

U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit
Public Affairs Office
(706) 545-5436

March 22, 2005

Soldiers Armywide learn valuable skills

Marksmanship competition provides training

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FORT BENNING, Ga. – “Being able to shoot, being a marksman is what being a Soldier is all about.”

That’s what Lt. Gen. Anthony R. Jones, deputy commanding general and chief of staff of the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command, told the nearly 200 Soldiers gathered at the 2005 U.S. Army Small Arms Championships.

Jones was the guest speaker at the All-Army Championships Awards Ceremony conducted March 20 at Phillips Range. Active duty, National Guard and Reserve Soldiers from across the country took part in the All-Army Pistol and Rifle Championships March 12 to 24. The U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit hosted the All-Army Small Arms Championships in conjunction with the U.S. Army Infantry Center.

“I know that now you’re more confident marksmen and better Soldiers and I ask that you take this training back to your units and share it with your fellow Soldiers; it’s tremendously important,” Jones told the competitors. “Go back and tell your leaders about the good training that the Army Marksmanship Unit and Fort Benning provide; I think there’s none better.”

Braving pouring rain and wind chills in the 30s, Soldiers competed with the M-16 rifle or M-4 carbine, M-9 pistol and M-24 or M-14 rifles against 188 counterparts from the regular Army, Reserve and National Guard. Rifle matches were shot at ranges from 200 to 500 yards.

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Pistol matches were fired under combat time standards at seven to 25 yards; one team match included a timed two-mile run with weapons and full combat gear. All firing was done with helmet and individual combat gear. Long-range matches were fired at ranges of 600 to 1,000 yards.

“The advanced shooting experience gained in these challenging matches translates into better trained and confident Soldiers, ready to meet the challenges of the global war on terrorism,” said USAMU Commander Lt. Col. David J. Liwanag. “These championships are the pinnacle of in-service Army competitive marksmanship training.”

Not only did the Soldiers learn from competing in the matches, but all competitors in the All-Army Championships also attend mandatory rifle, pistol and long range training classes given by USAMU instructors and received Certificates of Training.

According to Liwanag, after last year’s All-Army Competition, competitors from Fort Benning’s CONUS Replacement Center used the training they received and applied it to their own unit training, which resulted in a weapons qualification increase from 30 percent to 90 percent.

“The All-Army Competition gives all competitors the opportunity to spend a week on the ranges fine-tuning the fundamental skills necessary for successful shooting ,” said USAMU’s Spc. Sean P. Watson, who won the U.S. Army Small Arms Overall Individual Championship and the Service Pistol Individual Championship. “The added pressure of competition is important as it keeps the shooters’ motivation and mindset focused every day. These matches are unique in that all soldiers competing are using their assigned or similar weapons. Many are very surprised to find how successful they can be engaging targets at extended ranges.”

“The All Army Rifle Championships was a tremendous event and a great experience for future leaders of our Army,” said Staff Sgt. Jared N. van Aalst of the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, who won the Service Rifle Individual Championship. “All of the rifle firing was conducted on a known distance range and emphasized individual marksmanship skills and not target engagement. Most soldiers lack the training and confidence necessary to reliably hit a man-sized target past 200 meters, much less 500 yards.

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“Soldiers will also take back to their respective units the importance of known distance firing because of the downrange feedback that they received while firing,” van Aalst continued. “I also believe the All-Army Championships better prepares service members for combat, the only way to duplicate the marksmanship stress felt during combat is at the highest levels of individual shooting competition.”

Matches were open to all Soldiers worldwide of any military occupational specialty. Participants included active duty Soldiers from Fort Benning, Fort Gillem, Ga., Fort Bragg, N.C., Fort Campbell, Ky., Fort Sill, Okla., Fort Lewis, Wash., Fort Riley, Kan., and Fort Drum, N.Y. National Guardsmen came from New York, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Wyoming and Texas and numerous Army Reservists also participated. Approximately 40 percent of the Soldiers who competed were combat veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Other guests at the March 20 ceremony included, Fort Benning Commanding General Brig. Gen. Benjamin Freakley, Fort Benning Garrison Commander Col. Ricardo Riera, Accessions Support Brigade Commander Col. Freddie N. Blakely, TRADOC Command Sgt. Maj. John D. Sparks, Fort Benning Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelso, Accessions Support Brigade Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas J. LiPuma and retired Command Sgt. Maj. Jimmie W. Spencer, who represented the Association of the U.S. Army; the Infantry Center Band also performed.

(Formed in 1956 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to raise the standards of marksmanship throughout the U.S. Army, the Army Marksmanship Unit is assigned to the Accessions Support Brigade of Fort Knox, Ky., which is under U.S. Army Accessions Command, of Fort Monroe, Va. Accessions Command is charged with overseeing recruiting and training of the Army’s enlisted Soldiers and officers. The Marksmanship Unit trains its Soldiers to win competitions and enhances combat readiness through train-the-trainer clinics, research and development. The world-class Soldier-athletes of the USAMU also promote the Army and assist recruiters in attracting young Americans to enlist in the Army. For more information on the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit, contact the Public Affairs Office at (706) 545-5436, paula.pagan@usaac.army.mil or <http://www.usarec.army.mil/hq/amu/>.)

