Team Blaster at Peacemaker National Training Center

I recently had the good fortune to attend an entry-level precision rifle course put on by two members of Sniper's Hide at Peacemaker National Training Center just across the border in West Virginia. After talking to Rob Ormond, one of the instructors for this class, he graciously allowed me to attend gratis so that I could do an honest, no BS article. Both Rob and Tony, the other class instructor, are USMC veterans with years of competition shooting under their belts so their insights on marksmanship and long range shooting come from direct experience, not theory. The strange part for me during this class was that I wouldn't actually be firing a shot the entire time but instead acting as more or less an observer. PNTC is a relatively new facility in this area, however it is becoming very popular because of its multiple ranges for anything from long-range rifles to pistols. This class would be split between PNTC's classroom located at the HQ building and the "Frontier" range, which is their unkown distance range located a few miles away.

Day 1

Class started promptly at 8 am at the HQ building, although saying it was a classroom would've been a bit of a stretch, however it was large enough to accommodate everyone in the course. In front of every student Rob and Tony had left an information packet full of common shooting terms, wind formulas, ranging methods, and other valuable pieces of information that would come into play later. Each student was also provided with a chamber flag, which is required on all rifle ranges at PNTC. The instructors gave a quick introduction into their backgrounds, the range safety briefing, and a little bit of paperwork had to be done before things could get going. After that we went around the room introducing one another and for the most part it seemed that a majority of the class was fairly new to long range shooting. The introduction packet that Rob and Tony handed out proved to be a little treasure trove of information, especially for the new guys that weren't totally up on the lingo. They covered minutes of angle, milliradian, ballistic coefficient, and a lot of other really pertinent topics, although I felt they did it in a way that really helped it sink in for the students as well. I believe they were able to do this successfully by providing examples based on their personal experiences in long range shooting and not just from regurgitating info from somewhere else. It was at this early stage that Tony started to expose the students to some of the technologies available that help make their life easier on the range and in the field. One such product was the Adaptive Quick Card from Adaptive Consulting and Training Services, the same company that makes the excellent FDAC product line. Just like the FDAC, the Quick Cards use density altitude to provide ballistic solutions that cover a wide range of conditions but for a wider variety of cartridges than the FDAC can accommodate. The cards are easily slipped into a data book or pocket and I felt every student would've been well served to have one for their rifles.

I was pleasantly surprised to see a good portion of the class dedicated to riflescopes, their components, and how to care for them as most people I've seen regard them as some sort of voodoo. They know it works, they don't know how or why, all they know is that it tracks well and holds zero. Rob gave some great tips on how to measure the scope height of a rifle and how that would factor into ballistic programs like JM Ballistics and other similar programs. Rob also covered zeroing the rifles at 100 yards and the reasons why to zero at that distance for most cartridges that don't have magnum in their nomenclature. There were some confused looks in the room though when he said that with a 100 yard zero everything closer in and further away requires up elevation to order to hit it. Tony and Rob handled it well though with a great illustration showing the relationship between the line of sight from the scope and the trajectory of the round when zeroed at 100 yards. I was also glad to see both types of MOA talked about and what the difference between them would really mean as the ranges increased. I sometimes feel that this topic gets skimmed over for the sake of trying not to confuse the students too much but in my opinion this sets them up for failure. It's also another reason why I like milliradian based optics because a mil is a mil is a mil no matter whom you purchase the scope from. There are some scopes that are MOA based but the manufacturer aren't always crystal clear on whether they are using True MOA or Shooter's MOA as the basis for their adjustments. This can come into play when using the reticles for ranging since the different MOA types use slightly different formulas to calculate the range.

We only spent about two hours in the classroom going over the introductory materials and such before it was time to head out to the range. By this time it was sprinkling a little bit in the parking lot but in true hardcore fashion we donned our rain gear and pressed on. I was curious to see how some of the students that were relatively new to long range shooting and had mentioned wanting to shoot in competitions were going to fare. Competitions rarely take a rain break and a shooter has to prepare in more ways than one in order to deal with the rain successfully, otherwise they just fall apart. That being said I was hoping for just some mild scattered showers at the beginning the day and then good weather for the rest, however as they say wish in one hand and…well you get it.

