



2011 Best CBRN Warrior Competition

Story and photos by **DAVID CROZIER**

Dragon Soldiers compete for top honors

Sgt. Royce Sneath (left) and Sgt. Christopher Cox of the 110th Chemical Battalion, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., don their mission-oriented protective posture suits during the land navigation/warrior tasks portion of the Best CBRN Warrior Competition, held June 12–18 at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.



“Battle is the most magnificent competition in which a human being can indulge. It brings out all that is best; it removes all that is base. All men are afraid of battle. The coward is the one who lets his fear overcome his sense of duty. Duty is the essence of manhood.”

— Gen. George S. Patton

While Patton was talking specifically of the battle of war, competition within the Army occurs in many other forms. Battling your peers in a healthy contest also takes courage and brings out the best in all who participate.

Starting in basic training, Soldiers strive to be the best, to outdo their peers and earn the esteem that comes with knowing and being acknowledged as the best of the best. This competitive spirit continues throughout one’s career at the unit, organizational, division and Army level — Soldier/NCO of the Quarter and Year; Best Warrior, Best Sapper, Best Ranger, Drill Sergeant of the Year and so on. The list is large and the rewards many.

Enter the Dragon — “Dragon Soldiers” — that is, and the Best CBRN (Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear) Warrior Competition.

Held June 12–18, at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., home of the Chemical Corps and the U.S. Army CBRN School, the competition pits Chemical Corps Soldiers against one another in a week-long event that culminates with the Green Dragon Ball, where the winners are announced.

Formerly known as the “Dragon’s Peak” competition, it was

only within the last two years the competition moved from an individual to a team concept, something that the Chemical Corps command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. Ted Lopez, said is the “nature of the beast” for CBRN warriors.

“Everything we do as a CBRN warrior requires a team approach. At any sensitive site exploitation, you will always be at a minimum of pairs. Most of our chemical readiness teams, any kind of teams we have, there is more than one individual,” Lopez said. “That is why the competition is done in teams, so that we practice what we do in the field. Most of our tasks require another Soldier to be there to do it with you. If you do [decontamination], you can’t do it by yourself. If you do a reconnaissance, you can’t do it by yourself.”

Lopez said the competition is also a great way for the leadership to see how the corps is keeping up with the ever-changing CBRN environment.

“That is part of what we are doing with this competition — to capitalize on all the best things that we do as CBRN warriors. When we go through this weeklong process, it gives us a good look at the corps — where we are technically, physically and, most importantly, where our warrior tasks stand within our corps,” he said. “So, we force the field to do a lot of training so we can evaluate what we are doing here at the schoolhouse and to see how they do under different environments.”

This year’s competition started out with 22 teams aligned under the 20th Support Command at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., and assigned to the 48th Chemical Brigade at Fort Hood, Texas. These organizations are scattered across the Army in various companies and battalions, providing support to joint and Army force commanders, and include Soldiers from private first class to first lieutenant.

As at other Army competitions, day one began with the obligatory Army Physical Fitness Test at 4:30 a.m. There, the competitors showed their mettle, performing push-ups, sit-ups and running two miles.

Hitting all strides during the APFT, Spc. Jason Meffley of the 83rd Chemical Battalion at Fort Polk, La., led all competitors in the run sprinting home in 12 minutes, 29 seconds. By the end of this portion of the competition, only 20 teams advanced to the next challenge.

With only minutes to compose themselves after the PT test, the competitors were whisked away to Fort Leonard Wood’s physical endurance confidence course. Team by team, they navigated 20 obstacles, which included: the low crawl, horizontal ladder, low bar, low barrier, cargo net,



Spc. Brandon Shissler (center) and Spc. Jason Meffley, 83rd Chemical Battalion at Fort Polk, La., attend to a mock casualty who has been exposed to a chemical agent. The pair had to treat and evacuate the casualty before completing a sensitive site exploitation and assessment at the Chemical Defense Facility. Live agents were present in the room, adding to the realism of the competition.



Sgt. 1st Class Antonio Diaz (left) and Pfc. Lloyd Gray of the 61st Chemical Company, 23rd Chemical Battalion at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., use an M17 lightweight decontamination system to decontaminate a humvee during day four of the competition. The pair later had to perform unmasking procedures using the M256 chemical agent detector kit, all while in mission-oriented protective posture

tunnels, balancing on a log, rope bridge, rope swing, rope climb, low wire and tire step course.

“In looking at the score cards, we had one team miss four obstacles, one missed two and one team did not do the ropes,” said Staff Sgt. Keith Elam of the 84th Chemical Battalion, 3rd Chemical Brigade, Fort Leonard Wood, and the NCO in charge of the course challenge. “I can understand that. They just got through doing a PT test, and then they come to the obstacle course where you have got to have a lot of stamina. It’s tough.”

