

FINNISH SNIPER GUILD



SIMO HÄYHÄ CHAMPIONSHIP

- BY GREG ROBERTS

The 2007 Finnish Military Sniping Championship was held at the Sotinpuro Shooting Area, in North Karelia in eastern Finland, close to the border with Russia. The competition was run by the Finnish Sniper Guild which is a voluntary military reservist organisation, founded for training all Finnish Reserve Forces, both officers and soldiers alike, to master the art of sniping and, most importantly, about the proper deployment and utilisation of snipers in a military setting. The competition was sanctioned by the Reservist Sport Union, which is the governing body for Finnish Military Reserve Competitions.

Competitors may participate in either the amateur/enthusiast division or the military division, of which only the latter qualifies for the national championship. The military division is a shooter-spotter pair competition, with both team members shooting, which tests the most important sniper skills such as movement, recording information on a range card, observation and marksmanship. Participants are required to use their issued or personally owned firearm and are responsible for their personal maintenance. Food and water are provided for all competitors by the competition organisers.

The amateur division includes testing field marksmanship and recording

Main Image: At Stage A5 the team had to run to their final firing line, do push-ups and then engage the targets from the supported kneeling position

1: The spotter estimates the distance to the targets in order to enable the sniper to make an accurate shot



information on a range card. This division is also a pairs competition, but the spotter may or may not elect to shoot. Personal score is kept for the amateur division competitors but they do not count for national championship ranking and have their own scoring.

History of the Championships

This competition is named after the

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The weather conditions were also challenging this year, with sunny and heavy rain showers at intervals. Wind speeds varied from zero up to eight metre per second gusts, which meant that all competitors had to carefully read the wind all the time before engaging any targets...

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2: Competitors making out their range cards on a stage. They note specific features and estimate the distances for later reference when a target appears

4



3: Good to go. A sniper pair ready to enter the field, each equipped with the Sako TRG-42 in .338 Lapua Magnum calibre

5



4: Reactive 'fall when hit' Jaster targets used in Finland give immediate feedback when struck - dust cloud is from bullet impact into ground behind target

5: A sniper pair advances through scrub to the forward firing position. Note how important it is to carefully match camouflage with the surrounding terrain

legendary Finnish sniper, Simo Häyhä, who came from Karelia Rautjärvi in rural Finland and was an avid outdoorsman, active reservist and hunter. Simo won numerous target shooting competitions in the twenties and thirties, but the Finnish way of life changed abruptly in November 1939, when the Red Army invaded. Refusing to go quietly the Finns stood and fought. A member of the Suojeluskunta (Finnish Reserve Forces) Simo rose with his fellow countrymen to the call to defend their homeland.

Positioned along the Kollaa River, Simo and his comrades took the fight to the Russians. Facing odds similar to the Spartans at Thermopylae, the Finns fought with great tenacity against the invaders. Using a 7.62mm calibre Mosin-Nagant derivative Jalkäväkivääri m/28 rifle, Simo hunted the Russians in the forests through the winter, taking shots at ranges up to five hundred yards. During the 1939/40 winter he racked up a total of 542 confirmed kills, making him the highest scoring sniper of all time. Simo's war came to an end in March 1940 when he was severely wounded. He passed away peacefully on 1st April 2002, in Hamina, at the mature age of 96.

Competition Organisation

Since 1999 the Lapua ammunition manufacturer and the Sako - Tikka firearm manufacturers have sponsored the competition. The Finnish Defence Forces in Nurmes provide the military shooting area complex and substantial working hours are spent preparing the stages of the competition, organising the barracks accommodation, food, transportation staff and other support material. The range complex terrain is a mix of wood and open scrub with marsh and small lakes.

As well as competitors from Finland, the competition is open to both military and shooting enthusiasts from abroad and there were entries from other countries including Estonia, France, Germany and the United States. The competitors compete as a two-person team and the team wins (or loses) according to their combined skills and abilities. There were nineteen teams in the military category and four teams in the enthusiast category. The enthusiasts do not have to complete the more demanding tactical tasks.

