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2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO

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Team takes on 'pressure cooking' to earn feast of accolades at annual Army culinary arts competition

By Staff Sgt. Patricia Deal

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany – Proving that “pressure cooking” was no problem, the 15-member Installation Mangement Command-Europe and U.S. Army Europe team brought home a feast of accolades, including four gold and two silver medals, from the Army’s 34th Annual Culinary Arts Awards competition at Fort Lee, Va.

The IMCOM-USAREUR team joined hundreds of military chefs from all services worldwide last month to compete for coveted culinary titles in what Army quartermaster officials call the largest annual cooking competition in the United States.

Team members competed for coveted culinary titles such as the Armed Forces Junior and Senior Chefs of the Year. To prove themselves the best chefs in the Department of Defense, competitors had to design a menu and prepare a gourmet meal for four people, in less than four hours.

Spc. Julio Garcia of E Company, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation, earned a bronze medal in the Senior Chef category for his four-course gourmet meal and Spc. Francis Gonzales of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, brought home a



KIMBERLY FRITZ

Under a judge's watchful eyes, Spc. Francis Gonzales of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, prepares an element of his dessert dish during the Practical and Contemporary Patisserie category of the 34th U.S. Army Culinary Arts Competition at Fort Lee, Va., March 5. Gonzales and 14 other military and civilian chefs represented the Installation Management Command-Europe and U.S. Army Europe in the competition.

silver medal in the Junior Chef category (pay grade E-5 and below) for his three-course meal.

“It really was an intense competition. Not only did you have the pressure of the time limit, you knew you were competing against so many seasoned cooks,” Garcia said.

The specialist, who worked in a four-star restaurant before joining the Army a second time, said he is proud of his performance, commenting that it brought out some skills he didn't know he had. Garcia also earned a bronze medal in Live Cookery, a timed category during which competitors are judged on every aspect and detail of meal preparation, including nutrition, hygiene, presentation and taste.

New to the mix of culinary categories was a revamped Field Kitchen Competition, designed to test cookery skills and teamwork using the Army's Containerized Kitchen. For that event, four-member teams cooked, prepared and served a three-course meal for 60 people using a tactical field kitchen.

Event organizers said this year the field category was designed to simulate the World Culinary Olympics competition, which takes place every four years and draws the best chefs from all over the world. A parking lot at Fort Lee's Army Center of Excellence, Subsistence, was transformed into a five-star restaurant, they added, where members of the public could buy a \$4.25 ticket that offered a choice of four different menus served inside a 5,000-square-foot dining tent. The IMCOM-USAREUR field kitchen team's "Worldwide Café" menu included an entree of encrusted rack of lamb, roasted garlic herb-whipped potatoes with tomato concasse, seasoned asparagus, and apple mint simbal; a roasted red pepper soup with seafood and French bread crisp; and spring fruit soup with coconut pannacotta with phyllo wafer for dessert.

The field kitchen team earned four gold medals despite the fact that team members said they had never worked together before within the constraints of the new type of field kitchen. NCO-in-charge Sgt. Jesse Parker and Pfc. Gerardo Ortiz of 529th Military Police Company; Garcia; and Pfc. Matthew Hendriks of the 64th Transportation Company lost the third-place win by less than a point to the U.S. Coast Guard team.



T. ANTHONY BELL

Installation Mangement Command-Europe and U.S. Army Europe team member Pfc. Gerardo Ortiz Gonzalez of the 529th Military Police Company cuts fruit during the field kitchen competition of the 34th U.S. Army Culinary Arts Competition at Fort Lee, Va., March 7.

“This experience was invaluable. As the Army moves to this new concept, at some point in their careers, food service workers will ultimately work with the containerized kitchen. We can take back what we learned here to our units,” Parker said.



T. ANTHONY BELL

Installation Management Command-Europe and U.S. Army Europe team members Sgt. Jesse Parker of the 529th Military Police Company (left) and Spc. Julio Garcia of Company E, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation, cut potatoes during the field kitchen competition of the 34th U.S. Army Culinary Arts Competition at Fort Lee, Va., March 2-13.

