

'If you're not bleeding, sweating and pushed to your brink ... then you didn't do enough'

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Maj. Gen. Anthony Funkhouser, commanding general of the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training (from left); Sgt. Maj. Kevin Artis, the G3/5/7 (operations/plans/training) sergeant major for the CIMT; and Staff Sgt. Jacob Miller, 2015 Drill Sergeant of the Year, look on as Staff Sgt. Tyler Cushing conducts a disassemble/assemble/functions check on a weapon. Cushing is competing to be the 2016 Drill Sergeant of the Year. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. James Seals)

After a formal board interview and written test Tuesday night, the 2016 Drill Sergeant and AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competitions kicked into high gear Wednesday, with the 15 competitors taking on challenges like a physical training test, day and night land navigation, basic rifle marksmanship and teaching new recruits.

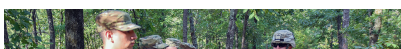
Sgt. Maj. Kevin Artis, the G3/5/7 (operations/plans/training) sergeant major for the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training at Fort Eustis, Virginia, said he told the competitors their days and nights would be challenging through Friday, but he hoped they would stay motivated.



Sgt. 1st Class Martin Delaney, competing for 2016 Drill Sergeant of the Year, reaches the last part of the hand grenade course, in which he had to name each grenade in the case and its function. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. James Seals)

"I expect the Soldiers here to do their best and strive to be the best they can be," Artis said. "I expect them to show that they are top professionals, not only in the NCO Corps, but in their respective jobs.

"These are the top trainers in the Army, so we expect them to adhere to that standard," Artis continued. "We expect them to be very professional and to execute all the tasks and requirements that we have laid out for them. Most of the tasks will be surprises to them. They don't know what they are going to run into when they get here."





Staff Sgt. Daniel Barsi, competing for 2016 Drill Sergeant of the Year, instructs Basic Combat Training Soldiers in changing the direction of a column, column left, Sept. 7 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. James Seals)

Staff Sgt. Dominique Curry of C Company, 1-81 Armor Battalion, at Fort Benning, Georgia, is one of the nine NCOs competing to be named 2016 Advanced Individual Training Platoon Sergeant of the Year. As Artis predicted, Curry said the unforeseeable nature of the tasks he was being put through made the competition difficult.

"It's definitely a challenge," Curry said. "Every day is a surprise. You really don't know what to expect, so you are definitely on edge all the time. It's a huge opportunity, not only for myself, but to represent Fort Benning. I'm definitely humbled. I'm out here to do my best and see where that takes me."



Staff Sgt. Brandon Laspe dons nuclear, biological and chemical protective gear during the 2016 AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competition Sept. 7 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. James Seals)

Staff Sgt. Keith Lovely of D Company, 1-222 Aviation Regiment, 128th Aviation Brigade, at Fort Eustis, Virginia, is also competing to be AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year. Despite the surprises, he said he could predict one thing about the coming days: The events were only going to get more difficult.

"It's going great so far," Lovely said. "A lot of good NCOs out here competing against each other. It's a lot of fun. I foresee it getting more difficult. I'm not saying it's not already difficult, but we still have two-and-a-half more days ahead of us, so I think it's going to get rougher."

Maj. Gen. Anthony Funkhouser, commanding general of the Center for Initial Military Training, was at the Hand Grenade Assault Course on Wednesday, watching as the competitors went through different stations demonstrating their knowledge of their craft, as well as their ability to pass that knowledge down to new Soldiers.




Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Wood, competing for 2016 AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year, conducts an in-ranks inspection Sept. 7 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. James Seals)

"It's amazing the level of effort the sergeants put into this, to be very technically and tactically competent," Funkhouser said. "You walk around here and you see them assemble and disassemble weapons, all the knowledge that we ask of them, the physical ability to do their mission, warrior tasks and battle drills. They are great role models. What's really neat is that we have some trainees here from reception station — who haven't even received basic training yet — learning from these guys as their role models."

Staff Sgt. Tyler Cushing of C Company, 1-46 Infantry Battalion, 194th Armor Brigade, at Fort Benning, was one of the four NCOs competing for the title of 2016 Drill Sergeant of the Year. He talked about the preparation necessary for the difficult days ahead.

"I spent months preparing once I was selected as post drill sergeant of the year," Cushing said. "Preparation was pretty grueling. A lot of physical training, a lot of mental training and a lot of studying. I feel very fortunate being able to compete against all these great drill sergeants."





Staff Sgt. Emanuel Olivencia camouflages his helmet during the 2016 AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competition Sept. 7 at the Hand Grenade Assault Course on Fort Jackson, South Carolina. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. James Seals)

Sgt. Ryan Moldovan, E Company, 1-390th Infantry Regiment, 98th Training Division, 108th Training Command, is one of the two NCOs competing to be the 2016 Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year. He also spoke about his preparation in the past few months.

"I did a lot of studying, a lot of reading, reading deep into the regulations, looking paragraph by paragraph, looking into the weapons regulations and seeing what every little piece is called," Moldovan said. "I did lots of running, lots of foot marching. I try to get to the range as much as I can, but it's hard to because of my civilian job" as a UPS delivery driver in Canton, Ohio.

"I'm just glad to be here, glad to be competing, happy to represent the Reserves," he said. "All of the NCOs who are here are great. They're the best of the best; I'm proud to be counted among them."

Staff Sgt. Mark Mercer, 2015 Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year, helped organize this year's competition. He said his message to this year's group was to give "110 percent" during each event.

"Don't let Friday come and you say, 'I didn't leave it all out there at Fort Jackson,'" Mercer said. "Because if you're not bleeding, sweating and pushed to your brink after the last event, then you didn't do enough. You need to come out here and give it your all."

Competing for the title of 2016 Drill Sergeant of the Year are:

- Sgt. 1st Class Martin Delaney
- Staff Sgt. Tyler Cushing
- Staff Sgt. Dustin Randall
- Staff Sgt. Daniel Barsi

Competing for the title of 2016 Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year are:

- Sgt. 1st Class Jason Scott
- Sgt. Ryan Moldovan

Competing for the title of 2016 AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year are:

- Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Wood
- Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Cummings
- Staff Sgt. Keith Lovely
- Staff Sgt. Jacob Meyers
- Staff Sgt. Dominique Curry
- Staff Sgt. Christopher Johnson
- Staff Sgt. Brandon Laspe
- Staff Sgt. Emanuel Olivencia
- Staff Sgt. Jonathan Sisk