



PRT, Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills Test Drill Sergeant, AIT Platoon Sergeant Competitors

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester

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The second day of the 2014 Drill Sergeant and AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competitions began much like one would expect, with a five-mile run beginning at 3:45 a.m., followed by a lot of Physical Readiness Training.

At stations circling Darby Field at Fort Jackson, S.C., the 15 competitors were tested on how well they could teach PRT exercises to the young Soldiers waiting for them at each station. Doing the exercises to standard is important for drill sergeants and AIT platoon sergeants, said Staff Sgt. Casey Lowe of A Company, 232nd Medical Battalion, 32nd Medical Brigade, at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Lowe is competing to be AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year.

“PRT is a big part of our job,” he said. “PRT is fairly new to the Army; it’s only been around a few years. A lot of the more veteran and seasoned NCOs, they remember the old-style of PT, and a lot of them have had a hard time implementing PRT into the unit because they don’t get trained to the proper standards. It’s really important

to set that standard right at the beginning so all these privates — the trainees that are coming into the force — they know what right looks like. It’s really important not only for us to know what right is, but also be able to correct it so that the Soldiers can go out to the units and affect the rest of the Army as well.”

The competition tests NCOs on how they train PRT because of its importance to the Army, said Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Dunham of B Company, 187th Ordnance Battalion, at Fort Jackson. Dunham is also competing to be AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year.

“PRT is the most important thing we do as Soldiers,” he said. “It trains our bodies to be able to adapt to any situation. It prevents injuries and it makes us completely physically fit and ready to go into combat. If you are not ready to do that, what’s the point of training on anything else?”

Part of the competition was testing how the drill sergeants and AIT platoon sergeants handled Soldiers falling out of their PRT formations. The competitors were



Staff Sgt. Derek Leonhardt (right) of A Troop, 5th Squadron, 15th Cavalry Regiment, 194th Armored Brigade, at Fort Benning, Ga., trains a group of Soldiers on how to clear a room Tuesday. Leonhardt was being tested on Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills as he strives to be the Drill Sergeant of the Year. (Photos by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)



Staff Sgt. Jonathan Miller (right) of the 787th Military Police Battalion, 14th MP Brigade, at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., instructs Soldiers in Physical Readiness Training on Tuesday. Miller is competing to be Drill Sergeant of the Year.



Staff Sgt. Christopher Croslin of the 95th Training Division, U.S. Army Reserve, Norman, Okla., instructs Soldiers in team formations Tuesday. Croslin is competing to be Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year.



Sgt. 1st Class Alex Montero of the 98th Training Division, U.S. Army Reserve, talks to a Soldier who fell out of his PRT formation. Montero is competing to be Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year.

expected to quickly handle the situation in their own way. Soldiers dropping out of PRT is a situation Dunham said he deals with daily as an AIT platoon sergeant.

“It does come up at least once a day,” he said. “It’s a fairly common situation, but it’s actually fairly easy to fix, too. You just have to take that time to be open minded and understand where they are coming from.”

Sgt. 1st Class Alex Montero of the 98th Training Division, U.S. Army Reserve, is one of two competitors from the 108th Training Command fighting for the title of Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year. He agreed that

helping Soldiers find a way through their problems so they can train is a common and important duty.

“In a [basic combat training] environment, Soldiers come up with a lot of issues,” Montero said. “They are not used to the long days, not being able to call back home. When they are in BCT or the training environment and they come up with a problem back home, it takes their concentration from their training. We want to take care of that problem so they can focus on the training.”

“You have to attack the problem real quick, because if you don’t it starts spreading to other Soldiers,” he said. “So, using your experience as a leader, as an NCO, you come in, try to identify the problem, see if you can find a solution to the problem as soon as possible.”

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Russell of B Battery, 1st Battalion, 78th Field Artillery Regiment, at Fort Sill, Okla., said being an Army recruiter in the past helps him influence Soldiers to do the right thing and get back in formation. Russell is competing to be AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year.

