

### RAF Archery v UK Blind Vets match report

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June select members of the RAF Archery team took part in the annual Blind Veterans competition. This year the competition was held at HMS Sultan and organised by the Navy Archery Association

Every year the UK Blind Veterans challenge the RAF, Army and Navy to an archery round called a Short Western. This round consists of shooting 4 dozen arrows at 50 yards, followed by a further 4 dozen at 40 yards.

It was a glorious day and a very good turn out from all 3 services. There was a mixture of bow styles present, ranging from top of the range Compound bows, all the way to a Medieval Longbow! These varying styles obviously brought out some vastly different scores, thankfully a handicap score system is used to help level the field.

The UK Blind Veterans arrived in their bespoke bus, along with their assistants full of smiles and keen to get started. After setting up their equipment it was time for sighters. This is 12 arrows shot at the furthest distance to allow the archers to get their sight marks right. For the Blind Vets this was their chance to test and adjust their stands and get them in the right position.

As you can see from the images below, they have a base board to put their feet into and a tripod mount. This mount is fully adjustable by the archer for elevation and left/right movement. At the top of the tri-pod is a small bar, the archers will draw up and place the bar in between the knuckle joints on their hand, draw the bow and take their shot.

At this point their assistant will let them know where the arrow has fallen, and what adjustments are needed. The archer will then themselves adjust their stand accordingly and take another shot. Before too long their arrows were hitting the mark and fine tuning was taking place.



*SAC Yau from RAF Wittering trading shots with a Royal Navy Marines archer*

Shooting started just after 1000hrs, on my target was Ex Welsh Guardsman Clive Jones. At 26 years old the serving Welsh Guardsman was blinded in an unprovoked and savage attack in December 2000. The attacker, who was later diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, forced his two thumbs into Clives eye sockets leaving him totally blind with no light perception.

At the age of 26, Clive joined St Dunstons a charity for blinded ex service men and women at their centre in Brighton. It was at this centre that Clive was persuaded to take up archery. Clive instantly loved it and with help from his regiment, bought his first bow.

Since taking up archery in 2001, Clive has found himself being BBS(British Blind Sports) indoor and outdoor(recurve) National Champion and holds several club records at Blind Veterans UK.

Clive a usually bubbly and approachable person left the sport of archery in 2013. Fortunately, he has recently restrung his bow again and was present at HMS Sultan. Clive said, "it's great to be back shooting Archery and to be amongst friends of the Tri Services once again"



*Above is Clive Jones using his tri-pod set-up to take his shot*

By 1300hrs we had almost finished the first distance but it was time for lunch. Food was provided by the HMS Sultan Junior Rates Mess and filled everyone up nicely for the rest of the days shooting.

We resumed shooting after lunch to finish the last few arrows at 50 yards just as the Navy Photographer turned up to capture the days events. Cue many people hiding their faces behind hats or jokingly asking for the photographer to catch their best side as we scored and moved the targets.

Due to a few missed arrows and the ensuing search (you can't leave an arrow behind in the middle of a sports pitch for obvious reasons!) we needed to shorten the round, so at 40 yards we only shot 2 dozen arrows.

Spirits were high as we ended the shoot and scores were tallied, there were a few close matches and we eagerly anticipated the final scores. At this point I would like to say in the last few years, the UK Blind Vets have swept the floor and walked away with all the silverware!

This year was different, everyone was surprised to hear the RAF Team had won! A big congratulations to those who took part in the day! The Navy and Army also won their matches so congratulations go out to them too.



*Cpl Cope of RAFC Cranwell preparing for his next shot*

Clive won his first individual competition since returning to archery just 2 days later on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June, quite a fitting day as it was the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sir Galahad being bombed in the Falklands War, a ship that the Welsh Guards were on.