

Oregon National Guard looks to include Air Guard in Best Warrior

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(Official U.S. Army photo)

The U.S. Army Best Warrior competition is scheduled to begin Sept. 26 at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, with 20 competitors vying to be named NCO of the Year and Soldier of the Year.

Receiving less attention are the many state-, regional- and national-level competitions that lead up to the big event in Virginia. Around the country, leaders are testing their NCOs and Soldiers in innovative ways to discover their Best Warriors.

Recently, the Oregon Army National Guard had its Best Warrior competition at Camp Rilea, Oregon. The NCO leadership in the Oregon National Guard works hard to make the competition challenging. They hope the effort allows the winners to build on their successes as they compete regionally and nationally. Master Sgt. Geoffrey Miotke, ammunition manager and competitive sports program manager for the Oregon National Guard, said he is proud of the results of past competitions, with the winners often going on to further victories.

"I believe my job is to find out who can still perform when they are dog tired," Miotke said. "They're mentally fatigued, they're physically fatigued, but who can still perform? Who is the best? It's a long three-day event."

One of the innovations Miotke is working toward is having competitors from the Air National Guard join the Army National Guard competition. To that end, a liaison team from the Air Force worked with Miotke and Sgt. 1st Class Scott Nyquist, quota source manager for the Oregon National Guard, to learn about the competition and find ways to make it a joint one next year.

"The problem we have is my stuff is Army-centric, obviously," Miotke said. "The Air Force does not have some of our capabilities or the equipment they would need to be familiar with. So some of their senior leaders are going to work with me during the setup and running of this year's competition, so they have a better understanding of what their Airmen will be required to do come next year."

"I'll provide them a lot of documentation from the Army side of the house, so they can actually participate and have a chance to win," Miotke said. "They are going to provide me information from the Air Force side that my Army Soldiers don't do, so that we can combine it next year and actually make it completely joint. It's joint-run this year, but not joint competitor-wise yet."

Second Lt. Daniel Hicks of the Oregon Air National Guard's 116th Air Control Squadron, 142nd Fighter Wing, at Camp Rilea was part of the team helping run the Oregon National Guard Best Warrior competition from Aug. 18-20. He said there isn't a similar competition in the Air National Guard. After a couple of days, he was impressed by what the event brought out in the competitors, and he was looking forward to the Air Guard taking part.

"I think it's phenomenal," Hicks said. "I think it's a good way to develop the warrior ethos that we speak about all the time. It's an amazing way to develop a joint relationship for now and in the future, because a lot of these folks are going to be future leaders. I just like the chance for people to get out there, push themselves, develop some fortitude and just challenge themselves."

"Obviously the joint relationship is good," Hicks added. "But even among our own services, we tend to pigeonhole ourselves by occupational specialty. Anytime you can get the different career fields challenging each other and working together, I think it only breeds better camaraderie and a more successful Army and Air Guard."

As the competition kicked off, Command Sgt. Maj. Shane Lake, Oregon's command senior enlisted leader, talked to the competitors about the move toward a joint competition.

competition.

"Everything we can do that's joint and broadening is important," Lake said. "At your level, you're fighting your missions at the company level. That's all you really need to worry about. But if you're in this room right now, I hope you are looking at becoming something bigger and better in your organization. You've already proven you are. The Airmen who are going to start showing up are also those leaders. So in 10 or 15 years, when you're command sergeants major, you are going to remember each other from this. So this small event is actually incorporating some strategic visions for the next 10 years."

Lake challenged the competitors not to give up during what was sure to be a difficult three days, telling them the memories would be worth the pain.

"You are going to compete this weekend," Lake said. "But at the end of the day, we also need to build together as a team. You notice in life that the tougher the competition, the tougher a point in life, you remember it more. ... After this event, you are going to be social media buddies for the rest of your life. I encourage that."

Lake ended his talk to the competitors with a phrase that became an oft-repeated motto during the competition: "Remember, false motivation is still motivation."

At the end of three days of physical and mental challenges, ruck marches, obstacle courses, blindfolded weapon checks, written tests and more, Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Ash of 1st Battalion, 186th Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, was named Oregon National Guard NCO of the Year, while Spc. Mitchell Sierra, also of the 1-186th, 41st IBCT, was named Soldier of the Year.

Ash said testing himself during events such as Best Warrior is one of the reasons he loves being a Soldier. Perhaps more surprising, he was able to call the competition "fun" while being treated for a bleeding foot blister soon after he completed a grueling obstacle course.

"This forces you to push yourself," Ash said. "This is where you might have thought your wall was, but it's actually not. You break through that and keep pushing. We're competitive by nature. A lot of us are 'Type A' personalities or we wouldn't even be here at this level competing. It's fun because ... if you want to be the best, you have to compete against the best. That's what we are out here doing."

With Ash and Sierra now moving on to a regional competition early next year, Master Sgt. Scott Stimpson, first sergeant of the Oregon National Guard Recruit Sustainment Program, had advice for them. In 2014, Stimpson was the Oregon National Guard NCO of the Year and he went on to win the regional and national National Guard competitions, as well.

"The biggest thing the competitors need to do is incorporate the Army lifestyle into their every day," Stimpson said. "Go hike Silver Creek Falls here in Oregon with a rucksack on. Go take your family out on a walk around the track: You go sprint one lap, then walk a lap with your kids."

"At the actual competition ... I'll give you my secret of how I knew the people who weren't going to win," Stimpson said. "That first event, or that first 9-mile ruck march, there are people on the side who say, 'There are a lot more events, I need to save myself for some of the other events.' They never place. You go 110 percent, full throttle, every single event."

"Finally, compete against yourself," Stimpson said. "Do your own personal records, and go out there and break them. Because you can't control what the other competitors are doing or how they prepared. When you compete against other people, you always end up bitter with the result. When you compete against yourself, you are always going to get better. That's what I learned from my competitions."

Good advice, as NCOs and Soldiers throughout the Army compete to be named Best Warrior, and it all comes to fruition beginning Sept. 26 in Virginia.



Image 1

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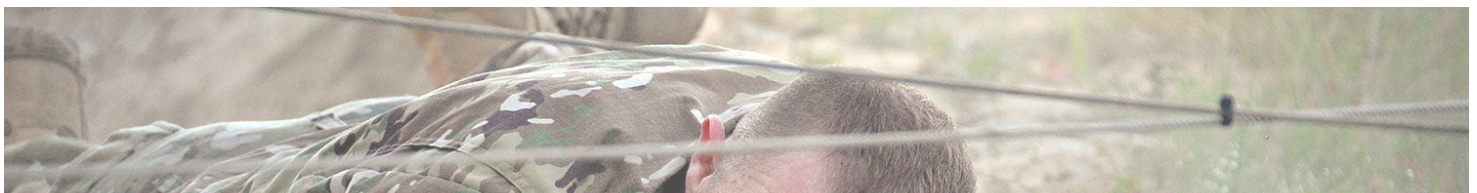




Image 2

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Image 3

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