



Who's the Best of the Best?

First annual Firearms Industry Choice Awards and 2016 Firearms Industry Team Challenge

By Gary Farley

July 11, 2016 was an ordinary day until I received a call from Mr. Anthony Pace of Freedom Hunters out of Denver, Colorado. This changed the "pace" of the day drastically. Mr. Pace was given my name as a veteran with PTSD, and after about 30 minutes of conversation, I was invited to come to Kentucky and compete against the "Best of the Best in America." Three other veterans were also picked. One from South Carolina, one from Colorado and one from Kentucky. Each of these men had been wounded on duty. This made up our four man team to compete at Rockcastle Shooting Center in Park City, Kentucky. We would be competing against the best of the best shooting teams in America.

Shooting Industry manufacturers submitted or donated their best "Product of the Year" to be evaluated and used by all 60 teams. We were not allowed to use our own firearms. That leveled the playing field a little. Not enough for the four of us to think we were going to win, but believe you me we had one GREAT time for two days and three nights.

The next three days and nights were exciting and exhausting. Thursday night we met at the Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, Kentucky for the welcome reception and snacks.

Friday morning we met at Rockcastle Shooting Center for our team number and instructions on where we would start. There were 8 shooting stages which were divided up into two days. Our group was assigned stages 5 through 8.

The stages ranged from 2 feet away out to 650 yards. We shot pistols as small as RM 380 to 12 gage shotguns to 308 rifles and several in between. All stages were timed with limited amounts of ammo. Some stages we had to run back and forth to our team members (yea I said run, my wife said it was more of a lope) where we shot 5 different handguns on 70 targets. Some were in the woods, heavily shaded and we ran out to a ladder made on an angle which we had to climb up and address 6 long range targets out to 550 yards with an AR 15 in 223. I managed to hit all 6. The other long range course was using a Ruger Precision Rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor. There were 6 targets out of 650 yards. I man-



Gary Farley of Goldthwaite, far right, pictured with Anthony Pace (host) and team members Sgt. Scott Smith of Simla, Colorado; Sgt. Todd Rico of Clarkson, Kentucky; and Capt. (Ret.) Raymond Kaster of Bluffton, South Carolina.

were mainly skeet, trap and what they called modified trap. We shot singles, report pairs, true pairs and rabbits. Man rabbits run fast. We had one stage where we shot a Glock pistol and that was the only course that did not require shotguns on this day. We finished and were back at the Lodge by 11 a.m.

The Awards Banquet and Celebration was held at the Sloan Convention Center, which was in the Holiday Inn, our hotel. All the firearms used on all the stages were raffled off except the Benelli shotgun - it was auctioned off. The three firearms that were judged to be the best of the best were the 9 mm Sig Sauer P320 (which was a dream to shoot), the Ruger Precision Rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor and the Benelli auto loading shotgun.

Barbara and I have never been as welcomed or as well treated, by so many nice people, as we were for those three days. I cannot tell you how much fun we had shooting someone else's firearms and using their ammo. We did not win anything but we met some great shooters and veterans. A more humbling and honorable experience I have never had than the time with this team.

Our team consisted of Capt. (Ret.) Raymond Kaster of Bluffton, South Carolina; Sgt. Todd Rico of Clarkson, Kentucky, Sgt. Scott Smith of Simla, Colorado and myself, Gary Farley, Goldthwaite, Texas.

Freedom hunters paid the expenses for the hotel, food and entry fee. Mr. Anthony Pace arranges hunts, sponsors fishing trips, provides land access, contributes air miles, shares time shares and sends our military families on outdoor adventures. Mr. Pace was assisted by Doug Lyons of Monument, Colorado and Gary Fooshee of Woodland Park, Colorado.

aged to hit 5 out of 6 including the 650 yard target. This gave me a total of 11 out of 12. The temperature was about 95 degrees with 95% humidity. My goodness it was hot. We finished at 4 pm. At 6:30 we were served a delicious dinner consisting of a fully smoked pig and trimmings.

Saturday proved to be an easier day, except for the shotguns. NO running. Stages 1 through 4