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WI National Guard: Volk Field hosts national competition

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VOLK FIELD, Wis. — The U.S. Air Force's eight most accomplished munitions teams from around the world converged here late last month for the third annual Air Force Combat Operations Competition (AFCOCOMP).

Participants were evaluated for their speed and technique in assembling bombs, setting up and tearing down the munitions assembly conveyor, following an air-tasking order, supporting operations at forward deployed bases and sites adapted for use as an air base, accountability practices, warehousing procedures, and operating in environments requiring use of masks and garments to protect against chemical, biological, radiological or nerve agents. The purpose of the high-intensity competition is to increase combat readiness and meet emerging Combat Operations Command requirements.

This competition was held at Beale Air Force Base's Air Force Combat Ammunition Center in California in 2018 and 2019. The COVID pandemic halted the competition the last two years. When talks of resuming the competition began last October, Beale was facing a considerable backlog of munitions specialists who needed to train at the Combat Ammunition Center.

That's where Volk Field came in. The Combat Readiness Training Center was capable of hosting such a competition, as it has hosted its own Ammo Rodeo bomb-building competition since 2017. The National Guard Bureau's munitions functional area manager reached out to Volk Field leadership to determine if the Air National Guard base would be interested in hosting the Air Force competition.

"We said yes, and that started 10 months of planning to put this event on at an Air National Guard base," said Senior Master Sgt. Charles Weyers, the munitions flight

chief at Volk Field. “This was a very big deal to highlight the total force concept of active duty, reserves and Air National Guard working together.”

The 10-person teams came from Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., representing Air Combat Command; Canon Air Force Base, N.M., representing Air Force Special Operations Command; Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., representing the Air Education and Training Command; Aviano Air Force Base, Italy, representing United States Air Forces in Europe; Misawa Air Base, Japan, representing Pacific Air Forces; Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo., representing the Air Force Reserves; Minot Air Force Base, N.D., representing Global Strike Command; and Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England, also from the Air Forces in Europe and the defending competition champion. Distinguished visitors from each participating Air Force base, and munitions leadership from each major Air Force command were also on hand for the competition.

The competition ran Aug. 29 through Sept. 1, with each team completing two events daily, and also a mystery event. Lakenheath successfully defended its title.

“Overall, this was a resounding success,” Weyers said. “The event greatly benefitted the Air Force munitions career field by increasing our lethality, our readiness and morale. It also highlighted Volk Field to the active duty munitions career field as a great training location to enhance readiness.”

Weyers said the competition reinforced the belief that Volk Field can support any exercise and is capable of providing a world-class training facility to enhance Defense Department readiness, at both the large and small unit level.

“One of the driving factors of Volk Field was its ability to execute a wide array of training,” said Master Sgt. Joseph Hack III, command munitions manager with Air Combat Command headquarters. He noted that Volk Field’s stockpile of inert munitions allowed competing munitions teams to conduct operations across the base, which simulated how they would operate in austere locations. This underscores how the munitions career field approaches future combat needs.

“We are adapting the way we are training and are executing contingency operations,” Hack explained. “We are able to execute robust missions with smaller footprints. This competition highlights not only the teams, but what the units are getting after across the globe.”

Col. Matt Eakins, Volk Field commander, said AFCOCOMP is another example of Volk Field's ability to provide a world-class training environment to any customer, tailorable to the customer's desired learning objectives.

"Volk Field's organizational capabilities directly align with the Secretary of the Air Force's Operational Imperative Number 7," Eakins said, referring to the Air Force's readiness to transition to a wartime posture against a peer competitor. "Volk Field is the perfect backdrop for active duty to test and grow agile combat employment techniques in a completely dynamic training environment."

Weyers said Volk Field leadership learned that the base needs to continue modernizing its munitions stockpile, as well as increase tool and equipment availability. He said there is already discussion to continue the competition at Volk Field, with a decision expected in the upcoming weeks.

"Volk Field personnel and the Headquarters Air Force working group showcased a ton of potential," Hack added. "With additional resources, Volk Field could become a training staple across the enterprise, not just for the Air Force Combat Operations Competition."