As with previous years the organisers had planned the stages to be demanding and in such a way that they measured and tested the essential

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skills of a sniper team; the shooting / spotting skills at unknown distances, wind / distance estimation and advancing under surveillance and not just the ability to accurately group shots on a target.

Heading up the competition organisation was Jarkko Kröger, his assistant was the Chairman of the Finnish Sniper Guild, Juha Espo, and the referee was Heikki Juhola. The supervisor for the Reservist Sports Union was Jukka-Pekka Laine. There were also many judges and assistants from the Finnish Sniper Guild and other reservist organisations to make sure that everything worked as planned. Additionally the Finnish Defence Forces in Nurmee offered transportation, communication equipment, barrack accommodation and sauna facilities as well as professional military personnel to enable the safe and timely completion of the competition.

The competition functions as a good opportunity to test the personal skills, tactics and equipment of the various individuals as well as their work as a pair. For example, the French duo said that the competition was the most demanding and high grade competition they have ever attended. Each year has been a learning experience for both the competitors and organisers, which enables the level of both the participants and the competition to be continually raised.

The distances at which targets had to be engaged varied from 100 out to 900 metres. The weather conditions were also challenging this year, with sunny and heavy rain showers at intervals. Wind speeds varied from zero up to eight metre per second gusts, which meant that all competitors had to carefully read the wind all the time

before engaging any targets. No range finders are allowed in this competition, so you have to estimate the ranges by gauging the distance or by the use of Mil gradients on your telescopic sight, binoculars or spotting scope.

All competitors are given an opportunity to check their rifle's zero the day before the competition. The match starts with an open ceremony and raising of the Finnish flag. The competitors are then briefed on the match and given an overview of the stages and issued maps and other necessary information.

Shooting Stages

There were five Shooting Stages in total for the 2007 event; from Stage A1 through to Stage A5. The long range shootings were held on Stages A1 and A4. At Stage A1 the competitors had to shoot the targets based on the range card they had made before. The distances varied between 400 and 900 metres. Wind reading was also a must at this stage.

There were ten targets in total and two shots maximum per target. The shooter of each team shot targets 1 to 5. After this the shooter and the spotter changed tasks for the spotter to shoot the targets 6 to 10. Disengagement was carried out from the firing position back to the starting point. If the first round hit the shooter got full points and if they missed with the first round if the second round hit they got half of the points. The total time for the stage was thirty minutes, including the advance and withdrawal from the final firing line. The judging of the task included hits to the correct targets, teamwork, and actions taken in the firing position.

This proved to be a hard task for many of the teams. Unlike a normal range where the targets are visible against a sand back stop, the targets here were placed amongst the surrounding terrain. Most were of the electronically controlled metal pop up and fall when hit variety. As with camouflaged soldiers on a battlefield, many of the targets in this match blended in with the background. It was not a case of the competitors not being able to shoot them, but sometimes of simply not being able to tell them apart from the surrounding terrain.

At the Stage A4, competitors were given a range card already made out by the organisers. This time they had



6: A sniper pair – note camo tape on weapons and sights - discuss their tactics as they survey the stage in front of them

7: Second part of Stage A1 had the sniper engage targets from the braced standing position

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ten targets to shoot but only ten minutes to do it in, with the distances varying from around 420 to 890metres. The reactive targets rose up. The competitor acting as a sniper had to shoot reactive targets marked A to E and the competitor acting as spotter had to shoot reactive targets marked F to J. Prior to every shot one of the pair had to tell to the range officer which target they were shooting at. They got points only from targets indicated prior to the shot. The team could try to hit each target twice; a hit by the first round giving maximum points, but a hit by second round gave only half.

Stages A2 and A5 were planned to simulate deployment of snipers in defensive scenarios. At Stage A2 the team had to shoot moving targets at various speeds at 100 metres. After that they had to shoot at five stationary targets placed from 250 to 450 metres distance. The distances were not too great, but the shooter had only one minute timeframe to do it, including range and wind estimation, so gauging the distance quickly with just the Eyeball Mark One was a good skill to have.