After a quick 10 minute drive to the Frontier Range Tony stepped in and launched into a great block of instruction talking about precision rifles and how to properly set them up. He placed a lot of emphasis on having the right eye relief, proper height on the cheek piece, and what constitutes a good length of pull. There was a fairly good mix of rifles on the line that day from semi-auto AR-15's to bone stock Remington 700's to a top end Sako TRG. It didn't matter what kind of rifle the person was behind though, Tony and Rob went up and down the line to make sure the rifles were properly fitted to each shooter. If that meant taping some foam to the stock to raise the cheek or sliding the scope in the rings then that's what it took to make sure the rifle was set to the shooter. Most of the factory guns got the foam cheek piece treatment and I doubt there was an ounce of complaint over that, even though it may have been a little ugly to look at.

Tony and Rob wanted to be sure everyone was comfortable behind their rifles before we moved on to the next stage and that was getting a solid zero on the guns. Tony was using some the awesome targets that he had with him from his company, Impact Data Books, including some that are available free on the company website, impactdatabooks.com.

Just as everyone seemed to be satisfied with the zero on their rifles the heavens opened up one more time and really let us have it. While we all tried to huddle under the little canopy it was negated by the simple fact that the wind was blowing it sideways that pretty much ensured everyone go soaked. The rain made it impossible to shoot so the decision was made to regroup back at the HQ building so that Tony and Rob could continue on with the remainder of the classes. While some felt this was a bummer it did salvage the day and ensure that most of the next day would dedicated to putting rounds downrange.

It was a wet and soggy ride back to the HQ building, however as wet and somewhat sleep deprived as most of us were feeling there was little grumbling from the students. I was somewhat surprised when everyone simply came into the room, took their seats, and got ready for a little more seat time. This portion of the classroom instruction wasn't entirely planned but I thought Tony and Rob adjusted well and went right into talking about data books and how to maintain a rifle.

It's no secret that Tony's company sells very good modular data books and arguably the best ones the market for anyone doing long range shooting. His data books were used as the basis for the class on logging your shots and how that can help you be more accurate in the future. I liked how Tony stressed also being honest with yourself when calling and plotting your hits to get the most benefit from it. The guy that calls every hit center but then plots his shots all around the target that creates a scattergun effect isn't doing himself any favors. On paper he'd look like a terrible shot when in reality if he'd been honest with himself he would've seen he just needed to hone his fundamentals a little bit more. I had the opportunity to follow along in one of the Tony's books and while being a pretty large data book he does offer smaller ones that give up little functionality compared to its bigger brother. I thought Tony's data books left more than enough room for the shooter log all of the pertinent information as well as notes as well that might help later on. Most of Tony's data books are also completely modular so a shooter can add or remove pages as they see fit to tailor it to their particular shooting style or preference.

Tony and Rob wrapped up the day with a great block of instruction on wind and mirage, the true nemesis for any long-range shooter. They not only went over what winds to take into account but also how terrain can affect wind also. Usually when an instructor refers to wind they are talking about winds on a flat range where there are no trees, hills, or mountains to affect it much. This was another part of the course where Rob and Tony used their personal experiences in dealing with the wind to help drive home the

concept of taking everything into account. The trouble with wind though is that the only way to really learn how to shoot in the wind is to just shoot in the wind. What none of us knew then was that the next day would afford everyone the opportunity to shoot in some real wind and learn what it's all about.

Fun Fact #1: Most inexperienced shooters always underestimate the wind velocity.

Day 2

Day two started out at the Frontier Range as opposed to the HQ building, which meant that the students could start sooner in the day to get more shooting in. I showed up just as all the students had arrived on the range and were preparing for the 8 am cold bore shot at 100 yards. Even thought it wasn't raining anymore, conditions were still made challenging by the steady 10-15mph that were whipping across the range. Combined with the cool morning air and the wind chill made it seem more like shooting in late February than mid-May. There wasn't going to be a lot of classroom type instruction since Tony and Rob wanted the students to get rounds downrange and get as much data as possible on their guns. 8 am approached quickly and the students got down behind their guns to make ready to engage what I'm sure seemed like an impossibly small hostage target. Now remember how I said that most new long-range shooters underestimate the wind when taking a shot? Well that even applies when shooting at the relatively close distance of 100 yards since a good majority of the cold bore shots were 1 ½" or so left of the target. The strong and steady 12 mph winds coming from right to left blew everyone except one student off target. That person perfectly center punched the intended target shooting a bone stock Remington 700 AAC-SD. Although most of the students missed their targets it was an excellent lesson in how even wind at 100 yards has to be taken into account if the shooter has any hope of hitting the target. Tony also provided some great insights on dealing with the wind in regards to dialing versus holding and sometimes using a combination of both depending on how the wind is blowing. From then on I think everyone started to have a better understanding of the wind and as they say "learning occurred."

