2011 BEST WARRIOR COMPETITION

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Cpl. Ryan Barger, representing the 200th Military Police Command, scans his sector during the M4 rifle night fire qualification event at the 2011 Army Reserve Best Warrior competition at Fort McCoy, Wis. on June 22. A steady rain made the task all the more difficult as Warriors had to fire on targets at distances ranging from 50-300 meters. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY L. HALE, ARMY RESERVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Sgt. 1st Class Daniel G. Urquia with the Army Reserve careers Division from McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., did a take-down move during combatives. PHOTO BY SPC. BENJAMIN JOHN, 364TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER

It's a test of the limits of both mind and body.
But to emerge best of the best, you must overcome...

THE LONG, HARD ROAD

STORY BY TIMOTHY L. HALE
ARMY RESERVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Cpl. Ryan Barger keeps moving forward during the 10km road march at the Army Reserve Best Warrior competition at Fort McCoy, Wis. on June 22. Barger, a native of Belding, Mich., represented the 200th Military Police Command at this year's competition. The Warriors had 2-1/2 hours to complete the course carrying a full combat load along a paved course with moderate to steep road inclines. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY L. HALE, ARMY RESERVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Staff Sgt. Bret Klatt eyes the skies during the 10km road march. Klatt, a native of Rochester, N.Y., represented the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command at this year's competition. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY L. HALE, ARMY RESERVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Sgt. Christopher Couchot keeps a steady pace count during the 10km road march at the Army Reserve Best Warrior competition at Fort McCoy, Wis. on June 22. Couchot, a native of Sidney, Ohio, represented the 335th Signal Command at this year's competition. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY L. HALE, ARMY RESERVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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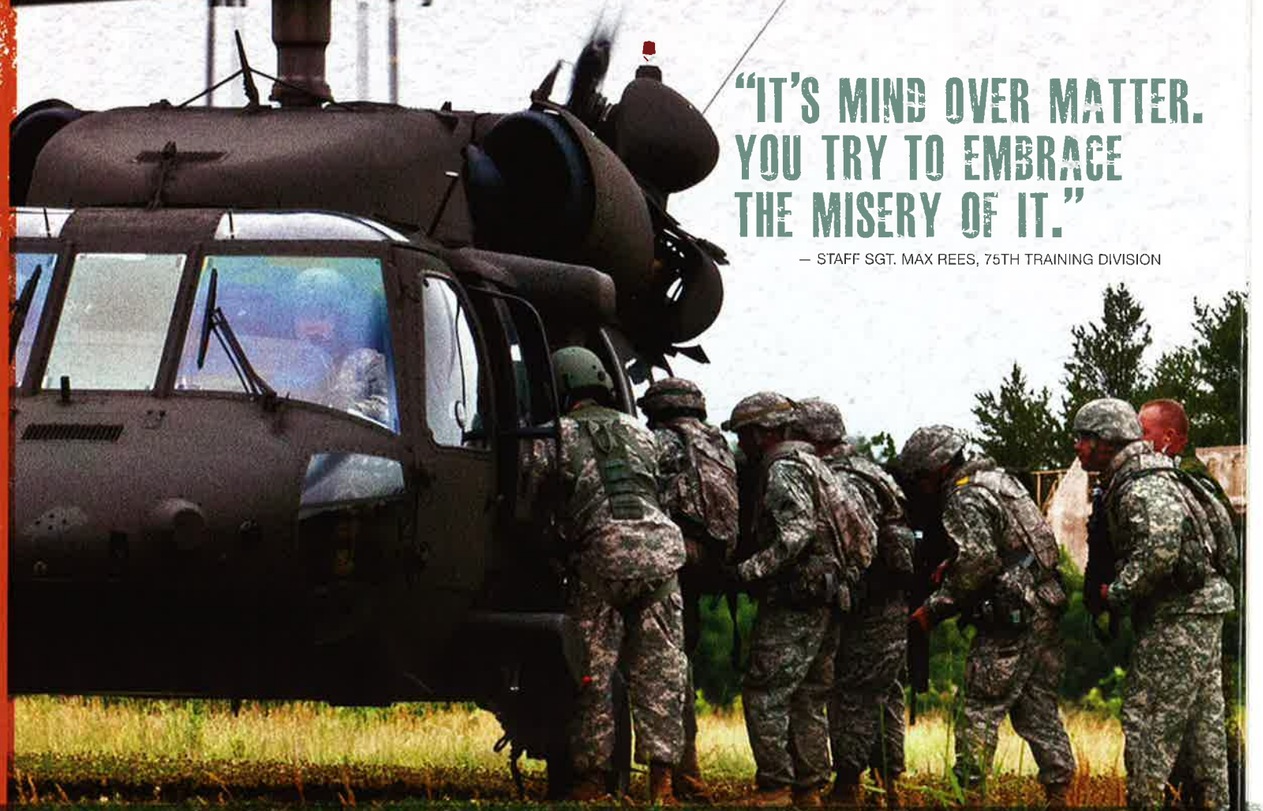
2011 BEST WARRIOR COMPETITION