Sgt. Royce Sneath of the 110th Chemical Battalion at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., agreed.

“I ain’t going to lie to you. I am 38 years old, and that was tough,” he said. “It is hard on us older gentlemen. But, I loved it — loved every minute of it.”

The course took its toll, and a few more Dragon Soldiers were eliminated from the competition. After cleaning up a bit and getting some much-needed nourishment at the local dining facility, the succeeding teams spent the rest of the day at the Incident Response Training Department, familiarizing themselves with the equipment they were to use during the next two days of competition.

Days two and three saw the competitors being challenged on their specialty as CBRN Soldiers and the Army’s warrior tasks. The teams split into two groups. One group focused on tasks performed at



Top: Pfc. Hector Salazar and Spc. Alvaro Gomeztorres of the 83rd Chemical Battalion at Fort Polk, La., navigate the horizontal bars at Fort Leonard Wood’s physical endurance confidence course. The course consisted of more than 20 obstacles the competitors had to tackle. **Right:** Sgt. Royce Sneath of the 110th Chemical Battalion at Joint Base Lewis-McChord does push-ups during the Army Physical Fitness Test.



the Chemical Defense Training Facility while the other group went to the IRTD. The next day, the groups switched places.

“Today, they are being evaluated on their Level A expertise to see if they are able to execute a sensitive site assessment and sensitive site exploitation, as well as evaluating a casualty in a chemically contaminated environment,” said Sgt. 1st Class Gregory Seamon of the 3rd Chemical Brigade at Fort Leonard Wood and the NCOIC of the CDTF event. “We are putting these competitors through a condensed scenario. Normally, they would have a lot of time to

perform all three of these tasks.”

Daniel Murray, director of the CDTF, explained the scenario is set in an urban environment somewhere in southwest Asia at a facility that is suspected of producing a weapon of mass destruction.

“It will be up to them to come in and do the site assessment,” Murray said. “They have to do that systematically using whatever gear they have chosen to bring in, which is a combination of [explosive ordnance disposal] tactical equipment as well as commercial off-the-shelf items. Once they finish the assessment, then they will have to go through and collect samples. So, they have to go through all the [tactics, techniques and procedures] for packaging things up.

“One of the other things they will have to react to that we have introduced here is a casualty. There is a casualty card that will be provided to them that will indicate the symptoms of that casualty, and



they will have to take appropriate actions.”

Because live nerve agent was used in the event, the competitors had to first don their Level A protective suit, complete with self-contained breathing apparatus, and be thoroughly checked out by the graders to ensure the suits had been donned properly. After completing the event, all the competitors had to go through a medical screening and have blood samples drawn to ensure they were not exposed to any of the live agent present in the room.

At the IRTD, competitors faced numerous first-responder tasks in mock accident scenes, including leaking pressurized rail cars, a ruptured chemical drum, and rescuing and evacuating a fallen comrade from a chemically contaminated site. The competitors again completed the tasks while in their Level A protective suits.

While on day two, the Missouri weather cooperated a bit by staying overcast and cool, the same could not be said on the following day, when teams were faced with temperatures in the high 80s and high humidity, making the tasks even more difficult.

“The toughest part of this competition so far is the [sensitive site assessment and sensitive site exploitation] at the CDTF,” said Pfc. Lloyd Gray of the 61st Chemical Company, 23rd Chemical Battalion, at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. “I have very little training on that, and I am taking away a lot of experience. I have learned a lot just by participating in this competition.”

Sgt. Terry Ellis of the 31st Chemical Company, 2nd Chemi-



Far left: Cpl. Tyan Wagner and Spc. Thomas Covington, of the 92nd Chemical Company, 23rd Chemical Battalion, at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, subdue a non-compliant subject during the combatives portion of the competition.

Above: Spc. Alvaro Gomeztorres and Pfc. Hector Salazar of the 83rd Chemical Battalion at Fort Polk attempt to stop a leaking 55-gallon drum that contains an unknown chemical substance. **Left:** Sgt. Terry Ellis of the 2nd Chemical Battalion at Fort Hood, Texas, breaks down an M4 carbine during the warrior tasks portion of the competition on day four.

cal Battalion, at Fort Hood, Texas, agreed.

“Getting to do the different missions, like the hazmat hands-on — we don’t get to do that every day,” he said. “This is some good training that I can actually go back and work with some of my Soldiers on [to learn] some of these task drills, like the hazmat.”

