

# Illinois National Guard Shooting Team earns Army-wide championship

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SPRINGFIELD - Thick fog filled the cool morning air at the 260-acre range complex at Fort Benning, Georgia on March 12 where approximately 200 competitors prepared to embark on a four-day competition that would challenge the Soldiers, both physically and mentally.

When the fog cleared, the Illinois Army National Guard proved it was the best shooting team in the Army.

The Illinois National Guard Joint Force Headquarters Small Arms Readiness and Training Team (SARTS) was named the U.S. Army Overall Team Champions, U.S. Army Rifle Team Champions and earned 2nd Place in the Multi-gun Championship at the 2016 United States Army Small Arms Championship at the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit range complex Fort Benning, Georgia.

The all-Army competition is free and open to all soldiers, including West Point and ROTC cadets. During the event, Soldiers competed in separate classes: cadet, novice, open and professional. Classes were determined based on Soldiers' previous competition experience. Each team included four shooters and a coach.

Though this was the first time the Illinois team had earned the top spot at the competition, the team was confident in their abilities prior to their victory.

"We knew going in we were going to be one of the top five teams," said Sgt. 1st Class Shelby Stockton, of Petersburg, Illinois who won the Silver Medal in the National Match for Excellence in Competition. "We had shot enough matches to know that if we shoot at our potential, we can win matches."

Gleason said all the Soldiers have their assigned roles on the team, but at the end of the day, they all came together and got the job done collectively.

"We picked the best guys for this team and they didn't have any weak links," said Gleason. "All these guys are good at everything, they may not be the best in one area, but they are good at rifle, pistol and multi-gun and that is why we won."

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kyle Gleason, of Lincoln, Illinois, who received the Gold Medal in Rifle Match 7 and served as the coach for the SARTS at this year's competition, said that the members spend a lot of their personal time and money to prepare for upcoming competitions.

"I shoot a competition once a week with a civilian club at a range," said Stockton. "If I'm not away training with the Army, I'm there shooting."

Despite the fact that the members were experienced shooters prior to the competition, the team came together for training before hitting the range in Georgia.

"We trained to the standard of the upcoming competition for 12 hours a day, 6 days straight in full gear," said Sgt. 1st Class David Perdew, of Rushville, Illinois who won

the overall spot in the Pistol Championship, the Gold Medal in Pistol Match 3 and 5 along with a Bronze Medal for Excellence in Rifle Competition. "The work we put into training gave us the results we wanted."



During their training, the team shot 10,000 pistol rounds and 10,000 rifle rounds.

"It is not a hit or miss competition, it is scored on a point value system," said Gleason. "We use data books and the minute of angle formula to dial in our rifles at different distances prior to the competition to put ourselves in the best position to score well."

During the competition the Soldiers had to fire using optics and then iron sights on the pistol range which ranged from 10 yards to 50 yards and from 25 yards to 500 yards on the rifle range.

Stockton said the team's success hinged on them being able to train together and train on targets at 500 yards out. Stockton went on to say that it was not that they were better shooters than their opponents, but that their team's preparation made the difference.

"We were better prepared for the match than the active-duty competitors," said Stockton. "We had our rifle zeroed at every yard line so we knew exactly how to adjust our sights during the competition."

Perdew said that it wasn't just the preparation that led to the team's success this year.



"We take training advice we get from other teams at the competition and use it in our next year's preparation plan to make us better," said Perdew. "When you stop being willing to learn from others, you will stop getting better."

At the all-Army competition the teams are required to have at least one 'new shooter' competing and to do this the team must look for recruits.

Stockton said the team watches for recruits throughout the year and contacts the top shooters of the Illinois National Guard Adjutant General Match to meet the "new shooter" requirement.

"When we do training events we are looking for potential members of the team," said Stockton. "We go to the zero range and pay attention to which Soldiers can shoot groups," said Stockton.

In addition to looking for potential recruits at training events, the SARTS helps Soldiers improve their marksmanship skills. They attend annual qualification training for units throughout the state to mentor and coach Soldiers on the skills they have learned.

"As much skill as this team has already, we still have room to grow," said Perdew. "There are Soldiers in the Illinois National Guard that have great potential, if we can get with them, train with them and inform them about this team and the competitions. The potential for this team is limitless."

Stockton said being a part of the SARTS is not just about them going to competitions to win.

"We use the competition to gather more information about shooting and bring it back into the Army to make Soldiers better marksmen," said Stockton.

Gleason said the team looks forward to future competitions and they are always learning and looking for new ways to improve their skills.

The following is the complete list of the team's accomplishments from this year's competition.

Team Awards:

1. U.S. Army Overall Team Champions
2. U.S. Army Rifle Team Champions

### 3. 2nd Place Multi-gun Champions

#### Individual Awards:

1. Staff Sgt. Brandon Hornung, of Mendota, Illinois - 1st place novice overall champion and 1st place novice Multi-gun and Gold Medal for Excellence in Rifle Competition
2. Sgt. 1st Class David Perdew, of Rushville, Illinois – U.S. Army Pistol Champion, Gold Medal in Pistol Match 3 and 5 along with a Bronze Medal for Excellence in Rifle Competition
3. Sgt. 1st Class Shelby Stockton, of Petersburg, Illinois – Silver Medal in National Match for Excellence in Competition
4. Staff Sgt. Jacob Blount, of St. Louis, Missouri – 1st place in novice service Rifle Match and 4th overall (pistol, rifle, multi-gun) placing in the novice class 5. Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kyle Gleason, of Lincoln, Illinois – Gold Medal in Rifle Match 7