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Spc. Jessica R. Storch grabs a cup of water after completing the 2-mile portion of the Army Physical Fitness Test at the 2011 United States Army Reserve Command Best Warrior competition at Ft. McCoy, Wis. PHOTO BY SPC. BENJAMIN JOHN, 364TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER

Command Sgt. Maj. Michael D. Schultz (right) offers words of encouragement to Sgt. Le'Fate Jones, a information technology specialist, 78th Training Division, Ft. Dix, N.J. (left) during the 10km road march at the 2011 USARC Best Warrior competition on June 22. Shultz waited for 43 competitors at the finish line as they all completed the foot march within 3 hours. PHOTO BY SGT. GREGORY WILLIAMS, 78TH TRAINING DIVISION

FORT McCOY, Wis. – Forty-three of the Army Reserve's best, brightest and strongest Warriors were put to the test, not only against each other, but Mother Nature got in on the action as well during this year's Best Warrior competition held June 20-24.



Soldiers participating in the Exfiltration event at the 2011 Army Reserve Best Warrior competition at Fort McCoy Wis., load into a UH-64 Blackhawk helicopter on June 23. The Exfiltration event gives Soldiers a good idea what to expect while loading, riding, and exiting an aircraft in a combat zone. PHOTO BY SPC. CLIFF COY, 416TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS

"IT'S MIND OVER MATTER. YOU TRY TO EMBRACE THE MISERY OF IT."

– STAFF SGT. MAX REES, 75TH TRAINING DIVISION

Periods of thunderstorms and rain nearly every day added a completely different element of difficulty to the weeklong competition. To make matters worse, during the night-into-day land navigation course, it even hailed.

But when the clouds parted and the sun set on the week, Cpl. Ryan Barger and Staff Sgt. Christopher Couchot survived the elements and all the physical and mental tasks to be named the Soldier and Non-commissioned Officer of the Year respectively.

"Forty-three competitors…we have the cream of the crop this year," said Command Sgt. Major Michael D. Schultz, the Army Reserve's top enlisted Soldier. "This is a higher level and caliber than we've ever seen."

Schultz said it is unfortunate that not everyone will be able to claim the bragging rights of being the "best of the best," but there is something else much bigger at stake in this competition.

"It's about taking what you learn here and setting the example and mentoring other Soldiers when they return to their units," he said.

