a decent weather day, but once I looked at the wind flags down range from the firing line, I said its going to be a very interesting day, that's for sure.

Backing up a bit, earlier in the week, I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Mr. Ricky Hunt.

Thanks to Charles, he introduced me to Ricky. Prior to meeting him, the only thing I knew about Ricky was that he was a wind coach and conducted “clinics” around the Midwest on the subject matter; of course clinics I couldn’t attend at the time. But knowing nothing more than the positive accolades I had heard from such accomplished shooters as Russ Theurer and Charles Clark, this guy was somebody I wanted to meet and hopefully learn something.

I know I said earlier that my goal was to place in the middle of the pack; well, my primary goal (besides having fun and meeting folk) was to learn something about reading the wind and effectively shooting in it. Here was my chance to meet someone who likes to teach such arcane phenomena. My impression of Ricky, he is a top-shelf professional with a great sense of humor. I had a great discussion with him and it appears I did not offend him. So there is hope for me to learn something from this guy. I look forwards to attending one of his upcoming clinics and even “pre-volunteered” to be the guinea pig. Adam Shidla, told me that he attended one of Rickys clinics and was the guinea pig - and he was very glad he did. I wanna be a guinea pig too...

Alright, back to the match, the last match of the week. I drew first relay and middle of the field for a firing point. I was stoked because I finally had a chance to shoot in the desired first relay in the morning (conditions, conditions). But, what the heck are the flags doing? Two are pointed straight East, three are flopping around in all directions and three more are in the general westerly directions. “Oh well Rod, pick a condition and go for it, you only learn by doing.”

I get my gear to the line, set up, start to relax, await commands and look down range. Wait a minute, there is no mirage to speak of, the fog has lifted. “Can you believe I got flipping cannon smoke hanging the air?” After the morning flag raising and canon firing, the resultant smoke just decided to hang right on the ground in the low spots. actually making it difficult to clearly see the target frames with your eyes. My initial reaction was, “I now have the most unique excuse for an errant shot.” I just took it as a good omen and prepared to shoot.

Well, the wonderful Lodi vertical was in great form. I couldn’t figure a dang thing out and kept chasing my spotter. I’m pretty sure I shot a 143 for the relay, not great, but not bad for me. Bill Gravatt was scoring for me and said, “Good Shooting, Rod, that was a good score from what I saw others doing”. Cool, my confidence restored and a compliment from Bill, it was going to be a good day! But, like a whole bunch of others, I went on to chase the spotter the rest of the day. However, the day was not over.

The last relay was called to the line and this awesome experience was almost over, but not without a little interesting, I should say great, shooting. The command was given to load and to fire when your target appears. You have 22 minutes to complete the match. Well, after 4 minutes of firing, 90% of the relay had completed their shooting; two competitors had not yet fired. After 7 minutes, only the two were left and they had not yet fired. It was down to Jim See and Charles Clark. Two very knowledgeable and competent shooters and they are just kicking back, watching the clouds, the flags, the light, just looking around with no outward appearance of being in any hurry. I am thinking: “Cool, these guys are onto something here and if I pay attention, I may just learn something of value.”



The whispers are going: “Why aren’t they shooting? What’s going on?” Once again using my highly developed investigative skills, I determined that Jim and Charles were just waiting for this cloud to pass; it was a big and dark one and it significantly affected the conditions. Oh yeah, the ambient air density is affected due to air temp changes, due to the ambient lighting change and the resultant change is significant enough to change the point of impact at a 1000 yards. Ahh pshaw, most folk would say. Well, I am now a believer. These two shooters already knew that, and were just waiting for the cloud to pass. Cool, one more thing learned and another factor to confuse me with. And of course, they finished with 4 or 5 minutes to spare and I think they only dropped 2 maybe 3 points for the string. Good Shooting guys, but an awesome display of observation and discipline.

I dropped 27 points for the day, not bad for my second time at “real” 1000 yard shooting. Can I do better? I sure intend to. Could I have done worse? Heck yeah. But it was fun and I enjoyed every minute of it. All that is now left is the award banquet, a non-factor for me, but there is to be plenty of food, count me in.

Overall, I had a blast and learned a lot. But what made this match so fun and special to me was the people. I got to hang out with my great friend Bob Pastor and made another great friendship with Mike Warner just by showing up at Bob's camper and not getting kicked out.



It was very satisfying to get to meet a lot of the "Who's Who" in the shooting world and some took the time to just chat with me. Folks like Bill Gravatt, Charles Ballard, Charles F. Clark, Ricky Hunt, Dean Morris, Monte Milanuk, Ken and Earl Liebetrau, and many more. These folks were there to do the same thing I was, to shoot and enjoy themselves. It was simply cool to chat with these guys (glad I didn't ask for autographs though, that may have scared a few away). I got to meet and establish a friendship with some great International shooters that came to participate, like Bruce Condie, Terry Perkins of Canada and Alan Canavan of the UK.

To our hosts at the Winnequah Gun Club, the members at Lodi, the Liebetrau clan (especially Karin and Mark) and our sponsors Brux Barrels, Criterion Barrels, Center Shot Rifles, Savage Arms, I thank you for a great experience. But to the rest of the attendees, thanks for making my first outing at such a large National event special!

Rod Vigstol

Note: I ended up placing 59<sup>th</sup> out of 90 in F/O and 15<sup>th</sup> out of 28 in my class. And I have since learned how to properly button my shirt..

