



Photo from Day 2 of the 2015 Best Warrior Competition. Photo courtesy of 55th Combat Camera.

Competitors Face New Challenges from SMA at Best Warrior

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It didn't take long for competitors at this year's Best Warrior Competition to see that the 2015 event is different.

Day 2 of the competition opened with the standard Army Physical Fitness Test on Monday, but after that, the 26 competitors vying to be named NCO of the Year or Soldier of the Year donned their uniforms and assault packs and ran to an obstacle course the likes of which many of them had never experienced.

Competitors said they had to improvise to get through several of the obstacles, because they couldn't rely on practiced techniques. Sgt. 1st Class Jesse K. Murray, an infantryman representing U.S. Army Africa, is a second-year competitor and a former drill sergeant. "None of the other competitions I've participated in have had all-out obstacle courses such as this," he said.

Murray and his fellow competitors listed the incline wall, the weaver, the ladder and pull, the up-and-over, the tough-nut and the vault among the most challenging obstacles on the NCO course. After the obstacle course, a mystery event required participants assemble an M4 Carbine rifle, an M249 squad automatic weapon and an M9 pistol from a box of mixed parts inside a camouflaged shelter.

After the obstacle course, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey spoke with the competitors and explained the overhauled competition.

"This is unlike anything you've seen in the past. Because I'm trying to build physically fit, mentally tough Soldiers, that have knowledge, skills, and attributes capable of winning in complex roles in the future," the 15th sergeant major of the Army said.

This year's Best Warrior competition is being held at Fort A.P. Hill, Va., for the first time; the new events are more physically demanding than in previous years; and the Asymmetric Warfare Group is in charge of Soldiers and the competition for the first time.



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“This competition needs to reinforce those base Soldier skills, and that’s the critical importance of it,” Dailey said. “Things like PT [physical training] are important, weapons qualifications is important, being able to shoot and move on the battlefield is critically important.

“We have to reinforce what’s important,” he said. “I can’t recognize the Soldier as being the best Soldier or best NCO in the Army and you fail a basic Soldier task.”

Dailey gave the competitors a bit of encouragement, too.

“There’s a whole lot of Soldiers who aren’t here, but you are,” he said. “It’s because you care, because you want to go the extra distance, and I know that and appreciate it. . . . I’m extremely proud of what you’re doing. I wish I could give you all the title of Best Warrior, I really do.” Not long after the sergeant major of the Army’s brief, the competitors were transported to the wet, muddy forest areas of Fort A.P. Hill to perform a day and a night land navigation course.

Staff Sgt. Kevin M. Simpson, a special bandsman assigned to the U.S. Army Band Pershing’s Own, representing U.S. Army Military District of Washington, said that though he did not feel comfortable at the start of his journey into the Best Warrior Competition, he has already had some training experience at Fort A.P. Hill. Simpson hopes this might give him a slight advantage. “I definitely felt a bit like a fish out of water. It was me and a bunch of infantry guys and MPs [Military Police],” Simpson said. “I found out after the first day or two that we were all just Soldiers.” ■

Sgt. Brian Godette, 382nd Public Affairs Detachment, contributed to this story.

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