FULL FORCE NATURE

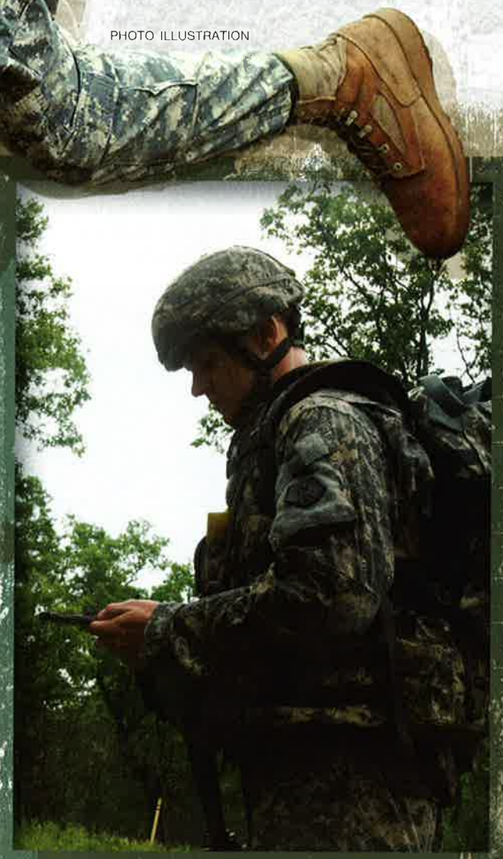
If there was one underlying theme this year compared to previous years, it was the weather. Pretty much every tactical event was conducted in rain and surprisingly cool temperatures.

Although both Barger and Couchot said they are honored to represent the Army Reserve at the Department of the Army competition and are looking forward to competing later this year, they were not alone in their sentiments for the often miserable conditions, especially during the land navigation course.

"Land navigation was a long story," Couchot said with a slight grin. "I plotted my first point and took off at night—15 minutes later, I lost my protractor so I walked around for about two hours looking for my first point."

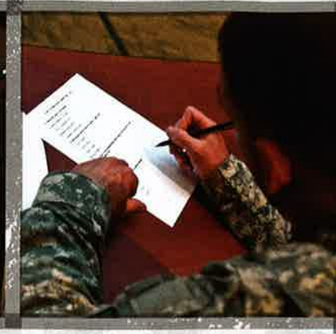
Sgt. Daniel Florez represented the 416th Theater Engineer Command in the 2011 Best Warrior competition at Ft. McCoy, Wis. He enlisted in the Army Reserve to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. SPC. BENJAMIN JOHN, 364TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION



Spc. Christopher Lamp, representing the 7th CSC out of Germany, checks his compass before continuing to his next point during the land navigation event at the Army Reserve Best Warrior competition on Fort McCoy, Wis., on June 21. PHOTO BY SGT. 1ST CLASS MARISOL HERNANDEZ, 416TH THEATER ENGINEER COMMAND

2011 BEST WARRIOR COMPETITION



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Staff Sgt. Janine Smeltz smiles after forcing her opponent, Sgt. Jacob Probst, to 'tap out' during the Modern Army Combatives tournament. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY L. HALE, ARMY RESERVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Spc. Gregory A. Thompson, 369th Minimal Care Detachment, Sharronville, Ohio, enters a room during a dry run during the Shoothouse event. Soldiers do a dry run to make sure they are prepared and safety concious when they enter the event with live rounds. PHOTO BY SPC. TRUE THAO, 364TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER

A Soldier takes a 25 question multiple choice exam which must be finished in under an hour and is used to test their knowledge about a wide variety of Army topics. PHOTO BY SPC. CLIFF COY, 416TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Couchot, representing the 335th Signal Command, said that after waiting for the sun to come up, he was able to find all of six of his points within the six-hour time limit by using terrain association, negotiating elevation changes across the course ranging from 600-1,300 feet. Couple that with the driving rain, hail and thick forests, it made for a daunting course.

Barger, representing the 200th Military Police Command, may have won the junior enlisted title, but he said the land navigation was his least favorite event.

"That was a really tough course," Barger said. "We started out in pitch black…it really got the best of me."

But one event does not necessarily make or break a Best Warrior. As Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz said during the awards ceremony, "There are no losers in this competition—hands down," the Chief of the Army Reserve said.

