

STORY OF THE HOFFLAND PIT

Long Range Goal

By Don Sheldon



It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Seven years ago, members of the Alliance Rifle Club, took a tentative step in the direction of having our own highpower rifle pit. The road to achieving that goal has indeed seemed a thousand miles long to some of our members.

The smoke from our first ever highpower rifle match had not yet blown away before members were wistfully thinking about how nice it would be to shoot on a range with a military-style rifle pit. The dream found its way onto the bottom of the Alliance Rifle Club's five year plan. There it languished for several years. As other goals were reached, the pit project started to inch its way up the list. Several plans were tried and rejected, including an attempt to interest the Nebraska National Guard in being a partner in our range. An attempt to superimpose a 600 yard range on land that we then owned was given careful consideration. The final analysis was that we would compromise our excellent highpower silhouette range and congest the other ranges with a project of this type.

More time passed and a desire to have a 1000 yard range began to manifest itself. Our club plainly lacked the physical property to realize a range of this length. A chance encounter with the landowner from whom we had purchased acreage for our new range, indicated that an additional purchase of adjoining land would be possible. Hopes were raised that our problems might be solved. After considerable negotiations, which were handled by members Judge Glen Fiebig and attorney Jim Moravek, arrangements to purchase the necessary land were completed.

Once the legal work was completed, it was time for the nuts and bolts guys in our club to get busy. The fencing of the new property was handled by members Royce Brown, Rich Bell and Pat Synak. Soon the new range was surveyed, thanks to Zumbahlen Surveying, and staked out.

Early on it was apparent that a pit constructed entirely of concrete was beyond our meager means. Ways to circumvent this problem were discussed. A plan to use steel retaining walls acquired from old railroad cars was deemed feasible.



Looking from the east to the west—the 2 x 6 frames have just been installed.



Bill Ewert watches section being lowered into place.

Then club president, Pat Synak, was the man in the driver's seat for the rest of the long journey. Through Pat's connections as General Car Foreman at Burlington Northern Railroad, the needed material was assembled. Pat was able to secure the donation of surplus railroad cars to the Alliance Rifle Club. Much after hours work was done by Pat and Rich Bell, to salvage the usable material from several railroad cars slated for destruction. Club members then used Burlington Northern's facilities to complete the necessary welding operations to transform the raw pieces of steel into the pit walls. The finished products were 50 foot sections of steel, which were welded into parallel walls 6 ft. apart.

I remember commenting to Pat after one long afternoon and night of work, that the anti-gun crowd just didn't know the kind of determination that they were up against. Several club members including Steve Lickliter, Royce Brown, Ralph Hanson, and Rodney Johns, had just finished regular eight hour shifts on their jobs for Burlington Northern. These members then worked an additional 8-10 hours to

help make our pit a reality. The pit walls were designed to be transported to our range and then assembled on location.

Through the efforts of Pat Synak's many friends, the trench to receive the pit walls was excavated. Filsinger Excavating Co. of Sidney, Nebraska, donated a caterpillar and operator to dig the required hole in the earth.

It was a great day when members began placing the pre-constructed retaining walls in their final location. Much thanks to local excavating pro Bob Henderson for the use of his crane and expertise in the placing of the pit walls. As the composite units of the pit walls were assembled, a certain sense of finality set in on club members. We all knew that many sweat-soaked days of labor would be required to accomplish our final goal. We were well on our way to having the only privately owned rifle pit in the state of Nebraska, and the only 1000 yard range.

The Nebraska wind had filled the pit with the ever present tumbleweed by the time the spring of 1990 rolled around. Much work remained to make the

dream come true. The next step was to pour concrete around welded steel bases for the upright pipes of the target carriers. When this work was completed, the next step was to lay cement blocks for the clearance wall needed for the target carrier mechanisms.

Warren Hanson, a local contractor and club member lent his expertise to this phase of the operation. The last concrete work to be completed was the pouring of a walkway 4 ft. by 165 ft. long. Club members Pat Synak, Rich Bell, Don Sheldon, Brian Amerman, Ron Ewing, Jim Cunningham and Irv, Lori and Cory Huber, rejoiced at the completion of this critical stage.

The installation of the target carrier mechanisms, which were patterned after those found at NRA's Whittington Center, were the next order of business. The design of the target carriers was carefully considered. After much discussion and testing on our prototype model by such all time great shooters as Gary Anderson and Lones Wigger, not to mention dozens of Alliance Rifle Club members, the final design was decided upon.

Don Sheldon undertook the task of welding the required 15 target carrier units into their completed form. During the process, 1680 1/4" holes were drilled. 150 lbs. of welding rod was used, and several tanks of oxygen and acetylene were consumed. The 480 slotted 1/4" x 1" long holes needed to provide adjustment for the roller wheels were hand filed.

It was a great day when all 15 target carriers were set into place. Now the woodwork required to manufacture the wooden target frames was undertaken. Club members Gene Sheldon, Allen Tuck, Oscar Carr and draftee Tim Moffett, assisted Don Sheldon in the construction of the 15 target frames and the 45 1"x4"x6' target insets that were required.

A light was beginning to shine at the end of the long tunnel. Everyone hoped that the light was not coming from another train headed down the same track.

Pat Synak and Rich Bell worked hard to complete the number boards to mark each of the 15 shooting positions. Dr. Wendell Fairbanks, who had provided a loan to the club, also acquired special 6x6 ft. cardboard pieces to cover the target insets from neighboring Colorado rifle clubs. Weights for fine tuning the concrete counterweights of the target carriers were cast from scrap donated by Co-op of Alliance by Don Sheldon. The final touches were taken care of by Rich Bell and Pat Synak, and the Huber family.

The end of the long trail was in sight. Seven years of hard labor and determined problem solving by Alliance Rifle Club members were about to culminate in the first match held on our new range. Such a success story could have only happened with the dedication of loyal club members and through the support of our many friends. The help of local merchants, the Alliance Lumber Company, Bernie's Ace Hardware, Alliance Co-op, Bob Henderson, and Silver Line Salvage is greatly appreciated.

Clubs around the country should take heart. If a town of 10,000 citizens in Western Nebraska can accomplish what our club has, then surely towns of greater populations could also find the means to have their own highpower ranges.

Speaking personally, I am proud to have had a hand in a precedent setting effort by a small town club to achieve what many larger clubs can only hope for. Our people made all the difference. Maybe other clubs have the determination and the dedication of the Alliance Rifle Club. I hope so. When your range is finished, I hope to see you at the 1000 yard line to share in a few moments of reflection of a job well done.



Looking from the west end of the pit toward the east. Pictured are Danny Hudson, Pat Synak and Jeff Synak.

Reprinted from Issue No. 31 December 1992
Panhandle Shooting News
Gene and Janice Rader Editors
Article and Photos courtesy of
Don Sheldon



ALLIANCE RIFLE CLUB

1000 yd. Pit

After seven years of planning and work, the ARC 1000 yd. highpower rifle pit is finished in 1992.



Pictures show the pull targets and number boards



Photos taken in 1992 by
Gene Rader