

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CMP

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The NBPRP, National Matches, DCM, the new CMP and America's Quest for Better Marksmanship

By Gary Anderson, DCM Emeritus



Shooting for the Beef, an early 19th century American painting by George Caleb Bingham. This scene depicts a marksmanship contest staged by American frontiersmen where they take turns shooting at the mark (on wooden slab, far right) for a prize beef (far left). The original is in the Brooklyn Museum.

The history of the CMP is a story about America's quest for better marksmanship. This history begins with a government organization, the **National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice (NBPRP)**, that organization's primary program, the **National Matches**, and its executive agent, the **Director of Civilian Marksmanship (DCM)**. This is a history now being continued by the NBPRP's successor organization, the **Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP)**.

The key word in this history is **MARKSMANSHIP**. Marksmanship is the human ability to use projectile weapons with accuracy, skill, safety and discipline. Marksmanship is the definitive word in the name of the organization, the **Civilian Marksmanship Program**. It is also the key word in the title of the official who administers NBPRP and CMP programs, the **Director of Civilian Marksmanship**. The

concept of marksmanship reflects a human motivation to not just use weapons to shoot projectiles at targets, but to use them with accuracy to "hit the mark" on those targets.

Marksmanship has been an American quest since the settlement of the 13 colonies and the opening of the western frontier. The **Shooting for the Beef** painting (shown above) portrays how American frontiersmen improvised shooting contests to test the marksmanship skills they needed to protect their settlements and put food on the table. Marksmanship with projectile weapons has played a vital role in human history from ancient bows and arrows, to the crossbows of the Middle Ages, to the flintlock and percussion rifles of the American frontier, to the rifles and pistols of the modern era. Marksmanship impacts civic defense as well as national defense; it plays vital roles in human survival and sports competitions and in fostering

human development. This history of the CMP considers how NBPRP and CMP efforts to promote marksmanship among USA citizens, and especially among American youth, has enriched our nation's civic defense, national defense, sports competitions and human development.

The Beginning in the USA – 1903

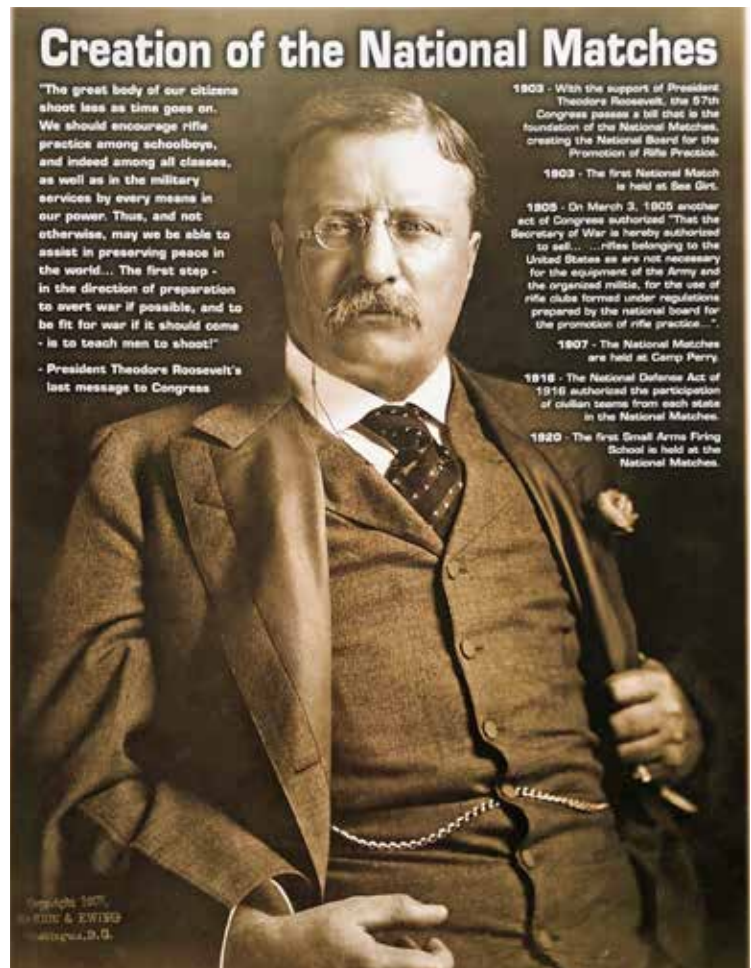
Marksmanship became a quest of the U. S. Government in February 1903, when Congress and President Theodore Roosevelt approved legislation that founded the **National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice** (NBPRP) and the **National Matches**. President Roosevelt was an enthusiastic advocate for government action to promote marksmanship. During the debates about whether to provide government support for marksmanship, Roosevelt said, *"We should encourage rifle practice among schoolboys, and indeed among all classes, as well as in the military services by every means possible."* Roosevelt said practicing marksmanship was *"preparation to avert war."*