Staff Sgt. Matthew Easly, 807th Medical Deployment Support Command, prepares to plot a waypoint during the Land Navigation. A driving rain and strong winds added an additional element of difficulty to the event that started at 3 a.m. and finished six hours later. PHOTO BY TIMOTHY L. HALE, ARMY RESERVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Spc. Jessica R. Storch with the United States Army Hospital Detachment from Fort Wainwright Alaska, reacts to a simulated Improvised Explosive Device during the Bounding Overwatch event. PHOTO BY SPC. CLIFF COY, 416TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS

"Every one of you has strengths in a certain area. When you bring all those strengths together then you make a powerful team. You gave it everything you got. Nobody walks away from here as a loser."

SUPPORTING CAST

Staff Sgt. Janine Smeltz, representing the 377th Theater Sustainment Command, was this year's top M4 rifle qualifier. Smeltz said she would entertain the thought of coming back next year—but as a sponsor. "I would love to take my leadership skills and train next year's Warrior (for our command)."

Smeltz, this year's only Bronze Star award recipient in the competition, was quick to point out the event support staff and their efforts to make this year's competition a success.

"The hardest event was the M9 pistol qualification mystery event," she said. "But the training cadré took the time to train us and because of that I was able to compete further in the other events. Great props to the support staff."

And her thoughts about that land navigation course?

"I could have spent the first hour on the bus and got the same results. I found my way back in time and that's my story and I'm sticking to it!" she said with a laugh.

Staff Sgt. Max Rees, representing the 75th Training Division, probably summed up the land navigation the best.

"It's mind over matter, you try to embrace the misery of it," he said smiling. "I had a desk job for awhile and I'd trade a cold and wet night in the forest by myself for a desk job any day."

"THE LEVEL OF COMPETITION HERE IS TOUGH. THE EXPERIENCE HAS MADE ME A BETTER SOLDIER....WE PUSHED OURSELVES HARDER THAN WE THOUGHT WE COULD."

– SPC. KYLE MCLAFFERTY, 377TH THEATER SUSTAINMENT COMMAND

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Spc. Ivan Pimentel with the 5th Brigade, 75th Division form Camp Parks, Calif., shot his M9 target during a mystery event of the 2011 United States Army Reserve Command's Best Warrior competition at Fort McCoy, Wis., on June 22. PHOTO BY SPC. LINDSEY A. SCHULTE, 364TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER

2011 BEST WARRIOR COMPETITION

LEFT: Warriors toe to line at the beginning of the 2-mile portion of the APFT at the 2011 United States Army Reserve Command Best Warrior competition at Fort McCoy, Wis. PHOTO BY SPC. BENJAMIN JOHN, 364TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER

BELOW LEFT: 43 Soldiers start the running portion of the Army APFT test at the 2011 USARC Best Warrior competition on June 26. The APFT test tested the competitors on their cardiovascular strength. PHOTO BY SGT. GREGORY WILLIAMS, 78TH TRAINING DIVISION

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

BECOMING A BETTER SOLDIER

Spc. Kyle McLafferty, representing the 377th Theater Sustainment Command, had support from his Family during the week. His brother Sgt. Sean McLafferty served as his sponsor.

"The level of competition here is tough," Kyle said. "Everyone here is extremely good at Soldiering. The experience has made me a better Soldier because it was challenging and we pushed ourselves harder than we thought we could."

The brothers are hoping to swap roles next year with Kyle sponsoring his older brother Sean.

