



Staff Sgt. Andrew Gregory, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Materiel Command, had 5 minutes to move his team and a 40-pound ammunition box over a wall while maintaining stable contact with the wall during the Leadership Reaction Course on Thursday, Nov. 21. (Photo by Meghan Portillo)

Best Warrior Day 2 Demands Precision and Creativity

By Michael L. Lewis

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After a draining Day 1 that challenged their soldiering skills, physical stamina and Army knowledge, competitors at the 2013 Army Best Warrior Competition at Fort Lee, Va., were preparing for the worst on Day 2, Thursday, Nov. 21, and the evening that preceded it.

"I know I woke up at midnight thinking, 'They've let us sleep for a couple of hours. They should be coming to mess with us right about now,'" said Staff Sgt. Andrew Gregory, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Materiel Command.

However, the event's benevolent organizers allowed competitors to enjoy some much needed rest, as success in the second day's tasks depended on having a clear and open mind.

'It gets burned into you'

First, it was back to Fort Lee's old airstrip where the sun rose over three lanes: conducting drills from the Army

Physical Readiness Training manual, performing various weapons drills and conducting an in-ranks inspection. Evaluators were looking for precise, by-the-book actions that indicated a familiarity with Army regulations and doctrine.

"We didn't know anything about today. It could have been easy, it could have been ridiculous like yesterday," said Sgt. De Gosh Reed, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Pacific. "But it was a pretty good surprise to see that we were doing things like taking care of Soldiers, drill and ceremony, doing PRT, doing inspections — important things for the Army."

"That was my cup of tea right there," said Sgt. Brian Hester, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command. "You teach enough Soldiers how to do that stuff, and it gets burned into you permanently."

However, some competitors' obvious bewilderment at how to conduct the PRT drills disappointed Sgt. Maj.



Staff Sgt. De Gosh Reed, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Pacific, conducts an in-ranks inspection during the 2013 Army Best Warrior Competition on Thursday, Nov. 21, at Fort Lee, Va. (Photo by Meghan Portillo)

of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III, who oversaw the entire competition as well as observed the warriors go head to head each day.

“I’m very frustrated with this,” Chandler said. “The Army has a physical fitness program. We put a lot of time and effort into developing one. It’s proven to be successful. It’s been in place across the Army for about four years, and I am not satisfied where we are. That was demonstrated out here that some folks didn’t know anything about PRT.

“I think we need to give the Army’s physical fitness program an opportunity before we say it’s no good, or try to do something else like P90X or CrossFit, or some other exercise program that’s the flavor of the year,” Chandler continued. “I’m an advocate of PRT. I believe in it. I know it works.”

From by-the-book to out-of-the-box

The next collection of events, however, no one was expected to be prepared for. Organizers created a Leadership Reaction Course that, by design, competitors could not have practiced beforehand.

“It’s definitely not something you’ll find in any manual or regulation,” said Staff Sgt. Jasmine Joyner, an evaluator for one of the LRC’s six lanes. “We actually built every lane from the ground up to be very challenging.”

Competitors had to think creatively and innovatively to solve the six puzzles, most of which involved moving

their assigned fire team and some equipment across an obstacle with an added restriction to complicate matters. In one, a pallet of heavy boxes had to be moved without carrying the pallet or removing the boxes. The solution was to roll the pallet on three pipes that many competitors thought were to be used to carry the pallet.

“They’re supposed to think outside-the-box, but also follow instructions,” Joyner said. “Time management plays a big role.”

“We were trying to create something where a competitor would need to think to figure something out rather than using brawn or skill,” said Staff Sgt. Corey Damas, the NCO in charge of the course. “This is not something that just anybody could show up and complete successfully. If they have a good plan to begin with, it’s very easy. But it takes a while to develop that plan, and unfortunately, they don’t have that time. So the trial-and-error way doesn’t work so well.”

Indeed, some competitors seemed flummoxed going from a rigidly by-the-book event to lanes that required creativity and novel approaches. But, others seized the opportunity.

“That was my favorite event of this whole entire thing — taking Soldiers, executing the mission,” Gregory said.

“It was my favorite event, as well, because I got to take Soldiers who really didn’t know what was going on, and I got to shape the situation,” Reed said. “The lanes we were successful on, the Soldiers really motivated me. I didn’t want to let them down. I didn’t want to look bad in front of them.”

Chandler said the event was exactly what he hoped it would be: a venue for gauging the Army’s progress in creating adaptive, critical leaders.

“We didn’t give people a lot of instruction,” Chandler said. “We expect that you’re going to figure out how to do it. That has elements of mission command. A lot of people will say that mission command is commander-driv-



Sgt. 1st Class Ronnie Reynolds, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Medical Command (right) guides his team in moving themselves and two trailer tires across three 2 x 6 planks during the Leadership Reaction Course on Thursday, Nov. 21. (Photo by Meghan Portillo)



Sgt. 1st Class Sergio Velazquez, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Europe, leads a group of Soldiers in one of the Army Physical Readiness Training drills on Thursday, Nov. 21. (Photo by Meghan Portillo)

en. Well, it is. But NCOs have huge roles in its success — elements of trust, understanding that commander's intent, having a disciplined approach at how the mission will be accomplished. Those are all important, and we wanted to reinforce that. Plus it's fun."

Getting ready for the board

The competitors were given the rest of the day off to prepare with their sponsors for the final event on Friday, Nov. 22: a board composed of the sergeant major of the Army and some of the Army's seniormost command sergeants major.

"The board is a big part of how we promote and recognize Soldiers as we have done for decades," Chandler, the board's president, said. "The board will be, I'm sure, a relatively comfortable experience for Soldiers, because they've probably practiced it a dozen times before they got to this level. I'm excited about it."

Competitors appeared to look forward to it as well.

"I think a lot of it will be, how do you handle pressure? How well can you articulate your thoughts in front of people?" said Staff Sgt. Colby Perotti, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Training and

Doctrine Command. "I mean, we've pretty much demonstrated what we know in all the Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills lanes, in the exam, and in the essay. So this is really going to be about how you interact, how you hold your composure, and how you answer tough questions."

"It's just a matter of keeping calm," said Sgt. 1st Class Ronnie Reynolds, the NCO of the Year competitor representing U.S. Army Medical Command. "You'll have some of the most-senior-ranking enlisted personnel in the Army there. But you've got to keep calm, remember that they're human and just answer their questions."

Friday evening, the competition concludes with an informal dinner featuring addresses by 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. But the moment everyone will be anxiously awaiting is the announcement of the winners, the Army's 2013 NCO of the Year and Soldier of the Year. The event will be live-streamed at <http://www.dvidshub.net/webcast/3538> beginning around 7:25 p.m. Eastern time Friday night with the winners expected to be announced around 8:25 p.m. ■

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