Another influential lobbying force for this cause were the leaders of the National Rifle Association of America (NRA). The NRA had been formed in 1871 by New York National Guard officers who wanted to improve the poor marksmanship Soldiers displayed during the Civil War. By the turn of the century, NRA leaders had decided government support was necessary in order to make real progress in achieving that objective.

The answer to these concerns was to establish a U. S. Government program that provided direct support for rifle marksmanship. The NBPRP became the governing board for this effort. Its objective was to foster national defense by promoting marksmanship training and competition among military personnel and later among civilians who could serve in the military. Secretary of War Elihu Root appointed the first National Board that consisted of government, military and NRA leaders. The Board's primary initial program was the National Matches. Advocates of this legislation believed the most effective way to improve Soldiers' rifle skills was to have them use their rifles in competitions. Participation in the first National Matches was limited to active and National Guard teams, but by 1905 new legislation authorized the NBPRP to sell military rifles, ammunition and equipment to civilian rifle clubs so their members could participate in the program.

The National Defense Act of 1916

By 1916, the NBPRP was providing marksmanship support for civilian rifle clubs, but it was struggling to



Theodore Roosevelt, U. S. President, 1901-1909, advocated rifle marksmanship practice as a means of fostering national defense preparedness.

find its future direction. The **National Defense Act of 1916** addressed that concern. To give the program professional leadership and staff, this Act created the **Office of the Director of Civilian Marksmanship (ODCM)**.

This is the National Trophy Congress commissioned in 1903. This trophy, popularly known as the "Dogs of War Trophy," is now part of the CMP's National Trophy Collection. It is presented annually to the winner of the National Trophy Rifle Team Match.



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The Act authorized increased distributions of rifles and ammunition to civilian rifle clubs, provided funding for military instructors to assist civilian rifle clubs and funding to transport civilian teams to the National Matches. That same year, civilians became eligible to compete in the National Matches. The NBPRP program was gradually becoming the “*civilian marksmanship program*” as it placed more and more emphasis on developing marksmanship skills among men who could serve in the military in time of war.

The NBPRP appointed the first DCM in 1917 and a succession of DCMs established the ODCM with a permanent staff for its programs. In 1922, the DCM started publishing an annual “*Price List of Supplies*” to institutionalize the ODCM sales program. During the program’s first two decades, the NRA Secretary had served as the NBPRP Recorder and the ODCM shared office space with the NRA in Washington DC. In 1924, the ODCM acquired its own offices, and the DCM became the Board Recorder.

As World War I ended, the NBPRP was reorganized to facilitate the reestablishment of its programs. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt became the NBPRP Chairman. Among the programs now administered by the ODCM was the program that awarded Distinguished Rifleman and Distinguished Pistol Shot Badges. The National Defense Act authorized the creation of the Small Arms Firing School (SAFS). The first SAFS was conducted in 1918 in conjunction with a reinstated National Matches that had been suspended during the war.



Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, became the NBPRP Chairman in 1918. This photo shows him on a rifle range, wearing a shooting jacket, with a sling attached to a M1903 Springfield Rifle as he prepared to practice marksmanship.

