

Army will host concert for atheists at Fort Bragg

by [Kimberly Winston](#) in the [September 6, 2011](#) issue

A group of military atheists have won the backing of U.S. Army officials to hold a "Rock Beyond Belief" concert for nonbelievers at North Carolina's Fort Bragg next year.

The victory came after several church-state separation watchdog groups complained in July to the secretary of the army that a Christian-themed concert held at the fort last September gave "selective benefits" to religious groups.

That concert, staged by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, received more than \$50,000 in financial support from the base, according to records obtained by local atheists through the Freedom of Information Act. The nonreligious concert will receive the same funds and will be held at a similar venue at the base.

Hailing the decisions as a major victory, military atheists say they are on the "cusp of a major breakthrough."

"This just might be the turning point in the foxhole atheist community's struggle for acceptance, tolerance and respect," Sgt. Justin Griffith, a member of Military Atheists and Secular Humanists (MASH), a Fort Bragg-based group that complained about the Christian concert, wrote August 2 on the "Rock Beyond Belief" website.

"Rock Beyond Belief" was originally slated to be held last April after Fort Bragg officials agreed to MASH's original appeal for an alternative concert. But it was canceled in April when the garrison commander refused to sign off on it.

The

American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and several atheist groups complained to army officials.

The "Rock Beyond Belief" concert will be held March 31, 2012, and will be free to all members of the military, their families and the public. It is slated to feature musical groups and speakers, including Richard Dawkins, a best-selling author and prominent atheist.

—RNS