



Staff Sgt. Lindsay Hultman, C Battery, 1st Battalion, 434th Field Artillery Brigade, Fort Sill, Okla., backs under the low wire obstacle Wednesday. Hultman is competing to be drill sergeant of the year.

# NCO Camaraderie Helps Drill Sergeants, AIT Platoon Sergeants Through Competition

*By Jonathan (Jay) Koester*

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**A**s the 2014 Drill Sergeant and AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competitions continued into a third day of strenuous events Wednesday, the NCOs were weary, but they had no opportunity to rest.

After ending a difficult Tuesday with a 10-mile road march, the competitors began things Wednesday with a for-record physical training test. That was just a warm-up for the rest of the day, which included more testing on Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills, a run through a confidence obstacle course, more ruck marching and day – and night-time land navigation.

During testing on Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills, 15 stations were set up Wednesday morning as the competitors took their turns at each one. Two of the stations were set up to test the competitors marksmanship, said Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis Woods, command sergeant major for the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training at Fort Eustis, Va.

“We’ve been beating up their bodies for days now on all these tasks, everything from rope climbing, road marching, physical stress tests, confidence courses, ladders and more,” he said. “Now, they are going



to end up in there trying to shoot. Their bodies have been maxed out, not for one day, but several days. In order to be able to shoot in that condition, they've had to learn how to control themselves before they can control the weapon.

"One of the tasks I really like seeing, though it may appear very mundane, in inspections," Woods said. "As an NCO basic skill, it is critical that we reinforce this throughout the Army. So, the NCOs must do a timed inspection of a group of Soldiers. We're making every NCO give a thorough technical inspection of those Soldiers. The time pressure ensures that they can do it to a high standard. You give anybody enough time, and they'd be able to do it. But, here, it's timed."

Staff Sgt. Lindsay Hultman of C Battery, 1st Battalion, 434th Field Artillery Brigade, at Fort Sill, Okla., is competing to be drill sergeant of the year. As she worked through the 15 stations, she said she has been impressed by the spirit of the competitors.

"I just completed an in-ranks inspection, where we check the Soldiers' uniforms and make sure they are clean and serviceable," Hultman said. "We check that they have haircuts, all that. We've had some written exams, including one on the history of the drill sergeant. We took apart and put back together a couple of the automatic weapons.

"Everybody is pushing each other," she said. "Yesterday, we had the 5-mile run and 10-mile road march, and this morning we had our physical fitness test. Everybody is giving it their all. On the physical tests, nobody is quitting, nobody is giving up. It shows that everybody is determined to be here and determined to win."

Staff Sgt. Jonathan Miller of the 787th Military Police Battalion, 14th MP Brigade, at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., is also competing to be drill sergeant of the year and has also been awed by his competitors.

"I'm truly impressed with the level of competition here," Miller said. "We're representing the best of the best, and we're representing our installations. Each one of the NCOs here, regardless of the category — active component drill sergeants, reserve component drill sergeants and the AIT platoon drill sergeants — each one of them are stellar NCOs. They're putting their best foot forward to represent their installations. As I look across at my competitors, they are really pushing me to be the best that I can. They're pushing me mentally, and they are pushing me physically."



Sgt. 1st Class Joshua McCrudden of C Company, 551st Signal Battalion, 15th Signal Brigade, at Fort Gordon, Ga., instructs Soldiers on the proper way to give the hand salute. McCrudden is competing to be AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year. (Photos by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)



Sgt. 1st Class Charles Sheffield of B Company, 309th Military Intelligence Battalion, 111th MI Brigade, at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., works to assemble an M240 machine gun Wednesday. Sheffield is competing to be AIT platoon sergeant of the year.





Staff Sgt. Christopher Croslin of the 95th Training Division, U.S. Army Reserve, at Norman, Okla., works on putting the parts of an M16 rifle back together Wednesday. Croslin is competing to be named Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year.



Staff Sgt. Jonathan Miller, 787th Military Police Battalion, 14th MP Brigade, Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., teaches a Soldier how to fire an M203 grenade launcher. Miller is competing to be drill sergeant of the year.



Staff Sgt. Derek Leonhardt of A Troop, 5th Squadron, 15th Cavalry Regiment, 194th Armored Brigade, at Fort Benning, Ga., said the camaraderie among the competitors has been nice to see. Leonhardt is competing to be drill sergeant of the year.

“What’s really surprising is how well everyone is getting along,” he said. “Typically at competitions, it’s pretty cut-throat with your competitors. But we’re all motivating each other and pushing each other, and that’s the key of a good NCO.”

Sgt. 1st Class Kenny Smith of D Company, 16th Ordnance Battalion, at Fort Lee, Va., said he has been impressed by the level of professionalism he’s seen as the competition progresses. Smith is competing to be AIT platoon sergeant of the year.

“A part of us being leaders and leading from the front is being physically fit and having the endurance to complete whatever the Army asks us to do,” Smith said. “Everybody here has showed some true grit, pushed through everything, and accomplished some amazing feats. These are definitely some of the best NCOs in the military.”

It’s now down to the wire for the 14 competitors. Four are competing to be the 2014 Drill Sergeant of the Year. Two are competing to be 2014 Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year. And eight are competing to be 2014 AIT Platoon Sergeant of the year. (The competition started with nine AIT platoon sergeants, but one was forced to leave for medical reasons.)

During the day Thursday, the 14 competitors will go through a formal board. Then, on Thursday night, the three winners will be announced. Check the *NCO Journal* on Thursday night to see who came out victorious. It’s an announcement the competitors are looking forward to with anticipation, said Sgt. 1st Class Joshua McCrudden of C Company, 551st Signal Battalion, 15th Signal Brigade, at Fort Gordon, Ga. He is competing to be AIT platoon sergeant of the year.

[The competition] is starting to wear on us today,” McCrudden said Wednesday. “We’re on our reserves right now. But we’re getting through it, staying motivated, and looking forward to seeing who wins this thing.” ■



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