The National Matches – 1903-1967

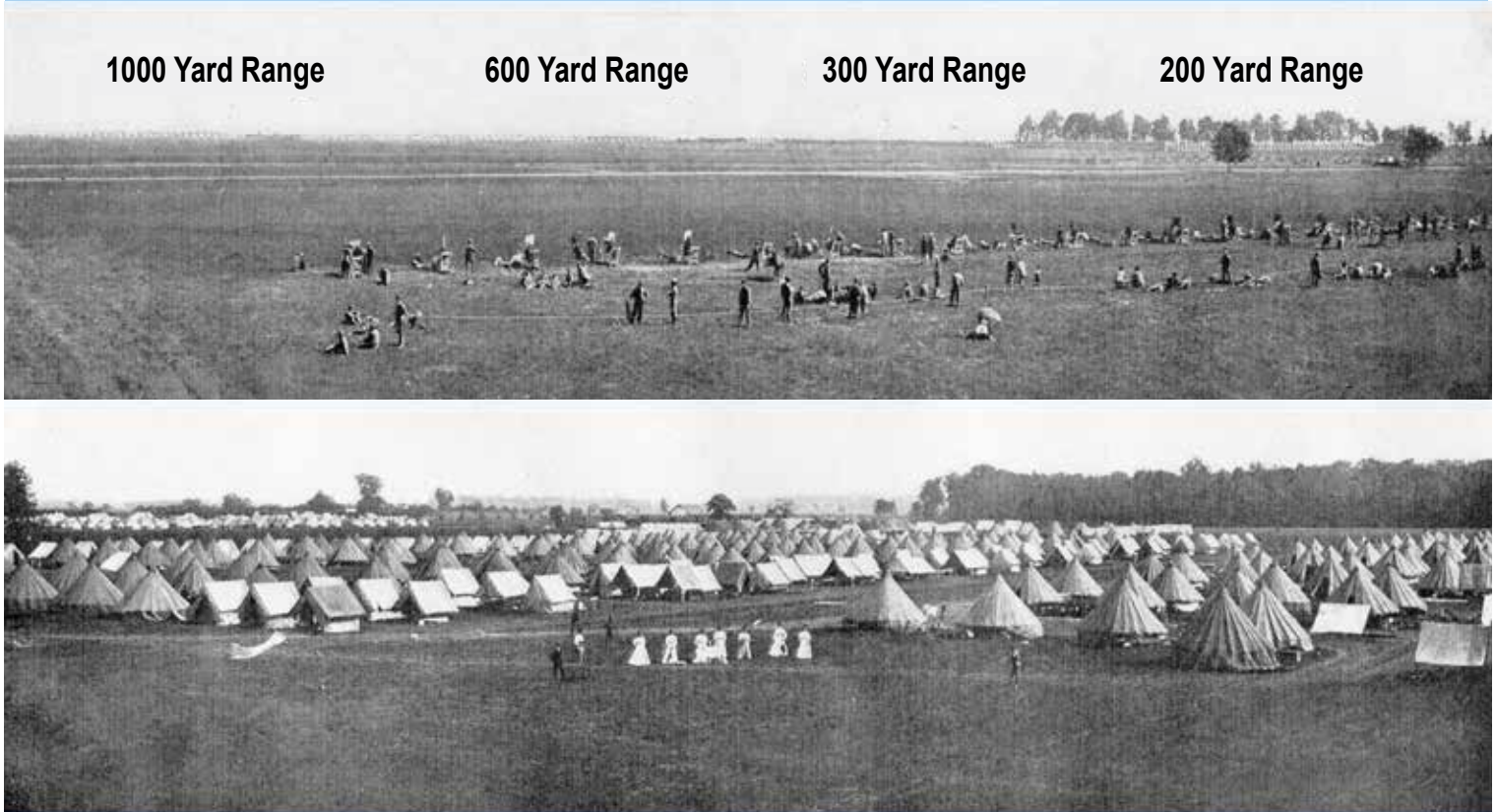
A primary objective of the 1903 legislation was to establish the National Matches with rifle competitions aimed at improving Soldiers’ marksmanship skills. The first National Matches were conducted that same year at Sea Girt, New Jersey. The following year they moved to Fort Riley, Kansas and then back to Sea Girt for two more years. Pistol events were added to the program in 1904. A major objective during those early years was to find a more suitable site for the Matches. Ohio Adjutant General Ammon Critchfield answered that challenge by securing State of Ohio funding to purchase 350 acres of marshland on the south shore of Lake Erie. **By 1907**, a mile-long series of ranges and a massive temporary housing complex had been constructed and **the National Matches were conducted at Camp Perry for the first time**. Except for years when there were cancellations due to funding cutbacks or war, Camp Perry has been the home of the Matches.

