

# U.S. Army Europe Soldiers and NCOs compete for Best Warrior titles

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GRAFENWOEHR TRAINING AREA, Germany – Seven noncommissioned officers and seven Soldiers from across Europe braved an onslaught of physical and mental challenges to test their skills, knowledge, and stamina at the 2010 USAREUR Best Warrior Competition, July 26-29.

Only one NCO and Soldier in the competition can claim the title of USAREUR's "Best Warrior" and those winners will be announced Aug. 12. The two winners will then compete with NCOs and Soldiers from 12 Army commands from around the globe in the Department of the Army Best Warrior Competition scheduled to take place Oct. 17-22 at Fort Lee, Va.

"Last year's NCO of the Year for Department of the Army was a USAREUR Soldier and we will have two more USAREUR winners this year," said Sgt. Maj. Brad Weber, who has been overseeing USAREUR Best Warrior competitions for the last five years. Weber, from [USAREUR G1](#), the command's theater-level human resources provider, also said that USAREUR has won at the Army level three times in the last five years. "That type of success speaks directly to the quality of our competition and how well it prepares our winners for the next level," he said.

All competitors are confident that they could be the top USAREUR warrior, and go on to win at Army.

"I think I got a pretty good chance of winning," said Spc. Gerald Ramsey, a financial technician with the [U.S. Army NATO Brigade](#) in Naples, Italy. "I've trained-up pretty well and I've already done three competitions at the lower levels. I may not have as much experience on some of the tactical skills as some of these other people since I have an office job, but I know I can do this."

Each of the competitors had challenges to overcome to be able to compete. Sgt. Luis Mitchell, from the [12th Combat Aviation Brigade](#) in Ansbach, had just returned from Iraq two weeks before. "When they told me I would be representing our

unit at the competition, I didn't think twice about it. Yeah, everyone from the deployment is on block leave now, but here I am," he said. "I always try to stay up on my training so I felt pretty good about doing it. I had heard this competition was hard, but I really didn't know what to expect."

Mitchell wasn't alone. None of the competitors knew what tasks would be included in the competition, nor did they know what they would be doing from minute to minute.

The competition is designed to be purposefully challenging, testing the competitors' ability to react at a moment's notice while under pressure, and to be able to excel even when extremely fatigued.

This year's competition was even more challenging than past ones, said Sgt. 1st Class Theodore Meckley, from the [Joint Multinational Training Center](#), who managed the two previous USAREUR competitions. Yet it still allowed competitors to balance weaknesses with strengths. "We structured it in such a way that someone who isn't as physically fit as another competitor, say, can make up points in other areas where they may be mentally stronger," he said.

In creating this year's program, Meckley said he gleaned a lot of information about the Department of the Army's competition from last year's winners. "We made ours more challenging, no doubt," he said. "We have the regular events like APFT, marksmanship, and board briefings. We've changed things up, of course, and added some new things like night land navigation and added a level of realism to the training by using helicopters for some of the events."

Other events in the competition included an obstacle course, land navigation, 12-mile road march, night qualification, and orienteering through an urban area.

"Through the help of our Bundeswehr (German military) partners, this year's mystery event was true-life training that all Soldiers in Europe need, as it involved reacting quickly in a crisis while facing the challenges of breaking through the language barrier," Meckley said. The scenario required competitors to respond and provide aid to a wounded service member from an Allied nation, then react to an ambush from an enemy force, he said.

"I have to say the added bit of realism really amped up the training. I was really surprised when doing the 'Evacuate a Casualty' task that a helicopter actually came. We usually just go through the motions when doing that part,"

said Sgt. 1st Class Henry Scott, from the [357th Air Missile Defense Detachment](#) in Kaiserslautern. "I like the idea of 'train as we fight'. This was really a good competition. It was tough, but I'm glad I did it. It gave me something real that I can take back to my Soldiers."

Scott, the oldest of the competitors at 32, said he managed to hold his own with some of the younger competitors and that his years of experience gave him a bit of edge in some areas.

At 19, Spc. Michael Freas, from the [21st Theater Sustainment Command](#) in Kaiserslautern, was the youngest of the competitors. He said he feels good about his performance, and that despite a "broken" body his spirits are good. "All throughout the competition, I gave it my all. It was definitely a lot harder than I expected. I'm hurting a bit now, but I just need a little time to heal and then on to Army," he said.

Competitors were sore at the end of the competition, with everyone's feet suffering the brunt of it all. By the end of the four days, they walked approximately 30 miles over gravel and through rain and rough terrain. Moleskin was a hot commodity during the competition.

Despite the pain and fatigue, each competitor made it through, drawing on their own means of motivation.

"It is tough, but no matter how much they try to break you down physically, you have to keep mentally strong. I just focus on doing the things I do well and keep going," Staff Sgt. Alicia Anderson, from JTMC, said. Anderson was one of two female competitors this year and feels she has a pretty good chance of proving herself the top warrior. "I do have the competitive spirit so I'm always wanting to do my best, to be the best that I can be. I keep pushing myself to stay ahead of everybody else," she said.

Not only did that warrior spirit help her through this competition, but it helped her earn a spot on the USAREUR women's team that will compete in the Army 10-Miler in Washington, D.C. in October.

Anderson said she is honored to represent USAREUR for both major events. "It would also be a great honor to be the second NCO from the Academy to win NCO of the Year for Army. It would be a great representation of the 'best of the best,' showing that we have the best leaders training our future NCOs," she said.

**Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Blackwood**, USAREUR's interim command sergeant major, supported the competitors throughout the competition, sharing bits of advice and encouragement. He said he was impressed with the skills and tenacity of the competitors. On the last day of the competition, he told competitors that, while only one Soldier and NCO will emerge from this competition as the Best Warrior, he considered them all winners. "This competition was tough, and the fact that you took it on is testament to your dedication and commitment. You represent the continued future strength of our Army," he said.