On day four of the event, the Soldiers were tested in navigating the woods of Fort Leonard Wood while completing several warrior tasks and responding to chemical and radiological scenarios. Each team had to navigate the 15-mile, six-station course with just a compass, map and protractor.

At the first station, the competitors had to react to a chemical attack by donning their protective suits, evaluating and treating a nerve agent casualty, calling in a 9-line medical evacuation and then evacuating the casualty to the landing zone. At station 2, the

teams had to survey and mark a contaminated area, and submit two CBRN reports. At station 3, the competitors cleared, disassembled, assembled and completed a functions check on the M4 carbine, M9 pistol and M249 squad automatic weapon. At station 4, the teams put on mission-oriented protective posture Level IV suits while conducting decontamination operations on large equipment using the M17 lightweight decontamination system. Then, they performed unmasking procedures using the M256 chemical agent detector kit. At station 5, the competitors reacted to unexploded ordnance of unknown contamination, performed a survey and took samples of an area, and submitted the appropriate CBRN report. At station 6, the Soldiers were tested on their ability to properly conduct a survey of an area where a radiological dispersion device was reported to have detonated.

The final day tested the competitors' skills in reflexive fire and the use of combatives techniques.

At the range, the Soldiers were given an M4 carbine and an M9 pistol and had to navigate a pop-up target course, identifying both friend and foe, and transitioned from the M4 to the M9 while dragging a casualty to safety. When they were finished, the teams were taken to the Shea Fitness Facility, where they faced the combatives challenge.

"There are two phases to the combatives portion of this competition," said Sgt. 1st Class Rick Melvin of 13th Chemical Company and the NCOIC of the combatives event. "The first phase consists of coming into a room and dealing with compliant and non-compliant subjects. The second phase is a techniques test."

Two-by-two, the competitors entered the rooms wearing body armor and a helmet, and carrying a mock M4 carbine. As soon as they entered the room, they were confronted by two individuals wearing protective fighting suits. Many teams were taken by surprise by the full-on attack.

Lopez said that next year's competition will add more wrinkles to the combatives portion, including more one-on-one challenges.

With the competition portion over, the Dragon Soldiers returned to their lairs finally able to rest until the following evening, when they would learn who took top honors as the 2011 Best CBRN Warrior Team.

The Chemical Corps and the Green Dragon



Army chemical units adopted the symbol of the Western-style dragon in the 1940s, as embodying the fire and destructive power of chemical and incendiary munitions and flamethrowers.

When the Army went to a regimental system in the mid-1980s, the Chemical Corps submitted a design for a coat of arms consisting of a shield "blazoned as follows: Per bend Or and Azure (half gold and half cobalt blue) a dragon rampant Vert (a green dragon standing on one leg and gesturing with the other three) and in base a tree trunk scarred by war eradicated of the first (symbolizing the birth of the Chemical Corps during World War I)." While the Army no longer employs chemical weapons or flamethrowers, the Dragon Soldiers continue the legacy. Though most units use a green dragon for their unit insignia, some, like the 2nd Chemical Battalion, have adopted a red dragon and a few others use a gold dragon.

Motto: *Elementis Regamus Proelium*, "We rule the battle through the elements."



At the Green Dragon Ball, the CBRN School commandant, Col. Vance P. Visser, and Lopez introduced the teams and announced the winners — Spc. Brandon Shissler of the 83rd Chemical Battalion at Fort Polk, La., and Spc. Jason Meffley of the 101st Chemical Company at Fort Bragg, N.C.

"It was a long, long week — lots of strenuous activities, a lot of physical and mental challenges," Shissler said. "It really tested everything. It was tough. Doing this competition forces you to know your craft. I know my job 10 times better than I did before this competition."

Shissler said the team concept helped them to complete the competition. His teammate Meffley agreed.

"There were points during the competition where our strengths and weaknesses balanced each other out," Meffley said. "I would carry us through one event. Then, we would get to another event, and he would have the technical part. So, the team concept constantly worked out."

Both individuals said they learned a lot from the competition and plan on going back to their respective units to impart what they learned and encourage others to compete.

"I am going to go back and try [to] let people know that it is worth coming out for this," Meffley said. "It is a good time, good training, good competition. The [rewards] are fantastic."

Lopez hopes the pair follows through and tells their stories about the competition.

"I want them to tell the field what it took to prepare for this competition, what they got out of it. I want them to showcase what the Chemical Corps is all about, what a CBRN warrior does," he said. "I basically want them to be the mentors and somebody to look up to in the corps."

"We started out with 22 teams, and through transition, we ended up with 10," he added.

"They went through a lot of stuff to get here, all the tasks and everything else. But really, the bottom line is that those units out there picked their very best to compete, and I think we gave them the hardest competition possible to come up with." 📺

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