



Five cavalry scouts from U.S. Army Alaska won the inaugural Gainey Cup Competition on March 5, beating out 18 other teams to claim the right to call themselves the best cavalry scout team in the Army.

# Cavalry scouts from Alaska take inaugural Gainey Cup

*By Sgt. 1st Class Raymond Piper*

Army News Service

**F**ive cavalry scouts from U.S. Army Alaska won the inaugural Gainey Cup Competition on March 5, beating out 18 other teams to claim the right to call themselves the best cavalry scout team in the Army.

Staff Sgt. Justin Miller, Staff Sgt. Zachary Adkins, Spc. Mitchell Sanderson, Spc. Alexander Berlin and Pfc. Joseph Calderon made up the winning team from the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, headquartered at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

The five-day event held at Fort Benning, Ga., March 1-5, tested the Soldiers physically and on the basics of being a cavalry scout. The competition was named for re-

tired Command Sgt. Maj. William J. Gainey, who was the first senior enlisted advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2005.

“It re-established all of the fundamentals of my job with me,” Miller said. “It was just a great training experience, and I’ll take it back to my unit and teach it to my guys and make them a better team.”

The competition began with a four-hour physical test, the “Disciplus Validus,” or “strong disciples” in Latin. The event incorporated both traditional exercises, such as pull-ups, dips, pushups and situps, with nontraditional challenges, such as tire-flipping, pulling a wounded person on



a casualty sled and pushing a humvee uphill. The teams started at 10-minute intervals and were awarded points for each station based on their overall performance.

Spc. Ramuel Figueroa, a cavalry scout with the 2nd Infantry Division team from its 4th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, said the humvee push, which followed a 5-mile ruck march, was the toughest event of the test.

“We were going pretty good when we started. Then you just hit a wall,” he said. “You’re fighting for every inch, waiting for that guy to say, ‘Go, go, go.’”

Staff Sgt. Michael Christensen, a team leader with the 1st Cavalry Division team from its 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, said that though the humvee push was probably one of the hardest events of the day for him and his team, it showed what they were made of.

“You know when you get really tired, you just got to dig down deep and think, ‘Don’t put the quit in,’” he said. “Once the quit gets in you, it won’t leave, so you can’t have that poison in your mentality. You have to just keep pushing forward.”

Following the *Disciplus Validus* event, the scouts took a written exam to test their ability to recognize various U.S. and foreign vehicles, helicopters and weapon systems. The competitors then received the weapons and radios they would need for the rest of the competition.



Tracers fill the night sky as cavalry scout contestants perform during the night small arms live-fire event. (Photo by Marvin Lynchard)

During the next two days, the teams would face day and night live-fire exercises and a reconnaissance lane with a variety of tasks.

“It’s a great opportunity to see, as a representation of their units, where their unit is in their training path,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Michael S. Clemens, command sergeant major of the 316th Cavalry Brigade, U.S. Army Armor School, at Fort Benning. “It gives them an opportunity

to focus on the fundamentals of reconnaissance and security tasks that we may not have been able to do necessarily over the past decade of conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

During the live-fire exercises, the cavalymen were tested on their ability to observe named areas of interest — known as NAIs — acquire targets and engage them with both direct and indirect fire, and use proper reporting procedures. The teams were issued a fragmentary order that both instructed them to observe two NAIs and specified their engagement and displacement criteria.

The scouts were supported by a section of 81-mm mortars providing indirect fire support and targets to engage. They were allotted one adjustment and then a fire for effect. Additionally, a series of trucks, troops, and armored fighting vehicles were presented to test competitors’ knowledge of engagement and displacement criteria, as well as marksmanship.

“I have personally never called for fire with live mortar rounds,” Figueroa said. “We actually had to engage small-arms targets at the same time, so I thought that was awesome.”

The next test was the disassembly, assembly and functions tests of weapons common to the scouts’ mission. They were tested on the M9 automatic pistol, M4 carbine, M240B machine gun, M2 heavy barrel machine gun and Mk 19 automatic grenade launcher. Team leaders selected one member from their team for each

weapon. Each system was given a time limit, and if they went over the allotted time for the weapon, graders began to deduct points. For example, the Soldiers were allotted three minutes for the M4 carbine.

“I’ve seen a really high level of professionalism and motivation,” Clemens said. “These guys are fired up; they want to be here. They are proud to represent themselves and their units. They want to the best job they can possibly do.”

The reconnaissance lane tested the cavalymen’s ability to plan and execute a dismounted reconnaissance operation. Teams were issued a fragmentary order instructing them to observe an NAI approximately 7 kilometers from their location.

They were required to plan their route, link-up with a host nation force, maneuver into their observation post and report any activity within their NAI without being detected by enemy forces.

Once they reported activity, they were instructed to displace to a specified location and establish a helicopter landing zone. As they maneuvered through various checkpoints, they tackled additional tasks and challenges.



Scouts from 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, from Fort Hood, Texas, spot and destroy targets during a live-fire event while competing in the Gainey Cup Competition. (Photo by Marvin Lynchard)

Participants had to evaluate a casualty, set up a field expedient antenna, react to a chemical attack, and demonstrate their use of explosives to create a hasty crater.

“I think it definitely put into perspective some of the stuff I would have to work on and some of the stuff that I’m pretty good at,” Figueroa said.

The scouts took to the air on the final day, as Chinook helicopters flew them from the training area to the last event: an obstacle course 2 miles from where they landed. The entire event was timed, and points were awarded based on the best completion time.

“The obstacle course was probably the roughest part,” said Spc. Sam Shuler of 1st Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment, 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Georgia National Guard. “It definitely took a lot of teamwork to get over it. We were all out of breath, but you just had to go, go, go.”

After the last obstacle, the scouts completed a written exam that tested their knowledge of the fundamentals of reconnaissance. Once the test was completed, they traversed the final three miles to arrive at the finish line.

Win or lose, the experience is one that scouts can use to hone their individual and unit skills, Figueroa said.

“Even if you come in last place, you’re going to learn so much from every other team and about yourself,” he said. “You’re going to learn what you need to work on, you’re going to learn what you’re good at, and you’re just going to learn your job better. You can’t leave here disappointed; there is a positive aspect to everything you do here.”

Miller agreed and said he will encourage his Soldiers to compete in similar competitions.

“I’m going to tell them it’s a great training experience,” Miller said. “Anytime you can get some training like this, go ahead and take the opportunity.” ■

**NCO JOURNAL**

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

