

329th, 116th Soldiers tops at Best Warrior Competition

Virginia National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 229th Chemical Company, 1030th Transportation Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group and the Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team took top honors at the 2025 VaARNG Best Warrior Competition March 13-16, 2025, at Fort Barfoot, Virginia.

The 229th's Pfc. Nicholas Warren and the 1-116th's Sgt. Ivo Garner were named the VaARNG's Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer Of the Year year after four days of events designed to challenge the competitors' strength, stamina, skills, knowledge and marksmanship.

"We're looking for the best of the best," said Command Sgt. Maj. Timothy Hawley, the VaARNG's command sergeant major. "Competition drives Soldiers to do more and challenge themselves, and that makes us all better. It's fun. You watch them grow together as a team - even though they're six individuals, by the time they're done they've got a bond for life."

Garner said the event really tested the Soldiers' endurance with a full schedule of challenges.

Read more at <https://vngpao.info/mv7rtca3>



Pfc. Nicholas Warren and Sgt. Ivo Garner are named the Virginia Army National Guard's Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer of the Year during a ceremony March 16, 2025, at Fort Barfoot, Virginia.

Virginia National Guard News Headlines

Virginia National Guard facilities team wins two national awards
 Maj. Gen. James W. Ring, the Adjutant General of Virginia, recognized staff from the Virginia Army National Guard Construction and Facilities Management Office March 17, 2025, in Richmond, Virginia, for receiving two first place national-level awards.
 Read more at <https://vngpao.info/ycksjb3h>

VNG aviation crews train on aerial fire suppression at Fort Barfoot
 Virginia National Guard aviation crews trained on aerial fire suppression with UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters equipped with water buckets March 12, 2025, during a prescribed burn at Fort Barfoot, Virginia.
 Read more at <https://vngpao.info/4fy8b3px>

VDF trains at Fort Barfoot to support evolving mission sets
 Members of the all-volunteer Virginia Defense Force convened March 14-16, 2025, at Fort Barfoot, Virginia, for a multiple unit training assembly that supports the VDF's evolving role as a force multiplier for the Virginia National Guard.
 Read more at <https://vngpao.info/5es9rbmb>

Virginia National Guard Foundation supports VNG, VDF service members
 The Virginia National Guard Foundation is an IRS-recognized 501(c)3 charitable organization that provides emergency financial assistance in the form of grants to service members and their families in times of need.
 Read more at <https://vngpao.info/39res633>

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237th Engineers train with Finnish counterparts

A platoon of Virginia Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 237th Engineer Company, 276th Engineer Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group recently took part in a historic cold-weather training exercise with the Finnish Defense Force's Karelia Brigade, marking a milestone in Virginia's growing defense relationship with Finland.

Held from Feb. 15 – March 1, 2025 in southern Finland, this was the first such training since Virginia and Finland formalized their partnership through the Department of Defense's State Partnership Program in May 2024. The exercise was part of Arctic Forge 25, a biennial U.S. Army Europe and Africa-led multinational exercise with Finland, Norway and Canada, designed to strengthen the U.S. Army's ability to operate in extreme Arctic conditions and reinforce allied cooperation, integration and security in the Arctic region.

In southern Finland, the Karelia Brigade and its Kymi Engineer Battalion hosted Virginia's 237th Engineer Company. The Kymi Engineer Battalion, within the Karelia Brigade, which also includes mechanized infantry, artillery, air defense, signal, and logistics, serves as a national center of excellence for combat engineer training for the Finnish Army. Its specialties include explosive ordnance disposal and counter mobility tactics such as the deployment of anti-tank mines and ditches, which can be strategically employed to enable or counter the flow of military forces and sustainment.

"I wanted our troops to be able to have direct cooperation with the Finnish Soldiers, but also to understand the complexities that this environment presents in a combat situation," said Master Sgt. Brett Albertson, operations noncommissioned officer in charge for the 276th Engineer Battalion, a planner and leader of the exercise.

Training focused on honing Soldier and combat engineer skills in cold-weather conditions while fostering military and cultural exchange to strengthen interoperability. Emphasizing real-world application, it blended tactical combat engineering, winter survival and soldiering with hands-on exercises in RK-95 weapons handling, anti-tank mine placement and clearing, wire obstacle construction, road clearing demolitions and two multi-day field training exercises which simulated modern combat contexts.

"I thought it was a fantastic and unique opportunity," said Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Teta, platoon sergeant with the 237th. "It was really great to see what we could learn from the Finns and what they could learn from us, especially when it came to being 'fast, ugly and robust'."

A recurring theme of the exercise, the motto 'Fast, Ugly, and Robust' also serves as a concise ideal for the work of combat engineers.

Over the two weeks, Finnish and Virginian counterparts exchanged combat engineer techniques and standard operating procedures, demonstrated equipment, and discussed overall approaches to military education, training, decision making, operations and culture.

Capt. Pauli Viljakainen, the Karelia Brigade Headquarters Lead for the Planning and Coordination of International Exercises, described his perspective on the significance of the event: "The



Soldiers assigned to the 237th Engineer Company stand together in front of the 'Eleven Row' anti-vehicle obstacle they constructed to demonstrate U.S. counter-mobility tactics for Finland's Kymi Engineer Battalion.

most important thing is that we finally got a platoon from the Virginia National Guard here, and that Virginia and Finland were able to do something together for two weeks. And, as with any international exercise, one of the key things is building personal relationships with different people, because those are the ones that will help you in the future, on a personal level, and will also help the greater military system. When junior leaders now become senior leaders later, and they know each other already, there is already a shared understanding and things can be agreed upon more easily."

Read more at <https://vngpao.info/2p9e2fp8>

MORE ON THE WEB

The Virginia Veterans Network

Read more at <https://vngpao.info/y67bwj7r>

Virginia National Guard Resiliency Resources

Read more at <https://va.ng.mil/Resiliency/>

VNG, VDF represent modern military at Jamestown event

Photos on Flickr at <https://vngpao.info/2p92brur>

229th Chemical Soldiers receive Emergency Service Ribbon

Photos on Flickr at <https://vngpao.info/53ac2t5t>

Settje sworn in as VNG Inspector General NCOIC

Photos on Flickr at <https://vngpao.info/336uyr2z>

