

South Dakota National Guard Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: pao@sd.ngb.army.mil
Web: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil>
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Soldiers compete to be named state's best

Spc. Julieanne Morse
129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

RAPID CITY, S.D. - They must study hard and wake up early. They are tested for physical and mental endurance. Some of them shed blood, sweat and tears. They are part of one team, but competing against each other for the title.

Three noncommissioned officers and two junior enlisted Soldiers competed in the South Dakota Army National Guard's Soldier and NCO of the Year competitions at Camp Rapid, Oct. 1-2.

The line-up included:

Spc. Tyler Eissler, a truck driver with the 1742nd Transportation Company in Sioux Falls.

Spc. Christopher Punt, an interior electrician with the 155th Engineer Company in Platte.

Sgt. James Dvorak, a plumber with Training Center in Rapid City.

Sgt. 1st Class Tom Martin, a supply sergeant with the Combined Support Maintenance Shop in Rapid City.

Staff Sgt. Tom Rauenhorst, a fire direction control chief with Charlie Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion in Yankton.

The Soldiers and NCO's began competing at the battalion level in July. In August, the battalion-level winners competed at the brigade level, and the brigade-level winners competed for the state title here this weekend.

The state competition included: an unarmed combatives bout, an obstacle course, weapons qualification, an interview board of five command sergeants major, and a land navigation course.

"We try to pick skills that are relevant for today's battlefield," said Sgt. Maj. Phillip Lakner, the operations sergeant major of the state competitions.

There were two phases to the unarmed combatives event. During the first phase, Soldiers had to demonstrate proper techniques and during the second phase, they had to compete in an actual bout.

“This is the first year we’ve ever run the bouts and did the testing the way we did, because of feedback from last year’s competition,” said Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Huitema, the unarmed combatives grader. Huitema explained that the state competition was set up like the regional competition that the winners will compete in, in the future.

Another physically challenging event was the obstacle course held at West Camp Rapid. The Soldiers weaved through a wooden ladder, balanced on logs and stumps, swung on a rope to get over a beam, and climbed over a wall in an attempt to complete the course the fastest.

“It was pretty draining,” said Punt, just after his turn through the course. “You just have to pace yourself to make sure you get through all of it.”

Along with the physical challenge is the mental demand.

“The biggest challenge is just maintaining a level head through it all, and getting through the day,” said Punt. “It’s pretty demanding so you just have to keep rolling with it and finish the best you can.”

The Soldiers said they gained knowledge from participating in this competition.

“I feel more confident about my knowledge of the army,” said Dvorak, who studied 350 pages of possible questions before going in front of the sergeants’ major board.

Along with this knowledge, the Soldiers said they built confidence during their time competing.

“Before I came into the competition, I wasn’t so comfortable with land navigation or the warrior tasks,” said Eissler. “However, the more I did it, I realized that I was better at it than I thought.”

The competitors said that it’s a beneficial experience to compete for NCO and Soldier of the Year.

“I think that it’s something that NCOs and Soldiers alike should compete in, just because it shows what you should be working on to become a better Soldier,” said Dvorak.

The winners will go on to compete in the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition in the spring, which includes the state winners from Idaho, Montana, Washington, North Dakota, Wyoming, Montana and Oregon.

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PHOTOS: High-resolution photos for this release are available upon request or at: www.flickr.com/southdakotanationalguard



011011-A-M5804-118: Spc. Christopher Punt, a competitor in the South Dakota Army National Guard Soldier of the Year competition, jumps over wooden beams during the obstacle course event Oct. 1, 2011, in Rapid City, S.D. (SDNG photo by Spc. Julieanne Morse)(RELEASED)



011011-A-M5804-130: Spc. Christopher Punt, a competitor in the South Dakota Army National Guard Soldier of the Year competition, clears a wooden beam by swinging on a rope during the obstacle course of the competition Oct. 1, 2011, in Rapid City, S.D. (SDNG photo by Spc. Julieanne Morse)(RELEASED)



011011-A-M5804-215: Staff Sgt. Tom Rauenhorst aims an M-9 pistol during weapons qualification of the South Dakota Army National Guard Noncommissioned Officer of the Year competition Oct. 1, 2011, in Rapid City, S.D. Soldiers and NCO's in the competition must qualify with an M-16 rifle along with the M-9 pistol. (SDNG photo by Spc. Julieanne Morse)(RELEASED)



011011-A-M5804-236: Sgt. James Dvorak fires and qualifies with an M-9 pistol during the South Dakota Army National Guard Noncommissioned Officer of the Year competition Oct. 1, 2011, in Rapid City, S.D. Dvorak went on to win the competition, becoming the state's NCO of the Year. (SDNG photo by Spc. Julieanne Morse)(RELEASED)

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Maj. Brendan Murphy at (605) 737-6721 or cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail pao@sd.ngb.army.mil.