“The one thing that helps me with that is having been a recruiter,” Russell said. “When I was a recruiter, I learned to not force them to do anything they don’t want to do, but guide them on the right path of making the decision on their own. You empower them with the choices in order to get that positive outcome.”

After a morning of instructing in PRT, the competitors spent the afternoon both performing and instructing Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills. Being able to instruct the Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills is critical for drill sergeants, because it is those skills that will keep Soldiers alive in combat, said Staff Sgt. Christopher Croslin of the 95th Training Division, U.S. Army Reserve, at Norman, Okla. Croslin is competing against Montero to be named Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year.

“I believe that with the change in environment that we’re fighting in overseas, the ever-changing Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills are key to what drill sergeants do,” he said. “We’re taking the information from higher

on what's important to train these Soldiers on so they can successfully operate in their new combat units, or whatever unit they get attached to. The tasks they are being taught here are what will keep them alive when they go overseas. And the tasks are ever-changing based on the situation overseas. So as we're getting them handed down, it is imperative that we know the standards on what needs to be taught, and that we get that to the Soldiers, because they are the ones who will soon be going overseas and taking our place."

This the first year that the Drill Sergeant of the Year and AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competitions have been combined. There are six competitors for Drill Sergeant of the Year (with two of them vying for Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the year), and nine competitors for Army AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year. Though all 15 competitors go through the events together, they are judged differently, said Sgt. Maj. Thomas Campbell, the G3/5/7 (operations/plans/training) sergeant major for the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training at Fort Eustis, Va.

"The drill and ceremony station over there is a great example: I can tell from here that's a drill sergeant because he's pitching the module and talking them through it," he said. "When you see a platoon sergeant come up, the platoon sergeant is going to be graded on his ability to execute it and maintain it.

"The drill sergeant takes Physical Readiness Training, Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills and all the common-core tasks and teaches it for the first time to a new Soldier who hasn't done any of it," he said. "When those Soldiers go to AIT, and they learn their skill set,

the AIT platoon sergeant has to maintain what they learned in basic training and keep continuity until they get to their first unit assignment."

Starting in less than a month, the AIT Platoon Sergeant School is expanding from two weeks to match the six weeks drill sergeants go to school. Campbell said the extra weeks were needed to help NCOs make the transition to leading large groups of Soldiers.

"The first three weeks is Phase 1 of both courses, so the drill sergeants and AIT platoon sergeants are going to be learning the exact same things, going through the same training," he said.

"Most of the [military occupational specialties] that have AITs are technical MOSs. So you're taking an NCO out from that skill, and he's a master of a system," Campbell said. "For instance, take a night-vision repair guy — he's been by himself in a shop, repairing equipment in a brigade combat team. He went from private to staff sergeant and *may* have had another Soldier under his watch ... maybe. Now we're going to pull him out and make him an AIT platoon sergeant. We're going to put him front of 50 to 100 privates and tell him, "Figure it out, with no training." Not anymore. We want to try to make that master of systems into a master of formations. So we made the course six weeks to develop that."

But that's coming in the weeks ahead. This week, it's about watching some of the best NCOs in the Army show their stuff.

"This is the best in the Army," Campbell said. "For these guys, just to be picked to compete, it will impact their careers. The three winners from this competi-



Staff Sgt. Casey Lowe of A Company, 232nd Medical Battalion, 32nd Medical Brigade, at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas, makes his way through an obstacle course Tuesday. Lowe is competing to be AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year.



Staff Sgt. Jason Oberle of E Company, 2nd Battalion, 13th Infantry Regiment, at Fort Jackson, S.C., performs first aid during a test Tuesday. Oberle is competing to be Drill Sergeant of the Year.

tion, just from their exposure over the next year, they will be sergeants major, no doubt about it. In the IMT headquarters, we have a huge board with the drill sergeants of the year and the platoon sergeants of the

year since the beginning. Every name on that board, all the way to the beginning — with the exception of the newest ones who haven't made it yet — every one of them made sergeant major.” ■

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