Immediately following the Land Navigation Stage, the teams had to prepare for the CQB (Close Quarter Battle) Stage. The tactical scenario here was to check an abandoned enemy base, to ascertain whether it was safe to be seized by own troops. One of the most interesting stages, it measured the skills scout snipers may sometimes encounter. There were



At Stage A5 the team had to run to their final firing line, do a set number of push-ups and start shooting targets from supported kneeling position. The targets were at fairly close distances of around 300 metres. Again this distance was unknown to the competitors, but was challenging to shoot, because the firing position was not the best possible one to adopt and they were breathing heavily. After that they had to run to the next final firing point which was a supported standing position. Again the distances were not too great but the challenges were the same as at the previous final firing line. The clock was running during the whole stage and the faster the team could do it, the more points they could get from it. Eighty percent of the maximum score was received from the hits on the target and twenty percent from the time. The fastest performance of this competition received the maximum score and the other performances were proportioned to this, in similar fashion to how an IPSC practical pistol competition is scored.

Special Stages

The Moving Under Surveillance stage was a very demanding one, because the judge had binoculars to look for competitors while they were advancing towards him and they only had seventeen minutes in which to complete the task. A good ghillie suit for camouflage and excellent fieldcraft were essential at this stage.

The Land Navigation stage was intended to measure the ability of the sniper team to find their way across terrain to the target area, and there was also a one hour time limit to do

8: A Sniper Team in final firing location at Stage A1. The sniper engages and the spotter assists him locate the ten targets in this stage

9: Here a target moves across the front of the sniper at 100 metres and has to be engaged between the two blue flags

10: A spotter gauges the distance to the target while the sniper manoeuvres himself into position for the shot.

11: Fully cammed-up a sniper engages distance targets while the spotter observes the impact of the shot.



the stage. The teams could navigate either through forests and swamps, which was a more direct and a potentially faster way, or use roads, which was a more time consuming and a longer way, but for navigation. The control points were hidden in such a way that one had to do the navigating really well to find them in a hurry and while tired.

The team had to find its way to the control points marked on the map and visit them in the right order, which was one to four. The team had to pass on letters mentioned in the control points to the judge of the combat simulation stage, plus had to be at the combat simulation stage at the precise time given in the timetable. All the teams who made the stage in the allotted time chose to travel through swamps and forests. Some testified that the swamps were quite deep at places.

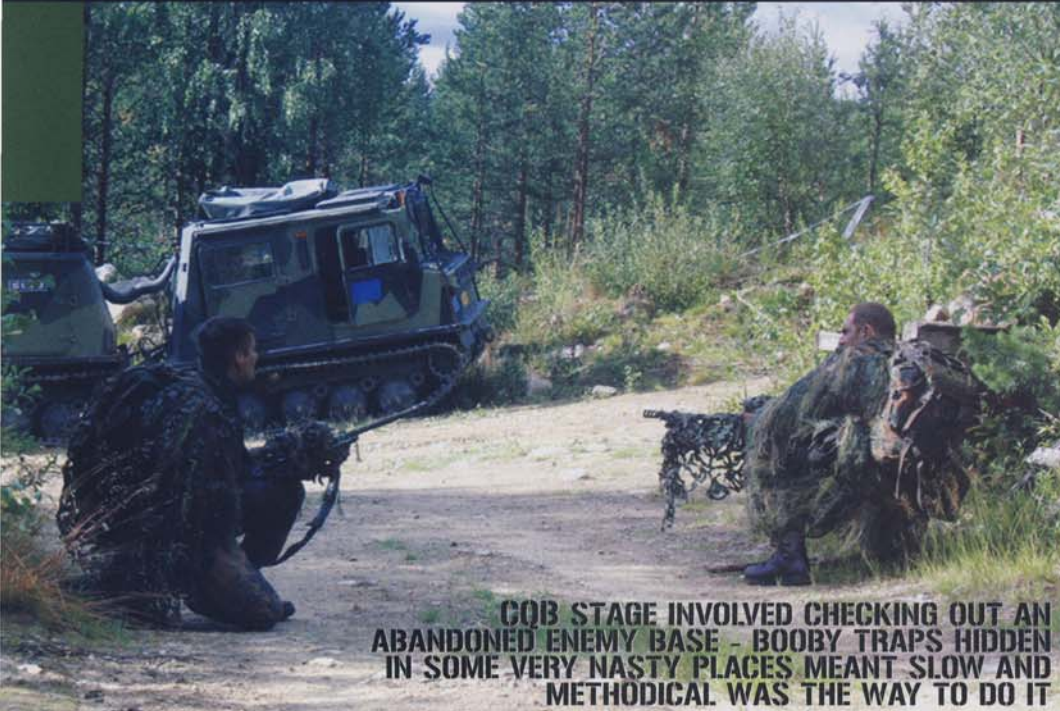
some booby traps hidden in some very nasty places, so slow and methodical was the good way to go.

