



A Soldier from 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group and other competitors in the 2013 Army Best Warrior Competition prepare to enter a conference center at Fort Lee, Va., Tuesday evening, Nov. 19, to hear a video message from Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III on the eve of the competition's first event. (Photo by Meghan Portillo)

Competitors Get Ready To Determine NCO, Soldier of the Year

By Michael L. Lewis

NCO Journal

For the 24 Soldiers filing into the conference center at Fort Lee, Va., on Tuesday evening, Nov. 19, the weeks of preparing, studying, training and practicing were officially over. Whether or not they were ready, the Army's premier test of everything that embodies being an American Soldier was about to begin for them — the Soldiers of the Year and the NCOs of the Year from 12 of the Army's major commands.

Delayed from October by the federal government shutdown, the 2013 Army Best Warrior Competition was already different than the previous 12 years'. Though still a crucible of endurance designed to push competitors to their physical and mental limits, this year's competition would also test other traits the nation expects of its war-

riors, explained Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III, under whose auspices the competition is run.

"This is a challenge to be the best *all-around* Soldier — not just physically or mentally or [based on] your military experience," Chandler told the competitors via a video message on the eve of the competition's first event, which he planned to attend in person. "The Army is a profession, and you represent all of us. Your commitment to the Army, to each other and to the Soldiers you lead are an important part of the American people's perception of our Army."

As representatives of the Army's best, competitors had to win at several other levels to reach the pinnacle event at Fort Lee, Chandler noted.

“You have risen to the highest levels of our organization,” he said. “You’ve competed numerous times to make it this far. You 24 represent more than 650,000 enlisted Soldiers — active, Guard and Reserve.”

But the thrill of victory is not the only thing worth seeking, Chandler said.

“NCO and Soldier of the Year competitions are part of the Army’s tradition to compete — not only to win, but to improve ourselves and others,” he said. “Being a Soldier means being a part of a team, and that will be evident here, too.

“You will not win by yourself. You have mentors, trainers, sponsors, family members, senior NCOs, commanders and countless others who made it possible for you to be here today. And when you return home, you will be part of another team that prepares others to compete.”

The competition began in earnest in the cold, pre-dawn hours of Wednesday, Nov. 20. But competitors won’t know the actual events until they begin. They do

know that each day will begin early and end late, that they will have some sort of physical fitness and written tests, that they should expect at least one mystery event designed to test their mental and physical acuity while under pressure, and that Day 3 will feature the stressful board appearance before Chandler and six of the Army’s seniormost command sergeants major.

That evening — Friday, Nov. 22 — the competition will end with a dinner and the announcement of the winners. Chandler’s predecessor, retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston, who now is in charge of NCO and Soldier Programs for the Association of the United States Army, and the vice chief of staff of the Army, Gen. John F. Campbell, are expected to speak.

“Now only one of you will be the NCO of the Year, and only one of you will be the Soldier of the Year. But I want each of you to know that you are winners,” Chandler told competitors Tuesday night. His parting words of advice: “Be proud, and give it all you’ve got.” ■



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