In addition to his gold medal, Parker racked up several other awards. His rack of lamb, special sauce, dauphin gratin potatoes and ratatouille earned him a bronze medal in Live Cookery. He also won silver for his Six Plated Appetizers -- each like a mini entrée with its own set of challenges -- and passed his Executive Chef certification.

Parker said all the team members thrived on the pressure to perform. Their successes are just icing on the cake, he added; something to be enjoyed by the chefs as well as the

customers they serve at home station.

“We all learned so much here. I’ve been in food service for some seven years and thought I was pretty knowledgeable, but I still took away some great experience from the competition,” Parker said.

Another new category added to this year’s competition was the Enlisted Aide Competition. A unique job specialty, an Enlisted Aide has to be well versed in more than just cooking skills. For the competition, competitors were required to plan, shop and prepare a four-course meal for judges and others to demonstrate their effectiveness in helping general officers prepare dinner parties. The competing aides also raced the clock to prepare their generals’ uniforms, faced a selection board and completed a written test on military and enlisted aide knowledge.

Master Sgt. Major Lockett, senior enlisted aide to the USAREUR deputy commanding general, in his first appearance at the Culinary Awards Competition, said he was impressed with the process.

“This type of competition is really more than just a test of an individual’s specific skills. It’s about teamwork, encouraging and supporting each other,” Luckett said.



AMY PERRY

This dish was part of the Installation Mangement Command-Europe and U.S. Army Europe team table display at the 34th U.S. Army Culinary Arts Competition at Fort Lee, Va. Fifteen civilian and military chefs from across IMCOM-E and USAREUR represented the commands at the event, March 2-13.

As team captain, he praised the team members for their dedication. “Not only did these Soldiers show they are skilled at their jobs, they demonstrated complete professionalism and the true Army spirit of teamwork. Everyone contributed 100 percent and inspired each other to do their best. We had all ranks -- from lower

enlisted to NCOs to civilians to warrant officer.”

Luckett said each team member’s performance was outstanding, especially since this was the first time most of the participants had competed. Warrant Officer Catherine Watson, the team manager and a returning competitor, helped guide the newcomers in culinary techniques and provided tips for “cooking under pressure.”

Several of the competitors said they are motivated to do even better next year. Parker is already setting his sights on the Senior Chef title and Garcia’s goal is to enter the enlisted aide job specialty.

Team results:

4 Gold Medals, 2 Silver Medals, 8 Bronze Medals and 4 Commendable awards

Team members and individual awards:

Master Sgt. Major Luckett, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, U.S. Army Europe (Team captain)

Warrant Officer Catherine Watson, 7th Signal Brigade (Team manager)

Sgt. Jesse Parker, 529th Military Police Company

Bronze Medal, Live Cookery

Silver Medal, Plated Appetizers

Executive Chef Certification

Sgt. Jason Spell, F Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry

Sgt. John Lloyd, E Company, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation

Bronze Medal, Plated Desserts

Bronze Medal, Centerpiece
Sgt. Quincy Queen, 72nd Signal Battalion
Commendable, Petit Fours
Spc. Brian Flanders, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, USAREUR
Bronze Medal, Plated Appetizers
Spc. Andrew Nicholson, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 39th
Transportation Battalion
Spc. Jaime Medina, Headquarters Support Company, 412th Aviation Support Battalion
Spc. Francis Gonzales, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 21st Theater
Sustainment Command
Commendable, Hors d'oeuvres
Spc. Julio Garcia, E Company, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation
Bronze Medal, Senior Chef of the Year
Bronze Medal, Live Cookery
Pfc. Gerardo Ortiz, 529th Military Police Company
Pvt. Matthew Hendriks, 64th Transportation Company
Certified Culinarian
Daniel Trawick, U.S. Army Garrison Hohenfels
Bronze Medal, Live Cookery
Commendable, Two Restaurant Platters
Julian Gude, U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach
Bronze Medal, Game Platter

For more information on the 34th Annual Culinary Arts Awards, photos and a complete listing of winners, visit
www.ima.lee.army.mil/sites/pao/09_CulinaryArtsCompetition/index.html



www.hqusareur.army.mil