

MONDAY 31st March

Monday started early – too early – with many of the team seeing the dawn. A prompt departure saw us at the range well before the 7am opening ceremony and an entertaining speech from “Uncle” Bill Bramley. The flags of the attending countries and provinces were raised as the South African national anthem was played. Scotland won. And Mpumalanga’s flag unfortunately failed to unfurl.

On the range, we learned that it was the General’s birthday – 61 today - and he gave us some good news: not only were we shooting in the Orange Free State competition but also for the General Smut Cup – some of our team members must have a good chance in that one, surely! “Our” General, Brig Gen “Mac” Alexander, had two Scottish grandfathers; hence the nickname and the kilt. More from him tomorrow, we expect.

The morning saw a Queen’s I individual shoot, with a great many 35s recorded by our team at 300 and 500m. As is normal with these things, a slight drop-off at 600m saw five team members go clean in the competition, with 105.14, 105.13, 105.13 and 105.12: Messrs Lewis, Shouler, Watson, Patel and Messer.

After a rather brief lunch break and another briefing from the Captain, we again broke into BCRC teams to shoot in the Hamilton Cup, for teams of six over a Queen’s I course of fire. 300m started oddly for BCRC Red, with Adam’s head at some stage knocking his plotting scope such that it was pointing at a different target 4, a whole range away! One hopes that happened only on the last shot, which is when he noticed it...

A few ropey shots and the great heat and high levels of sweat contributed to a weakish showing from that team at 300m, with 4 points dropped to the Blue and White teams’ two. All the coaches were in agreement that the mirage and flags had almost never tallied, with the former more consistent than the latter but neither of them a reliable guide as to what was happening on the range.

The mirage became rather more truthful at 500m, particularly (with the wind coming from in front) for those who focused their scopes further down the range than usual. That was fortunate, given that the wind was changing rapidly, from both directions and one needed to be on the ball. A strong showing by the BCRC teams at that range saw the Red team (who were treating the range as a new match to win) go clean, with the other two dropping just one point each. That left only one point in it overall.

600m was similar, with the changes sometimes larger and often harder to detect, as the light dimmed and took some of the mirage with it. Fortunes here were mixed: the White team dropped eight points, the Blue team three and the Red team lost only one (to which the coach owns up) point to complete the turn-around. Whether that would be a winning score remained to be seen, but it was within a point of the

record. Final tallies out of 630 were: BCRC Red (coached by This Correspondent) 625.69, BCRC Blue (Matt Ensor) 624, BCRC White (Martin Townsend) 619.

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The team departed quickly after shooting to make preparations for the reception it was hosting that evening at the Lettie Fouche School for which it had raised some money, in part by means of an Ebay auction of items donated by the team. This sale, the brainchild of Ed Compton, was executed by Nigel Ball on account of his familiarity with the site. It soon became apparent that Nigel's retirement shooting was funded by sales of his personal junk. The reception was attended by many invited guests from the South African shooting community and was co-hosted by the GB U19s and the Dollar Academy team. The school, a charity funded institution for the aid and education of families with disabled children, made for an excellent venue and was very grateful to receive the 20,000 Rand donation.

The captain also asked his SABU pairs partner, Georgie Ogden (the "Lady" in the "Lady and the Tramp" team – she had nearly been the "Beauty" in the "Beauty and the Beast" pair), to circle the room with a GB hat to boost this figure. To the school's delight the total was increased to 25,000 Rand (an appreciable sum for such an establishment). Matt Ensor also presented the school with a selection of items from his girlfriend, the lovely Jen. Her pupils, at Byfleet Primary School in Surrey, had handmade a number of gifts for the children at Lettie Fouche, all based on The Enormous Crocodile by Roald Dahl. The handwritten letters from the children were especially well received. The evening's dinner was good and the company fine.