

# South Dakota National Guard

## Public Affairs Office

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## SD Army National Guard names Soldier, NCO of the Year

RAPID CITY, S.D. – The South Dakota Army National Guard brought four of their top enlisted Soldiers and four noncommissioned officers to the Black Hills, April 20-22, to compete in the state’s Best Warrior Competition, which names the Soldier and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, respectively.

After the three-day competition, Staff Sgt. Bjorn Henstein, Joint Force Headquarters, was named the 2016 SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year and Spc. Trent Miller, 200th Engineer Company, the 2016 SDARNG Soldier of the Year.

“A great honor,” said Miller, of Sioux Center, Iowa, on being named Soldier of the Year. “There are so many top notch Soldiers within the South Dakota Army National Guard.”

The Best Warrior Competition tests each competitor’s Army knowledge, skills and abilities while adding the additional pressure of competition.

“It basically encompasses every aspect of being a Soldier - of being a warrior,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Shay, 881st Troop Command. “It tests their ability to think under pressure and make decisions on the battlefield.”

The Soldiers and NCOs were given a very brief welcome from State Command Sgt. James Hoekman, the SDNG’s senior enlisted leader, and a drill floor lined with command sergeants major before shouts of “Gas! Gas! Gas!” officially kicked off the Best Warrior Competition.

Once in their full chemical and biological protective suits with their masks on, competitors move to a Firearms Training Simulator where they engage targets with the M16 rifle. Moments later, competitors are handed a 50-question test as they board a bus to the outdoor firing range at West Camp Rapid to qualify on the M16 and M9 pistol.

Testing would continue on events ranging from building firing positions to conducting an ambush to a late-night obstacle course.

“We put them through physical test after physical test throughout the competition pushing their endurance levels while at the same time testing them mentally,” said Shay. “The Soldiers and NCOs compete in a wide variety of events, from Soldier skills to essays and tests, all designed to challenge them and make them rise to the top amongst their peers.”

The following day began with the Army Physical Fitness Test, followed by lanes testing their abilities to evaluate and treat a casualty, request medical evacuation, a timed five-mile ruck march, a land navigation course and a final event testing their familiarization with three weapons systems.

“It’s fun - it’s challenging - it works you to your extremes,” said Henstein, of Rapid City. “You learn what your limits are and how far your body really can go.”

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The third day placed competitors in front of a board of sergeants major who quizzed them on a wide array of Army knowledge before scores were tallied and winners announced at a National Guard Association conference in Rapid City.

Henstein and Miller will move on to the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition next month, where they will represent the SDARNG against Soldiers from Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and North Dakota.

“It’s a big honor,” said Henstein. “We’re representing all of the Soldiers, NCOs for me, at the regional level. It’s kind of heavy - a lot of weight of on your shoulders but at the same time it feels good to get the opportunity to represent the state.”

Henstein’s fellow competitors in the Non-Commissioned Officer category were: Sgt. Shawn Hulbert, 740th Transportation Company; Staff Sgt. Seth Fredrickson, Battery B, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery; and Staff Sgt. Steven Zubko, 2nd Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute).

Joining Miller in the Soldier of the Year competition were: Spc. Cory Mergen, Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment; Spc. Rebekah McLaughlin, 147th Army Band; and Spc. Garrett Welsh, Detachment 1, 235th Military Police Company.

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High resolution photos are available at [www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard](http://www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard)



**160422-Z-TL267-043:** The South Dakota Army National Guard named Staff Sgt. Bjorn Henstein, left, of Rapid City, a member of Joint Force Headquarters in Rapid City, the 2016 SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year and Spc. Trent Miller, of Sioux Center, Iowa, a member of the 200th Engineer Company in Pierre, the 2016 SDARNG Soldier of the Year, at an April 22, 2016, ceremony in Rapid City. The two will move on to represent the SDARNG at the Regional Best Warrior Competition next month in Montana. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss/Released)



**160422-Z-TL267-047:** Staff Sgt. Bjorn Henstein, of Rapid City, a member of Joint Force Headquarters in Rapid City, S.D., is named the 2016 South Dakota Army National Guard’s Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss/Released)



**160422-Z-TL267-045:** Spc. Trent Miller, of Sioux Center, Iowa, a member of the 200th Engineer Company in Pierre, is named the 2016 South Dakota Army National Guard's Soldier of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss/Released)



**160420-Z-FO377-002:** Soldiers with the South Dakota Army National Guard engage targets on the Fire Arms Training Simulator while in full chemical-protective ensemble during the first event of the Best Warrior Competition, April 20, 2016, at Camp Rapid, Rapid City, S.D. The Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22 naming the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and the SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**160420-Z-FO377-057:** U.S. Army Spc. Cory Mergen, with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, qualifies with the M9 pistol during the first day of the Best Warrior Competition, April 20, 2016, at Camp Rapid, Rapid City, S.D. The Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22 naming the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and the SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**160421-Z-FO377-002:** U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Steven Zubco, 2nd Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), Staff Sgt. Bjorn Henstein, Joint Force Headquarters, and Sgt. Shawn Hulbert, 740th Transportation Company, walk through a smoke-filled training lane during day two of the South Dakota Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, April 21, 2016, at Camp Rapid, Rapid City, S.D. The Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22 naming the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and the SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**160421-Z-FO377-045:** U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Steven Zubco, with the South Dakota Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), calls in a medical evacuation during the second day of the Best Warrior Competition, April 21, 2016, at Camp Rapid, Rapid City, S.D. The Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22 naming the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and the SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**160421-Z-FO377-083:** U.S. Army Spc. Garrett Welsh, with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 1, 235th Military Police Company, competes in a five-mile ruck march during the second day of the Best Warrior Competition, April 21, 2016, near Fort Meade, S.D. The Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22 naming the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and the SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**160421-Z-FO377-146:** U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Seth Fredrickson, with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Battery B, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery, assembles one of three weapons systems during a timed event on the second day of the Best Warrior Competition, April 21, 2016, at Fort Meade, S.D. The Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22 naming the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and the SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**160421-Z-FO377-187:** U.S. Army Spc. Trent Miller, with the South Dakota Army National Guard's 200th Engineer Company, pulls a casualty uphill as part of a medical evacuation lane during the second day of the Best Warrior Competition, April 21, 2016, at Camp Rapid, Rapid City, S.D. The Best Warrior Competition concluded April 22 naming the SDARNG Soldier of the Year and the SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)

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