



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Ray Chandler, left, discusses Best Warrior Competition plans last month on a Fort Lee, Va., range with Sgt. Justin Morataya, center, and Sgt. Moises Alfaro. (Photo by Army News Service)

Army's Best Warrior Competition Postponed Due To Budget Battle in Washington, D.C.

By Patrick Buffett

U.S. Army News Service

The budget standoff in the nation's capital has stalled the Department of the Army Best Warrior Competition, which had been set to take place beginning Oct. 15 at Fort Lee, Va.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III announced Tuesday that the event will be postponed until a yet-to-be-determined date due to the current constraints on spending for temporary duty trips.

"I appreciate the continued commitment and flexibility of all agencies and commands involved in Best Warrior," Chandler said in a message to the Army's most senior non-commissioned officers yesterday. "I've told many of you that this year's competition will test our agile and adaptive warriors with a compressed timeline and a few surprises, so this date change adds yet another unexpected level of challenge."

The first phase of the 12th annual Best Warrior Competition was set to begin Sunday, with the arrival of competitors from overseas locations. The remainder of those competing — 24 in all, representing 12 major commands — would have reported Monday.

Command Sgt. Maj. James K. Sims, Combined Arms Support Command, was appointed by Chandler to oversee all preparations for this year's competition. Sims said he was glad to hear that the government shutdown did not cancel the event.

"Every one of the competitors earned the right to make the trip to Best Warrior," he said. "Over the past year, they competed at company, battalion, brigade and major Army command levels to secure a spot in the competition. Their commands are basically saying 'these are the Soldiers we selected to represent us.' That's why we refer to them as the 'best of the best.'"

What specific challenges the competitors will eventually face during this year's competition is a well-kept secret. Event planners from Fort Lee and the Pentagon have squelched that information, saying it "adds to the intensity of the competition and prevents any unfair advantages among participants."

They only say it will include an Army Physical Fitness Test, a written exam and graded essay on general military topics, weapons qualification, a land navigation course, warrior tasks and battle drills, a mystery event, and a Soldier and NCO selection board comprised of Chandler and six senior command sergeants major from across the Army.

"A big change this year is the timeline," Sims said. "It will be shorter in length, which reduced our overall cost by 70 percent compared to previous competitions. We also rearranged the traditional order of events. Aside from that, it will feature the same successive and unexpected challenges that make it a complex, real-world-orientated competition.

"Our strategy was to base all aspects of the competition on the challenges faced while deployed. That was

the SMA's vision," Sims said. "In combat, our Soldiers face situations where there may not be a true right or wrong decision, as each option has its own set of consequences. Weighing those options and consequences takes well-developed critical thinking skills — skills that will be necessary to find success in this year's Army Best Warrior Competition."

The schedule for this year's event also includes an unprecedented end-of-event ceremony where the winning competitors will be announced at Fort Lee and through streaming video. In previous years, the awards presentation took place in Washington, D.C.

"For us, it adds another level of excitement," Sims noted. "The place where they fought for the title is the same as where two will be crowned as the NCO and Soldier of the Year."

Speaking on behalf of the Fort Lee planning cell, Sims said his team is unfazed by the decision to postpone the competition. The mission has not changed, he noted.

"Whether this happens a couple of weeks or a couple of months later, CASCOT and Fort Lee remain ready to support the event and its competitors just like it has done for the past 11 years," he said. "The Soldiers on our team are true game-changers in their level of commitment to excellence and getting the mission done whatever it takes. This competition has been under constant development and refinement since January, resulting in the intended world-class competition that will showcase the talents of the best warriors in the world."

Chandler echoed that sentiment.

"My sincere thanks goes out to everyone who worked to plan this year's competition," he said. "Whether you're assigned to Fort Lee or other nearby commands, I know you have studied, practiced and prepared to be part of the cadre and support staff that will make this event a success very soon. I appreciate your commitment — and your flexibility." ■

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