Before World War II, the Department of War conducted the National Matches with military personnel who were assigned to that mission and led by military officers who served as National Match Executive Officers. The Matches were dependent upon annual Congressional appropriations. In lean years like 1912, 1917, 1926 and 1932 to 1934, funding cutbacks led to cancellations. The Matches were closed for the duration of World War II in 1941 and were not reestablished until 1951. They did not return to Camp Perry until 1953. When the National Security Act of 1947 established the Department of Defense as a successor to the Department of War, the National Matches support mission shifted to the Department of the Army. Executive leadership of the Matches then became a DCM responsibility.



The Army awarded the first Distinguished Badges in 1884. Awarding Distinguished Badges subsequently became one of the popular programs managed by the ODCM.

CAMP PERRY, OHIO, BECAME THE HOME OF THE NATIONAL MATCHES IN 1907



These photos of the Camp Perry, Ohio ranges (top) and temporary housing (below) were published in a 1907 edition of Harper's Weekly. The range configuration shown in the top photo is still a feature of Camp Perry ranges today.

The National Match program, both before and after WWII, included service rifle and pistol events governed by the NBPRP, which became known as **National Trophy Matches**, as well as NRA National Championships, which benefitted significantly from government funding and support. Every year, several hundred military personnel were detailed to Camp Perry to serve as highpower rifle target pullers and scorers and to perform the many tasks necessary to conduct the month-long series of competitions.

In late 1967, due both to the financial and personnel pressures from the war in Viet Nam and to political pressures driven by gun control politics, the Secretary of the Army released a statement saying, "*the expenditure involved in conducting the National Matches is not considered essential at the time.*" This decision meant that the U. S. Government would no longer support the National Matches and that their future was in jeopardy.

NBPRP and ODCM After World War II

During the war years, the NBPRP continued appointing DCMs, although most aspects of the program were

curtailed. After the war, rifle sales resumed, but numbers were limited. By the 1950s, with some Congressional funding restored, the ODCM became active in supporting junior rifle clubs, clubs and schools with junior programs and Boy Scout camps by loaning .22 cal. rifles and issuing annual allocations of rimfire ammunition and targets. The justification for youth-oriented marksmanship training was that by teaching marksmanship skills to young men who would become eligible to serve in the Armed Services they would be more effective in handling their weapons in combat. **The ODCM of that era served as a support organization that provided resources, rifles, ammunition and targets, to other organizations.** Except for the National Matches and SAFS, the NBPRP did not have marksmanship training or competition programs of its own.

NBPRP priorities were reflected in President Dwight Eisenhower's 1956 Executive Order that created the U. S. Army Marksmanship Unit and to the desire many military and marksmanship leaders had to respond to the Cold War challenge posed by the Soviet Union, which began to dominate Olympic and World Championship shooting

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This official photograph of the National Board was taken when it met at Camp Perry in 1956.

competitions in the 1950s. Starting in 1958 and continuing through the 1960s, the NBPRP provided funding for USA National Teams that represented this country in international championships. The NBPRP awarded the first U. S. Distinguished International Shooter Badges to U. S. medal winners in the 1962 World Championship.

During this period, NBPRP and ODCM activities functioned under the authority of the Under Secretary of the Army. The National Board submitted recommendations to the Under Secretary who made final decisions. The Under Secretary appointed DCMs who were responsible for executing those decisions.