On the Surveillance Stage the sniper team had to spot for objects from the seemingly uninteresting landscape for some fifteen minutes, after which they had to leave the stage for ten minutes and then come back to spot the differences made by the judges in the landscape. The stage measured well the observational skills of a sniper team, with minuscule objects placed on the terrain. A 360 degree surveillance was also needed, as there was a booby trap placed fifteen metres behind the team. If they did not notice it, they got docked some points.



Calibres, Rifles & Equipment

Calibres are getting larger every year. Whereas in years gone by the .308 Winchester (7.62 mm NATO) and 7.62x53 Russian were the most commonly used rounds, the .338 Lapua Magnum and .300 Winchester Magnum have become more and more popular. Another popular calibre is the 6.5-284 Norma, which has also become a very popular calibre for F Class target shooting around the world. Both calibres have very flat trajectories



COB STAGE INVOLVED CHECKING OUT AN ABANDONED ENEMY BASE - BOOBY TRAPS HIDDEN IN SOME VERY NASTY PLACES MEANT SLOW AND METHODOICAL WAS THE WAY TO DO IT



customised Remington 700 rifles, or custom rifles made on Remington actions with Leupold and Nightforce telescopic sights.

Both team members were required to bring mandatory equipment, which included rifle and ammunition, camouflage clothing, a knife, a foldable shovel, first aid kit, water bottle, food, pens and notebook, compass and rifle cleaning equipment. All kit, with the exception of sleeping bags and shelter equipment, had to be carried on the person for the duration of the competition.

Obviously top of the range equipment will give many benefits, but the competition results listed the best sniper pairs in order of ability and not the pair with the most expensive gear. On the shooting stages the clock is always ticking and no allowances are given for faulty equipment. With the exception of target or stage equipment malfunctions no re-shoots were given.

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12: Fully cammed-up in a ghillie suit, a sniper advances towards the final firing point. The tip of the sound moderator is just visible in the foreground

Rifle calibre varying from 6.5 mm to .338 Lapua Magnum (8.6mm bullet diameter by 70mm case length) was permitted, and each team would fire approximately one hundred rounds during the competition. Ranges varied from 100 to 900 metres, with most being in excess of 500 metres.

The telescopic sights used were the tactically orientated European brands

and are less affected by crosswinds. The more traditional calibres like 7.62x53 Russian and .308 Winchester are still quite common, but lack the previously mentioned qualities at extreme ranges and in difficult wind conditions.

Some competitors used factory ammunition, but most reloaded their own ammo using Lapua's Scenar Hollow Point Boat Tail target bullets. I can personally testify to the quality of Lapua Scenar bullets, as I use them myself for long range shooting. Whatever calibre is used, the bullet has to be both accurate and powerful enough to reach out to 1000 metres.

The Sako TRG-42 bolt action rifle is the most common gun in this competition, but other rifles used included Accuracy International, Sig Sauer 3000, Sako TRG-2, Tigr, Mosin-Nagant, DPMS and various Sako and Tikka heavy barrelled models. As .308 Winchester and 6.5x55 Swedish ammunition can be loaded to be effective at 1000 metres, a number of heavy barrelled target rifles in these calibres were also used. Over half the rifles had either flash eliminators or sound suppressors fitted to them.