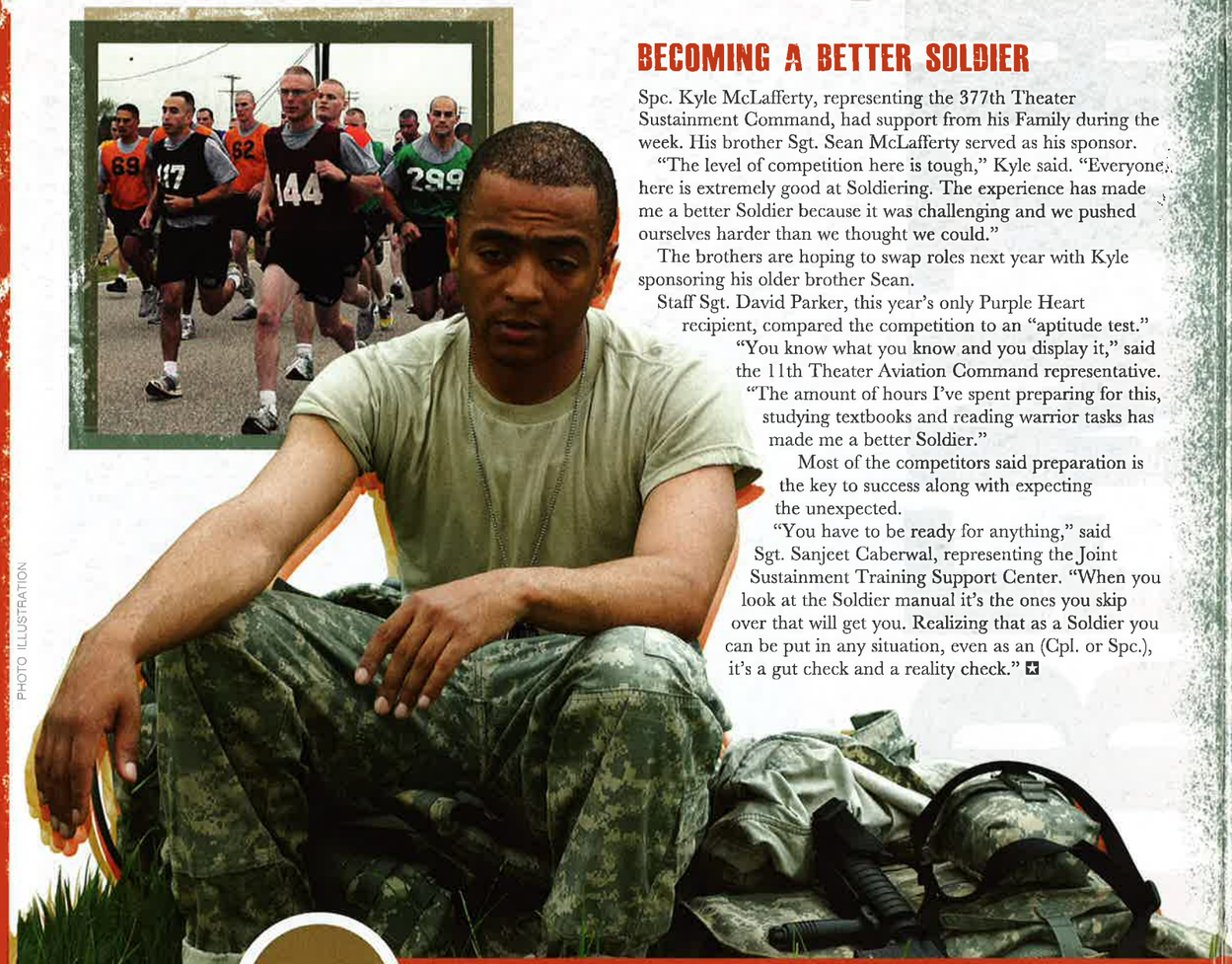
Staff Sgt. David Parker, this year's only Purple Heart recipient, compared the competition to an "aptitude test."

"You know what you know and you display it," said the 11th Theater Aviation Command representative.

"The amount of hours I've spent preparing for this, studying textbooks and reading warrior tasks has made me a better Soldier."

Most of the competitors said preparation is the key to success along with expecting the unexpected.

