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278th Armored Cavalry Regiment Takes 2014 Best Warrior Competition

SMYRNA, Tenn. – For every soldier, there comes a time where they have to prove their knowledge and skill. For most, this comes at a schoolhouse, learning a specific task to complete their mission. For a select few, this test came in the form of a competition against the best of the best. It is the annual Best Warrior Competition, where each major command sends their best junior enlisted soldier and noncommissioned officer through a series of rigorous challenges based on common soldier tasks.

The competition was overseen by the State Command Sergeant Major for the Army National Guard, Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Jennings. He along with each major command's command sergeants major judged each competitor on their performance of written, physical and mental exams to determine who the best junior enlisted and NCO were within the state of Tennessee to compete in the National Guard's upcoming Region III Best Warrior Competition later this spring.

The four-day event was hosted by the 117th Regiment, Regional Training Institute, headquartered at the Volunteer Training Site in Smyrna, Tenn. This was the first year the RTI has hosted such an event and is expected to host several more, including a Regional Competition, in the upcoming years. The training site not only had the logistic facilities necessary to hold the event, they also served as a non-bias group of cadre as the 117th will never have any competitors in this competition. The RTI cadre created events centered on basic soldier skills: physical fitness, military bearing and courtesies, weapon systems and land navigation. Every soldier in today's Army knows these tasks from Basic Training, where they were given the conditions and standards. It's here at the competition where the soldiers' mastery of these tasks and skills are tested to their limits.

"We were given the concept. We went out and did a lot of research studying the [Active] Army's best warrior's comp seeing what the standards were, trying to make a mirror image," said Command Sgt. Maj. Devin Rodgers, command sergeant major for the 117th Regiment. " We also went out and looked at the next level, being the Regional competition," continued Rodgers, "We looked at their past criteria to make sure we were preparing our soldiers to compete at the next level."

This competition is both physically and mentally challenging, but it can also provide very positive experiences. Staff Sgt. Michael Gentry, Jr. was a previous competitor in 2011 Best Warrior event for the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment. His loss was a driving factor in making him compete again. "My best friend won the competition that next year and that pushed my game up to the next level to put me where I am now," recalled Gentry.

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"Just the thrill of being a competitor motivates me to push myself to the next level," said Gentry.

Gentry, currently serving as a Military Intelligence Systems Maintainer with Troop A, Regimental Troops Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Nashville, Tenn., came from a very competitive upbringing. "I thought I was going to go far because of my family because of their competitiveness. I knew from a sophomore in high school that I would make a great soldier, since I didn't make it in competitive sports" said Gentry. "Though when I joined, I never expected to be competing at an event like this."

Gentry won the title of NCO of the Year for the Tennessee Army National Guard by only a small margin. The entire competition was very close, with only a few points between first and second place in either category. Spc. Burton Holloway, currently assigned to Det. 1, Troop B, 1/278th ACR in Springfield, Tenn., stood above the other junior enlisted competitors from the beginning, but barely earned the title of Soldier of the Year for the TNARNG by mere single digits.

Gentry and Holloway will move on to the Region III competition at Camp Blanding, Fla. in mid-April.

Both Gentry and Holloway, along with every soldier that made it to this level, show the strength, integrity and constitution that Tennessee Guardsmen are known for throughout history, continuing the legacy of the Volunteer Spirit.

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

140325-Z-TX145-209.jpg outline

Spc. Burton Holloway won the title "Soldier of the Year" for the Tennessee Army National Guard March 25. Presenting the award is Maj. Gen. Robert A. Harris, the Assistant Adjutant General for the state of Tennessee. Holloway, an Infantryman with Detachment 1, Troop B, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Springfield, Tenn. competed against three other junior enlisted soldiers from across the state in a grueling contest of wits, skill, and physical prowess. Holloway will continue on to the Region III competition to be held at Camp Blanding, Fla. later this April.

140325-Z-TX145-216.jpg outline

Staff Sgt. Michael Gentry, Jr. won the title "NCO of the Year" for the Tennessee Army National Guard March 25. Presenting the award is Maj. Gen. Robert A. Harris, the Assistant Adjutant General for the state of Tennessee. Gentry, a Military Intelligence Systems Maintainer with Troop A, Regimental Troops Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Nashville, Tenn. competed against three other noncommissioned officers from across the state in a grueling contest of wits, skill, and physical prowess. Holloway will continue on to the Region III competition to be held at Camp Blanding, Fla. later this April.

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140323-Z-TX145-122.jpg outline

Spc. Burton Holloway goes over his study material one last time before an Army Warrior Task just after completing a 7-mile road march on March 23. Holloway, along with 7 other soldiers from across the major commands of the Tennessee Army National Guard, competed in the Best Warrior Competition March 22 through 25. Holloway, an Infantryman with Detachment 1, Troop B, 1/278th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Springfield, Tenn., went on to win the Soldier of the Year portion of the competition and a spot in the Region III competition at Camp Blanding, Fla. later this April.

140323-Z-TX145-052.jpg outline

Staff Sgt. Michael Gentry, Jr. runs part of the 7-mile road march with his sponsor, 1st Sgt. Scott Barlow, while competing in the Best Warrior Competition for the Tennessee Army National Guard, March 23. Gentry, a Military Intelligence Systems Maintainer with Troop A, Regimental Troops Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Nashville, Tenn., went on to win the Noncommissioned Officer of the Year portion of the competition and a spot in the Region III competition at Camp Blanding, Fla. later this April.

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