

RUN FAST, SHOOT STRAIGHT

THE NEW ZEALAND ARMY COMBAT SHOOTING TEAM 2019



By LCPL Leon Hunter

The New Zealand Army's best marksmen had their talent on display when they placed fourth overall amongst the 20 teams competing in the Australian Army Skills at Arms (AASAM) competition in Puckapunyal recently.

This is an outstanding result considering the winning team, Indonesia, has a full time shooting team which trains all year round to win competitions like AASAM. The team had 4 firers finishing in the top 20 out of 200 firers in the competition; LCPL Jason Buick (1RNZIR) 6th, PTE Ezra Berridge (QAMR) 7th, LCPL Mark Lupi (5/7 RNZIR) 11th and PTE David Cramp (1RNZIR) 20th. There were three first placings, four second placings and three third placings amongst the team.

Preparation for the competition began earlier this year when a team of shooters gathered at the New Zealand Collective Training Centre to compete for a spot on the New Zealand Army Combat Shooting Team (NZACST), which would leave to compete at AASAM 2019 in four weeks' time.

The soldiers trained under the expert guidance of Warrant Officer Class Two Monty Montgomery, honing their shooting skills further. The team followed three simple rules throughout the training and competition period: master the basics, do the little things well, and always do more.

Twenty shooting teams from 19 nations took part in the competition. Each competitor had to shoot 19 matches with three different in-service weapons – a pistol, rifle and machine gun. There were also various team matches and sniper matches. To compete competitively, all firers had to train in several different styles of shooting. These included rapid instinctive shooting, accurate reactive shooting and precise deliberate shooting, at ranges from 5m to 600m.

To prepare for this the team trained for three weeks in Waiouru, covering the techniques and skills required to compete on the

world stage. The common theme throughout training was the basic techniques mastered in order to achieve advanced results. Marksmanship principles were broken down, and training given in understanding fine and complex human body motor skills.

The shooters were also trained to prepare themselves mentally in order to handle the stress of high level competition. Training days were devoted to high-level, purposeful, demanding training, which pushed the shooters to perform at their very best.

The assembling of the world's best combat shooters in one place made for a fiercely competitive environment. The various flags of the nations were raised on flag poles, draped across doorways and windows, carried proudly behind teams and adorned the shoulders of the jungle of different uniforms.

In the sniper matches, the NZ sniper team shot with only 7.62mm rifle in comparison to most teams using .338 calibre. Despite this disadvantage LCPL Travis Sherriff and PTE Elliot Knight came third overall. New Zealand snipers will use the 338 Barrett Multi-role Adaptive Design (MRAD) sniper rifle next year.

Team coach WO2 Montgomery said the benefits of training for and attending AASAM 2019 were immense for all involved. "From the FUP at NZCTC, and through three weeks of intense purposeful training in Waiouru, everyone worked extremely hard and improved their shooting considerably. This paid off, with the best results ever being achieved at AASAM. This experience has given these soldiers a huge skillset to take back and share with their units.

"The NZACST will build on what was achieved this year. Lessons have been learnt, soldiers are waiting in anticipation and the future of the NZACST looks bright. NZACST would like to thank everyone that helped during the training and competition periods."

Competing countries included:

New Zealand, Malaysia, Canada, Australia, Indonesia, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Japan, Cambodia, Timor Leste, Tonga, Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, United Arab Emirates, Thailand and Brunei.



TOP SHOTS

Two young New Zealand Army soldiers found themselves on a par with some of the world's best marksmen at the recent AASAM competition.



They put their success down to training, and having an excellent coach. Lance Corporal Jason Buick of Victor Company, 1 RNZIR was placed sixth in the competition, and Lance Corporal Ezra Berridge, of QAMR, seventh.

The two soldiers have entered the contest before, and in their words "did OK", but nothing like this year's results.

LCPL Buick, who was brought up on a Masterton farm, did some

clay bird shooting and casual hunting when he was younger, and says shooting is one of the most enjoyable aspects of his job. He didn't train a lot until about a month before the competition, and then the practice was intense.

He tried to become proficient in the full range of weapons used by the NZ Army. "I enjoy the competitiveness of AASAM, and Sergeant Major Montgomery was a very good coach and mentor."

He says the key to success as a marksman seems to be "more time behind the weapon."

LCPL Berridge, an armourer at the QAMR workshops, has been in the Army for five years. He, too, had done a bit of hunting before he joined. "AASAM is a great competition and it's a real privilege to be able to attend and compete against shooters from the likes of Malaysia and Indonesia. They train all year round, so our team did quite well."

He also trained hard for about a month before the competition, especially on his favourite weapon, the MAG-58 machinegun. He said he found the hours before he had to shoot "a bit nerve-wracking".

"It was easier this year though. We trained hard and it paid off."

Above: LCPL Berridge (left) and LCPL Buick