This was also when Army leaders began to question the need for a government-funded agency that trained American youth how to shoot. Many Army leaders concluded it was no longer necessary to have recruits with marksmanship skills because they believed those skills could be adequately taught during regular military training. In 1966, the Army commissioned the Arthur D. Little Company to examine the NBPRP's support for youth marksmanship. The study ended up contradicting Army conclusions and praising the program for producing military recruits who were more likely to use their rifles in combat, better prepared to use their rifles effectively and more likely to become military combat leaders. Army leaders were not dissuaded, and by the end of the decade, the NBPRP and ODCM could no longer officially justify their programs by producing youth with marksmanship skills that the Army did not want. NBPRP leaders and its DCMs were undaunted, however, because they also had seen how youth marksmanship training taught valuable life skills like

leadership, teamwork, discipline, gun safety, concentration abilities and self-control. **The program's justification for teaching youth marksmanship changed to supporting youth development through marksmanship.**

The Birth of the New CMP in 1996

Congressional attempts to defund the NBPRP, ODCM and National Matches began in the 1960s as a result of national gun control controversies and public questions about whether government funding of marksmanship training and competitions was justified. Those efforts continued for three decades and were never successful, but there were many years when friends in Congress had to fight hard to save or restore funding. Congressional leaders who supported the NBPRP program concluded that the best way to give the program a secure future would be to privatize it. They worked with the Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army to draft legislation that **created a new Corporation for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and Firearm Safety (CPRPFS) as a federally-chartered, 501 (c) (3) organization.** The Act was approved by Congress and signed into law by President William Clinton on February 10th, 1996. It transferred CMP Program assets and functions, including authority to conduct the National Matches and SAFS, from the Department of the Army to the new corporation. This organization quickly became known as the **Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP).** The Secretary of the Army appointed its initial Board of Directors, which appointed the first civilian DCMs, and the new CMP began program operations at Camp Perry, Ohio and sales operations at Anniston, Alabama.

The new organization succeeded because its enabling legislation authorized 1) the appointment of a DCM to give it leadership and staffing, 2) the transfer of surplus U. S. government rifles and ammunition that the CMP could sell to U. S. citizens to give it a secure source of funding, and 3) the conduct of marksmanship, safety training and competition programs so it could become an effective program agency. A vital aspect of this legislation was language that specifically said, ***In carrying out the Civilian Marksmanship Program, the corporation shall give priority to activities that benefit firearms safety, training, and competition for youth and that reach as many youth participants as possible*** (36 USC, §40724). In 2001, the CMP Board adopted a new strategic plan and articulated a corporate vision "***that every youth in America has the opportunity to participate in firearms safety and marksmanship programs.***" This vision has driven many of the CMP's program initiatives since then.

The National Matches after 1967

The most prestigious events in the National Matches were the President's Rifle Match, National Trophy Individual Rifle and Pistol Matches and National Trophy Rifle and Pistol Team Matches. These National Trophy Matches were competitions conducted according to rules established by the NBPRP and that awarded "national trophies." When the Army withdrew its support from the National Matches after 1967, the NRA stepped forward to keep them alive. In 1968, the NRA conducted the NRA National Championships at Camp Perry and NBPRP National Trophy Matches at the Black Canyon Range near Phoenix, Arizona. NRA staff managed the competitions, and a new cadre of volunteers replaced the military personnel who staffed previous Matches. Highpower rifle competitors had to pull their own targets and score for each other. Those competitions were significantly reduced in scope and size; in 1967, there were 180 teams and over 1,700 individual competitors in the National Trophy Rifle events; in 1968, there were 25 teams and 350 individuals in highpower rifle events at Camp Perry.

By 1969, the NRA Championships and the NBPRP National Trophy Matches were back together at Camp Perry, under the National Matches banner. The NRA, with limited support from the U. S. Army Reserves and Ohio National Guard, continued to conduct the Matches until the new CMP and its civilian DCMs began to take back control of the Matches after 1996. In 2000, the CMP started managing its own National Trophy Match entries.

