

USMC Shooting Prizes

The US Army instituted a range of large, wearable marksmanship prizes in the 1880s that continued through 1902. In 1903 the army introduced smaller prizes with an enameled target in the center. It was the early 20th century before the US Marine Corps began to take marksmanship seriously, as the army had done in the 1880s. Initially the marines used the army's Small Arms Firing Regulations and purchased their badges from Rock Island Arsenal.

In the summer of 1908 that the marines instituted a distinguished marksman badge for recognition of winning medals at the national matches. The same year the commandant authorized the first real Marine Corps wide match by providing for four division matches. The divisions at that time were not tactical units, as the name implies today, but a geographic area.

As a result of these early matches, the marines began to issue prizes similar to those given by the army. One 1911 prize that has the same planchet as used by the army, is that to Corporal Howard Rhodes. The planchet has the letters U. S. above the target and is the design introduced in 1907 by the army. The army's brooch had ARMY but otherwise was identical to this marine version. The top 10% of competitors received prizes. In that group, the top 1/6 were awarded gold prizes, the next 1/3 received silver, and the last 1/2 earned a bronze prize.



Slowly the marine prizes took on their own distinctive characteristics. Prizes marked for a division had that marked on the planchet, while the army awards at this time had the distinction shown on the top bar (brooch). Besides the words MARINE CORPS on the brooch, this design difference was a mark of marine prizes.



While the front of these pre World War II prizes were very similar, the reverse of all awarded prizes were engraved. Two, one from 1914 and the other from 1915 that were

given to Albert L. Notheis, are shown. By the 1920s the typical engraving that characterized these awards was standard. A 1928 bronze prize is shown next.



For prizes given at the Corps level, the USMC globe, anchor, and eagle above the target replaced the first design that had the U.S. letters. A gold corps-wide pistol prize with this change is shown. Like all prizes, this one is engraved with the winner's name and award year.



A similar silver prize awarded to Marko Belovich in 1937, is shown at the right. Belovich became a distinguished pistol shot in 1940.



Designs continued to evolve and move away from the original army influenced designs. The wording for DIVISION moved to below the target, as shown at the left. This prize was awarded in 1946 and still has a pin-back fastener (below).