From there Tony set out one of his Impact Data Book Precision Rifle Targets for the next round of drills that the students would go through. This was the first time that I'd seen the Precision Rifle Targets and thought that it was an excellent training tool with an array of different target shapes and sizes. There are literally hundreds of drills and variations of drills that could be used with the targets so it provides immense training value in an 18" X 20" target compared to your average zeroing target. Students started out with a grouping exercise shooting three and five round groups to help practice their fundamentals and get a feel for how to do it right. The whole time Rob and Tony stalked the firing line watching each shooter and working one on one with those that needed help fine tuning their marksmanship. More than once Tony could be heard sounding off "Give me more follow through!" a sure sign that a student wasn't applying the fundamentals for that shot. Shooters did some more grouping exercises on the dots

to make sure the guns were zeroed and students had a grasp of the fundamentals before moving out to 200, 300, and beyond later in the day.

The next block of instruction from Rob and Tony was on slings and sling use. This was a brief class that I'd say was more of an introduction to slings rather than a full on class in their use. Rob went into the parts of the sling, how to get it properly adjusted, as well as some of the different slings that are on the market for the shooter to pick through. Just like the eclectic mix of rifles on the line there was a good mix of slings too, some were simple carrying straps and others more complicated. He also put on a good demonstration of some of the more common shooting positions when using a sling and some helpful hints to go along with it. Sling use is one of those things that takes a lot of practice to master and it's a perishable skill, something both Rob and Tony tried to emphasize. I can whole heartily agree with them on this because I've been to matches and ranges where quite a few expensive slings have been seen dangling from rifles instead of being utilized properly. I once watched a poor guy struggle to hit a target from the sitting position by resting his elbow in the crook of his knee while his TIS Quick Cuff swayed in the breeze. He may have done a little better in that even if he'd taken a class like this one and learned how to utilize the equipment he'd had with him.

Unfortunately I knew I wasn't going to be able to stay for the entire day so when everyone broke for lunch that was my time to head on out. After talking to Rob later on the students pushed back to 200 yards and then all the way out to 550 yards collecting data on their guns. I had a great experience watching Tony and Rob work to pass on their knowledge to new members of the long range shooting community. I think that over the course of the two days that students were in the classroom and on the range they not only learned the basic skills needed but also some of the mental preparation that is always a big part of long range shooting. I noted how early on a lot of the students were already learning the limitations of their equipment and what changes had to be made to improve. I saw students struggle with unsatisfactory bipods, slings, and even the guns themselves during my time at the course. However, this didn't seem to hold them back and they adapted to work with what they had to get the most out of the training. I would highly recommend taking a look at Team Blaster's Precision Rifle Courses whether you're new to long range shooting and want to get a handle on the fundamentals or a long time shooter looking to brush up on some skills. You're money is well spent at this course and I very much look forward to a PR-2 level course at this range in the near future.

Things to improve:

One student commented on how he thought that better use of the audio/visual teaching aids would've illustrated some points better. This could go for wind reading or breaking down the reticle instead of a hand drawn illustration.

Speaking of breaking down the reticle I thought that it might be a good idea to have a little “quiz” section in the packet similar to what you had for wind but relating to range estimation and holds. Nothing too complicated just a couple questions like the target is this size, this many mils tall, how far away in yards? Or have a reticle overlaid on a target and ask “what’s the wind hold in mils for this?”

I thought that it would’ve been a good idea to combine the optics maintenance portion with the rifle maintenance portion and do a top to bottom cleaning. Space was limited in the classroom but I think it could help new guys establish a cleaning routine they can use on their guns. Something like start with the bore, then the chamber, the bolt, and finish up with the optics…something like that.

I also think that it could be a good idea to include a list of basic cleaning items and tools in the packet that new shooters should get or think about getting for their rifles. I know you did touch on it with some of the tools and some guys took notes but having it there in front them could be nice for later one. It might also be a good idea to include some places to buy them like Brownells/Sinclair International and MidwayUSA.

Since most of the class seemed interested in shooting competitions I also thought it’d be nice to throw in a packing list of sorts for what gear they might want to look at getting. Everyone is going to have their own personal preference but this question gets asked often on the Hide so it might give them a leg up.

Hammers are not the answer to all rifle problems….just sayin’ lol. Marines.

Having some backup slings for shooters with inadequate shooting slings could’ve been helpful for those with carrying straps. I felt like they didn’t get much out of that course of instruction because they spent much of their time figuring out how to just make work half way decently.

That’s about all I can really come up with, I was never good at AAR’s and I know there were some coordination issues that could’ve been improved upon but in your defense it was your first time at PNTC. I hope you guys enjoy the article and I look forward to getting it post up soon.