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Best Warrior Competition Keeps Soldiers Guessing and Moving

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Fort A.P. Hill, Va. – Day 3 of the U.S. Army’s Best Warrior Competition began with a brisk autumn wind and a mystery for the Soldiers and Noncommissioned Officers vying for the coveted title of Best of the Best in the Army.

“Adaptability has really been tested,” said Spc. Travis Shooks, a healthcare specialist representing the 517th Geospatial Engineer Detachment, U.S. Army Africa. “You don’t know what you’re doing until two minutes before they tell you.”

The competition is shrouded in mystery for the competitors. An ominous white board, in the common area of a building, tells competitors where and when to be and not much else.

“They keep you on your toes and make you react quickly, and you will make more mistakes than you

would if you had time to plan it out over an hour or day,” Shooks said. “That’s a good way to train because in the real world you’re going to have to be able to react on your toes.”

The mystery of the coming events did not change with Day 3 of the competition, as competitors were broken up into three groups. They arrived at each location with the equipment they chose to meet the unexpected.

“You never know what’s going on or how you or the competitors around you are doing,” said Spc. Emanuel Moore, a radio and communications security repairer representing 1st Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), U.S. Army Special Operations Command. “They keep the scores for each event a secret, so it always makes you compete as hard as you can.”



Photo courtesy of 55th Combat Camera

The three groups were in store for a round robin whirlwind of events, which featured chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear scenarios at the U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Training Center; weapons qualifications at a range, utilizing several different weapon systems and a live fire stress shoot lane; and ending with a casualty evaluation on another range.

"This is a pretty tough competition to even get into for some," Shooks said. "Some people have to go through three to five competitions just to get here, so I knew it would be challenging."

After an event was completed, groups were immediately shuttled to the next. For one group of competitors, the events unfolded as the sun rose with weapons qualification for the M4 carbine, the M249 light machine gun and the M9 pistol.

The rest period, which immediately followed, included a graded media-training event, which was designed to simulate the stress of conducting an on-camera interview

with the civilian media. Hours before, competitors completed a night land navigation course.

Moving on to another range, competitors were engaged in suppressive live-fire scenarios in which they responded to pop-up, mobile and robotic targets as smoke grenades and explosions detonated. In addition to the timed stress shoot course, the competitors responded to a simulated casualty, requiring immediate medical care.

"They kept us moving," Moore said.

The final stop on the brutal list of events was the scenario in the "mock city" at the U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Training Center, complete with street intersections, a church, a school, a train station and underground tunnels. Competitors were given a route of execution to follow, which led them through circular tunnels where they had to don their gas masks in a timed period. After reaching their final destination, competitors completed a SALUTE, or a size, activity, location, unit, time and equipment, report.

The competitors looked exhausted, but an essay was still due by the end the day.

Sgt. Michael Hooks, a horizontal construction engineer assigned to Headquarters, 130th Engineer Brigade, 8th Theater Sustainment Command, from Metropolis, Ill., came to the Best Warrior Competition not to beat other Soldiers but to better himself.

"The motivation in a competition gives you that extra push to see what you really have," Hooks said. "I want to be the best noncommissioned officer I can be." ■

Sgt. Brian Godette and Sgt. 1st Class Robert Jordan, both of the 382nd Public Affairs Detachment, contributed to this report.

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