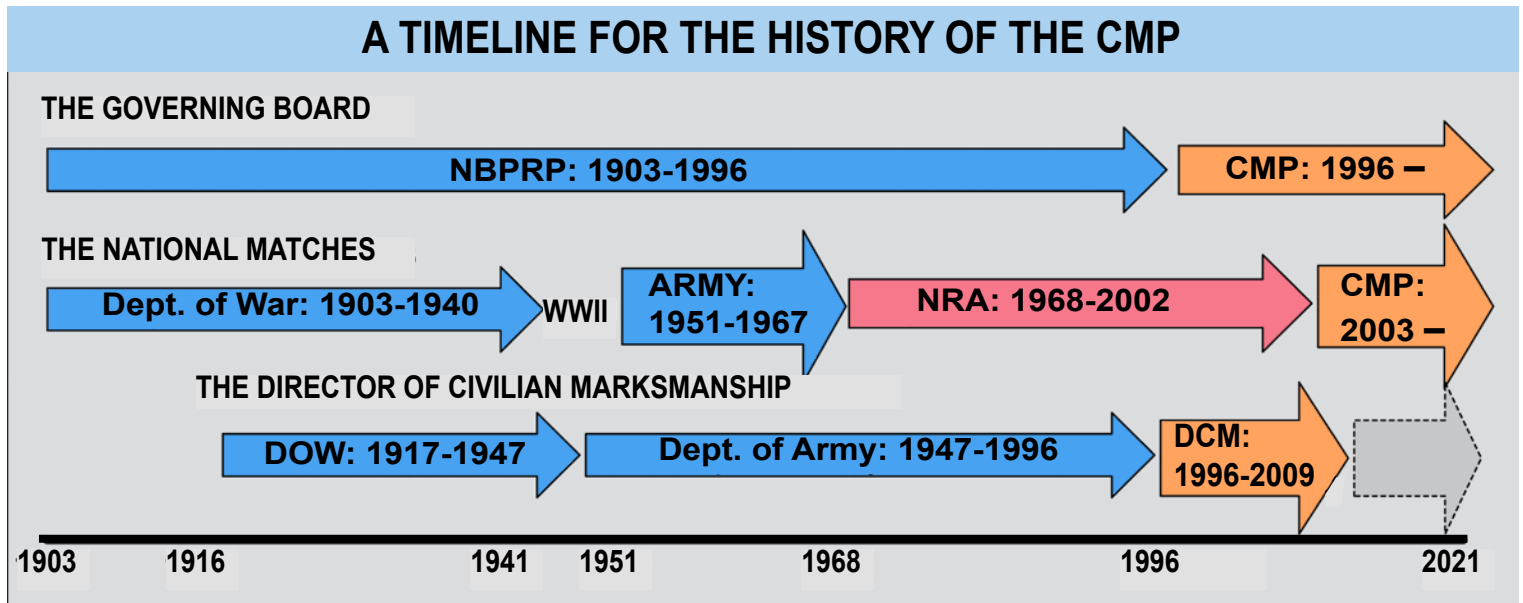


A key aspect of the 1996 federal legislation was its expectation that the new CMP would emphasize youth marksmanship programs. The Nation Ford (Fort Mill, SC) MCJROTC rifle team pictured here won the 2019 CMP and National Junior Olympic Three-Position Air Rifle Championships.

In 2003, the implementation of innovative Competitor Tracker software made it possible for the CMP to take over National Trophy Match statistical operations. To increase participation opportunities, the CMP began adding new events to the National Matches program by inaugurating the John C. Garand Match in 1999. By 2018, more than two dozen new CMP Pistol, Highpower Rifle, Vintage Military Rifle, Smallbore Rifle and Air Gun events had been added to the program.

The final change that gave the CMP full control of the National Matches came in 2017 when it introduced a comprehensive Range Officer Training Program that

A TIMELINE FOR THE HISTORY OF THE CMP



This graphic shows the timeline relationships between the U. S. Government's NBPRP, the privatized CMP, the National Matches and the Office of the DCM. It also depicts shifts in responsibilities for conducting the National Matches from the Department of War to the new CMP.

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A greatly expanded sales program for government surplus rifles and ammunition provided equipment for program participants and secure funding for the CMP.

CMP SHOOTING EVENTS FOR ALL

Since 1999, the CMP has introduced several new marksmanship disciplines like these that are affordable, accessible and enjoyable!



VMR:
Vintage
Military
Rifle



Rimfire
Sporter
Rifle



3-Position
Air Rifle
Sporter
Class



.22 Rimfire
Pistol

facilitated the staffing of a new CMP National Matches Support Team. This enabled the CMP, with continued support from the Ohio National Guard, to control all aspects of the Matches, including range operations. This transition was combined with NRA decisions to withdraw its National Championships from Camp Perry and the National Matches, which began in 2014 and were completed with the withdrawal of the last NRA Championship in 2020.

