



# WHATSOEVER

by Hoyt Harwell

## YOU'VE HEARD OF TEDDY ROOSEVELT, BUT WHAT ABOUT TACKHOLE LEE?

Teddy Roosevelt and Thomas K. "Tackhole" Lee of Alabama never knew each other but they had something in common, in a reverse sort of way.

Birmingham's Lee got that nickname because he could put a bullet in a space no larger than a tack hole.

Roosevelt, conversely, was concerned that so many of his Rough Riders couldn't shoot well enough to hit the broad side of a bar. That concern led to major developments in Alabama's Calhoun and Talladega counties.

Lee died in 1957, but in his day he was known as one of the top shooters in this country and around the world. He held close to 30 world records and more than 900 trophies and had a life-time percentage of 96 on 100,000 targets.

Lee had a standing offer of \$15,000 - quite a sum in his day - for anyone who could defeat him in combined rifle, pistol and shotgun competition.

In his early 20s he shot a perfect 2000 x 2000 as the national rifle champion.

Lee invented the Lee Dot gun-sight and the Lee Tomic shell.

Roosevelt, the leader of that charge up San Juan Hill, could have used gunmen such as Lee during the Spanish-American War.

In 1903, while president, Roosevelt and Congress established the National Matches and National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice to try to ensure that future servicemen would perform better than they did in that war.

When the program became available to civilians it was re-named the Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP), and that brings us back to Alabama.

One of the nation's two CMP marksmanship centers is in Anniston (the other one is at Camp Perry, Ohio), and the Anniston center has an 80-point indoor air gun range equipped with electronic targets and a results display center. Competitors fire from prone, kneeling and standing positions.

The range is open to the public at specified times. Most of the competitors are young, but Orest Michaels, chief operating officer, said he would like to see senior adults form clubs and enjoy the thrill of competition.

The CMP attracts various age groups from several states to its safety and marksmanship clinics, camps and competitions. For instance, the National Junior ROTC three-position air rifle matches have ended up at the Anniston facility.

The Anniston camp is the home range of 2012 U.S. Olympian Jonathan Hall, one of about 80 employees of the camp, whose shooting range is surrounded by other support buildings.

Olympic tryouts are held at the Anniston and Camp Perry camps.

In a single year the Anniston camp was host to almost 10,000 users and almost 7,000 competitors in 117 single- or multi-day training or competitive events.

Michaels quoted economic impact studies by Jacksonville State University showing that the Anniston camp brings \$21 million to Calhoun County each year.

In addition, an outdoor \$20 million air rifle and air pistol range is being built on 500 Talladega

County acres three miles south of the Talladega Superspeedway. It will include targets at 200, 300 and 600 yards. The range is targeted (if you please) for completion next January. About 5,000 clubs, schools, teams and other organizations are affiliated with the CMP in safety and marksmanship programs.

These groups are helped by a mobile range, with 60 firing points, that can be set up as an extension of the two permanent CMP camps. So, old Teddy Roosevelt would be proud of what his vision has produced, and old Tackhole would be facing much stronger competition now as a result of all that CMP training.

Hoyt Harwell is retired after 42 years with The Associated Press, the last 26 as the AP's north Alabama correspondent based in Birmingham. Harwell owns a BB gun.