



Photos from the first day of the 2015 Best Warrior Competition are by Spc. Jamill Ford, Spc. Hayley Gardner, Sgt. Henrique Luiz de Holleben, Spc. Sandy A. Barrientos and Pfc. Michael Parnell.

2015 Best Warrior Competition Begins with Essay, Weapons Range

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Soldiers, competitors, warriors. Whichever title chosen, their arrival Sunday at the Fort A.P. Hill Army training installation in Virginia marked the beginning of the U.S. Army's 2015 Best Warrior Competition.

Sgt. Maj. Steven Payton, Headquarters of the Department of Army G 3/5/7 sergeant major, had one message for all the Soldiers: "Compete, compete, compete!"

Not even the threat of a hurricane affecting the east coast could stop the 13 Noncommissioned Officers and 13 Soldiers from 13 different major Army commands from competing in an event that emphasizes excellence, professionalism and adaptability.

As the Soldiers stepped off the bus at the Asymmetrical Warfare Training Center with mixed looks of excitement, nervousness and curiosity, Payton asked them all a question.

"Is there anybody out there who doesn't want to be here right now?" Payton asked.

The group remained silent, with only the wind blowing outside creating a sound.

"Exactly!" Payton said. "You represent what is great about this Army of ours."

The competitors, accompanied by their unit sponsors, looked across at each other before focusing back on Payton who gave them his expectations.

"We know that you are the best in the business and we expect to see some dynamic things this week," Payton said.

The winners of the competition will become ambassadors of the Army according to Payton, with the distinguished title of the best noncommissioned officer and the best Soldier across the Army.



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“It’s going to challenge you, and that’s why you are here,” Payton said.

The competitors gave no illusion to the challenges ahead of them.

“I’m just trying to take it all in right now, and get my mind right,” said Spc. Adam Walton, a Army musician representing the Army Material Command.

“I know it’s going to be rough. The weather is rough, the terrain looks pretty rough, so I’m just getting ready for it all,” Walton said.

For many in the group, there was an anticipation to get the events — many of which are a mystery to the competitors — underway.

“I’m feeling a little anxious,” said Sgt. James French, a military satellite communications systems operator representing the Space and Missile Defense Command.

“I like to compete. I’m a big competitor, so I just want to get it going,” French said.

These competitors came to represent their respective units and commands, winning best warrior competitions at other levels of their command before arriving.

“This is a good group and looks like there will be strong competition,” Walton said.

While winning is the goal, the benefits exceed the immediate victory aspirations. Being able to get to this level also represents an opportunity for growth for the Soldiers participating and their units back home.

“For me, being a noncommissioned officer, I’ll be able to take this experience back to my Soldiers,” French said. “Not many Soldiers get to experience this, so I want to take it back to them and hopefully improve them down the line.”

Competitors began the essay and weapon-zeroing portion of the competition Sunday afternoon. While the essay portion is essential to the soldiers’ score, they were most interested in beginning the weapons portion, zeroing an M4 carbine on a 25-meter indoor range.

Sgt. Michael Hooks, a horizontal construction engineer from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 130th Engineer Brigade, 8th Theater Sustainment Command, representing U.S. Army Pacific Command, was among the first to finish zeroing his weapon during the first qualifying event of the competition.

“I’m feeling good so far,” Hooks said. “I think shooting is something everyone enjoys.” ■

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