The New CMP and Marksmanship Program Growth – 1997-2021

The 1996 legislation that created the new CMP turned out to be one of the most successful privatizations ever of a government program. The 21st century CMP instituted numerous program developments that changed marksmanship training and competition in America. This history highlights just some of those changes and their impacts:

CMP Rifle Sales Program. One of the first actions of the new corporation was to reestablish and expand its government surplus rifle sales program. Government surplus rifles, and now M1911 pistols, are transferred to CMP facilities at Anniston, Alabama. The CMP pays all government expenses connected with these transfers. Proceeds from the sales fund CMP programs. A dynamic military rifle collector community emerged as a result of the increased availability of these rifles.

Permanent Endowment Fund. The financial success of the rifle sales program made it possible to place a substantial portion of sales returns in a Permanent Endowment Fund that is managed so it can fund CMP programs for many decades into the future, after large numbers of surplus rifles are no longer available to sell.

National Match Expansion. The National Matches were transformed into a diverse national festival of marksmanship through the addition of many new championships and events for pistols, highpower rifles, historic military rifles, smallbore rifles and air guns as well as by technological innovations like electronic targets and computer vision scoring technology.

Three-Position Air Rifle. After WWII, junior shooting was in decline because of the loss of indoor shooting ranges. The CMP cooperated with the National Guard Junior Marksmanship Program to promote three-position air rifle shooting in schools and clubs; the CMP was a leader in establishing the National Three-Position Air Rifle Council as a unified governing structure for national youth-serving agencies that supported junior three-position air rifle competitions. This is now America's dominant junior rifle activity.



The CMP opened the Talladega Marksmanship Park in 2016. This massive facility features a groundbreaking highpower rifle range with electronic targets at 200, 300 and 600 yards and a single fixed firing line.

JROTC Marksmanship. The CMP cooperated with the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force JROTC commands to implement marksmanship instructor training and championship programs that now offer air rifle marksmanship training to all JROTC cadets.

Affordable, Accessible Target Shooting Disciplines. The CMP pioneered in developing new target disciplines for Vintage Military Rifles, Rimfire Sporter Rifles, 22 Rimfire Pistol and Sporter Class air rifles to give thousands of new participants access to target shooting events featuring affordable equipment and recreation-oriented courses of fire.

New World Class Ranges. The CMP established two world-class 10-meter air gun ranges at Camp Perry, Ohio and Anniston, Alabama and the nation's finest outdoor rifle, pistol and shotgun range complex near Talladega, Alabama.

CMP Regional Competition Games. These regional competitions make National Match quality competition experiences available to more participants in more parts of the country, with annual events conducted by CMP staff at Talladega Marksmanship Park, AL; Camp Butner, NC; Camp Ethan Allen, VT; Oklahoma City, OK and Phoenix, AZ.

And Many More. This is only a highlight list. During its first 25 years, the new CMP developed many other pioneering programs that further the marksmanship quests of American youth and adults. These included junior training camps, training courses for instructors and officials, publications, scholarships and many more.

The Heritage of the New CMP. The post-1996 CMP succeeded because it did some things differently. Those differences included:

- Emphasizing participation by all (grassroots), not just the elite.

- Keeping training and program focused on marksmanship, not just shooting.

- Having a service-oriented, accessible, friendly staff.

- Promoting shooting disciplines that are affordable and accessible such as Vintage Military Rifle and Rimfire Sporter for adults and Three-Position Sporter Class Air Rifle for juniors.

- Keeping the National Matches as a national shooting sports festival open to all.

- Placing constant emphasis on conducting well-managed events, providing great facilities, teaching real marksmanship, and respecting traditions that go back to the program founding in 1903.

In the future, America's quest for marksmanship will continue, evolve and produce positive outcomes under CMP leadership, just as it has for the last 118 years.

About the Author

Gary Anderson is the Director of Civilian Marksmanship, Emeritus, and is the holder of two Olympic gold medals, seven World Championships and 16 National Championships. Mr. Anderson served as a Technical Delegate for Shooting during the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games as well as for the 2014 and 2018 World Shooting Championships.

In 2012, the International Olympic Committee awarded Gary Anderson with the Olympic Order, its highest honor "for outstanding services to the Olympic Movement."

