

The Tough Ruck is an event sponsored by the Military Friends Foundation and coincides with Massachusetts Patriots Day celebrations. Historically the event took place alongside the Boston Marathon, but sadly because of the Boston Bombing bags are no longer allowed on the marathon route, so the event has moved to the Battle Road Trail in Minuteman National Park between Lexington and Concord. It is still sponsored by the Boston Athletic Association and all finishers of the 26.2 mile ruck march receive an official Boston Marathon finishers medal.

There was a great article in the Summer 2016 edition of Sky Soldier magazine that chronicled our participation last year. The basic premise was that many of the younger generation of Sky Soldier are tied up with their transition to civilian life, trying to finish college, starting families, or finding meaningful employment and that makes events like the annual reunions difficult because of time needed and expenses. Another soldier I deployed with, Robert Colliton (President of the Skate for the 22 Foundation) asked me about participating, and being the dumb grunt I am, I agreed to drag my broken body out there in memory of the fallen.

We decided that we wanted to use small, localized events to get Sky Soldiers together. Shorter duration, easier for travel and expense, and hoped to inspire others to replicate that effort across the country. We are frankly tired of seeing many of our brothers who we brought home from the battlefield lose the war at home, so we reached out to a few guys in the local area to form a core group for the event and then with the help of the 173rd Foundation brought a Sky Soldier who was still on active duty to the event. He was in the middle of a medical retirement process, his wife expressed concerns for his mental health and we were worried about him. We were also sponsored as a team by Nationalgrid, and they provided support vehicles and drivers. The soldier we brought in for the event was so badly injured to Ruck so he rode in the support vehicle with the Nationalgrid guy and acted as the team medic and logistics coordinator. I am happy to say that not only did the soldier stand up and give a speech at the 173rd Golf Outing in NH crediting the event with saving his life, but he was offered a job as a supervisor at Nationalgrid and has recently started on his new civilian job. Mission Accomplished.

So for 2017 we wanted to replicate last years success and we have more than 20 former Sky Soldiers committed to walking the event this year. Like last year we are dragging along some guys who we are concerned about how they were doing. The goal is to bring guys together and share the common misery of the event, share memories, carry the legacy of our fallen and make the living feel like part of a team and community again.

The event will take place on April 15th and steps off at 0715. It is mainly military, police, fire, EMS and supporters who participate, but it is open to the public. I can say it is a sell out event and all slots have been sold for this coming year. I am happy to say Nationalgrid has doubled down on their sponsorship, not only of our team but of the entire event and will provide a robust presence for supporting the event with volunteers and vehicles.

We have endeavored to be as self-sufficient as possible. Last year we had people donate to the 173rd foundation on our behalf to use the funds raised to offset the help they provided us for t shirts, food, and to assist in lodging and travel for some of the veterans. We have a more robust team this year, with most insisting they be allowed to cover their own cost, but I will likely reach out to Eric to see if they want to provide shirts so the team can represent the Brigade and if we have hardship cases for his support in those individual matters.

We plan to have a gathering of event participants the night prior, a low-key pasta dinner, and then a bonfire to relax following the event itself for the participants and families.

We would welcome any Chapter members who want to show up and support the event, we will be easy to spot as we will carry the Brigade colors and all team members will have the 173rd patch on their shirts. If you want to do something in a formal manner we are open to any ideas you may have, but to be honest for as much as we are doing we are a pretty disorganized bunch. We are really just a bunch of dumb grunts, strapping on rucksacks and linking up for a weekend with our brothers who we fought beside.

If you would like any additional information or want to make any coordination, please feel free to contact me.