



Soldiers compete in the excellence-in competition rifle match Feb. 1, 2013, one of four rifle matches during the U.S. Army Small Arms Championships at Fort Benning, Ga.

# California Guardsman claims top honors at Small Arms Championship

*By Michael Molinaro*

U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit

**A** California National Guardsman needed an extra suitcase to haul away the hardware he collected at this year's U.S. Army Small Arms Championship held in early February at Fort Benning, Ga.

Sgt. 1st Class Geoffrey Applegate won the overall individual championship, ending the reign of the competition's four-time defending champion and putting an exclamation point on an outstanding two-week run at the All-Army competition.

"I am still a bit overwhelmed," said Applegate, an infantryman with the 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment, 79th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. "I love this competition. I have a competitive spirit, it's what I love to do and to win here at the All-Army is awesome."

A railroad conductor/engineer who lives in Weed, Calif., Applegate competed for the third time at the All-Army. He improved on his 17th-place finish in 2012 to get his name engraved on the champion's trophy. In

addition to Applegate's overall championship, he and members of Team California claimed the overall team championship. He also earned the coveted Distinguished Rifleman's Badge, the open-class title and was the combined arms match individual winner.

Among the items he was awarded for his strong showing was a Secretary of the Army M-1 Garand Trophy Rifle.

Army Reservists Sgt. 1st Class John Buol and Master Sgt. Russell Moore took second and third place, respectively. Moore came into the match as the reigning four-time champion. He won the overall pistol individual championship.

"It doesn't matter how many times I come here I always learn a lot," Applegate said. "When you get to train and shoot against Soldiers like (Master) Sgt. Moore, whose name is on those trophies since he was a staff sergeant and is an amazing shot, you are going to learn something."

Spc. Nicholas Girardin of the Maine National Guard, won the novice-class overall individual championship. More than half of the field competed in the novice class of shooters. The competition was originally structured to give novice shooters the chance to gain invaluable marksmanship training in an effort to enhance the overall combat readiness of the Army.

"I learned so much in these two weeks and had a lot of fun," said Girardin, a computer detection systems repairman with the 152nd Maintenance Company 286th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion. "I loved the combined arms match since we never get to do that sort of thing. I met a lot of people who gave me advice. My marksmanship got a lot better in just these two weeks."

The matches at the championship were designed to raise the shooting proficiency of Soldiers and units across the Army by teaching advanced combat marksmanship techniques using issue rifles and pistols. Soldiers shot in several pistol, rifle matches and a combined arms match to test their capabilities against their peers. Weather played into the event as Soldiers dealt with cold mornings, unseasonably warm days and one day when Mother Nature tested everyone's mettle with a torrential rain storm.

"It rains in wars, so it just made things realistic," Applegate said. "There's no better training aid for



Sgt. 1st Class Geoffrey Applegate (center) of the California National Guard took home the top prize at the 2013 U.S. Army Small Arms Championship after winning the overall individual championship. He is presented a Secretary of the Army M-1 Garand Trophy Rifle by Lt. Col. Don King (left), commander of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit, and Col. Michael W. Rauhut, commander of the 197th Infantry Brigade. (Photo by Michael Molinaro)

shooting than All-Army. You get the best shooters, a whole range of shooters, and you can pull from so many. It's a friendly competition but it's serious business when we get on the line." ■

### Individual Awards:

- Overall champion: Sgt. 1st Class Geoffrey Applegate
- Rifle Champion: Sgt. Evan Messer
- Pistol Champion: Master Sgt. Russell Moore
- Combined Arms Champion: Sgt. 1st Class Geoffrey Applegate
- High Drill Sergeant: Sgt. 1st Class Nuel Allee
- High Active duty (E1-E4): Spc. John Rummage
- High Reservist (E1-E4): Spc. Sean McDaniel
- High Guardsman (E1-E4): Spc. Nicholas Girardin
- Col. Ralph Puckett Trophy: Sgt. Chauncey Reed
- Pistol EIC: Staff Sgt. Eric Lawrence
- Rifle EIC: Staff Sgt. Kyle Bartman

### Team Awards:

- Overall Champions: Team California
- Rifle Champions: Maine National Guard
- Pistol Champions: Maine National Guard
- Combined Arms Champions: Team California

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