13: At Stage A5 two of the targets - white spots just below track - are visible at an unknown distance

14: Not all rifles used were of the heavy barrelled bolt action variety. This competitor uses a Israeli Calil self loading rifle in .308 Winchester



such as Schmidt and Bender, Hensoldts, Meopta and Zeiss. When it comes to rifles and scopes, competitors equipped themselves with the top of the range equipment. A near absence of the equivalent American made equipment was noticeable. A similar competition in the USA would be wall to wall

Scoring & Results

In the Military part of the competition the following counted towards scoring:-

1. Camouflage and equipment
2. Range / observation card and co-operation between the pair
3. Shooting (60%)
4. General behaviour in the forest.
5. Observation

6. Special operation

Penalties could be applied for being late, losing equipment, having an illegal cache or behaving against rules.

The 2007 competition was the closest run to date. Although the winning team stood out clearly, the following placed pairs were positioned closely after each other. A few more hits with the first shot would have changed their positions dramatically.

'On the shooting stages the clock is always ticking and no allowances are given for faulty equipment...'



of the world's best sniper-orientated shooting competitions.

An extra thumbs up must go to the Finnish Defence Forces support which is really needed to make a competition like this possible at such a high level as it is today. Only one hour after the end of this competition an armoured company started their live-fire field exercise on the same firing areas.

The next Simo Häyhä Sniping

to achieve in setting up a sniper competition in his name. Simo gave his approval to use his name for the competition, and when he passed away in April 2002 the competition's organisers sought the approval of his family to continue to use his name in connection with the match. This approval was granted and the event continues to both demand and attract a high level of marksmanship and sportsmanship, while honouring the exemplary military achievements of an extraordinary man.



MILITARY TEAM SNIPER PAIRS

Pos	Team Pair Names	Country	Points
1	Lipponen - Hyvärinen	Finland	1666
2	Sandberg - Poikela	Finland	1507
3	Viola - Salonen	Finland	1499

ENTHUSIAST TEAM SNIPER PAIRS

Pos	Team Pair Names	Country	Points
1	Merivald - Kirotar	Estonia	740
2	Uotila - Peltonen	Finland	713
3	Henttonen - Varjus	Finland	703

Thanks were given to the Sako Firearms Factory for the Tikka T3 Tactical .300 Winchester Magnum sniper rifle and to Realex Oy for the Industry Optics Rumania sniper scope, donated as top prizes. Kivelä Outdoor provided Eberlestock gun packs, TAB Gear gave suppressor and rifle covers and Nordis Oy donated Lapua Ammunition products. Alloptics Finland Oy provided financial support for the competition and Finnrapel Oy donated tactical gear.

The Finnish Sniper Guild has stated that it wishes to thank the representatives of the Finnish Defence Forces and the very helpful and professional staff of the North Carelian Brigade Military Training Area and Finish companies Lapua and Sako-Tikka. Their generous support ensured the Simo Häyhä Sniping Championships continues to be one

15: Scanning for objects during the surveillance stage – note how all kit had to be carried throughout the competition



16: Teams had to spot for objects in an uninteresting landscape for 15 minutes, leave the stage for 10 and then return and spot differences made by the judges

17: This DPMS LR-308 calibre rifle has an US Optics scope on it.

Championship will take place from 15–17th August 2008. The competition is open to all military and law enforcement organisations and to competitive target shooters as well. Information regarding the 2007 competition is available on the competition website:

www.takilta.fi/hayha2007 and info on the 2008 competition will be published at www.takilta.fi/hayha2008, should any of our military sniper readers (don't even think about it JH, Ed.) be interested.

Regarded as a hero in his native Finland, where target shooting, hunting and military service are still traditional and time-honoured pursuits, Simo Häyhä's patriotic stance made him a legend in sniping circles and with those who have a historical interest in sniping. Founding members of the Finnish Sniper Guild met in person with Simo Häyhä in 1999 and explained to him what they were trying

Acknowledgements

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

Häyhä Sniper Match
www.takilta.fi/hayha2008
Finnish Sniper Guild
www.takilta.fi
Lapua
www.lapua.com
Sako - Tikka
www.sako.fi
Realex Oy
www.realex.fi
Kivelä Outdoor
www.kivelaoutdoor.com
Alloptics Finland Oy
www.alloptics.fi
Finnrapel Oy
www.finnrapel.fi
Riflesonly
www.riflesonly.com