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Tullahoma resident prepares for Army National Guard competition in Alaska

TULLAHOMA, Tenn. – Every year, hundreds of Army National Guardsmen from across the United States’ 54 states and territories compete for a chance to be named the National Guard’s Best Warrior. This year, one of the finalists representing the Southeastern Region of the U.S. is from Coffee County, and he is ready to compete against the best Guardsmen in America at the national competition in Alaska.

For the last year, Spc. Jackson Jacobs, a 20-year-old guardsman who is a joint fire support specialist with the Regimental Fires Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, has been training and preparing for the competition ahead. A graduate of Coffee County Central High School, he has been doing everything necessary to ensure he is representing Tennessee well.

“I’m excited to see where I stack up against the other competitors,” said Jacobs. “I’ve really been working on my physical fitness to make sure I’m in the best shape possible.”

From July 9-13, Jacobs and 13 other Soldiers will compete in a series of mentally and physically demanding events that will challenge mind, body, and spirit. Daunting ruck marches, precise marksmanship, land navigation, and medical triage are just a few of the events packed into the 9-day competition, culminating with an awards ceremony on July 13. The competition will take place in and around Anchorage, Alaska, and is being hosted by the Alaska National Guard, in coordination with National Guard Bureau.

Physical strength and endurance are needed for the competition, but mental and intellectual ability is just as important. To prepare, Jacobs enlisted a former Best Warrior winner to help.

“We spent a couple days together and I was able to answer all his questions and helped with his training,” said Sgt. Cole Lukens, the 2021 National Guard Best Warrior. “We went through weapons systems and board procedures and everything in between.”

Lukens, an infantryman with the Tennessee National Guard’s F Troop, 278th ACR, won the national competition in 2021 when it took place in Arizona. Since then, he has completed numerous advanced combat schools, including the U.S. Army Ranger School, which is widely considered one of the most demanding military schools in the U.S. Armed Forces.

“Sometimes the hardest part about these competitions is the unknown,” said Lukens. “We talked about what he can expect when he gets out there in Alaska. He’s a fierce competitor and I think he has a real shot at winning it.”



The path to make it to the final competition is rigorous. Soldiers must win their local unit, then their brigade, for a chance to compete at the state level. Next, the state winners compete against peers from other states in a regional competition. Finally, each regional winner represents their area to see who the nation's "Best Warrior" is for the Army National Guard.

For Jacobs, the path to Alaska has been rewarding, and he is grateful for the opportunity to represent his state and unit.

"It's definitely been a great experience," said Jacobs. "Each time I get out there to compete I meet some awesome people and get a chance to build relationships with Soldiers from all over the country. There's nothing like the comradery you get when put into stressful situations with fellow Soldiers."

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Spc. Jackson Jacobs, a joint fire support specialist with the Tennessee National Guard's Regimental Fires Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, checks his map during a land navigation drill, Feb. 25, as part of the Tennessee State Best Warrior Competition, which took place at Tullahoma's Volunteer Training Site. Jacobs won the state competition and is traveling to Alaska to compete in the National Best Warrior Competition in July. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Tupper)



Spc. Jackson Jacobs, a joint fire support specialist with the Tennessee National Guard's Regimental Fires Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, navigates an obstacle course, Feb. 25, as part of the Tennessee State Best Warrior Competition, which took place at Tullahoma's Volunteer Training Site. Jacobs won the state competition and is traveling to Alaska to compete in the National Best Warrior Competition in July. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Tupper)



Spc. Jackson Jacobs, a joint fire support specialist with the Tennessee National Guard's Regimental Fires Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, lifts weights during the Army Combat Fitness Test, Feb. 24, as part of the Tennessee State Best Warrior Competition, which took place at Tullahoma's Volunteer Training Site. Jacobs won the state competition and is traveling to Alaska to compete in the National Best Warrior Competition in July. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Tupper)

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