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Tennessee National Guard receives new range certification

TULLAHOMA, Tenn. – For the first time ever, the .50-caliber Browning machine gun was fired on a Tennessee National Guard weapons range, Nov. 15, at Tullahoma’s Volunteer Training Site. Col. Randal J. Gordon, Arnold Air Force Base Commander, and Lt. Col. Thomas J. Foley, Tennessee National Guard Deputy Training and Operations Officer, fired the first rounds at the ceremony marking the inaugural firing of the weapon in Tennessee.

“What this does is build on our capabilities and increase capacity for our organization,” said Foley. “We now have a range that’s centrally located which our units can utilize year-round, and a lot of people worked hard to make this happen, so we’re very thankful for that.”

The range had always accommodated smaller weapons systems, but since the range is co-located with Arnold Air Force Base, both Army and Air Force personnel worked together to find a way to upgrade it. The Department of the Army conducted range terrain analysis and analyzed ricochet data to determine the limits of the current range.

The Army and Air Force then informed Tennessee’s training site team that if the weapon system stayed under four degrees from ground level, the range could be used to fire the .50-caliber machine guns.

Maj. Timothy Butler, Volunteer Training Sites Program Manager, and his team developed a new .50-cal mount device to limit the weapon’s height. The mount, along with new concrete lanes in the firing area, met the Department of Army and Air Force’s standards, and they certified the Tennessee Guard’s new .50-cal range, allowing service members to fire the weapon on targets up to 800 meters away.

“This mount was crucial for the advancement of this project,” said Butler. “We figured out a way to limit barrel movement on the range without compromising safety and the quality of training, so everyone wins. Our organization now has a new range which can be operated safely, which is crucial.”

For decades, Soldiers of the Tennessee National Guard have traveled to training area in other states to certify and train on the .50-cal, but now, this new capability will continue to increase readiness and continue the modernization of Tennessee’s volunteer fighting force.



“In the past, for so many of our units, too much time has been spent behind the windshield, driving to an out-of-state-range to be able to fire these weapons,” said Foley. “Adding this range to our training site here in Tennessee will save valuable time that we can now use to train in other areas, improving the overall readiness of our organization.”

The .50-cal is a heavy machine gun that has been used by the U.S. Armed Forces since 1921. It uses larger, more powerful ammunition than more common squad automatic weapons like the M240B and has been used primarily as a mounted vehicle weapon in recent years. The .50-cal, which used to be referred to more commonly as the Browning M-2, played a large role in World War II and is still used today by infantrymen, transportation companies, cavalry regiments and other combat units throughout the Tennessee National Guard, and the U.S. Armed Forces.

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Lt. Col. Thomas J. Foley, Tennessee National Guard's Deputy Operations and Training Officer, is one of the inaugural firers of the .50-caliber Browning machine gun, at a ceremony held Nov. 15, at Tullahoma's Volunteer Training Site. New analysis and range modifications now allow the .50-cal to be fired at Tullahoma's machine gun range, which marks the first time the weapon is fired at a Tennessee National Guard training site. (photo by Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Cordeiro)



Maj. Timothy Butler, Volunteer Training Sites Program Manager, showcases a new .50-caliber Browning machine gun mount that his team developed to be able to fire the weapon on Tullahoma's machine gun range. The Department of the Army and Air Force worked together with the Tennessee National Guard's training site team to analyze the range, leading to the implementation of the new mount, which allows the .50-cal to be fired here in Tennessee for the first time ever. (photo by Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Cordeiro)

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