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Tennessee National Guard engineers complete 12-hour relay race

WATERTOWN, Tenn. – More than 25 members of the Tennessee National Guard’s 230th Engineer Battalion completed a 12-hour relay ruck march in Watertown, Feb. 3. The event was part of the ‘Black Toe Run,’ an annual trail running event hosted by Hardwin Adventures.

Hundreds of trail runners, outdoor enthusiasts, hikers, and members of the community met at Hardin Farm, in Watertown, for the race. The event is a 12, 24, and 48-hour trail running competition with multiple categories for individual and team relays. A few years ago, organizers added a ruck category, a specialty of military members. Rucking, or walking for a long distance with a weighted pack on your back, has increased veteran involvement in the ‘Black Toe Run,’ including the participation of the Tennessee National Guard.

“I’ve done this event in the past, so I thought it’d be great to bring some of our folks out for our drill weekend to participate,” said Lt. Col. Tony Glandorf, commander for Trenton’s 230th Engineer Battalion. “It’s a great way to get out in our community and build some team comradery within our ranks.”

The Guardsmen were split into two-person teams and participated in the 12-hour ruck event. One at a time, team members completed the 5.1-mile loop through the hills at Hardin Farm, often walking through thickly wooded areas with steep elevation changes. The goal was to complete as many miles as possible in the 12-hour window.

“Mile three was just straight uphill,” said Spc. Reese McVay, a combat engineer with Trenton’s 230th Engineer Battalion Headquarters. “It was difficult, but I really enjoyed it. It was fun to do something different and to get to know more people in the unit, as challenging as it was.”

The ‘Black Toe Run’ has always been a community event. Many of the participants compete every year and camp for the entire weekend. There is a communal potluck where participants bring food and drinks to be shared by everyone. People cheer for each other, and everyone claps when competitors finish their portion of the relay.

But it wasn’t always this way. When John Hardin, co-founder of Hardwin Adventures, first started the ‘Black Toe Run’ in 2012, it was a much smaller event. Through the years it has grown to be a staple of the trail running community in Tennessee.

“We started with about 10-15 people back more than 10 years ago,” said Hardin. “We didn’t have many trail races in the area at that time and over the course of the last decade or so, people have continued to bring their friends and family and really grown the race into what it is today.”



Many of the participants that come every year are veterans, and with the addition of the 230th this year, that military presence continues to grow.

“Adding the ruck category brought more military to the event and we couldn’t be happier about that,” said Hardin. “We get all walks of life out here, but to have members of our National Guard participating and having a good time, they’re a part of our Black Toe community now.”

While participants rest after a long and grueling weekend, some are already committing to coming back next year.

“I would definitely do it again,” said Spc. Tiffany Brown, a carpentry and masonry specialist with Paris’ 212th Engineer Company. “It was fun coming out here and building trust with one another and working as a team to accomplish the mission.”

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Members of Trenton's 230th Engineer Battalion participate in a 12-hour ruck march relay called the 'Black Toe Run,' in Watertown, Feb. 3. More than 25 Tennessee Guardsmen split into two-person teams and rucked for 12 hours straight, alternating one at a time, around a 5.1-mile trail at Hardin Farm. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Cordeiro)



Members of Trenton's 230th Engineer Battalion pose for a photo before participating in a 12-hour ruck march relay called the 'Black Toe Run,' in Watertown, Feb. 3. More than 25 Tennessee Guardsmen split into two-person teams and rucked for 12 hours straight, alternating one at a time, around a 5.1-mile trail at Hardin Farm. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Cordeiro)

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