

## **NMNG dominates in the Marksmanship Advisory Council Regional shooting match**

By Sgt. Iain Jaramillo, 200th Public Affairs Detachment

RATON, N.M. – The New Mexico National Guard Combat Shooting Team dominated the competition, taking first place across the board at the National Guard Region VII Marksmanship Advisory Council Matches at the NRA Whittington Center in Raton, N.M., from Aug. 13 to 15.

The MAC Match is organized and judged by the National Guard Marksmanship Training Center based in Little Rock, Arkansas. Teams from New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Hawaii, and Guam comprise Region VII.

California, Hawaii, and Guam could not send teams to this year's event.

The NMNG claimed four of four team awards: Overall Team Champion, Team Pistol, Team Rifle, and Team Multi-Gun.

Sgt. 1st Class Erik Vargas, assistant operations sergeant for 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 200<sup>th</sup> Infantry, emerged as the standout performer of the competition. Vargas took home numerous awards and plaques, including:

First place in:

- Combined Individual Overall score
- Rifle Aggregate
- Rifle Excellence in Competition match
- NM Chile Pepper Shoot
- Multi-Gun Challenge

Second place in:

- Pistol Aggregate
- Night Fighter

Vargas also won the Reflexive Fire (Day) individual award.

Joining Vargas in the winner's circle was Staff Sgt. Sean Morris, a squad leader in the 126th Military Police Company. Morris won several awards, including:

- First place in Pistol Aggregate
- Second in the Multi-Gun Challenge
- Third in Night Fighter

In addition, Morris took home the Anti-Body Armor and Rapid Pistol Close Quarter Battle individual awards.

Shooters who compete in the MAC Match are faced with long days at the range, firing hundreds of rounds from the Air Force and Army's standard individual weapons, including the M-4 Carbine, the SIG Sauer M-17 pistol, and the Mossberg 590A1 shotgun.

Matches such as these teach competitors how to move and engage targets effectively from close quarters to more than 400 yards away. Some events can be physically demanding, requiring competitors to run hundreds of yards before taking up their positions on the firing line.

"The first match kind of set the precedent of how things would go," said Vargas. "The route to the 400-yard line was uphill, and we were at 6,800 feet elevation. It was pretty brutal. Everyone was super tired, and we had to go for another three or four matches after that, including another cardio-heavy one."

Soldiers and Airmen are taught four fundamentals of marksmanship during basic training: keep a steady position, aim, control their breathing, and squeeze the trigger. Marksmen who wish to place in the MAC match must learn how to apply the fundamentals in austere conditions and practice whenever they have an opportunity.

Vargas, who began competing with the California Civil Support Team in 2017, practices at home when he isn't working at his civilian job.

"Dry fire is really the key. It's free and you can do it inside your room," Vargas said. "You don't need any special equipment; you just need extreme focus on the front sight post and what the weapon is doing as you dry fire because that will translate to real fire."

Morris, who works as a project manager in Deming, N.M., when he's out of uniform, drew from his experience in the Marine Corps and on Army Reserve marksmanship teams to succeed.

"I've shot in multiple kinds of competitions, so there's some knowledge that carries over," said Morris. "The sheer number of rounds I have downrange is the key. Once you get to a certain level of understanding, you don't lose a lot of your ability."

The NMNG team, which consists of Soldiers and Airmen from across the state and beyond, trains regularly, but competing regionally takes more than range time during weekend drills.

"Our team's strength comes from experience, good leadership, and self-discipline, the discipline to do at least some kind of practice on our own," Vargas said. "A lot of the guys are pretty busy with their civilian jobs. The first thing they want to do when they get home is have a meal, relax, and get ready for the next day of work, but it takes self-discipline to go inside your room and grab whatever personal weapon system you have, make sure it's clear, and practice for however long you need."

Marksmanship competitions happen throughout the state year-round, usually leading to the state-level Adjutant General's Match. Soldiers and Airmen interested in joining a team or competing are encouraged to ask their chain of command for more information.

"It's only going to make you a better shooter," said Vargas. "It makes your squad and your unit better. At the end of the day, it makes the Army better, so when we do have to go do our jobs again in real life, we're very confident that we can do it."

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