"You have to be ready for anything," said Sgt. Sanjeet Caberwal, representing the Joint Sustainment Training Support Center. "When you look at the Soldier manual it's the ones you skip over that will get you. Realizing that as a Soldier you can be put in any situation, even as an (Cpl. or Spc.), it's a gut check and a reality check."



Spc. Le'Fate Jones with the 78th Training Division Operations from Fort McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., relaxes after a 10km road march. PHOTO BY SPC. TRUE THAO, 364TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER

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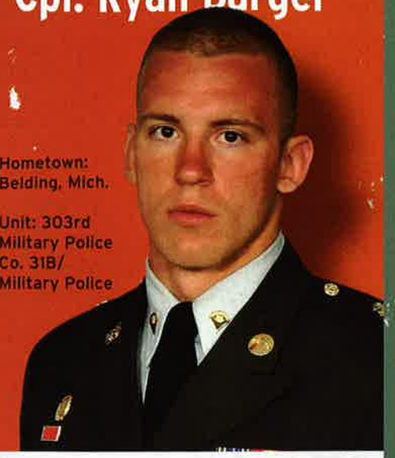
JUNIOR ENLISTED WINNER

Cpl. Ryan Barger



Hometown: Belding, Mich.

Unit: 303rd Military Police Co. 31B/ Military Police

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S WINNERS!

BEST OF THE BEST

NCO WINNER

Sgt. Christopher Couchot

Hometown: Sidney, Ohio

Unit: B Co., 98th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, 25B/Information Technology Specialist

Canadians Get First-Hand Look at the Army Reserve's Best

STORY BY TIMOTHY L. HALE, ARMY RESERVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

FORT McCOY, Wis. – The prospect of honing Soldier skills at a future international-level competition is what brought two Canadian senior enlisted advisors to observe this year's Best Warrior competition.

Chief Warrant Officer Bill Darling, incoming sergeant major for Canada's Landforce Training and Doctrine System, and Chief Warrant Officer Dino Luberti, the outgoing sergeant major, visited Fort McCoy at the invitation of Command Sgt. Maj. Michael D. Schultz.

After noting the similarities between skills and requirements of both armies, Darling and Luberti commented on the competition and the performance of the 43 Best Warrior candidates they had observed through three days of competition.

"Your Soldiers are stellar," Luberti said. "The quality of their instructors and mentors has been instrumental in what has been done in this competition. My hat tips to them."

Schultz is hopeful that next year's Best Warrior is a combined event with Americans and Canadians participating.

"We want to see if there is something that we can do between the Canadian enlisted and NCOs comparative to what we do as U.S. Soldiers in a combined event next year," Schultz said.

He added that he would eventually like to expand the competition to include military members from the American, British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Armies' Program, or as it's known by its shorter name, the ABCA Program.

"Our Soldiers would not only be competing against themselves and their commands but also with other nations – our NATO brothers that we're serving with (overseas)," he said.

Darling noted the skill of today's Soldiers. "This is a very competent, very professional, very well organized competition and that reflects on every Soldier here whether they're a competitor, a sponsor and a mentor, or whether it's the staff associated with hosting and running this competition.

"It's comforting to know that both forces can work together towards the same values that both countries share," Luberti said. "The training between the two countries is very similar, compatible, realistic and relevant."

LEFT: Chief Warrant Officer Bill Darling, incoming Sgt. Maj. for Canada's Land Force Training and Doctrine.

Chief Warrant Officer Dino Luberti, outgoing Sgt. Maj. for Canada's Land Force Training and Doctrine.

In the future, Darling believes a joint venture on this scale is good for both nations.

"You can share ideas back and forth," he said. "In the long run it's going to make both of our forces stronger and better. That better serves the citizenry of our countries. We're looking forward to the opportunity to come down here next year and compete."

PHOTOS BY COMMAND SGT. MAJ. LORI SCHLAFER, 364TH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER